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Democratic governance is a key-issue in Non-profit-Organizations (NPO): it represents a core value and it defines their identity, their quality of work-life and their outcomes (Lombardi et al. 1999; Converso, Piccardo, 2003). From a psychosocial and psychodynamic point of view, NPO can be described both, as attempts to organize work in a participative and democratic way, as well as paradoxes. Literature and empiric research suggest that there can be difficulties in translating democratic values in organizational praxis, leading to risky organizational behaviours like paralysis or bureaucratization (Pagliarani, 1973; Kanter, 1972; Acler, 1995; Barnett, Finnemore, 1999; Converso, Piccardo, 2003; Hindrichs, 2008; Converso, Hindrichs, in press). These paradoxes seem to be linked to the peculiar characteristics of the NPO’s organizational cultures and especially with the complex signification of power (Converso, Hindrichs, 2009) that deals with two main processes of organizational politics: leadership and empowerment.

The aim of our study is to develop a questionnaire that measures the perception of democratic participation, empowerment and leadership in NPO, and can be utilized as a tool for action-research oriented to double empowerment in NPO (Converso, Piccardo, 2003; Piccardo, Martini, 2004; Converso, Hindrichs, 2009). On the basis of a former comparative and qualitative study between Mexico and Italy (Hindrichs, 2008; Converso, Hindrichs, in press) and on the areas of organizational democracy carried out by Forcadell (2005), we built the questionnaire using Spanish and Italian translations and its adaptation to the NPO-language of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ: Avolio, Bass, 2004) and the Organizational Description Questionnaire (ODQ: Bass, Avolio, 1992). Moreover, a sample of 67 items adapted from the Questionnaire of Organizational Trust (Ghislieri, 2004), the Community-Scale (Prezza et al., 1999), and citations of interviews conducted with NPO-members were added.

In a pilot-study the questionnaire is submitted to the workers of two Mexican Civil-Society-Associations (N=100) and three Italian Social Cooperatives (N=150), all of them voluntary cooperating in this first validation-process. In data-restitution-sessions, we shared the results with the research-participants with the aim both to sustain them in changing-processes and to support our data-interpretation.

Data-analysis should give us three samples of results:
- the evaluation of president’s, director’s and group-coordinator’s leadership (MLQ),
- the perceived cultural tendencies (ODQ),
- a first factor-analysis of the remaining 67 items (dimensions of organizational democracy and empowerment).

We will present the results highlighting the significant differences at an intra- and inter-organizational level: between different kinds of members and workgroups, between older and bigger organizations and younger and smaller ones, and between Mexican and Italian organizations.

In our hypothesis, the results should confirm, on one hand, the perception of a lack of participation and organizational democracy in the last years in Social Cooperatives (Civati, 2004), organizations of Civil Society and NGO (Barnett, Finnemore, 1999), and, on the other hand, the need and willingness of intervention towards more attention for human resources.
and double-empowerment in this kind of organizations (Girardo, 2007, 2009; Biffi, 2008; Hindrichs, Converso, Girardo, 2010). Furthermore, we expect that data-analysis will allow us to work out our former reflections about different ways to concern organizational democracy and the social mission of NPO between Mexico and Italy (Hindrichs, 2008; Converso, Hindrichs, in press).

Finally, we are aware of the limits of this pilot-study: first of all the low number of respondents that does not allow a consistent validation of the questionnaire. Moreover, the NPOs participated with the aim to sustain our research-process and not because of a consistent democratic crisis (at least at a conscious level). Therefore, it would be interesting to use the questionnaire in a complete action-research starting from a critical situation.

References


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