Learning from organizational theory to build organizational empowerment

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Abstract

This paper aims to spark interest among community psychologists to become more involved in promoting organizational empowerment (OE) and to recognize that interdisciplinary efforts are required to reach this goal. In this spirit, first we identify for community psychologists OE theory and constructs drawn from the organizational studies literature that we believe provide useful adjuncts to the OE work emerging in community psychology. We find several OE key constructs that are particularly valuable for community psychologists wanting to promote empowering organizations.

Second, we describe OE intervention strategies developed by European community psychologists, specifically Francescato and colleagues' (PMOA) Participatory Multi-faceted Organizational Assessment. PMOA integrates theoretical concepts from several disciplines stressing particularly those taken from organizational psychology, to develop theoretically driven methodological interventions to promote empowered and empowering organizations. We conclude by presenting some ideas on why it is particularly important in this era of globalization that more community psychologist get involved in understanding and promoting organizational empowerment.

Keywords: organizational empowerment, organizational change, Participatory Multi-dimensional organizational assessment

From the time that Rappaport (1981) introduced the idea to the field, empowerment has become a central phenomenon of interest for theory development, research and action in community psychology. As has been noted earlier (e.g., Zimmerman 2000; Peterson and Zimmerman 2004), the bulk of the empirical work on empowerment has focused at the individual level, less at the organizational and community levels. Moreover, the bulk of work on empowerment, especially in the United States, has focused on increasing our understanding of how empowerment manifests in various contexts and how empowerment processes occur. Less work has focused how to intervene to facilitate empowerment, especially in organizations.

Yet, the need to promote empowering organizations is striking. Today, in the era of globalization, organizations face mounting external (world-wide competition, pressure to innovate, phenomenal growth in mergers, restructuring, legislative change, etc.) and internal stressors (increased work related stress, fear of job loss, conflict among diverse coworkers, difficulties handling life / work balance, etc.), that erode their capacity to serve as empowering contexts for most employees (Bhagat et al. 2012). Given growing attention in community psychology to organizations and increased awareness of opportunities to draw on organizational studies to augment community psychology work (Boyd 2014), the time is ripe for community psychologists to expand their work on empowerment at the organizational level, especially efforts to promote the development of empowering and empowered organizations.

In this paper, we hope to spark interest among community psychologists to become more involved in promoting organizational empowerment (OE) and to recognize that interdisciplinary efforts are required to reach this goal. This does not, necessarily, involve creating interdisciplinary teams of experts, but rather, as some European community psychologists (Bruscaglioni 2007; Francescato et al. 2008; Stark 2010; Francescato and Zani, 2013) have

documented, it requires utilizing the knowledge and methodologies produced by other disciplines, within a participatory, community psychology values perspective. In this spirit, this paper has two primary aims: first, to identify for community psychologists OE theory and constructs drawn from the organizational studies literature that we believe provide useful adjuncts to the OE work emerging in community psychology. Second, to describe OE intervention strategies developed by European community psychologists – specifically Francescato and colleagues' Participatory Multi-faceted Organizational Assessement (PMOA) – that aims to integrate theoretical concepts from other disciplines stressing particularly those taken from organizational psychology, to develop theoretically driven interventions to promote organizational empowerment. We will conclude by presenting some ideas on why it is particularly important in this era of globalization that more community psychologist get involved in understanding and promoting organizational empowerment.

Interest in OE among USA community psychologists: scarce but growing

In the United States, community psychologists have made important contributions to organizational empowerment theory by distinguishing and developing the constructs of empowering and empowered organizations (Zimmerman 2000; Peterson and Zimmerman 2004). Empowering organizations function in ways that increase the personal empowerment of individual members. An empowering organization can increase: *personal wellbeing*, augmenting knowledge of organizational functioning, and involvement in decision-making; *relational wellbeing*, improving communication and bonding and bridging social capital among stakeholders; and *collective wellbeing*, via increased awareness of political, economic and social forces impinging on the organization (Zimmerman 2000). An empowered organization, by contrast, develops successfully, achieves its goals, and influences systems in which they are

embedded (Perkins and Zimmerman 1995). Peterson and Zimmerman (2004), in their initial effort to articulate the nomological network of organizational empowerment, identified three primary components: intraorganizational (focused on the structures and processes internal to the organization), interorganizational (focused on the relationships and collaborations between organizations), and extraorganizational (focused on organizational efforts to influence the larger systems of which they are a part), each of which have associated organizational processes and related organizational empowerment outcomes. At their best, organizations are both empowering and empowered (Zimmerman 2000; Nelson and Prilleltensky 2010).

Despite these valuable contributions to organizational theory, to date, American community psychology has developed few strategies to aid organizations to become empowered and empowering. This reflects in part, an historic lack of attention to organizations and the organizational level of analysis more broadly in the field (Keys and Frank 1987; Boyd and Angelique 2002; Boyd 2014), which is evident in both graduate training and undergraduate textbooks. Few graduate programs provide students with the theoretical frameworks and practical skills necessary to conduct much needed participatory organizational analysis on how to improve both organizational functioning and the wellbeing of employees/volunteers for non-profit organizations, human service organizations, NGOs, and many other community-based organizations. Indeed, U.S. graduate training programs in community psychology do not appear to place a premium on preparing their students for organizational work. A 2012 SCRA survey of graduate training programs in community psychology examined, among other things, the provision of training in community psychology practice competencies (Connell et al. 2012). The survey gathered information from 39 programs about the availability of opportunities via optional and required courses in the program to develop competency in "Consultation and

Organizational Development." This competency was further defined as competency to "facilitate growth of an organization's capacity to attain its goals." Results indicated that only 29% of programs provide such opportunities via required coursework. The report also indicated that only 27% of programs described their graduates as "proficient" (meaning most students gain an intermediate ability to use this competency) and only 5.4% described them as having "expertise" (meaning most students gain an advanced or high level of ability to use this competency).

Similarly, most textbooks, both past and present, lack chapters on organizational topics. We examined widely used and cited textbooks published in the United States in search of chapters devoted to work in organizations. Our sample included prominent historical textbooks books published prior to the year 2000, as well as contemporary textbooks and general reference books compiled on the Society for Community Research and Action (SCRA) website (www.scra27.org) in June, 2014. The sample included 17 traditional textbooks – seven published since 2000 and ten prior. It also included five general reference books that provide overviews of the state of the field – four published since 2000 and one prior (see Appendix A for a complete listing). While we do not claim this is an exhaustive listing, we believe it includes nearly all of the most widely used and well-regarded community psychology textbooks and general reference books published in the United States in the past three decades. While several of the 22 texts devoted a portion of a chapter to topics such as organizational level of analysis or tactics and strategies for organizational change (Heller and Monahan 1977; Heller et al. 1984; Rappaport, 1977), only four (Glenwick and Jason 1980; Mann 1978; Moritsugu et al. 2010; Nelson and Prilleltensky 2010) – or 18% of total, 24% of the traditional textbooks – included a full chapter devoted to organizations. Thus, consistent with reviews of published articles in community psychology journals (Boyd and Angelique 2002; Boyd 2014), evidence from both

community psychology graduate training programs and textbooks suggests that organizations and organizational studies have not constituted a primary conceptual frame for work in U.S. community psychology.

There is, however, evidence that this state of affairs is beginning to change, even as there is abundant opportunity for continued growth. Boyd's (2014) recent meta-analytic review of scholarly work published from 2001 to 2011 in the two leading US community psychology journals (*American Journal of Community Psychology* and *Journal of Community Psychology*) documented a nearly seven-fold increase in the rate of publications devoted to organization studies compared to prior decades – clearly a noteworthy change. Between 2001 and 2011, the combined publication rate across these two journals of organization related articles was 21% (252 of 1209), compared to just 3.7% from 1977 through 1987, and 4% from 1988 to 2000 (Boyd and Angelique 2002). Content analysis of these publications indicated that about 4 out of 5 of them were focused in organizational settings, over 2 out of 3 utilized organization related concepts, while only 7.14% drew on organizational theory as an explanatory framework. This distribution of content across organization related settings, concepts and theory was largely unchanged from 1997, with use of organizational theory only starting in 2007 (Boyd 2014). Especially relevant, for our purposes of increasing community psychology's role in promoting organizational empowerment, Boyd (2014) identified only three studies from 2001 to 2011 that drew on organizational empowerment theory (Brown et al 2007; Ohmer 2008; and, Brown 2009) and three others that drew on organizational change theory (Evans et al. 2007; Chilenski et al. 2007; and Bess et al. 2009). One would not know, by reviewing publications in community psychology journals (with very few exceptions), that organization scholars have been concerned with promoting organizational empowerment since at least the late 1970's (see e.g., Kanter

1977), there is a large and growing literature devoted to this topic in management and organizational studies (see Seibert et al. (2011) for a meta-analytic review), and community psychologists in Europe began experimenting with organizational change strategies designed to promote empowerment in the 1980's (Francescato 1983). Clearly, there is untapped opportunity for community psychologists with interests in OE to incorporate into our work research findings, theory and constructs from outside our field. We now turn to a brief overview of some of this work.

OE theory and constructs from the management and organizations literatures

Perhaps the first and most obvious point to be made about organizational empowerment work coming from the organization and management literatures is that, more often than not, it either explicitly focuses on or implicitly assumes that the organizations of interest are private, profit making businesses, and thus, members of organizations are typically thought of in their roles as employees. This point merits mention for at least two reasons. First, it suggests the need for community psychologists to use caution when seeking to generalize concepts and findings from these literatures to a broader spectrum of organization types that are of interest in community psychology. Most certainly, many constructs and theoretical principles will transfer well from the business context to other organizational contexts, while others may be context specific. Second, and arguably more interestingly, it draws attention to business organizations and workplaces as critical contexts for community psychologists to engage in organizational empowerment research and action. Despite the enormous amount of time large segments of the adult population spend at work and in work organizations, somewhat surprisingly, private sector organizations (including private businesses) have not received significant research attention in community psychology (Boyd 2014). Two important reviews of research relevant to

conceptualizing empowering settings (Maton 2008) and organizational empowerment (Peterson and Zimmerman 2004) all but completely ignore corporate and business organizations. Yet, as Price (1985) argued, "Work can affect psychological well being, one's sense of personal identity, and provide a psychological sense of community. Work today is a major locus of social change and a reflection of our social values" (p. 1). The same can be said of the organizations in which people work, insofar as they shape the meaning and experience of work. The organization and management literatures, thus, underscore the importance of, and opportunities presented by, business organizations as sites for community psychologists to promote organizational empowerment.

In the organization studies and management literatures the importance of promoting organizational empowerment was already gathering steam in the nineteen seventies. Rosabeth Kanter's (1977) seminal book, *Men and Women of the Corporation*, is widely credited for introducing to the concept of empowerment to the management field. Kanter's work grew from her experience consulting to a very large bureaucratic chemical company. She was struck by the rigidity of the company's bureaucracy, its strict adherence to ritual practice, its dictatorial management style, its disaffected workers and its consequent struggles to adjust to new pressures in the business environment, such as the entry of large numbers of women to the workforce, the energy crisis in the United States, and the introduction of information technology to the workplace. Kanter's analysis (1977; 1979) led to her structural theory of organizational empowerment and focused on the role of power in the organization, and its affects on both individual employees and the organization as a whole. Kanter defined power in organizations as the ability to mobilize resources (human, material, information, etc.) to achieve organizational goals. She identified two systemic sources of power – informal power derived from

relationships and alliances with fellow workers (including superiors, peers and subordinates), and formal power derived from jobs that are central to the purpose of the organization, visible within the organization, and that allow workers flexibility in how they complete their work. In Kanter's model, both forms of power inhere in four primary structural conditions in organizations: (1) opportunity for advancement, (2) access to information, (3) access to support, and (4) opportunity to grow and learn. Work environments that include these conditions promote empowerment.

In the nearly four decades following Kanter's early work, a substantial body of empirical research has been conducted which largely supports Kanter's contention that these structures can be modified, or created by design, and underlie organizational empowerment, which in turn is related to a long list of employee job related attitudes and behaviors (Seibert et al. 2011). Two primary theoretical conceptions dominate thinking about empowerment in this body of work – the structural and the psychological perspectives. Both of these perspectives point to numerous constructs that merit consideration from community psychologists as they venture to promote OE. A third additional perspective – the process perspective – has received less attention but should also prove useful.

The *structural perspective* (sometimes referred to as the relational or mechanistic perspective) views empowerment as a set of structures, policies and practices by which authority and responsibility are distributed downward through organizational hierarchies from upper level to lower level employees. This perspective is especially useful to those who hope to promote *empowering* organizations as it focuses attention on aspects of organizations that can be modified or designed to enable organizational members to perform more effectively, have power over their work, and feel and exercise control over the outcomes for which they are responsible,

thereby significantly affecting organizational outcomes. Especially promising examples of such

practices for those who seek to promote OE include Kanter's (1977, 1983) four conditions –

information, socio-political support, opportunity for advancement and access to resources – as

well as transformational leadership (Dust et al. 2014), creation of a participative work climate

(Spreitzer 1996), building collaborative governance structures (Larkin et al. 2008), job

enrichment via creation of self-managing teams or autonomous work groups (Leach et al. 2003),

and building intrinsic task motivation (Thomas and Velthouse 1990). It is noteworthy that early

forms of the structural perspective, particularly from the management literature, often assumed

that empowerment occurred when power-holders delegated or granted power, authority and

responsibility to those with less power (Menon 2001). What is at issue here is the question of

who participates in and controls the organizational change process. Paralleling developments in

the community psychology literature (Swift & Levin 1987), more recent work has adopted

different language that focus on organizational change processes that are participative,

sometimes driven from the bottom up, and thus allows for the possibility of empowerment as a

self-transformational process – developments in keeping with community psychology values.

The structural perspective shares with Peterson and Zimmerman's (2004) notion of empowering

organizations – particularly the intraorganizational component – a focus on internal

organizational characteristics that lead to psychological empowerment (Zimmerman1990).

     In the organization and management literatures, the *psychological perspective*

(sometimes referred to as the organic or bottom up perspective) views empowerment as a

collection of psychological states experienced by organizational members reflecting their

perceptions of power and control. Multiple versions of this perspective have been advanced.

Each emphasizes different and potentially important aspects of the psychological experience of

empowerment. One version emphasizes organizational members' perceptions of their authority and ability to make business decisions, and the extent to which they are accountable and accept responsibility for the outcomes of their decisions (Hyatt and Ruddy 1997; Hardy and Leiba-O'Sullivan 1998; Hechanova-Alampy and Beehr 2001). A second version developed by Spreitzer (1992) – based on a thematic analysis of the empowerment literature across multiple disciplines including sociology, psychology, theology, education, social work, and management – emphasizes organizational members' sense of (a) meaning – how meaningful their work is to them, or the fit between the needs of the work role and the worker's personal values and beliefs, (b) competence – to carry out their work tasks successfully, (c) self-determination – having choice in what work actions they take on and how they regulate them, and (d) impact – the extent to which they can affect the critical outcomes of their work unit (e.g., team, department, organization). The psychological perspective on empowerment shares much with the cognitive aspect of Zimmerman's (1990) notion of personal empowerment. Insofar as empowerment manifests differently and takes on different meaning in different contexts (Zimmerman 1995), this perspective provides value-added for those seeking to promote OE in work settings by articulating the relevant psychological states in terms of work setting content. Moreover, it has value for those wishing to promote empowering organizations, as it functions as a critical mediator between structural empowerment constructs and a wide variety of work related attitudes and behaviors, including job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job strain, turnover intentions, task performance, organizational citizenship behaviors and innovation (Seibert et al. 2011). This latter point connects to the third perspective, the process perspective.

The *process perspective* views empowerment as a function of the relationships between structural antecedents and resulting psychological states. This approach functions to integrate

into a single model the constructs associated with both the structural and psychological perspectives above. The process perspective has yet to gain the same level of currency in the organization and management literatures as either the structural or psychological perspectives, but following Seibert et al.'s (2011) meta-analytic review, which provides the most comprehensive summary to date of evidence in support of these relationships (at both the individual and team level of analysis), we suspect this perspective will come to dominate the literature. For the organizational empowerment interventionist, this perspective is useful in focusing attention on the cross-level relationships between qualities of organizations and the well being and functioning of the people who populate those organizations (neither of which can be ignored when planning and implementing OE related organizational change. In this regard, Matthew et al.'s (2003) developed an organizational empowerment scale that sought to integrate in a single measure aspects of both Spreitzer's (1992) work on psychological empowerment and aspects of the structural perspective on empowerment. The scale has practical utility in that it "lends itself to obvious macro-level uses on an organizational or team-based level," and facilitates "the development and execution of strategic human resource (HR) practices intended to increase empowerment levels of employees … that provides a company with information necessary to develop empowerment" (p. 298). Matthews et al. (2003) proposed three organizational factors that are conceptually linked to macro-environmental facilitation of empowerment: (1) dynamic structural framework – this occurs "when a company provides clear set of modifiable guidelines that assists employee decision making both procedurally and behaviorally in an evolving work environment"; (2) control of workplace decisions – this occurs when employees are allowed input into all aspects of their professional career; and (3) fluidity in information sharing.

Should community psychologists take up the charge to become more engaged in promoting organizational empowerment in work settings, they will find that they are venturing into terrain already occupied by legions of organizational and business consultants. Perusal of the management literature suggests that the empowerment banner has been taken up by American business – a 2001 survey (Lawler, Mohrman, & Benson, 2001) found that over 70% of organizations have implemented some type of empowerment program targeted to some portion of their workforce. While the specific strategies of these programs vary widely, for the most part, they aim to promote individual employee empowerment as a means to improving the accomplishment of organizational goals.

We will now turn to examining how Francescato et al. (1988, 2002) have developed a methodology for promoting organizational change, based on constructs and modes of intervention coming from several disciplines but particularly from work and organizational psychology, but with a strong reliance on the construct of participation, as a source of empowerment as conceived by community psychologists, which gives its distinctiveness from work psychology approaches to organizational analysis. While most work psychologists perform organizational analysis of behalf of top management, PMOA requires simultaneous participation from members of all hierarchical levels, because it aims to help the organization as a whole to become more empowered and empowering.

The "linking" European approach to community psychology and organizational empowerment

After Bender (1976) and Francescato (1977) published the first textbooks in community psychology in Europe, community psychologists from different countries began to meet informally, to discuss if European community psychology should adopt theories and modalities

of intervention from the United States. Three common criticisms made of the dominant USA model were the paucity of (1) publications of interventions aimed at organizational empowerment, (2) courses on organizational development within community psychology programs, and (3) the omission of this topic in both US and European community psychology textbooks in the eighties (Palmonari and Zani, 1980; Contessa and Sberna, 1981; Francescato, Contesini, & Dini, 1983; Garofalo, 1981).

So in the eighties and early nineties, some European community psychologists, particularly Donata Francescato in Italy and Wolfang Stark in Germany, started experimenting with new interdisciplinary modalities to promote organizational change, making an important distinction. Interdisciplinary efforts to promote organizational change do not need, necessarily, to involve teams of experts of different fields, very difficult to organize in practice*, but to utilize the knowledge and methodologies produced in various disciplines, linking sciences together in practice*.

Francescato (1983) started to experiment with various interdisciplinary modalities to promote systemic organizational changes, within a theoretical community psychology values framework.   She built on the construct of empowerment, a concept just formulated by community psychologist Julian Rappaport (1981). Francescato gained inspiration also from several European and US authors, coming mostly from work and organizational backgrounds, who also were developing several kinds of pluralistic systemic approaches (Bruscaglioni 1982; Flood and Jackson 1988; Morgan 1986; Jackson and Keys 1984). These systemic approaches underlined the need to distinguish between "objective" and "subjective " dimensions of organizations. Flood and Jackson (1988) and Jackson and Keys (1984) argued that we needed to integrate the managerial Anglo-Saxon approach to the study of organizations and the European

structural school of thought. Bruscaglioni (1982), an Italian work and organizational

psychologist, examined various theoretical approaches and arrived at the conclusion that that we

needed a multidimensional approach since each theoretical approach could only "see" a partial

view of organizational aspects and problems:

> "In the field of organizational psychology different theories do not explain in
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> different manners the same aspects or problems, instead different theories explain with
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> different modalities different aspects and problems in organizations. For example, some
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> theories clarify how conflicts are endemic in organizations neglecting to explain how
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> cooperative aspects are developed, while other theories explain very well how people
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> cooperate but largely neglect conflictual aspects. Some theories focus only on observable
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> relationships patterns, neglecting to analyze how relationships within organizations also
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> have their roots in individual and collective unconscious processes, while other theories
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> explain very well relational aspects deriving from unconscious processes neglecting to
>
> deal with directly observable relational behaviors" (1982, p. 441).

Bruscaglioni (1982) wrote that the organizational field was in a phase of theoretical

isolation, that is, different authors followed one particular theory, neglecting or ignoring other

approaches. He argued for integration among the different approaches. Agreeing with

Bruscaglioni's call for theoretical integration, Donata Francescato (a clinical community

psychologist) and Guido Ghirelli (a community and work psychologist) with the help of Mario

Tancredi (a system engineer and a manager in a public energy company) constructed a multi-

faceted participatory assessment of organizational strengths and problem areas called

Participatory Multidimensional Organizational Assessment (PMOA), which aimed to increase

organizational empowerment. PMOA was based on constructs and modes of intervention coming

from several disciplines but particularly from work and organizational psychology, but with a strong reliance on the construct of participation, as a source of empowerment as conceived by community psychologists, which gives its distinctiveness from work psychology approaches to organizational analysis. While most work psychologists perform organizational analysis of behalf of top management, PMOA requires simultaneous participation from members of all hierarchical levels, because it aims to help the organization become more empowered and empowering. In organizations with less than thirty members, all participate in the evaluation process. In larger organizations a core group is formed, made up of representatives of all stakeholders. For instance, in a school, representatives of students, parents, teachers, janitors and office staff might analyze their organization across four dimensions.

In 1988, Francescato and Ghirelli published a first version of PMOA: they argued that an organization could be explored along four main dimensions: structural strategic, functional, psychodynamic and cultural, and psycho-environmental (Francescato and Ghirelli 1988). The four dimensions are all interconnected but the first two aim particularly to make the organization more empowered, by making it able to choose reachable strategic goals and efficiently organize all actions needed to reach them. The last two deal more directly with helping the organization becoming more empowering of its members, analyzing organizational culture and climate, plus several other psychosocial variables to improve fit between organizational goals and workers' aspirations, and increase personal, relational and collective wellbeing.

Each of these four dimensions described in detail below, had been mostly explored by authors from various disciplines outside community psychology, who have developed organizational theories that focus on different facets of organization, and used different methodologies to intervene in organizations.

The process of PMOA: Preliminary analysis

The process of PMOA starts with a "preliminary analysis" which consists of brainstorming sessions in which participants are invited to list main strengths and problems areas of their organizations. This gives a first rough measure of how empowered and empowering or disempowered and disempowering they perceive their organization. If the number of areas of strengths outnumbers problems areas for instance we consider it a first indicator of the level of the empowerment of the organization. We then classify each item as belonging primarily to one of the four dimensions, so we have also a first view of which dimension has more points of strengths or problems areas.

The strategic and structural dimension

Then we analyze the first dimension called the strategic and structural dimension, which deals with the economic, legal, political features of an organization To facilitate organizational strategic planning of goals and desired outcomes, one has to monitor the environment in which an organization is embedded using also perspectives and tools developed by economists, sociologists and political scientists. For instance we included the construct of power to mobilize resources to reach strategic goals as proposed by a sociologist (Kanter 1984); and the construct of strategic history of an organization that focuses on the main changes in aims that have occurred in the organization, used by an organizational sociologists and economists (De Masi 1973, 2003; Sennet 2006). An experienced member narrates the strategic history of the organization (i.e., when it was created, what goals and visions it had, how strategic goals have changed over time). Then members evaluate how the organization has fared, choosing various criteria with which to assess their organization's performance in the recent past.

We also use the tools of strategic positioning developed by management experts and economists (Lorsch and Clark, 2008; Greco and Termini, 2007). "Positioning" the organization, entails comparing it to similar organisations on a number of criteria. In for profit organizations, the criteria are well established (for instance market share, sale volumes, etc.), and these kinds of data are continuously gathered and discussed. In non-profit institutions such as voluntary organizations or even schools, sometimes we have to spend quite a considerable amount of time brainstorming about possible criteria of comparison and give participants time to gather these kinds of data, which is not immediately available for evaluation (Morganti, 1996).

Then, taking into consideration legal, economic and other structural limits, and opportunities, the core group defines strategic objectives for the immediate future and for the next five years. Finally they outline strong and weak points of the strategic dimension that emerge from their shared evaluations.

The functional dimension

The functional dimension includes all the tasks that have to be completed to meet organizational goals. We integrated methodologies taken from sociology and organizational disciplines to examine activity flows and detect where problems and assets may lie. To improve organizational functioning, to choose the action initiatives, which are helpful to reach desired outcomes, we also integrate concepts and tools from systems engineers and management experts. For instance we borrowed from a functional model of organizations developed by Tancredi (1981), a system engineer and management expert. He argued that functionally all organizations could be conceived as the systemic interplay of three main systems: a) the system of managerial control with includes function of high level decision making, planning objectives, organizing and controlling the efficacy and efficiency of organizational processes; b) the operational system

which deals with the actions one has to perform, whose main functions involves the acquisition of resources, the transformation of resources and the collocation of final products on the market as well as the acquisition and administration of personnel, of financial means and of knowledge; and, c) the information system which deals with the acquisition, storing, elaboration and transmission of data which allow the monitoring of all organizational processes to make changes when needed.

The functional dimension is examined by reviewing what tasks have to be completed to meet goals, using Tancredi's (1981) functional model adapted for the specific organization we are dealing with. We also have participants examine how often they have to deal with emergencies and how they deal with them following a schema proposed by Butera 1990, an Italian organizational sociologist and management consultant. Again at the end of the evaluation of the functional dimension a list of strong and weak points is posted.

The professional competencies of the community psychologist who facilitates these first two processes are mostly based on small and large group facilitation skills, including the capacity to integrate different contributions coming from the various small groups, to mediate, to offer support and encouragement, to help participants verify suppositions through data analysis, to agree on what were the major strategic goals in the past and which ones should be chosen for the future.

The cultural psychodynamic dimension

Then we examine the third cultural or psychodynamic dimension which explores the construct of organizational culture, exploring the irrational component of organizational processes such as group and individual emotional variables that are often not consciously discussed. We initially borrowed the construct of "metaphors" from Morgan (1986,) who argued

that an organization can be seen through images, such as machine, organism, brain, culture, political system, psychic prison, tool of dominance etc. Originally we also borrowed the constructs formulated by several French and Italian socio-psychoanalysts of the "irrational logic" of organizational behaviours (Jacques 1978; Enriquez 1980; Carli and Paniccia 1981; Muti 1986). This irrational logic differs from common rational logic because it promotes ambivalent subconscious emotions toward the organization in all its stakeholders, because an organization satisfies the need for security and belonging of participants but also frustrates their desires for autonomy and identity by imprisoning them in fixed organizational roles. They postulate that the unconscious processes of attachment that we developed as children in our family are re-enacted in the working environment with colleagues and especially with authority figures. Leaders sometimes have to deal with attitudes of collaborators who make "unreasonable contradictory emotional demands" and therefore elicit contradictory behaviors in their chiefs. They examine the kinds of conflicts these unconscious dynamics produce, which can hinder organizational performance and undermine organizational wellbeing.

We now primarily rely on soliciting different types of individual, group and organizational narratives, a construct proposed by community psychologist Julian Rappaport, (1995). We have also developed original methodologies: individual and group "work novels" and "a group movie script" technique. The movie script technique allows for exploration not only of the past but of the future. For example, one might ask different target groups (males and females, old and young, groups made up of different professionals etc.) to develop a plot for a movie script about their organization. Participants have to pick a genre of movie (e.g. historical, science fiction, comedy or detective) and come up with a title, a plot, main characters, and dramatize, if they wish, particular relevant scenes. Most groups choose to present their "movie"

in front of the other groups whose members are then encouraged to say what emotions they felt watching the performance. For instance if in a movie script is titled "Titanic" or "Climbing Mt. Everest" or "Fun and games," we ask participants how their title may relate to the emotions prevalent in their work setting. Or, if only negative emotions prevail we may suggest to further explore some small positive emotions they experienced in their work and vice versa. It seems that emotional sharing in a protected environment promotes bonding and bridging by building a climate of trust in which even conflicts can be openly expressed and accepted. We also use jokes, drawings to examine this dimension and help participants become more aware how hidden emotions may play a beneficial or harmful role in organizational functioning (Francescato et al. 2002; Francescato et al. 2004, 2006).

Again at the end of the examination of this dimension, strong and weak points that emerged are listed. The competencies needed here for the community psychologist who facilitates the exploration of this cultural, often unconscious, organizational dimension are those acquired generally in clinical psychology – the capacity to detect the emotional meaning of nonverbal and verbal behaviors, to help groups face conflicts and arrive at some creative solutions, to explore the relationships between the type and contents of movie scripts and drawings produced by the groups, and problems and areas of strength of the organization to which they formally belong.

The psycho-environnmental dimension.

Finally, the psycho-environmental dimension is explored which basically measures the fit between individuals' expectations and organizational aims. Generally, we use tools drawn from organizational psychology to measure constructs such as perceived leadership styles, individuals' motivations, competencies, potential, and organizational efficacy (Borgogni 2001, 2005). We

also have used multidimensional and organizational check-ups developed by work and

organizational psychologists (Spaltro 1977; D'Amato and Majer 2005; Leiter and Maslach 2000;

Lazzari et al. 2002), and Multidimensional Organizational Health questionnaires (Avallone and

Paplomata 2005) that emphasize different theoretical constructs.

We originally used Spaltro's (1977) organizational check up questionnnaire that focuses

primarily on group phenomena. His check up also investigates these theoretical constructs: hope

to solve problems, leadership styles, credibility, organizational stress, motivational commitment

to organizational goals and reward systems fairness.

We now also use the following more recent questionnaires.

a) D'Amato and Meyer's (2005) organizational questionnaire (MDOQ10) focuses on the

constructs of communication, autonomy, team work, fairness, job description, job involvement,

reward, leadership, innovation and dynamism.

b) Leiter and Maslach (2000) work primarily on the construct of job burnout, which they

argue is not an individual problem but it is context dependent. They measure therefore constructs

such as individual resilience, attitudes toward coworkers and work, and individual and group

perceived work efficacy.

c) Lazzari Pisanti and Avallone (2002) have developed a questionnaire to measure the

quality of organizational climate (COR) which focuses on three constructs: a) perception of

quality of service offered by the work unit to which each person belongs, b) perception of quality

of the organization as a whole, and c) perception of quality of relations with colleagues and other

professional figures.

d) Avallone and Paplomatas (2005) have developed a Multidimensional Organizational

Health Questionnaire (MOHQ) which focuses on the construct of organizational health,

measuring on a Likert type Scale: the comfort perceived in the work environment, "tolerability

of assigned tasks," psychosomatic problems, attitudes toward innovation, perceived safety of

work environment and positive and negative elements perceived in the work environment related

to organizational health.

These measures all deal with multiple variables that can create an empowering or

disempowering work settings.

Besides using one or two of these questionnaires developed by organizational

psychologists, usually we also conduct in depth individual interviews to assess the fit between

organizational goals and cultures and individual desires and expectations, a construct borrowed

from a USA based community psychologist Murrell (1973). To increase the congruence

between individuals' and organizations' expectations, we have used both group and individual

in-depth interviews focused on exploring the degree of fit between individual preferences,

competencies and desires, and the organizational functions to be performed to reach strategic

goals, formulated during the analysis of the structural and functional dimensions. In some cases,

each person gets to say what preferred function she may want to exercise in the future and

whether she has the necessary skills to perform it and finally, how she may learn them.

Setting priorities at the end of PMOA

After the various organizational actors have identified weaknesses and strengths in all

four dimensions as well as the connections among dimensions (for instance, a lack of procedures

on how to best go about a task (functional dimensions) may have negative effects both in the

psychodynamic dimension (workers feel anxious and confused) and in the psycho-environmental

dimension (insufficient communication among colleagues)), they formulate different narratives

and preferred visions of the future. We borrow here the construct and tools developed by

Wolfgang Stark in his Future Labs, where people belonging to an organization outline preferred futures (Stark 2000, 2011). Participants first take part in a critical session, in which a core organizational problem is selected and they are encouraged to explore all the possible negative consequences if the specific problem persists in time and to vent all their fears for the future. In a second " utopic" session they learn to explore through creative techniques, both verbal and nonverbal, all possible solutions to the problem, even the most unpractical ones. They discover and express their deepest desires. Finally, in the last session, they try to integrate their desired changes with the possibilities existing in the contexts, finding the best possible solutions and, agreeing on some actions to be taken to begin to realize desired changes.

At the end of the analysis, participants compare strong and weak points emerged in all four dimensions with the ones that were proposed in the preliminary analysis. They then formulate plans to effect desired changes that can be achieved through the resources available within the organization. They also outline the problems or solutions that cannot be tackled without intervention at a different level. Focusing on feasible change necessarily promotes empowerment and increases the capacity of organizations to foster creative change. The community psychologist facilitators discourage discussing changes that are not feasible because this is disempowering, and among the numerous suggested changes which are proposed at the end of PMOA, there are always several, which are reachable objectives, and working on them contributes to create both a more empowered and empowering organization. Participants are encouraged to plan who will be in charge to take the first steps to reach two or three specific reachable changes, and who will be responsible for the different tasks needed to implement it. In a follow up session, held about one month after the formal ending of PMOA, participants discuss how changes have begun to be implemented, problems encountered, and how to best solve them

to reach desired changes. Here the competencies needed by community psychologists are some shared with work and organizational psychologists, such as the ability to choose the best existing measures for the specific organization one is working with, to analyze and report test results, to promote open discussion of divergent or minority opinions and of different change priorities. In this crucial part of the analysis, community psychologists also have to be expert in facilitating the identification by participants of connections between both problems and areas of strengths that appear in one dimension but may affect other dimensions. Experience in conducting many organizational analyses in different work settings develops this specific competence, as we describe in a book that included case studies in more than 50 small and medium business firms, public administration structures, and nonprofit organisations (Francescato, Tomai and Solimeno 2008).

It takes at least 6 meetings lasting about three hours each to conduct a PMOA. Between meetings, normally scheduled every two weeks, members of the organization can gather missing information on problem areas and points of strength emerged during the shared evaluation of each dimension. In a follow up meeting, two tasks are performed: an evaluation of strengths and limits of PMOA, and a discussion of how the implementation of desired changes is progressing, and often new steps are proposed and discussed on the basis of the results achieved through the implementation of the first steps, agreed upon at the end of PMOA.

Strengths and limits of PMOA

PMOA follows several of the guiding principles that should be at the core of community psychology interventions: exploring four dimensions of organizations that include objective and subjective variables it helps participants gain a pluralist vision of organizations and to integrate different theoretical approaches, different modalities to gather knowledge that integrate

positivistic and constructivist viewpoints. Through the examination of the strategic history of the organization, participants can understand the past and how problems and strengths arose. Using four dimensions helps to give values to different professions that all contribute to organizational functioning, and helps marginalized workers to gain appreciation and visibility. It gives voice to minority narratives and promotes the production of new metaphors or new narratives that help "imagine" new scripts and roles for individuals and social groups within an organization. The methodology helps to share knowledge about the organization and increase social capital and sense of community and participatory decision-making. One important limit is that PMOA helps in sharing power based on knowledge of different organizational aspects, but does not change the legal and economic types of power. We found interesting differences between hierarchical organizations such as businesses and also schools where managers are not elected but nominated by boards or owners of the organization, and non profit and volunteer organizations such as unions, cooperatives and associations of the third sector where members elect their top figures. In these latter settings, PMOA obtains better results because their values of participation, power sharing, attention to the well being of members are more congruent with PMOA goals and methodologies. Other limits of PMOA are that it is time consuming, and requires an active involvement of different stakeholders that may be difficult to sustain during the whole process.

Another limit is that one has to undergo rigorous training, and participate in several PMOAs to gain the necessary competencies to facilitate empowering processes in organizations. However, training graduate students can be done also online, through computer supported collaborative learning in small groups (Francescato et al 2011). PMOA has been used by properly supervised masters level community psychology students, trained on this methodology over the course of three months of online seminars, to empower more than 140 organizations,

ranging from public administration departments, volunteers and non profit organizations,

hospitals, small business firms and schools (Francescato et al. 2008).

Mutual influence between community psychologists and organizational psychologists

PMOA, when first published (Francescato and Ghirelli 1988), gained the immediate

attention of work and organizational psychologists who invited the authors to publish their

theoretical scheme in a work and training national review (Tancredi and Francescato 1989). This

article was awarded a prize for theoretical and practical innovation in the field of organizational

studies. Donata Francescato was invited by the then President of the Italian Association of Work

Psychologists, Enzo Spaltro, to give a keynote presentation to the European Conference of Work

and Organization in Cambridge in 1989.

Francescato and colleagues have tested PMOA in many organizational settings

(Francescato et al. 2002, 2004, 2006, 2009) and in 2008 by invitation they published a book on

the results of these experiments in a book series collection aimed at promoting ideas and tools for

managing people, directed by two work and organization psychologists (Francescato, Tomai and

Solimeno 2008) . In fact, more work psychologists than community psychologists showed

interest in PMOA until fairly recently (Francescato and Zani 2010, Francescato and Zani 2013).

For instance Bruscaglioni (2007) a work psychologist has developed a theory and

methodology to promote self-empowerment, citing as source of inspiration Francescato and

Ghirelli's book (1988) and another work psychologist wrote an organizational textbook called

"empowerment"(Picardo1995). Caterina Arcidiacono in her research on the state of community

psychology in Europe (2013) found that in 2013, compared to the nineties, more courses on

organizational empowerment were offered in community psychology programs and more

chapters on the topic appear in several recent community psychology textbooks (Lavanco and

Novara 2002; De Piccoli and Lavanco 2003; Ornelas 2008; Zani 2012), but still only a small minority of programs offered specific organizational courses.

CONCLUSIONS

Why we need today more community psychologists involved in promoting organizational empowerment

In both the US and Europe there are still only a small minority of community psychologists involved in organizational empowerment. In both areas, few textbooks have chapters in organizational development and few graduate programs teach competencies at this level of intervention. However, in both areas there has been an increase in interest by community psychologist in organizational empowerment in the last decade (Boyd 2014, Arcidiacono 2013). This is a very timely development since today, more than ever organizations need community psychologists to help them become both more empowered and empowering.

Today, in the era of globalization, organizations face mounting external and internal stressors that erode their capacity to serve as empowering contexts for most employees, and often prevent them from being empowered organizations (Bhagat et al. 2012). They need the kind of help that can be given, as we hope to have shown in our paper, by community psychologists who can integrate the most useful theoretical constructs that come from both community psychology and organizational studies, as well as other disciplines as PMOA shows. Francescato, Tomai, and Solimeno (2008) experimented for years with the multidisciplinary constructs and methodologies described above to find which ones were particularly empowering. They found that the constructs of a) group narratives, especially group movie scripts, from community psychology, b) the fit between organizational expectations and individual aspirations, from both community psychology and other organizational theories, and, c) organizational

climate from organizational psychology, were particularly helpful (especially when they could confront data emerging from different organizational climate scales).

They also discovered one of the most empowering factors was the competence acquired by participants in examining the different facets of the organizations, which increased both the knowledge and the appreciation of the various kinds of contributions different stakeholders make to the organization. The most frequently empowering factor mentioned in the final feedback sessions was the discovery that problems that were perceived in one dimension as impossible to solve, could be tackled using viewpoints on the same problem from other dimensions. For instance, interpersonal conflicts that were long standing and attributed to negative personal characteristics of the people involved could be diminished by clarifying formal job roles and responsibilities in the functional dimension. Lack of clarity in this dimension had contributed to increasing interpersonal conflicts.

All the work done by organizational psychologists to increase different forms of employee empowerment is particularly useful today. In the US, as in other parts of the world like western Europe, the power of organized labor has been declining. Corporate, managerial and shareholder interests have grown stronger as worker voices and rights have diminished. At the same, time job security and employer provided support for retirement have diminished and austerity programs have cut welfare services negatively affective many workers employed in them. Suicide and depression have increased among people who fear the loss of their jobs and find the highly competitive climate in many firms hard to bear (Avallone and Borgogni 2007; Lalli 2008).

Bhagat et al. (2012) underscore even in non-western contexts the cultures "of organizations are becoming more results oriented, driven more by profit as opposed to concern

for employees. Values of consumerism, individualism, competition, and efficiency gradually replace traditional values of non-materialism, collectivism, and cooperation in the workplace" (p. 31). Moreover unskilled and low-skill labor opportunities have increased in some places (some parts of Asia, Africa, and South America) while they have decreased in other parts (North America, Europe). So there is change everywhere, all of which create challenges for organizations, but the nature of those changes differ from place to place.

However, Bhagat et al. (2012) also find positive consequences in these changes in work organization – the major one being the creation of a new multinational and multicultural work community. Increasing the demand for products, globalization has augmented the rate of production, and created new employment opportunities. Globalization has raised the numbers, power, and skills of employees such as women, ethnic minorities, and international migrants, creating a new multicultural and multinational workforce. This new workforce presents specific psychological problems that can best be tackled with a community psychology perspective that focuses on the mutual influence of individual and their contexts. For instance, the elite employees who differ from their white European or American managers in racial/cultural/national origins may experience cultural confusion and acculturation difficulties, while gender difference interactions with cultural background may contribute to emotional turmoil affecting extra-work activities as well as family interactions.

The new composition of the workforce has also had positive consequences. It has increased managerial attention to cultural diversity as an impetus for organizational effectiveness. These new human resources provide a competitive advantage due to increasing creativity and innovation, problem-solving quality, and organizational flexibility as dimensions of business performance. Specific cultural and gender relevant workforce issues are discussed in knowledge sharing, reward allocations, and in informational research briefs describing employee selection. In several international corporations there has been a shift from a multicultural

perspective to a cultural hybridization approach. A multicultural perspective recognizes cultural differences, yet relies upon indoctrinating local managers from a variety cultures to standard Western ideas and practices *per se*. Instead, by merging local and Western management policies a new hybrid corporate management emerges in which flexible practices are based on participative systems and the integration of different cultural values.

This hybrid perspective is also spreading in public services of the largest cities of the world, which are the global headquarters of large corporate multinationals but also of global nonprofit organizations. The working population in both settings is increasingly composed of culturally dissimilar individuals from different nations. New job opportunities are therefore increasing for organizational and community psychologists with experience promoting the appreciation of diversity, in all its multi-faced expressions, both in companies, non-governmental international associations, and in some public organizations, making these work settings more empowering for the people who spend a large portion of their lives in them. Occupational opportunities for psychologists who can organize employee assistance programs (EAP) to cope with work stress with a multicultural perspective are also rising (Bhagat et al. 2012). Community psychologists can help create preventive stress management programs, aimed at improving health and wellbeing at work. They also can focus on organizational and policy change which will empower women and minorities within these organizations, fostering a more power sharing approach to globalization (Francescato, Tomai, Solimeno 2008) and increasing empowering aspects of organizations.

Young well trained community psychologists who seek work that moves beyond the individual level, but are too inexperienced to influence policy change, may find rewarding work opportunities at the organizational level, helping community psychology as whole overcome its

past neglect of organizations while increasing individual, organizational and collective wellbeing. Also, directing trained professionals to work with empowering organizations may help reduce the academic-professional divide that has been a persistent problem in all countries, as it has emerged in all international meetings and in the SCRA practice workshops held in the past few years. Community psychologists well trained in organizational empowerment can also help the birth of new organizations in the community designed from the beginning with those features that increase the probability to build an empowering and empowered organization.

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Appendix A

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