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Research Article

Are there gender differences in how managers and professionals perceived organizational climate? The case of Tuscan healthcare system



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ABSTRACT

This study examines the organizational climate and looking at gender differences in professional roles within healthcare organizations. Data came from organizational-climate questionnaires administered in 2010 to 1498 health managers and 19,616 health staff in the Tuscany Region (Italy). An exploratory factor analysis was performed to verify the validity and internal consistency between items and Student t-test to compare mean perceptions regarding the dimensions across different groups of respondents. Five dimensions were measured: "training opportunities", "communication and information processing", "managerial tools", "organization", and "management and leadership style", and overall job satisfaction. Significant gender differences were found in the perception of professional roles between managers and staff.

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¿Existen diferencias de género en cómo los gerentes y profesionales perciben el clima organizacional? El caso del sistema de salud de la Toscana

RESUMEN

Este trabajo investiga si existen diferencias de género en cómo los gerentes y profesionales del sector salud perciben el clima organizacional en la Región de la Toscana. Los datos provienen de los cuestionarios administrados a 1498 gerentes de salud y 19616 trabajadores de salud de salud en la Región de Toscana (Italia). Se aplicó un análisis factorial exploratorio para verificar la validez y la consistencia interna entre los elementos y la prueba de la t de Student para comparar las percepciones medias con respecto a las dimensiones a través de diferentes grupos de encuestados. Se midieron cinco dimensiones: "oportunidades de formación", "procesamiento de la comunicación y la información", "herramientas de gestión", "organización" y "estilo de gestión y liderazgo", y la satisfacción general en el

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trabajo. Se encontraron diferencias de género estadísticamente significativas entre la percepción del clima organizacional entre directivos y trabajadores.

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In the 20th century, the condition of women has greatly improved in several aspects. However, the gender gap is remarkable in the lack of access to power and leadership positions compared with men, and women managers are still in a minority (Carli et al., 2001).

Generally, women are less frequently found in line positions than men and more frequently in staff positions and consequently they have less opportunity to demonstrate their competencies (Wiggins, 1996), and even in female-dominated occupations, men have more opportunity to be promoted to the top (Broadbridge, 2010). The 2011 Catalyst Census showed that in 2010 women held 14.4% of Executive Officer positions and 7.6% of Executive Officer top earner positions (Catalyst, 2011).

When considering the healthcare sector, the promotion of women to senior management positions in healthcare organizations has been shown to be slower in comparison with men even when most positions are held by women. The same happens to financial benefits which seem to decrease for women and expand for men as their respective careers advance. Moreover, researches in USA have demonstrated that, in the last years, little has been made to close the gender gap in healthcare leadership especially among the nation's top hospitals (Branin, 2009).

The same evidences have been also found in Italy where, independently if public or private organizations, women have more limited possibilities to advance in their careers. The percentage of women on boards and senior-executive teams remains one of the lowest among European countries (7% compared with 33% of women in Scandinavian countries). Italy, in fact, ranks 74th out of 134 countries in the Gender Gap Index 2010, immediately followed by Colombia, Vietnam and Perú. 35% of the Italian women in the age of 25-44 is unemployed (21% is the average in the rest of Europe) and women who work, on average, earn 20% less than men (Eurostat, 2010). Within years, only few policies have been adopted at national level to support women with young children, networks to help women navigate their careers and formal sponsorship programs to ensure professional development (www.womenomics.it).

With regard to the Italian healthcare sector, results from a survey administered to a sample of 1821 physicians of Padova city (Italy) in 2010 showed that 37,84% of the respondents declared to be not satisfied of the advancement in their career, and of these, 22% are women while 16% men (<http://www.fnomceo.it>). Whereas, results from another survey to a sample of 1549 Italian physician women belonging to the medical association in 2011 showed that 27% of the respondents declared to be discriminated in their work in general and 37.5% in their possibilities of reaching high job positions. 39% of the women reported that their ideas and suggestions were

not taken in consideration by superiors and 80% reported that they have not been involved in any training opportunities. Finally, 4% of the sample declared to have received a physical abuse and only 61% was satisfied with their job (Ordine Provinciale di Roma dei Medici Chirurghi e degli Odontoiatri, 2011).

Given these premises, the present study intends to contribute to the researches on gender inequality at work by analyzing results from an organizational climate survey administered in 2010 to professionals of twelve Local Health Authorities (LHAs) of Tuscany region (Italy).

The purpose of this study is to determine whether organizational climate characteristics such as training opportunities, communication and information processing, managerial tools, organization structure and management and leadership style and overall job satisfaction are differently perceived across men and women at managerial and staff level within LHAs.

In particular, the study aims to test the following hypotheses:

H1. "Male and female employees of Tuscan healthcare organizations differ significantly in terms of perceived organizational climate and job satisfaction."

H2. "Male and female employees of Tuscan healthcare organizations differ significantly in terms of perceived satisfaction in the relationship with their superiors in terms of communication, motivation, and support."

This information can be used by organizations and human resource professionals to better understand possible barriers and discriminations perceived by women within the organization which can negatively affect their attitudes, behavior, and organizational commitment.

Data and methods

Organizational climate is a distinct construct concerned with the way organizational members perceive the work environment within that organization and its impact on their individual psychological well being (Jones & James, 1979). This concept can be traced back to several studies, which have showed the role of the organizational climate survey to measure organizational characteristics perceived by employees and better understand those factors which contribute to a work environment (or climate) that is pleasant, and motivates all employees, regardless of their position, status and gender, to be committed and effective performers (Lewin et al., 1939; Koffka, 1935; Phillips, 1996).

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