
Representations and feelings related to organizational change: A Grounded Theory study with Italian prison workers

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• **ABSTRACT.** L'obiettivo della presente ricerca è esplorare e concettualizzare il processo di adattamento messo in atto da parte degli operatori penitenziari relativamente all'attuale cambiamento organizzativo in atto nel sistema penitenziario italiano. Attraverso l'applicazione della metodologia *Grounded Theory* (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) applicata su un campione costituito da 121 operatori provenienti da 4 regioni italiane, i risultati hanno evidenziato importanti elementi di similarità tra le diverse figure professionali considerate, nonostante la differenza di ruolo e delle micro culture di appartenenza. Il più importante elemento di trasversalità emerge rispetto ai problemi percepiti come essenziali nell'attuale pratica di lavoro all'interno del contesto penitenziario, riconducibili ad un livello organizzativo e ad un livello intrapsichico-relazionale. Inoltre, elementi di omogeneità caratterizzano anche i vissuti riferiti, a prevalenza emozionale negativa.

• **SUMMARY.** *The aim of this research was to explore and conceptualize the adaptation process activated by prison workers relating to the current organizational change that is characterizing the Italian prison system. To achieve the present goals, it has been selected the Grounded Theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) with a sample constituted by 121 prison workers coming from four Italian regions (Lombardia, Liguria, Emilia-Romagna, Campania). Results showed many important elements of similarity between the various professionals, despite the difference of role, geographical origin and type of institute. The most important transversal element emerged about the perception of the problems in relation to two main levels of reading, the first concerning the organizational dimension and the second concerning the intrapsychic-relational dimension. Furthermore, elements of homogeneity also emerged in the range of mentioned emotions, often characterized by highly negative connotation.*

Keywords: *Prison workers, Prison, Organizational change, Italian penitentiary system, Work representation, Emotional work, Grounded Theory, Adaptation process*

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study was to explore the representations about both the work environment and the organizational change concerning different professional roles employed in the Italian penitentiary system.

Two are the peculiarities for this work: the penitentiary context and the organizational change.

The first one regards an important area of interest for the political and social actuality in Italy. Lately, in agreement with the European Union, the Italian Government is focusing many effort towards the identification and resolution of matters that characterizes the penitentiary system (e.g. overcrowding, inadequate detention conditions, high level of suicide of detained population, conflict between punishment and education, inhuman treatment, etc.). More specifically, the reference goes to the innovative rules adopted after the sanctions delivered from the Court of Human Rights at the expense of Italy due to some critical deficit that characterizes the penitentiary system. Indeed, with the “Torreggiani and others vs. Italy” case issued on 8 January 2013, the second section of the European Court condemned Italy for violating Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights due to prison conditions experienced by seven detainees in Busto Arsizio (Lombardia) and Piacenza (Emilia-Romagna) (Maccanico, 2013).

Subsequently, the National Department of Prison Administration (D.A.P.) issued two circulars¹ by which it was started a process of change of the organizational and management system of Penitentiary Administration (Ministry of Justice, Lecture notes ISSP No.1, March 2013). The guidelines defined in the above-mentioned circulars outline a framework in which the dimensions of *time* and *space* acquire a new central value for the daily life in prison. The norms of “open prison” and “dynamic surveillance” are introduced; the first one establish that prisoners (of specific sections) are trusted to serve their sentences with minimal supervision and perimeter security and aren't locked up in prison cells, the second one determine that whereby all the prison workers (educators, penitentiary police, teachers, volunteers, health professionals) are called to contribute to a passage from the mere controlling custody system to a better knowledge of prisoners' personality.

This transformation represents a strong sign of discontinuity with the past and a transition to a conception of detention that is more oriented to the prevention of recidivism rather than to the punishment, closer to the new regulatory schemes corresponding to the most important requirements linked to the social development of the last decades (Gherardo, 2015).

Starting from these considerations, it becomes crucial to take into consideration the organizational change, that could be defined as the movement of an organization from the present state to a future desired scenario, with the aim of increasing its efficacy (George & Jones, 2002). It's an intentional act, planned to modify the organizational model and the flow of the decision-making process that puts into play the capacity of different groups to collaborate with each other's in an innovative way, as observed in actuality of Italian prison context.

There are different forms of organizational change - discontinuous and continuous (Weick & Quinn, 1999), evolutionary and revolutionary (Porras & Silvers, 1991) – but it's always possible to affirm that the organizational change is ever a phenomenon that owns to two principal aspects, one more technical and one more social. The technical aspect consists in the realization of a modification into the usual mechanical procedure of work, while the social aspect refers to the way in which people directly involved into the same process of change think about the way in which it will modify their rooted relations within the organization (Lawrence, 1954), with consequent effects on the complex system of organizational culture.

A final remark seems important: studying this process in such a rigid and formal context as the penitentiary system implies taking into account the need to constantly refer to the Institutions, in order to facilitate the access to the field and the involvement of the participants, active co-builders of the knowledge process. Therefore, a central role in the construction of the research was played by P.R.A.P. (Regional office of Superintendent for Prison Administration) and by D.A.P. (National Department of Prison Administration), main intermediaries between researchers and research stakeholders. Thanks to the synergic collaboration with these two offices it was

¹ 206745 and 36997, May 2012/January 2013

possible to build a research project which allowed to deeply investigate some crucial aspects concerning, on one hand, the experience of the prison workers and, on the other hand, the actual modification process.

METHOD

Starting from the complexity related to previously mentioned dimensions and considering the lack of literature relating to this field, researchers chose to use the Grounded Theory qualitative methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Bruscaglioni (2013) underlines that this kind of methodology disrupts the typical linearity of the hypothetical deductive process, delineating a “non-standard” path that assumes the impossibility to isolate the single steps that characterized the research process, preferring a logic of circularity. The Grounded Theory methodology distinguishes itself thanks to its highly applicative value, starting from a knowledge approach strongly anchored to data (Tarozzi, 2008). For the present study the researchers have chosen to adhere to Charmaz’s contribution (2006), the Constructive Grounded Theory; this kind of approach strongly underlies the necessity to recognize the subjectivity of theory and the central role of negotiation, dialogue and understanding between researcher and investigated object.

The present research has involved 121 prison workers recruited by theoretical sampling². The total sample has included subjects coming from 4 Italian regions (North: Lombardia; Middle: Emilia-Romagna and Liguria; South: Campania), subdivided between educators (49), penitentiary policeman (41), school teachers (15), social workers (6), psychologists (2), principals (2), employed in P.R.A.P. office (8)³. The final sample is recruited from 46 prisons, 4 P.R.A.P., 2 OPG (prison psychiatric hospitals), 5 UEPE (office for external penal execution).

A recent innovative use of focus group within a Grounded Theory research (Aresi & Pedersen, 2015) has inspired the use of the same technique for the present work. The use of group seems appropriate to investigate complex issues that goes beyond the sphere of behaviours and attitudes noted in individuals, such as sharing acts, values, knowledge, prejudices, fears, collective representations (Acocella, 2008), as well as in this case. Researchers chose to use mini-groups (4/7 subjects); these small number would create a secure and intimate place for each of these subject to talk with others unknown colleagues about their personal experience and eventually also about sensitive topics. All the focus groups have predicted the presence of one conductor and one observer, and all the discussions have been recorded (prior consent of all the participants).

The initial stimulus was represented by the choice of a picture⁴ by a photographic set, a technic utilized to promote and facilitate self-disclosure about personal experiences and emotional expression (Saita, Parrella, Facchin & Irtella, 2014). The photographic set - specifically developed for the prison context during the Grundtvig Program “Phototherapy Europe in Prison”⁵ - includes different photos representing a big variety of subjects, actions, and landscapes; the participants were asked to choose the one that better could help them to introduce their role to the group, with a particular reference to the current change process. This could be considered an easy and direct way to introduce the key-words of the discussion and to make the operators start thinking about the themes are going to be discussed.

After the initial stimulus, the focus group “ad hoc” track was submitted. According to the traditional Grounded Theory data collection and data analysis processes, all of the focus group are been verbatim transcribed and codified along 4 specific phases directed to identify the emerging interpretative categories (see Table 1).

2 This kind of sampling, regulated by the emerging theory, consists in identifying subjects following the indications coming from analysis process (Tarozzi, 2008), deepening the emerged dimensions step by step in order to verify the capacity in different contexts. The enlargement of the sampling is interrupted when all the emerged categories are considered saturated (Morse, 1995).

3 Operators were contacted in proportion correspondent to the number of subjects nationally employed in each role; the final number respect the percentage for all the professions, except for Penitentiary Police group, subscribed in minor number.

4 This technique, called photo-projection, is based on the assumption that the significance of an image is first created by the observer, thanks to the projective mechanism from the individual inner world to the reality (Cavallo & Callieri, 2007).

5 The “Phototherapy Europe in Prison” project (2013/2014) had as its aim the development of the use of phototherapy in EU prisons, with the purpose of: 1. improving the emotional awareness of detainees; 2. equipping prison workers of a new useful method for re-education and social reintegration of prisoners.

Table 1 – Example of coding process

Quotations	Open Coding	Focus Coding	Theoretical Coding
“I have been working in prison from 10 years as penitentiary police, and my point of view is very different from theirs! I work in close contact with the audience”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Conflict between educators and penitentiary police – Different mansions 	Fragmentation of work	Relational dimension
“The change has been very fast, we hesitated to understand what it was, it seemed contradictory (...) but the main role limit that I feel is that it was not made clear to people who are the real protagonists”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Introduction of organizational change – Misunderstanding about change 	Top down change	A paradoxal change
“This reminds me the question of excessive bureaucracy. I think it’s very heavy in our work and that still causes delays that often go to affect the final result, because this overload of paperwork reduces the proactivity and crushes us”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Excessive bureaucracy – Risk of overload – Delays in work procedures – Limited proactivity 	Formal limits of prison work	The penitentiary organization
“I am an agent of section and I often have to seek help in an office where there are only two persons who have to manage a prison now reaching 600 prisoners! They don’t have time to give us a practical help, a response (...). We could talk about little cooperation, little communication and big jitters”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Risk of overload – Lack of time – Lack of collaboration – Asking for help – Big jitters 	Risk of burnout Fragmentation of work	Coping strategies Relational dimension
“We are nucleus scattered throughout the institution, each force may be used by itself. I get along with my colleague, we share a specific kind of work (...), because our superiors are often absent, they don’t support us, they don’t help us”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Scattered nucleus – Lack of supervision – We and They – Lack of support 	Fragmentation of work Lack of apical figures	The penitentiary organization

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Quotations	Open Coding	Focus Coding	Theoretical Coding
“I think that you have to attempt to collect what is there, what I find in terms of personal resources (...), and you have to be serene. Me and some of my colleagues share the difficulty of not living a good life here, far from family, and, however, this affect the work, but in the sense that you have to make more effort to try to pull out the positive resources, first of all optimism!”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Optimism – Personal resources – Share the difficulties 	Possible answers to problems	Coping strategies
“It also true that the bulk of difficulties is related to the organizational level, so it’s not just the person”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Lack of organizational aspects 	Perception of work system	The penitentiary organization

After the first phase of data collection – which took place in Lombardia – researchers activated the “open coding” process (Charmaz, 2006), thanks to which they identified firsts codes connected together by the logic of similarity/overlap, in order to create the first categories. From this first phase relations between categories and sub-categories have been suggested (Tarozzi, 2008).

Once completed the first phase, researchers came back on field (specifically, in Campania, South of Italy) in order to collect new data to integrate with those previously emerged; this moment is typically called “focus coding”. Participants were not given information about what emerged in the previous data collection phase and the track of focus group remained unchanged as well as the conduction of the group, expect for the introduction of some deepening questions related to emerging categories. The codes used for phase one are reused to synthesize the new data and other codes are created ad hoc. Thanks to the constant comparison technique, researchers immediately observed a transversality of data that permitted to outline the definitive core category⁶.

The third phase predicted another return on field (in Liguria exactly) similar to the previous one.

The fourth and last phase - called “theoretical coding” - represents a turning point, in which it has reached the saturation of the data and has outlined the core category. Researchers came back on field (in Emilia-Romagna) re-proposing the same data collection procedure (participants were not given information about what emerged in the previous data collection phase and the track of focus group remained unchanged as well as the conduction of the group, expect for the introduction of some deepening questions related to emerging categories). Charmaz (2006) underlies that thanks to this step it is possible to reach a sophisticated level of coding that follows the codes selected during focus coding, as in this case.

RESULTS

Our evidences suggest the emerging of 5 main interpretative categories related to the experience of organizational change in prison. These categories are declined in specific subcategories - 13 in total - as shown in the General Diagram (Figure 1). Each category (bold character and capital

⁶ The core category is the principle organizer concept that could be inductively individuated by proceeding in hierarchization work of emerging data (Tarozzi, 2008).

letters in the Diagram) is now described in detail, in order to deeply understand the representations about prison workers experience in this era of change.

1. *The vagabond in a desert of snow*

The emerging core category has been denominated “*The vagabond in the desert of snow*”. This “in vivo” label has suddenly appeared appropriate to describe the set of current representations of prison workers experience, with a particular lunge to emotional aspects connected to them.

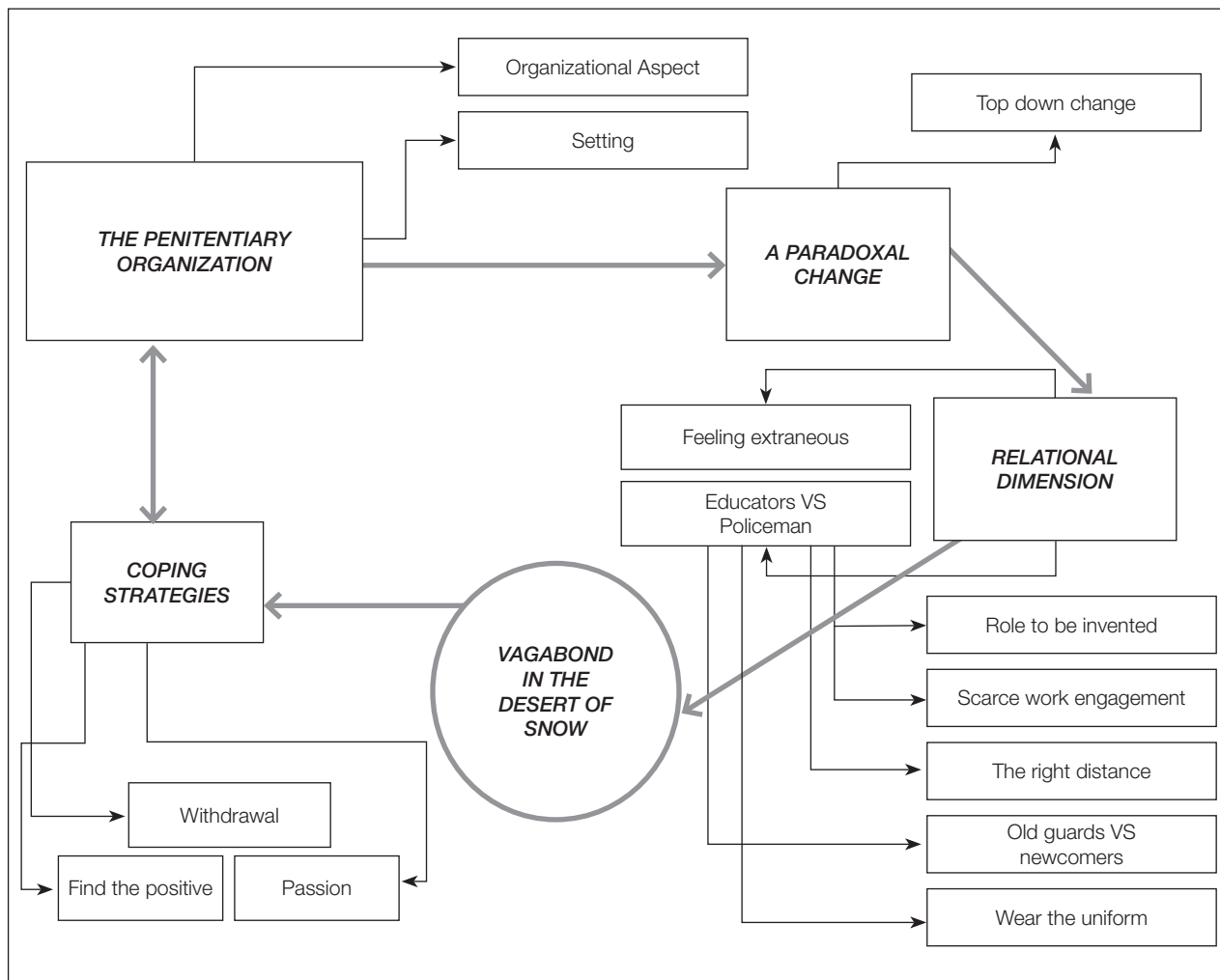
This metaphor evokes a condition of severe loss and uncertainty into an inaccessible and threatening context. The indication goes to the emotional spectrum described by prison operators – regardless to the role of belonging and the region of origin - that seems to be purely characterized by negative

emotions (anger, anxiety, fear, sadness, disorientation), feelings of frustration, disappointment, desolation, loss, despair, sense of inadequacy.

The prison operators describe their work practice as studded by lot of blinds moments where it is difficult to not get carried away by negative feelings (“*Ours is a labour of suffering, in every sense*”, educators, Emilia-Romagna; “*Lately, I feel unrecognized, abused every day, without dignity, more controlled then the detainees*” educator, Emilia-Romagna). In many cases these feelings are difficult to contain, as if penitentiary setting could not take charge of an emotional burden, paradoxically urged by the same context.

In this sense, the reference to the current process of organizational change seems to further encourage such a state of anxiety and fear, putting operators in a difficult state of

Figure 1 – The general diagram



“meandering”, paradoxical compared to the new required tasks.

2. Relational dimension

As already emerged from the core category, the data analysis underlines that the relational dimension is to be considered a crucial element for the understanding of the experience of working in prison, particularly in this time of change. A total absence of sharing appears to prevail both intra and inter group, a lack perceived in most cases as extremely detrimental (“*Everyone must be find the strength inside themselves*”, school teacher, Lombardia). What is clear almost unanimously is a sense of great fragmentation between the parties; the spirit of solidarity between colleagues seems to be completely missing, as well as the ability and opportunity to communicate - both vertically and horizontally - compared to the new ways of working and the collaboration towards a truly shared mission (“*The circulars about change are not enough*”, policeman, Liguria).

Thus, the relational dimension seems highly compromised and the conflict seems lord it, particularly between two crucial professionals: educators (representatives of the treatment area) and policemen (representatives of the security area). This conflict is recognized and mentioned by both parties and it seems to be traced and justified by specific dimensions such as diametrically opposed tasks, different mentalities, prejudices between the parties, different attitudes to change, lack of clarity regarding the specific skills. In short, two different organizational cultures. This condition is exacerbated by the required changes that seem to ignore the deep differences within the system, taking for granted a flattening of visions between parts.

This collision opens the scene to a difficult situation also for other operators, especially for teachers group, “smashed” within this conflict and unable to feel themselves part of the field, feeling as foreign observers of an issue that, in some way, does not concern them.

3. The penitentiary organization

Trying to explain the causes of such a state of disorientation and loneliness, prison operators first of all refer to the limits that seem to be deeply rooted within the prison organization, both in its structural and contextual aspects.

The context is described as very complex, unpredictable and ambivalent; all the operators refer to a very uncomfortable setting, both for them and for prisoners; in their words there are numerous references to the structural deficiency and

shortcomings that seem clearly oppose to the new open prison rules (“*Lack of space is the main problem! We don't have room to stay*”, school teacher, Lombardia, “*It's impossible to carry out our work in such a structure*” policeman, Liguria).

In most cases, when they talking about prison as an organization, they describe it as a rigid and overly pyramid, in which the distribution of power has to do with well-defined hierarchical scales, characterized by subordination and dependency dynamics, (“*There is a big difference between those who decide, the upper floors, and who does the job, the low manpower*”, policeman, Lombardia). With a particularly reference to this period of change, this severance is described as one of the main causes of the difficulties in coordinating a truly efficient work procedure (“*Who requires us to change? An organization that is actually absent*”, school teacher, Campania). The context is described as very complex, unpredictable and ambivalent; all the workers refer to a very uncomfortable setting, both for them and for prisoners; in their words there are numerous references to the structural deficiency and shortcomings that seem clearly oppose to the new open prison rules (“*Lack of space is the main problem! We don't have room to stay*”, school teacher, Lombardy, “*It's impossible to carry out our work in such a structure*” policeman, Liguria).

4. A forced change

A similar representation of their own work context drives prison workers to value this organizational change as highly dysfunctional and problematic.

Indeed, they feel themselves forced to adhere to a modification process that takes shape within an intrinsically immobile context that seems to fear evolution and change (“*It seems paradoxical to ask the prison to change*”, policeman, Lombardia). All workers recognize this change as “epochal” but continue to interpret it in terms of a mere ministerial fulfilment rather than as real opportunity to develop the operative system: in other words, it's a paradoxical change.

More specifically, the norm that seems to strongly make doubters the operators is the dynamics surveillance, defined as an “empty container”, not filled with recommendations, directions, indications.

This lack of reference points induces diverse feelings in the prison professionals; for example, educators suffer for the lack of apical figure able to lead them to the required changes (“*Here is a constant demand to do something, but we don't know why and what*”, educator, Liguria), while the policemen focus their attention on the possible consequences

of the application of the rule, in particular the deletion of the barriers between them and the prisoners (*"I still have colleagues who are afraid to get too close to the bars of the cells, what could happen by opening them?"*, policeman, Emilia-Romagna). The theme of "feel exposed and vulnerable" often returns in the words of policemen; they don't feel prepared or trained for such openness and sharing of space (*"Used to being ghettoized now we are in the middle of this reckless and without goals opening"*, policeman, Campania). By contrast, the teachers perceive themselves as external from prison establishment, even if they recognize problematic aspects in engaging prisoners in a really felt path in such a condition of less control.

5. Coping strategies

Such a state of isolation and anxiety, connected to the important work overload that involves all roles in every Italian Regions, appears closely related to continuous exposure to the risk of burnout. Prison workers talk about this construct directly, well restoring their sense of concern about the continuous exposure to massive psycho-physical efforts, source of stress, intense fatigue and tiredness (*"The most urgent problem? The constant exposure to the risk of burnout"*, educator, Lombardia; *"I feel like a climber on a high peak, I'm afraid to fall into the void"*, educator, Lombardia).

Such exposure, certainly accentuated by the introduction of the open prison system and the annulment of distances, appears the more difficult raw plug to manage. Indeed the prison operators, regardless of role and region of origin, repeatedly emphasize the aspect related to daily exposure to severe existential distressing situations, condition that seems to increase with the introduction of dynamic surveillance. This new norm is perceived as an element of reduction of the physical distance between workers and prisoners, and it potentially could also reduce the emotional distance.

These fears are forcing workers to seek adaptive strategies; despite the reference to the possibility to draw on passion for their work and to attempt to look at the positive side of the experience, workers are mostly referring to maladaptive strategies, in particular withdrawal. These feelings of discomfort and unease seem to be linked to a kind

of coping paralysis (*"I'm tired to feel bad, I prefer to retire"* educator, Lombardia), defence mechanism again paradoxical compared to the change process.

CONCLUSIONS

Starting from the classical use of the Grounded Theory analysis – that is the exploration of psycho-social process – this research allows to define an interesting overview of the representations and feelings about work experiences that characterize the actuality of the Italian prison context, connoted by numerous and significant normative changes that require the reference to a different organizational culture and a modification of the practical and relational functions.

Data analysis shows how to provide contribution within the prison context represents a constant highly challenging task at multiple levels, but our evidences underline that this condition of distress is increased from the current situation of organizational change⁷.

First of all our findings underline the pervasiveness of feeling of loneliness and confusion, as well as clearly expressed by the core category, *"Vagabond in a desert of snow"*. The prison workers perceived themselves as solitary players within a playing field impervious and not suitable, made even more uncertain by the introduction of sudden, radical and dropped from above changes, experienced as element of ulterior chaos.

Relational experiences are unsuitable, especially considering the international literature, that underlines the importance to eliminate conflicts and distances between different professionals to increase the perception of effectiveness and satisfaction about their own contribution (Lambert, Hogan & Tucker, 2009).

The penitentiary context is indeed based on multi-professional teams, established to deal with the complexity of the control and the rehabilitation process, that require the contribution of different skills. However, the data presented in this study suggest that every professional role protects its own identity at the expense of achieving a common mission, firmly maintaining boundaries among parties; the prison context seems to push each one to consider their membership rooted elsewhere,

⁷ A preliminary note appears important: the prison context of each Nation is closely interconnected to the set of rules and laws that characterize it. Due to the total absence of Italian contributions about this theme, it seemed appropriate to make reference to the international literature, always taking into account the peculiar specificities of each country.

as if everything had to be in the hands of the top management and the confrontation with the other is pushed toward confusion and identity's uncertainty. The process of organizational change seems to further increase such a complexity and exacerbates the fragmentation between parties, involving professionals in innovative processes that appear impossible to deal with in a state of such a confusion and distance.

The ambivalences that characterize any kind of change have already been discussed in literature, because of the perception of possible positive aspects of a changing process is flanked by inevitable negative consequences. As well as underlined from this study, the complexities increase when the change is required to apply a rule; constraints of compliance often extinguish the possibility of redesign operative given and indisputable practices, with the consequent activation resistances towards change (Saita, 2015).

The changing Italian prison system seems to encourage a profound sense of confusion and bewilderment in all operators, state at the base of the perception of high stress related to their role because of a lack of internalization of the tasks now required. Also the Italian workers perceive themselves as included in an organization whose directives are often contradictory and this seems to negatively affect their work experience, as well as confirmed also by the international literature (Hepburn & Knepper, 1993).

Furthermore, we note that the primary source of stress and dissatisfaction within this time of change is to be search in the organizational behaviour more than in the work itself and in the time spent with the prisoners; consistently with the international literature, also the Italian prisons workers refer to the difficulty of working with their respective user only as a result of organizational dimensions described above (Armstrong & Griffin, 2004).

Finally, despite only in recent years the role of emotions in organizations has found renewed interest (Zapf, 2002) it seems crucial to consider this topic to better understand the experience of working within the changing penitentiary context. The multidimensional construct of "emotion work" (Hochschild, 1979) explains how the employees of any organization should not only deal with the tasks required by their jobs, but also with the dose of emotions it stressed (Zapf, 2002). Penitentiary work, as a professional help, is characterized by highly meaningful emotional aspects; however, it is surprising how prison workers experience strong negative emotions to aspects in relation to the organization itself rather than to the work with their users.

Such negative and distressing feelings seem to increase when prison workers perceive to have any control on the tasks to be performed, as in the case of the changing process, considered at total unanimity as dropped from above. Therefore, also within the Italian context the lack of involvement of prison staff in the decision-making process plays a key role in increasing dissatisfaction on the work in prison (Lambert et al., 2009), while, on the contrary, being part of the decision-making process increases the perception of simplification of the procedures and relieves the stress of the experience of the role, increasing job satisfaction and decreasing the possibility of experiencing job stress (Dowden & Tellier, 2004).

Such exposure to a highly ambiguous situations could have severe negative effects on the person, both from a psychological point of view that from a physical point of view, arriving to diminish even the level of general life's satisfaction (Dowden & Tellier, 2004). Low levels of satisfaction also increase the probability of absenteeism, excessive staff turnover, burnout, as found with Italian prison workers (Petitta, Rinaldi & Manno, 2009).

The current analyses provide support to the idea that the main difficulty perceived with regard to work experience in the changing prison context is connected with the organizational coexistence, a construct referred to the quality of relationships between organizational subjects, capacity to experience and trait deal with the differences and recognize in others the resources that they bring (Lavanco & Di Maria, 2002), represents that particular way of "stay together" that individuals realize on work place (Avallone & Paplomatas, 2005).

Starting from the relational dimensions between its members, it's possible to understand the specific kind of organizational coexistence (everyone with own specific significance system, values, power, practices and reference culture) mediated by the work object.

With reference to these considerations, it's possible to affirm that the Italian prison system it's characterized by a chaotic/paralyzing/confused coexistence (Gozzoli, 2014), in which distrust in the encounter with the other and fear of difference strongly emerges; the object of the work seems not to be assumed or just individually assumed, because the organizational mandate isn't clear and shared or it often appears as senseless. In this kind of coexistence it's possible to perceive a pervasive conflict that seems to be pushing to defend oneself against the enemies rather than to confrontation and negotiation about work practices, exactly as is happen in the Italian prison context.

Certainly, a similar condition seems to be connected to a state of intense paralysis, contrary to the intrinsic meaning of construct of “change”. However, as underlined by previous works, the individuation of an organizational specific form of coexistence in a specific moment isn't a way to rigidly label its relational patterns but it's crucial to provide an access way to the complexity of the organizational life; this is the first step useful to better understand and treat resources and limits

inherent to the “stay together”, coming out of the temptation to reduce the problem / opportunity to the individual workers, to be able to intervene with efficacious changes (Di Maria, 2000).

Despite its innovative value, this research shows some limitations. Future studies should consider the opportunity to monitor changes with longitudinal researches, in order to provide further evidence to the opportunity and the limitations into the changing settings.

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