

For Middle Managers who Perform Intermediate Functions, at School, the Head Teacher Lacks Ordinary Tools (in Italy)

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Abstract

At the center of the investigation of this study is the organizational complexity of the school. The problem area concerns the (Italian) School with its articulations that presents a series of evidences and criticalities that deserve reflection. Instrumental functions (the middle manager), in Italian schools, represent temporary positions, which interpret and represent an organizational model anchored to the functioning of intermediate roles and support to the management strategies of the School system, but with little identity. The temporary nature of the assignment and its electoral nature also failed to guarantee the legitimacy of this role. The problems are very controversial with which we reason in the Italian context. It is not clear whether it is the middle management, that is, middle managers who collaborate with the head teacher in the exercise of predominantly organizational-managerial functions or, rather, if they represent figures expressed by the college of teachers because they are capable of interpreting the "vision" of the school, to gather the best professional energies. The results of the study seem to confirm that middle managers possess different characteristics of professional figures even if they are not officially known within the school's organizational structure.

Keywords: Middle management, School system, Teacher, Structure of organizational, The head teacher.

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INTRODUCTION

The Italian school system, with the introduction of autonomy, has undergone numerous changes. The organizational aspect has remained unchanged (with the exception of supporting the scholastic director, left alone with the complexity, the two collaborators identified by him, called to operate according to a fiduciary relationship).

The complexity generated by autonomy, involves the recruitment by the school operators of additional functions and tasks, aimed at covering the various functional areas of the institution project, with specific tasks related to the new needs.

These activities are coordinated by the head of the school but carried out in fact by a certain number of teachers who, without abandoning their original activity, also carry out other tasks within the school or favor their external collaboration with other subjects, thus giving rise to the intermediate figures. Intermediate figures are an expression of the need to use exponentially increasing complexity to the organization of the school. The organizational structure of the existing Italian school does not foresee intermediate

figures (middle management) between the management and the teachers.

The intermediate functions, called "instrumental functions" interpret and represent an organizational model anchored to the operation of intermediate roles and support to the management strategies of the School system, but are only envisaged by the employment contract, and are not known as professional figures.

The instrumental functions express a varied picture, their role assumes variable modalities, expresses a mix of directional discretion and is differently participated and operating in the schools, concretely present in most of the school's activities, user and differently demanding of the innovative activity, but with poor identity. Several critical factors emerged after a few years from the birth of the intermediate figures are to be attributed to the precariousness of these figures, identified annually and included in a regulatory framework that encourages their rotation, making it impossible for teachers to capitalize on the knowledge and skills acquired.

The intermediate functions at the Italian school still do not yet find a unified logic. For Drago [1], all

attempts to articulate, specialize and differentiate the role of teachers in relation to the challenges coming from autonomy and the social environment, to date, have been continuously reviewed and redefined to become confused. Scholars like Summa [2], Domenici & Moreti [3], Cerini [4], instrumental functions treat them differently from one another. The "staff" of Italian schools [1] is organized in a manner originating from different European countries.

The aim of the research is to contribute to increasing the understanding of organizational phenomena and functional processes of the school system.

The aim of the research is to explore the identity, the professional role, organizational and value control and the areas of intervention of the instrumental functions, in the school autonomy system.

By organizational structure we mean the formalized system of roles, tasks, functions, distribution of power, rules of behavior, connections between various parts (organizational units) and between them and the outside of the organization (environment of the organization), with reference to a set of goals to be followed. It presents a set [5] of the specific ways in which each organization manages and governs the processes of differentiation and integration. For Daft [6], the organizational structure must provide a system of responsibilities and reporting relationships, as well as mechanisms for linking and coordinating the elements of the organization to form a coherent whole.

The organizational structure (macro-structure) is the result of the choices, in a process of design and continuous redesign, projected to define the methods of division of labor and the coordination of the different activities, identifying organs, roles and tasks and respective responsibilities [7].

The organizational structure (in the case of educational institutions) is linked to institutional goals considered legitimate as established by regulatory provisions, considerations of appropriateness of the services offered, and other factors [8]. The organization establishes its own internal division and relations between the parties also with regard to the objectives it must pursue to achieve the purposes for which they were established.

A peculiarity of public organization is to have the double focus on efficiency but also on effectiveness [8].

The formalization of organizational behavior represents the way in which the organization seeks to reduce the discretion of its members and regulates behavior by [7] making explicit, a) the bodies and roles in which the structure is divided (who), through the

design of the organization charts, b) the tasks and activities that each body must perform (what), through the preparation of tasks (job description), c) the methods of carrying out the tasks and the relationships between the activities to be perform (how), by defining the procedures and possibly drawing the flow charts (flow chart).

The functional organizational structure is found in organizations where professional roles are required for carrying out operational activities with high levels of training and skills [7].

The peculiarity of the functional model is constituted by the drive to specialize roles within a function that represents a particularly positive aspect, as it tends to stimulate the growth and accumulation of skills (knowledge and skills), with respect to a particular area of functional specialization.

A solution to mitigate some problematic connotations of the model has been adopted by the hierarchical - functional organizations providing collegial bodies composed of function managers or staff services with the task of supporting the organization's government activity by studying and designing connections between functions, for make the decision-making and operational process more streamlined and integrated, also with reference to the results of the analysis of the environmental conditions of the organization's activities.

Some characteristic functions such as research and development, production, logistics, etc., depend in a hierarchical line on the general management; there exists a direct relationship of authority-responsibility (line authority) between superior and subordinate. Other functions such as administration and human resources are placed at the service of the entire structure, such as support and service bodies (staff bodies). They provide specific resources to internal users through resources with qualified specialist skills [7].

The model is especially suitable in situations where the organization's reference environment is quite stable, and in this case the strong specialization guarantees effectiveness and efficiency. If the external conditions are instead of strong change, the organization that refers to this model tends to react rather slowly, and even less to propose itself as proactive of the change, because it is scarcely dynamic internally, with functional hierarchical lines and few interfunctional connections [8]. The functional model can be frequently found in the organizations of the public administration, which are defined as hierarchical - functional precisely to mark the highly functional nature of the internal subdivisions and the use of the hierarchy to govern work activities, which often present problems of relationship between parties [8], due to the

difficulty in communicating and sharing programs and projects.

The principle of differentiation as an operational strategy is based on the study of the functional structures of Lawrence & Lorsch [9].

In the functional organization model each organizational unit carries out its specific function and disseminates the coordination directives necessary for all the other sectors, which are in some way influenced by its activities. The hierarchical lines differ from those of coordination [10], in the sense that each organizational unit has its own hierarchical dependence. The various subjects operating in the organization have a multiple dependence on other organizational functions [10].

Differentiation as a form of socio-cultural change involves the division or articulation, in structurally and functionally different parts, of the social system with the formation of subsystems [10], so it means acting on some key profile variables of a unit. The measurement of differentiation can be performed through various variables such as the degree of complexity of the organizational structure, the operational mechanisms, the time orientation, the level of specialization, the orientation towards the objectives. As differentiation grows, the need for integration grows, that is, the level of coordination and cohesion between the various units within an organization. Each organization must move from simple integration mechanisms such as norms and hierarchy to more complex mechanisms such as the creation of professional figures [9], specialized in integration and coordination activities. The level of differentiation linked to that of interdependence, determines the value of the integration necessary to allow the organization to operate as a unitary system [10]. Therefore it is the degree of segmentation of the organization into subsystems, each of which develops specific attributes (value, orientation, etc.). Organizations that are characterized by a level of differentiation and integration appropriate to the environment are more likely to succeed.

Method

The survey was carried out in 39 schools (complexes) of all the education cycles: 20 (between high schools, technical institutes and professional institutes), 7 secondary schools of first degree, 12 primary schools (Territorial area for the province of Bari and Territorial Area for the Province of Taranto). The empirical survey, carried out with the direct presence of the interviewer in schools with the paper questionnaire is conducted during the school year 2017-2018.

The research is characterized by an empirical exploratory approach and investigates the

organizational complexity of the school, the task of instrumental functions. A quantitative methodological path was developed in order to capture the profile of the role of the instructors in charge, taking into account the specificity of the school organization. The research is lowered in the school environment by directly involving teachers of instrumental functions. The latter represent the indispensable resource for the project.

Population Survey

The participants involved in the research are 135 professors in charge of instrumental functions of 39 schools in the provinces of Bari and Taranto. The "identity card" of the instrumental functions is presented with the average age of 50 years. The distribution of the instrumental functions by the age of the teachers also shows that there is a strong concentration of subjects between the ages of 45 and 55 years. The vast majority of instrumental functions are of the female gender (82.20%). As for the qualification, the picture is varied. 90.4% of participants have a remarkable professional experience from 10-25 years of teaching, compared to 9.6% with 5-10 years of experience.

Data Collection

The questionnaire was constructed by taking into consideration some aspects of the role and some aspects of job descriptions, elaborating the framework to build the survey tool.

Secondly, the items were constructed taking into full consideration the logical rigor, in the sense starting from the identification of the task of the instrumental functions and the selection process following the performance of the assignment and the evaluation.

The questionnaire used consists of five sections.

The first section is aimed at gathering socio-demographic information concerning the job position (1.1. Gender, Age, Level of education, seniority, Classification / contractual role, Institute / institutes - School / schools where he carries out his teaching activity, current subject (s) in teaching, Tasks / organizational and / or coordination roles previously held in the school environment).

The second section includes the criteria and methods for identifying / defining instrumental functions, and aims to explore the system of instrumental functions operating at the Institute / School. The section is divided into two sub-sections, each of which includes three sub-sections.

- Map of the instrumental functions present in the Institute / School and their identification which includes: a) Identification of the instrumental functions foreseen in the Institute / School which presents itself with a single multiple choice item with the possibility of choosing more than one

answer, b) Identification of the decision-making levels of the operational areas for the instrumental functions, and c) Identification of the decision-making levels of the objectives, the tasks and areas of responsibility of the instrumental functions, which are also presented with a single multiple choice item but with the obligation to provide only one answer.

- Criteria for the assignment of instrumental function assignments is composed of: a) The possession of competences and other requisites, as a criterion for access to the task of the instrumental function is presented as a Likert scale from 1 to 5 (1 = nothing, 5 = completely) composed of 16 items that measure the importance of the competences and other requisites listed in the evaluation of the professors' applications for instrumental functions, b) The origin of the proposed candidates for instrumental functions. This is a single multiple choice item which investigates the origin of the candidates (from the management, from the formal / informal groups of teachers or self-nominations of the teachers concerned), c) Organizational efficiency and other evaluations is defined as a Likert scale by 1 to 5 (1 = nothing, 5 = entirely) composed of 11 items aimed at exploring the opinion of the participants with respect to the adequacy, efficiency, professionalism and importance of the group of instrumental functions.

The third section deals with the assignment and some parts of the activities of the instrumental functions. The objective is to present and describe the task of instrumental functions and to characterize the role and organizational position in the context of the Institute / School. These are open questions related to the specific functions covered and the degree of previous experience in the role. There are also questions with multiple-choice answers with the obligation to provide only one answer to identify the part of the organizational structure that entrusts the assignment and the presence of the delegation to carry out the assignment. Finally, there are two Likert scales from 1 to 5 (1 = null, 5 = completely) composed of 6 and 5 items respectively. The first scale measures how the task is carried out, while the second one explores the self-perception of the role.

The fourth section concerns the placement and method of carrying out / performing instrumental functions. The section aims to examine organizational and operational aspects that characterize the role of instrumental functions. In particular, the sub-sections concern:

- Organizational placement of instrumental functions based on the perception of the organizational position, which presents itself with a single multiple choice item but with the obligation to provide only one answer.

- Actions and relations of the instrumental functions is composed of: a) Elaboration of a possible operational program according to the areas of the task by the instrumental functions, and b) Modification of the initial operational program according to the specific needs, which also occur with a single multiple choice item but with the obligation to provide only one answer. c) The relations of the instrumental functions, is defined as a Likert scale from 1 to 5 (1 = none, 5 = systematic) composed of 5 items aimed at exploring the contacts and relationship that build the instrumental functions during the carrying out of the assignment. The coordination of work groups is presented with a single multiple choice item but with the obligation to provide only one answer.
- The information and communication management system in the performance of the instrumental functions' activities is composed of: a) Contacts with the interlocutors, investigates the frequency in which the contacts are established, the instrumental functions, with different interlocutors during the performance of their assignment and looks like a Likert scale from 1 to 5 (1 = never, 5 = systematically), composed of 12 items aimed at exploring collaboration with internal components and other stakeholders. b) Communication and information methods, defined with a Likert scale from 1 to 5 (1 = never, 5 = systematically) composed of 7 items that measure the frequency of different information and communication methods used by the instrumental functions in the performance of activities related to the assignment. c) Communication tools, is defined with a Likert scale from 1 to 5 (1 = never, 5 = systematically), composed of 7 items that measure the frequency of use of different communication tools during their work. d) Frequently treated topics, it is defined with a Likert scale from 1 to 5 (1 = never, 5 = systematically), composed of 8 items that measure the frequency of the different topics dealt with the interlocutors during the carrying out of the assignment activities. d) Identification of working hours for the performance of the assignment, is defined with a Likert scale from 1 to 5 (1 = never, 5 = systematically), composed of 6 items that measure the frequency of the communication with respect to the opportune moments that the functions function instrumental perform during the activities related to the assignment. The management and enhancement of the documentation from the instrumental functions is composed of: a) The nature and quantity of the archived materials and the documentation produced by the instrumental functions during the performance of the assignment is defined with a Likert scale from 1 to 5 (1 = for nulla, 5 = completely), composed of 8 items that verify and measure the materials and the documentation

produced. b) The value that represents the obligation to document good practices is defined with a Likert scale from 1 to 5 (1 = not at all, 5 = completely), composed of 6 items that verifies the degree of the value it represents for the FS the obligation to document all the good practices implemented. c) The modality that uses the instrumental functions to manage the documentation procedure, is defined with a single multiple choice item and verifies the way of documenting that more is used between multimedia and traditional media. d) Identification of the recipients of the archived documentation is defined with a Likert scale from 1 to 5 (1 = not at all, 5 = completely), composed of 5 items that verifies to what extent the different recipients use the documentation produced and archived by the instrumental functions.

The fifth section concerns the consideration and evaluation of the effectiveness of the instrumental functions in the concrete personal experience, in relation to the actual needs of the individual educational institutions. In particular, the sub-sections concern: a) Efficiency of the actions of instrumental functions on different fields of functionality of the scholastic institution, and is defined with a Likert scale from 1 to 5 (1 = not at all, 5 = completely), composed from 6 items that verify to what extent the activities of instrumental functions have effects on the different areas of functionality of the educational institution. b) Identification of the contribution of the instrumental functions to improve to strengthen the identity of the scholastic institution is defined with a Likert scale from 1 to 5 (1 = not at all, 5 = completely), composed of 6 items that verify to what extent the activities of instrumental functions have effects on strengthening institutional identity and technical-professional specificity. c) Evaluation of the contribution of the instrumental functions to the functionality of the school system is presented with a single multiple choice item with the possibility of choosing only one answer that verifies the contribution of the FS on many fundamental aspects in the school of autonomy.

- The exploration of the self-definition of the role of instrumental functions is defined with a Likert

scale from 1 to 5 (1 = not at all, 5 = completely), composed of 10 items that verify the recognition of the role, draw some expressions which generally concern the role of instrumental functions in the exercise of the specific function.

Data Analysis

Teacher responses to instrumental functions were assessed on the basis of the Likert scale (1-5), and coded via SPSS 15.0 for Windows.

Search Results

The possession of the competences and other requirements, as a criterion for access to the mandate of the Instrumental Functions. To understand the structure of the scale: "The possession of competences and other requisites, as a criterion for access to the role of Instrumental Functions", we proceeded with an exploratory factorial analysis. A factorial analysis was conducted for main components. Specifically, the analysis of the main components carried out on this scale (70.17%) is confirmed as a four-factor structure. - The first, called "organizational skills (distinctive)" (44.29%) indicates the importance of communication skills, coordination of group work, planning skills, interpersonal skills, problem solving management and knowledge of the regulations of the educational institution, as the first criterion for access to the post. - The second, called "methodological - didactic competences" (10.93%) indicates the importance of preparation skills in the pedagogical field, in the field of docimology, in the field of didactic research as the second criterion for access to the assignment.

- The third factor, called "technical skills" (8.03%) indicates the importance of technical skills such as statistical skills and data processing, computer skills, ability to manage documentation systems as the third criterion for the access to the assignment.
- The fourth factor called "formal skills" (6.91%) denotes the importance of formal skills such as academic qualifications and specializations and participation in training courses consistent with the FS assigned in this process, as the fourth criterion for access (Table-1).

Table-1: Factor analysis "Skills and other requirements-criteria for access to the assignment of FS"

| | Component | | | |
|--|---|---|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| | 1 organizational skills - distinctive | 2. methodologica- didactic skills | 3 competenze tecniche | 4 formal skills |
| communication skills | ,868 | | | |
| skills in coordinating group work | ,811 | | | |
| organizational and planning skills | ,801 | | | |
| relational skills and abilities | ,776 | | | |
| excellent preparation in the pedagogical field | | ,777 | | |
| adequate preparation in the field of docimology | | ,747 | | |

| | | | | |
|--|--------|--------|-------|-------|
| adequate preparation in the field of educational research | | ,582 | | |
| experiences acquired in other assignments during the school career | | ,558 | | |
| statistical skills and data processing | | | ,872 | |
| IT skills | | | ,668 | |
| ability to manage project documentation systems | | | ,553 | |
| participation in training courses consistent with the FS assigned | | | | ,853 |
| academic titles and specializations | | | | ,778 |
| explained variance | 44,29% | 10,93% | 8,03% | 6,91% |

Total variance explained 70.17%

The organizational efficiency of Instrumental Functions The scale relative to the organizational efficiency of the SFs shows a factorial structure with two factors (59.8%). The first factor has been called "adequacy" (42.26%) denoting the consistency, adequacy with respect to the expected results and the

organizational efficiency of the FS. The second factor was called "competence" (17.53%) and denotes the importance of the professional skills of the candidates in the performance and attribution of the role of the SFs (Table-2).

Table-2: Factor analysis the organizational efficiency of Instrumental Functions

| | Component | |
|--|---------------|-----------------|
| | 1 adequacy | 2 competence |
| the operational program of the Instrumental Functions, in its Institute / School, is consistent with the priorities defined by the POF | ,857 | |
| the mandate assigned to the Instrumental Functions, in its Institute / School, is defined in a clear and adequate manner with respect to the expected results; | ,832 | |
| the mandate assigned to the Instrumental Functions is relevant with respect to the needs of its Institute / School | ,780 | |
| the Instrumental Functions, in its Institute / School, combine to make the organization and management of the school system more efficient | ,763 | |
| the method of identifying the Instrumental Functions, in its Institute / School, is adequate and correct | ,742 | |
| the teacher who carries out an Instrumental Function, in his Institute / School, is ultimately a sort of "slave" of the Management and of his colleagues | | -,744 |
| in his Institute / School, the professional skills of the candidates for the assignment of Instrumental Functions are taken into maximum account | | ,722 |
| the quality of teaching and training provided, in its Institute / School, depends very much on the effectiveness of the Instrumental Functions | | ,652 |
| explained variance | 42,26% | 17,53% |

Total variance explained = 59.8%

With regard to the assignment of the assignment (Table-3), it is confirmed that the identification of the professors appointed for the FS is of strict competence of the Academic Board (65.7%), based on the current legislation that does not necessarily make use of a preliminary work by a formal group / work commissions (this happens for 2.20% of the cases). There is a 29.10% of the cases in which the SFs are appointed by the school manager, and 3% of the

cases in which the SFs are designated by the management staff (overall DS = 32.10%). In the decision-making process there seems to be an overlap and an illegitimate interference in the prerogatives of the Teaching Board could be considered. Evidently the ever-increasing complexity of the school calls for the use by the leadership of agile forms of coordination emphasizing also the new parameters of the sizing of the institute.

Table-3: The assignment of the assignment

| The identification of the part of the organizational structure that entrusts the assignment. | Freq. | % |
|--|-------|-------|
| by the school manager | 39 | 29,1% |
| from the Academic Board | 88 | 65,7% |
| by the management staff | 4 | 3% |

| | | |
|---|---|------|
| by formal groups / teaching commissions appointed by the Teaching Committee | 3 | 2,2% |
|---|---|------|

With regard to the conferral of the delegation for assignment of the assignment (Table-4), the participants (FS) confirm that they have received from the Headmaster a delegation in "general guidelines" (35.90%) which could be an indication of respect for the prerogatives of the Academic Board and the collaborative expression aimed at maintaining the autonomy of the Instrumental Functions. The point of complexity is shown when the delegation is detailed and analytical on the modalities of carrying out the assignment, in other words an "essential" delegation (confirmed by 26.00% of the participants) which

becomes the expression of a return of the organizational type of the Instrumental Functions to the category of "staffing", which expresses another interference of the manager on the competences of the Board. The delegation of the Instrumental Functions is assigned by the Academic Board (to which it must give an account of the activity performed). The head teacher, who also assumes the position of chairman of the teaching board, also acts formally. Therefore in some of the schools our Instrumental Functions have actually received two delegations: from the teaching body and from the management.

Table-4: Awarding of the proxy

| Granting of the proxy for the assignment of the assignment for the FS | freq | % |
|--|------|------|
| a detailed and analytical delegation on how to carry out the assignment | 34 | 26 |
| a proxy for "general guidelines" for carrying out the assignment | 47 | 35,9 |
| the task of developing and proposing an activity plan within the framework of its FS | 46 | 35,1 |
| no delegation and / or programmatic indication | 4 | 3,1 |

The role of the manager, with respect to this function, is necessarily a coordinating one, as these functions, due to organizational opportunities, become part of the management staff [11]. Responsibility for the performance of the mandate by the instrumental function remains with the college, but contributes a duty to report to the manager on the activities carried out or in progress, as he is always the person responsible for the unitary management of the institution. It cannot be excluded that the delegation, which in this case also plays a role of compensation, is entrusted due to the lack of professional figures known horizontally in the internal organizational structure of the school.

In other words it is:

- lack of ordinary tools for the manager who finds all the means possible to coordinate the activity,
- lack of recognition of professional figures as FS in the internal organizational structure of the school.

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