

Quantitative survey of Italian head teachers

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Abstract: This article illustrates the main results of the only three quantitative surveys regarding Italy's headteachers in the last ten years.

The surveys produced different typologies identifying how headteachers' perception of their role has developed. The 1997 and 2000 surveys enabled the construction of a panel of 500 headteachers, interviewed three years prior to the attainment of school autonomy and when it received legal recognition. It was thus possible to understand how the profound change from headteachers as ministerial bureaucrats to autonomous school headteachers, co-operative and transformational leaders was adopted by the interested parties.

Besides studying headteachers' attitudes after eight years' experimentation of the new role, the third survey has the advantage of providing a comparison and mutual assessment between headteachers and their teachers.

The three surveys highlight both a positive development in the willingness of headteachers to accept an innovative role and the potential willingness of teachers to collaborate: the really serious problem in Italy in these years is the lack of schools policies which not only have not aided in the development of school autonomy after its introduction, but actually appear to have forgotten it, almost as if it were some legacy left over from the end of the century, impossible to eliminate, but which it would be preferable to put aside.

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The early surveys

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School autonomy in Italy and changes in the role of headteachers

Up until almost the end of the last century, our country's school system was centralised along the lines of that in France (Archer 1984): a prescriptive proportional electoral system was mainly responsible for the existence of a weak political organisation that had prevented any high school reform (still governed by the 1923 law today). A school system which may only be changed by law will remain the same, in fact, with governments lasting less than a year on average and even more so when accompanied by a perfect bicameral system. Even though a strongly experimental movement developed, the centralised nature of the system prevented it from becoming the basis of any overall transformation.

The school autonomy debate that began at the beginning of the nineties during the National Schools Conference was immediately placed within the overall reform of the public administration, which finally came about in 1997. Besides giving the schools legal status, Article 21 of law No. 59 transferred a good number of functions formerly performed by the Ministry and the Provincial Education Office, thereby granting schools levels of organisational and teaching autonomy. Each school acquired freedom of organisation, in order to create the flexibility and diversification needed for greater efficiency and effectiveness in the use of structures and for the introduction of innovative technology and for co-ordinating activities between the school and its area. Each school was free to choose its teaching methods, times and methods and extra contents could also be added in the interests of attaining the general aims of the national educational system, provided that freedom of teaching, families' educational preferences and the right to learn were respected, however. Freedom of research and experimentation was also guaranteed and school autonomy was intended to enlarge the educational supply.

The 1999 school autonomy regulations provided a better definition of the teaching contents. The idea of national educational uniformity that existed previously was in fact obsolete: school autonomy was now to meet very different educational needs, taking students' social and cultural characteristics and the demands of their families into account. It attempted to provide all students with educational success through individualised courses within the general aims of the national system, therefore. To this end, every school had to organise the E.S.P (Educational Supply Plan),

which defined "curricular, extracurricular, educational and organisational planning". A real tool reflecting the identity of each school, the E.S.P. also allowed for teaching experimentation to affect up to 15% of the hours of teaching of the national programme (a ceiling later raised to 20%). School autonomy was finally legally crowned by the 2001 amendment to Article 5 of the Italian Constitution, which ratified it officially as an autonomy of the Italian State. Despite some initially positive features, mainly linked to the greater degree of organisational and teaching autonomy, no legislative measures aimed at its effective development followed. In addition, changes regarding the management of financial and human resources, especially key factors in any real decentralization, were missing. On the contrary, the progressive fall in national financing led to a search for the same locally, with the consequently rise in local inequalities, already a traditional characteristic of our country.

These transformations obviously wrought substantial changes in the role of headteachers, those that occurred during the 90s were consecrated by the institutionalisation of role which in September 2000 at the same time as the formal start of school autonomy. In all countries school autonomy aided in reinforcing the position of headteachers: as illustrated in the next paragraph, the surveys reveals that a considerable part of Italy's headteachers appear to have largely gained a perspective of autonomy, to a greater extent than Italy's teachers, certainly (Cavalli 2000). The situation is difficult, however, due to the limits in financial and human resources, underlined previously, which make the performance of the tasks assigned to headteachers particularly arduous, as they have many new responsibilities towards getting results, but very few tools with which to attain them. Headteachers represent the school at all levels: in relations with trade unions, concerning the security and health of workers and in stipulating short-term contracts; they also still guarantee for the legitimacy of all administrative acts regarding the school, the authentication of academic qualifications included. While they merely used their very little discretion in applying ministry instructions formerly, they are now expected to demonstrate their entrepreneurial skills in carrying through the essential mission of the school: the education and upbringing of its pupils.

The new complexity of headteachers' roles has greatly increased their responsibility by imposing a change on the internal organisation of the school, which now increasingly requires intermediate managerial functions

performed by teachers. Accordingly, four areas of professional competence involving managerial and organisational tasks for teachers have emerged in Italy in recent years: the vice headteacher, the headteacher's aides, teachers with an organisational role and the department or subject area co-ordinators. Altogether they make up a considerable part of the teaching staff (around 15%), who work mainly as volunteers over and above their normal teaching hours.

Our 2003 survey ³(Fischer, Fischer and Masuelli 2006) highlighted relatively positive results: although with difficulty, the first three figures examined appeared substantially ready for a stable intermediate teacher band, able to manage the new autonomous school organisation. The vice headteachers, also due to the greater tradition of the role, are objectively those closest to an independent career as deputy heads, but do not seem sufficiently convinced of it in themselves, so much so, that they appear incapable of the mobilising themselves to this end. Compared with the period prior to school autonomy, a certain timidity in assuming more independent responsibility also emerges while actually fulfilling the role, even where the indispensable nature of the role they perform is evident. The headteacher's aides and, above all, the teachers with organisational tasks are rather advanced in stating that the tasks need to be performed in order to make the new school organisation possible. The inadequacy of government policy regarding school autonomy is particularly evident, in this case, as are the delaying tactics used by the unions and by the central government. Their scarce awareness of the need to assess the tasks they perform still appears inadequate. Despite the importance of the tasks they should perform in order to raise learning levels, the subject area and department co-ordinators remain largely uncertain and embryonic figures, while they should actually be the real engine behind improvements in teaching effectiveness. This role's vaguer organisational and managerial connotations possibly make it harder to define their functions and responsibilities clearly. It should not be impossible for more expert teachers to imagine a position which is actually recognised by colleagues and headteachers in terms of the skill and commitment dedicated to it, however. Teaching research and teachers' co-ordination within the school will be increasingly important for improving pupils' learning, in fact.

³ The survey was conducted on a national scale, using a sample of more than 450 schools of all kinds and levels and over 3300 teachers.

These brief considerations reveal the need to develop a shared leadership model, not just supported by these intermediate figures, but able to stimulate the active collaboration of the greater part of teachers. A cooperative leadership, where the headteacher's role is redefined more completely in terms of a division of tasks and the use of the school's human resources (Gather Thurler 2000) would be indispensable to this end. The development, in fact, of an organisational culture based on professional co-operation, enables headteachers to facilitate the development of school members' skills, to put new organisation methods into place, to listen to everyone's ideas and give constructive criticisms and work so that all the members of the group have access to some form of leadership. Government intervention and regulations have certainly not developed conditions favourable to a decisive implementation of school autonomy, so that the issue of headteachers' managerial roles is still mainly in terms of what should be, while the lack of any real power has actually stimulated the need to practise leadership in headteachers, at least in the best of them. We will now see how the situation developed in the period between the first experiments in school autonomy and when it actually came into effect.

The first survey on headteachers

A far better definition of the headteachers' professional profile in autonomous schools can be obtained from an empirical analysis of the functions and roles that headteachers actually perform and the consideration of the changes that occurred over time. Two surveys using a sample based on the different situations existing in Italy, in terms of both school kinds and levels and geographical location, were carried out to this end: the first in 1997 (Fischer and Masuelli 1998) and the second in 2000⁴ (Fischer, Fischer and Masuelli 2002). The first survey had already revealed that a consistent part of headteachers had found a new way to interpret their role during the 90s, although large differences remained. While a third actually appeared to have totally absorbed the principles of school autonomy and the basics of a new professional profile, over half occupied a middle position between innovators and conservatives. This headteacher band had two contradictory characteristics, however: one part favouring a management vocation and another a teaching vocation, but just as

⁴ Almost a thousand interviews, distributed so as to represent schools of all kinds and levels in the various Italian provinces.

managerial innovation without any knowledge of the educational plan is blind, changes in teaching models without any organisational knowledge are ineffective. However, a useless and mainly ideological debate developed in Italy in the nineties which set two alternative roles (and slogans) regarding headteachers – the “manager headteacher” and the “teachers’ teacher” - against each other. This was a “false problem”, since these are only two of the basic aspects of the special nature of leadership required by school autonomy.

Respondents’ replies revealed that the various roles performed by headteachers during working hours are divided on average as follows: educational and teaching management 22%, administrative management 20%, management and co-ordination of services 8%, staff professional development 12%, relationships with authorities and external parties and with the provincial education office 13%, relationships with parents and students 15%, professional self-development 9%, other 1%. This distribution of work times is fairly in line with the results of the debate on headteachers’ professional profiles: it should be underlined that the time dedicated to staff professional development is limited by the time dedicated to relations with parents and students, which does not figure formally in the present juridical profile, even though traditionally important. Administration activities occupy too much time, which can be reduced solely by assigning part of the task to other figures: on the other hand, for a long time it was thought that this task was the main part of the headteacher’s role. The relative pre-eminence of the role acquired via education and teaching management should be underlined: this is a fundamental outcome of the autonomous school transformation process and is a substantial change.

Briefly, it can be observed that: a) the management of education and teaching and that of professional development and self-development increase at the same time of the increase in professional experience and age and with an attitude highly orientated towards promoting school planning and teachers’ initiatives; b) on the other hand, the time dedicated to their administrative role decreases in the case of headteachers mainly orientated towards teachers’ planning skills and professional promotion; c) relations with parents and students continue to occupy a significant place in this interpretation of headteachers’ professional role.

The trends resulting from an analysis of the way they employ their time during working hours already reflect the new headteacher profile, at least in part, therefore. In 2000, over two thirds of headteachers judged the regulatory profile deriving from the appointment to their status positively: a level of awareness of their professional role emerged, therefore, which was far higher than in the past and which younger and female headteachers found especially interesting.

The nature of leadership is certainly fundamental to a successful school organisation: how aware of this were Italy's headteachers? Four fifths declared that they *were* aware of it. Therefore, the view of leadership as an «organisational resource» would appear to be a part of headteachers' professional competence by this time. A more specific question regarding the responsibility of headteachers for promoting an educational plan and sustaining a school of a higher quality, revealed that, apart from a few doubts and uncertainties, a large majority and, yet again, mainly women and younger people, were aware of the new tasks involved in their professional competence.

Over four fifths of respondents were certainly in favour of headteachers having their own *vision* for the school and believed it useful to promote the spread of leadership in their school: again there were the usual differences with a greater and lower propensity of women and headteachers in secondary schools and in the South of Italy respectively. Three quarters of respondents answered in the affirmative to the question whether they believed that the headteachers' role "was to promote qualitative innovation in the school's teaching and educational activities", while a quarter was uncertain. Opinions on the roles of guidance, direction and support of the educational environment appeared much less clear. Slightly less than half of respondents declared that, due to its importance, the leadership existing in schools should be increased, but over a quarter declared they were unsure about it and over a fifth believed that managerial and organisational functions would prevail. This lower awareness level can be interpreted in many ways, but when the scarce attention paid to it in the debate of those years is recalled, it will be seen that the share of strongly motivated respondents on this issue is already a positive result.

Constructed on the basis of the 2000 research data, the typology focussed on specific features of the headteachers' new role: to boost the development and quality of the educational service, cultural and pedagogic

leadership and the ability to govern organisational processes. Four basic types representing different interpretations of the professional role within the autonomous school were identified. It must be immediately underlined that, despite some terminological similarities and actual correspondences between the most similar groups (the first and the last), the professional and cultural profile defining the groups in the second survey is far more complex than what was possible in 1997, whether in terms of autonomy or managerial functions or, above all, leadership.

The first type, which we called «innovator leaders», has full command of the opportunities provided by school autonomy and determined and sure leadership (34% of respondents) was the distinguishing feature of their professional conduct.

The second type, called «moderate leaders», was similar to the previous one as far as the features of professional leadership were concerned, but reveals a narrower idea of school autonomy and was less orientated towards innovation in teaching and education (30% of respondents).

The third type, called «undecided», on the other hand, was made up of headteachers who appeared to have attained a good awareness of the basics of autonomy and educational innovation, but are unsuitable for this kind of responsibility and therefore less effective in their new executive role (23% of respondents).

The fourth type, called «ultra-conservatives», is made up of headteachers standing steadfast by a totally traditional idea of a weak and marginal role within a general denial of school autonomy (13% of respondents).

Leadership and the ability to exercise *governance* became basic elements of headteachers' professional profiles: very present in both the first and second types, these features are where «moderate leaders» differ from the «undecided». These two groups actually have a rather similar vision of autonomy based on intermediate awareness levels, but differ in terms of their awareness of the new role and the positive consideration of leadership as its foundation. The gender difference is particularly important: women were more often innovator leaders, and less frequently «ultra-conservatives». Female headteachers' greater professional development and, in particular, their greater willingness to accept the new professional role emerged, therefore. The definition of the new tasks appears to be more easily grasped by female pragmatism.

While the innovator leaders were over half of the total of younger headteachers, they were slightly more than a quarter of the over-60s. Differences also remained between large areas of the country, but fewer than in the previous survey: the situation of the innovator leaders is slightly better in the north, but the ultra-conservatives (fewer than in the past, however) were by now spread uniformly throughout the country. A negative note came from untenured headteachers, in an inferior position compared with regular headteachers: it appears far more difficult to identify oneself with a new profile of such complexity and responsibility without being on the permanent staff.

Since the focal point of our last survey was headteachers as leaders influencing educational processes, it is particularly useful to compare the typologies that arose and some items regarding headteacher-teacher relations. In fact, a relationship based on the guidance, valorisation, orientation and professional promotion of teachers, regarding jointly-decided strategies, is the fundamental task of an effective, credible and, therefore, appreciated headteacher.

As has been seen, 'innovative' and 'moderate' leaders total almost two thirds, a large majority, of headteachers, who appeared suitable for the new professional role, even if there some differences in their vision of the change possible with school autonomy. These two types of leaders (obviously the moderates slightly less than the innovators) were certainly convinced of the need to relate to their teachers in promotional terms and also that headteachers' actions are essential in producing a qualified professional environment.

The attitude of the respondents to two other important issues, whether the organisation of autonomous schools must be based especially on the «construction of the professional community and on co-operation» and whether different pay (or even career) scales according to the quality and quantity of work performed by teachers were useful, was particularly explicative. The innovator leaders were mainly «very much in favour», while the other three clusters resulted «quite in favour»: on the one hand, this highlights how the first group was clearly distanced from the others on some very significant points but, on the other, that a convergence of opinions on some issues was also by now quite common to the whole category.

The improvements highlighted by the panel

A comparison of the two surveys throws light on the overall improvement in headteachers' opinions, attitudes and conduct. The *panel*⁵ helps to understand this positive development better: it is not often possible to record continuity and change in the same persons at a distance of slightly more than three years and on the same issue. This group of headteachers, which is an excellent tool for discovering the approval rating of regulatory changes and compulsory training for headteachers, is a good illustration of the overall transformation that occurred during this period

A clear development occurred between the two surveys in headteachers' main perception of their role towards teachers on the subject of teaching activities. While the first survey revealed a mainly supportive role, the second revealed a largely promotional attitude.

Two indexes enabled four different kinds of headteacher support for the new professional profile to be identified: the first are headteachers who always supported it strongly (32%), the second, those who came to support it fully in the course of time (29%), the third, 15% of respondents whose doubts have increased over time, while the fourth and last, those headteachers whose support was always rather low (24%). It should be noted that, yet again, women make up the bigger part of those strongly in favour of the new profile, including those that came to support it only later on.

Another index was constructed using the answer to the questions: "What do you think of the idea of those who maintain that the organisation of autonomous schools must be based above all on the construction of the professional community and co-operation?" and "It is maintained in several quarters that headteachers' promotion of professional resources should be directed towards the widespread development of leadership within the school and particularly towards teachers. What is your view of this idea?". This dichotomised scale was used as a dependent variable in a logistic regression model. The model revealed that the relative likelihood of complete agreement is actually tripled by the awareness of being responsible for interpreting of education increases remarkably (77%) in the case of female headteachers and the under-50s (45%), doubles with above-

⁵ Approximately five hundred headteachers were interviewed both in 1997 and in 2000: it was therefore possible to construct a *panel*, that is a longitudinal study where the same subjects are interviewed over a period of time.

average scores on the leadership scale and interest in teaching-related problems, increases in headteachers with high scores in managerial organisation, if only by 13%, and by 79% in those totally agreeing with the new type of managerial profile: the model highlights the characteristics that increase the likelihood of a shared vision of headteachers as *transformational and co-operative leaders*, therefore.

The combined results showed that many head teachers had by now internalised an overall vision of the new professional competence needed for school autonomy, with special attention being paid to the question of transformational leadership open to co-operation. The development during the period between the two surveys confirmed the existence of a greater consistency and determination of the whole category, despite the persistence of inevitable differences, however: if anything, it is surprising how the majority has reached such a large-scale conviction of the need for the new role, even when coming from considerably different backgrounds. Faced with the radical transformation of schools as a result of autonomy, headteachers had three possibilities: partly active opposition, making a virtue of necessity or passive acceptance of the new situation, or seeing things from the transformational co-operative leadership point of view. The fact that this last has been the option mainly chosen is an important and quite unexpected result, but at least two things were needed concurrently in order for this outstanding desire to attain its best results: the collaboration of a significant part of teachers and a supportive schools policy.

According to the 1999 Iard study (Cavalli 2000), within a context largely favourable to school autonomy, almost two thirds of teachers appeared to hope that this would result in a diversification of teachers' roles, leading to an increase in their professional competence and prestige: but no contractual or regulatory changes have occurred to modify the situation in these years. In addition, school policy has unfortunately been mainly in a stalemate, something which has not facilitated the development of autonomy at all and which has not been challenged in any way.

A very serious situation has been created by frustrating the effective willingness of headteachers and teachers. This has blocked any effective development of the transformation valorising schools as centres of change which has already begun and which should pass in Italy as elsewhere. Our first quantitative surveys have shown that school management has undergone a considerable transformation, accompanied by a positive and

active acceptance of the prospect of autonomy and the development of a transforming co-operative leadership (the majority of headteachers) which has yet to be matched by any coherent schools policy on the part of the government, however.

The latest survey

Present role of Italian headteachers

Although noticeably smaller than previous ones, this survey's sample⁶ has a significant advantage: the two questionnaires have been formulated with identical batteries of questions regarding headteachers' and teachers' ideas and attitudes on the same issues, which can now be compared.

Some headteacher features must be taken into consideration, first of all. As is the case of gender: while women are by now traditionally the majority of teachers, the majority of headteachers are still men (52%). Despite this, the three surveys show how there has been a significant increase in female headteachers over time (Tab. 1)

While previous surveys revealed a percentage of male headteachers far superior to female headteachers (10 points) especially in the South and Islands, the increase in female headteachers has now redressed the balance, albeit partially, and the gap has been halved⁷.

Obviously differences according to school level have also been revealed: the majority of female headteachers (53%) are mainly in primary schools and they are also over-represented in junior high schools. In high schools, on the other hand, whether high schools or technical or vocational high schools, female headteachers are under-represented with respect to the overall average. Not only has this situation been revealed by all three

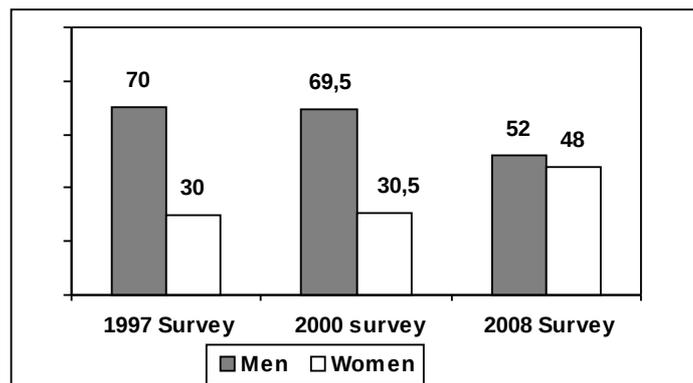
⁶ We would like to thank the Foundation for schoolCompagnia di S. Paolo and the Istituto IARD Franco Brambilla Foundation for providing us with the data for this survey, so that we could process it specifically for this article.

This survey was performed during April and May in 2008, in over 500 schools on the ministerial lists and therefore the same number of headteachers as respondents. In addition, a certain number of teachers was also interviewed in each school, totalling 3369 teachers, stratified on a national scale by region, size of the municipality where the school is located, gender, age and type subject taught.

⁷ Please note that the survey considered and compared here is based on probabilistic, stratified and representative samples of the population.

surveys, but it has now significantly deteriorated: female headteachers in high schools have fallen from around 27% in the first two surveys to less than 18% in the third one. The increase in female headteachers appears to be concentrated in primary and lower secondary schools, therefore.

Table 1. Percentages of male and female headteachers in the three surveys



Important gender differences also regard age: overall women are approximately an average of 54 years of age versus the 59 of their male counterparts and are younger in all school types, in particular, where they are an average six years younger than their male counterparts (very few). A comparison of surveys effected over time is once again interesting in this case: there is a progressive increase in the overall average age from 53 years of age in '97 to 55 in 2000 and 56 in 2008. The previous surveys also revealed female headteachers increasingly younger than their colleagues, a gap which remained unchanged from 1997 to 2000 (with women averagely three years younger) and which doubled to a six-year gap in 2008.

As already mentioned, the survey used identical batteries of questions for headteachers and teachers alike: one regarding ideas of the ideal role of headteachers, in particular, contains twenty-nine questions requiring headteachers and teachers to judge the importance of headteachers' various tasks on a scale from 1 to 10.

Since the comparison revealed that both groups (headteachers and teachers) rank two tasks top of the list: "guaranteeing the correct

functioning of the educational service for students and families" and "providing an overall vision of fundamental school issues ", these two items have been used to construct a typology. While these items are different, they are certainly essential to the current managerial role and, in a certain sense, are complementary: the aptitude for guaranteeing the function of the school service (institutional) and the ability to give an overall direction to the school (leadership).

A *cluster analysis* has given rise to four types of headteachers. A first group (approx. 4%), who have been named "absentees", because they attributed very low average values to both variables, to the second, in particular. A second group (21%) called "minimalists", due to the low values attributed to both variables. A third group (33%) called "guarantors", as a result of the high values attributed to the first variable and a fourth group (42%) called "leaders and guarantors", due to the high values attributed to both variables, to the second in particular.

Female headteachers are mainly "leaders and guarantors": they are half of the total, versus hardly a third of their male colleagues, who are far more numerous among minimalists and the absentees. Therefore (given the different gender composition of school levels) headteachers who are "leaders and guarantors" are mainly to be found in primary schools, "guarantors" in lower secondary schools and "minimalists" and "absentees" taken together in all the upper secondary schools. In geographical terms, the "leaders and guarantors" are above the overall average in the Northwest of the country, the "guarantors" in the Northeast, the "minimalists" in the Centre but the "leaders and guarantors" to a greater degree, while the "minimalists" and, above all, the "absentees" are above the overall average in the South and Islands.

A university degree in humanities is by far the most prevalent academic qualification, with above average numbers among the "absentees" and especially among "minimalists". Graduates in economics, law, politics, psychology and sociology are more prevalent among "leaders and guarantors", while graduates with degrees in medicine or science are relatively prevalent among "guarantors" and "absentees" It should also be noted that almost two thirds of the 10% of headteachers with Doctorates or Master's degrees are of the guarantor leader type.

Only 8% of respondents have a temporary appointment; 46% of "historical" headteachers, that is , those who entered service following the

2000 training course, are tenured, 16% won the 2003 internal competition, 29% passed the 2005/6 open competition and 9% got tenure as a result of the 2007 internal competition. Untenured staff are over-represented among minimalists and guarantors: the 2000 survey had already highlighted the greater difficulty experienced by non-tenured headteachers in providing strong leadership to their role. The “guarantor” type is by far the majority of those that started in 2000, “absentees”, the majority of those that began in 2003, “leaders and guarantors”, over half of those that began in 2005/6 and those who passed the most recent competitive examination are also relatively more frequent in this *cluster*. It should be noted that solely in the only ordinary competitive examination effected is there an absolute prevalence of this last type of headteachers.

When the reasons given for the choice of a headteacher’s career are seen in relation to this typology some very significant correlations appear.

“Leaders and guarantors” are over-represented among those that chose to become headteachers in order to have a concrete influence on school renewal, because of their interest in managing a complex organisation, in conducting extra-school relationships and taking on greater responsibility for the school. At the opposite end, are those who often state that difficulties in relating to students was not an important motive at all, but nor was the desire to reach a role of prestige in the school, or the fact that this was the only possibility of a career or of greater earnings within the school.

The “guarantors” appear to be more motivated by the wish for a change in their activities, by using their professional competence in some other way, by distancing themselves from any direct relations with students. Dissatisfied with their daily teaching activities, they take advantage of the only career possibility given by the school, although they do not exactly disdain the better pay; on the other hand, although quite willing to take on greater responsibility, they have no desire to increase the prestige of the school or to directly influence its renewal and very little interest in running a complex organisation.

The “minimalists” showed no interest in relating to the extra-school environment at all, but were significantly tired of managing students daily and of the difficulty experienced in understanding pupils, in particular. They are fairly motivated by the higher earnings and by this sole possibility of career.

The “absentees” showed little interest in relations with the extra-school environment or in running a complex organisation, in directly influencing changes in taking on greater responsibility. Rather tired of the relationship with students (and therefore wanting to change their job), they are not insensible to the wish to cover an important social function.

The average weekly working hours declared by the different types is as follows: 57% of “absentees” (versus an overall average of 17%), a maximum of thirty-six hours, 41% of “guarantors”, over forty-five hours, while below-average “leaders and guarantors” are solely among those declaring up to 36 working hours, but they are slightly above the average in all the other bands of working hours declared. Lastly, 60% of “minimalists” declare a maximum 40 hours weekly: yet again the results confirm the expectations as per type (and definitions of the various headteacher types). In particular, it seems logical that the “guarantors” work longer hours than the “leaders and guarantors”, who are obviously more inclined to delegate.

As is known, even within the framework of the current school autonomy, headteachers’ effective powers are very few. The questionnaire asked the headteachers to choose whether some important powers should be entrusted exclusively, to an ad hoc group of teachers in their presence, or to a group exclusively of teachers, or to none of these three options. In the case of the possibility of freely choosing teaching staff and of removing unsuitable teachers from teaching, solely the headteacher was mainly indicated by both “leaders and guarantors” and “guarantors”. In the case of powers to negotiate a part of teachers’ pay and to assess teachers in order to improve their professional competence, however, the group of teachers together with the headteacher was mainly choice in all cases, especially by the “guarantor” and “minimalist” types.

Taken as a whole, the relationships of headteachers with Unified Trade Union Representatives is seen as significantly positive, with an average of almost 8, on an ascending scale of 1 to 10, where 1 and 10 are very negative and very positive, respectively. Yet again, the type distinguishes respondents as expected: no “absentees” are above average and “leaders and guarantors”, “guarantors” and “minimalists” score 9 or 10, respectively.

The questionnaire has a series of questions measuring how often headteachers use a combination of strategies to motivate teachers in their schools professionally. In only two cases “Checking on teachers’

observance of rules” and “Stressing the pride and professional responsibility of single teachers” does the “guarantor” type use these methods more often than the other groups, while the “minimalists” use “Observing teachers’ activities in order to give them suggestions and instructions” relatively more often than the others. The remaining nine motivation strategies are often used first of all by the “leaders and guarantors”, then by the “guarantors”, followed by the “minimalists” and finally by the “absentees”, always in the same order. It must be remembered that the “leaders and guarantors” reply ‘often’ in 56% to 83% of cases according to the strategy type shown below in ascending order (Tab. 2)

Table 2. Percentages of strategies for motivating teachers professionally

	‘Often’ used by guarantor leaders %
Involving teachers in school governance choices	56
Providing teachers with clear school governance guide lines	66
Stressing the sense of belonging to the school community	67
Supporting teachers in difficult relationships with families	67
Promoting and sustaining continual teacher training	68
Promoting and sustaining teachers’ innovative initiatives	75
Proposing tasks to the teaching body	75
Recognising teachers’ individual merits	75
Involving teachers in the preparation and successive organisation of the school’s educational plan	83

A total of four indicators - ‘Checking’, ‘Involvement’, ‘Promotion’ and ‘Stimulus of teachers’ identity’ - has been identified to study the strategies used by headteachers to motivate teachers professionally and, more generally, to relate to them.

Checking is above average among first grade secondary school and vocational high school headteachers, in those working in the South and Islands and in the over-60s. “Guarantor” and above all “leader and guarantor” headteachers both tend to check most on the teachers in their schools.

Involvement is mainly pursued by female headteachers and “leaders and guarantors” (all of 13 points above average): again the prevalently female composition of this headteacher type must be born in mind.

A similar situation is seen in headteachers' promotional strategies: they are used by three-quarters of female headteachers versus slightly over half of their male counterparts, especially in primary and junior high schools (also with a strong female majority) and only "leaders and guarantors" are considerably above average. Finally, stimulating teachers' identity is effected more often by women, in the Northeast of Italy, but especially in the South and Islands and also by a part of "guarantor" headteachers, but also by an above-average number of "leaders and guarantors".

Head teachers' job satisfaction

The questionnaire contains two series of questions regarding this issue: the first concerns relationships within and without the school and the second concerns the satisfaction deriving from a combination of aspects of the headteachers' role.

The relationship issue has been divided into three groups: in school with teachers (teaching, school planning and school management), in school with students (discipline, learning and personal issues), outside the school (local businesses, school and local administration). "Guarantor" headteachers are slightly more satisfied than "leaders and guarantors" solely in their relationships with students (both groups are above average). "Leaders and guarantors" rank first, however, for satisfaction in their relationships with teachers and outside the school. "Minimalists" are third in all three cases, while "absentees" come last and at quite a distance.

Satisfaction deriving from the main aspects of the headteacher role is dealt with by a long series of items: first there are those which are usually considered more gratifying in this kind of activity: professional and cultural stimuli, teachers', parents' and students' trust and, yet again, teachers' recognition of their work, are the six factors providing greatest satisfaction, immediately followed by teaching results.

In schools of all kinds and levels the satisfaction rating of the first seven items is higher among female headteachers, especially in the case of upper high schools. This situation is not only interesting in how it reveals that female headteachers adapt better to school conditions, but it also highlights that the greatest difference from their male colleagues can be found in the vocational high schools, among the most complicated schools to manage.

Seen in relation to our typology, this satisfaction rating illustrates the usual trend: the most satisfied are the "leaders and guarantors" (the only

ones above average), followed, as always, by the “guarantors”, the “minimalists” and, lagging behind, the “absentees”, respectively.

The lack of financial resources and the limited disciplinary powers against teachers’ and ATA (auxiliary, technical and administrative) staff failures are at the source of Italian headteachers’ greatest dissatisfaction: this situation is most serious in the Northwest and diminishes progressively as you pass to the Northeast, the Centre and the South. Once again it is revealing when related to our typology, obviously now in the opposite sense: the “leaders and guarantors” are the most dissatisfied with these two items, followed by the “absentees”, the “guarantors” and, lastly, the “minimalists”.

The questionnaire has two parallel series of questions for headteachers and teachers, aimed at identifying the most frequent causes of conflict between them.

As expected, the two groups rank the items which are the most frequent cause of conflict in a significantly different way. So much so, that there is only one item in common among the first five in order of importance: “The definition of teachers’ time-tables”, ranked first by teachers and second by headteachers. A “good” time-table not only allows teachers to organise their working week better, but is also a sign of their prestige within the school, a welcome substitute to the lack of meritocracy. Although not stated as a frequent motive of conflict by many, the agreement between the two groups in ranking it at the top of the list reveals its real importance.

This fact appears to confirm the disapproval of the organisation of teaching by some in as much as it is a part-time activity. In reality, many teachers’ effective work load is at least twice the weekly 18 classroom hours, but the fact remains that the majority of these hours are not subject to any checking, unlike in other countries where school organisation requires the physical presence of teachers for 7 or more hours, five days a week. It appears that, while primary schools (with extended time-tables, a different type of organisation and almost exclusively female teaching staff) experience fewer problems in adapting to the required time-table, high-school teachers, who more often than not also perform other jobs, are particularly sensitive to this issue. Headteachers, especially in technical and vocational high schools, and those in the South, are also aware of this situation.

Headteachers put teacher punctuality at the top of the list as a reason for conflict: this problem, which is decidedly on the increase from primary to high schools, is signalled more frequently by male headteachers, who are strongly represented in technical and vocational high schools. In terms of our typology, it can be seen that, paradoxically, three quarters of "absentees" consider it a factor of conflict, at least sometimes. While for almost two thirds of "leaders and guarantors" it is only rarely so, or even never. The majority of both "guarantors" and "minimalists" also share this view.

The third ranked possible item of conflict, again in the case of headteachers, is the absence issue, where the trend is absolutely similar to that of punctuality, but emphasised more greatly in the South and the Islands. Headteachers are evidently particularly affected by these two factors of possible conflict in the daily running of the school: while headteachers consider these as fundamentally important problems, teachers attribute decidedly less importance to them. Limited only with difficulty by headteachers, these offences do not appear to bother the perpetrators overmuch. When absences are seen in terms of our typology, once again "absentees" and "minimalists" are significantly above average amongst those who see it 'often' or 'sometimes' as a cause of disagreement. "Leaders and guarantors", on the other hand, are relatively more numerous among those who declare it is never a problem.

Headteachers rank the "request for teaching innovations perceived by teachers as excessive" fourth and "teachers' conduct conforming to their role" fifth. It must be mentioned that four out of five possible motives of disagreement considered most important are linked to checks on teaching staff, while only one regards teaching: it seems clear that headteachers' interpretation of their role means that reasons of conflict with teachers are more often than not disciplinary.

This headteachers' classification has been studied in relation to their satisfaction with "teachers' trust" and "teachers' recognition of their work" (the variables were recoded within and above the average). When above average, both trust and recognition as perceived by headteachers give forecasts of a lower likelihood of conflict compared with the first five variables. The relationship is inverted, therefore: headteachers most satisfied with their specific relationship with their teachers expect less conflict.

Headteachers include "the definition of the educational supply plan" (or E.S.P.) and teachers "its implementation methods " among the issues causing least dissent: the important role performed by the E.S.P. within the framework of autonomy, as a tool for planning and organising the educational service in order to meet the demands of its target public as far as possible, must also be born in mind. There are two possible explanations for this: a wide consensus has been reached by schools on these issues by now, or these issues are considered of such little significance that they are not worth discussion or possible opposition, therefore. Obviously there are schools where intentions are widely shared and others where the E.S.P. is merely a piece of paper drawn up for bureaucratic reasons: bearing in mind the centrality of this tool in successfully implementing school autonomy, specific analyses would be needed. Yet again, interesting information results in terms of our typology: if, in general, over half of headteachers declare that the definition of the educational offer has never given rise to conflict with teachers, the few headteachers who have had such kind of conflict at least once, are to be found especially among the "absentees" and the "minimalists", while over six in ten "leaders and guarantors" have never experienced this problem at all.

A brief summation index regarding the perception of the conflict level with teachers by headteachers has been constructed. Female headteachers perceive a slightly lower overall conflict level than their colleagues, except in high schools (but where there is an infinitely small difference) and in vocational high schools. In passing from primary to secondary schools, to high schools and to vocational and technical high schools, the degree of conflict forecast rises progressively. Similarly this forecast increases when passing from the Centre of Italy, to the Northwest, to the Northeast and to the South and Islands. The relationship between this result and our typology confirms and amplifies the results already seen in relationship to some single factors of potential conflict. Obviously the record is securely in the hands of "absentee" headteachers (53), followed respectively by "minimalists"(42), "guarantors"(41) and "leaders and guarantors"(39) out of a total average of 41.

Teachers' assessment of headteachers

The teachers' questionnaire has a series of *items* relating to the jobs performed by headteachers and the possibility of assessing them in

ascending order on a scale from 1 to 10 (where 1 and 10 are highly negative and highly positive, respectively). Two rather traditional items are at the top of the list: "contact person for school regulations" and "manager of organisational aspects ". While promoter of teaching innovation lies fourth, that of promoter of a climate of co-operation and *vision* are just eighth and ninth and the ability to motivate teachers actually last but one. While the teachers state the importance of these items - typical of transformational and co-operative leadership – since they must exist, they consider their headteachers capable of very outdated roles above all.

By summation three indicators combining similar *items* have been constructed. The first is 'contact person and manager' (contact person for school regulations and manager of the organisational aspects of the school). The second is 'mediator' (mediator and peacemaker in relationships between teachers within the school and between teachers, students and families). The third is 'guide and promoter' (guide for teachers in giving direction to the school, that is *vision*, promoter of teaching innovation in the school to potential pupils and their families, of a climate of co-operation, networks/relationships with other schools and with local authorities, teachers' motivator).

In all three indicators, female teachers, those over-fifty years of age, those in primary and junior high schools and those working in the South and Islands gave the most favourable assessment of their headteachers. Yet again, when these indicators are seen in relation to the headteacher typologies, the already by now well-known valuation scale emerges: first "leaders and guarantors", second "guarantors", third "minimalists" and last, at a fair distance, "absentees".

The teachers' questionnaire also contains an explicit question regarding their overall valuation of their headteachers, again on an ascending scale from 1 to 10 . The result that immediately emerges is the indisputably favourable valuation given by the large majority of teachers to their headteachers (average score 7.7). It should also be noted, however, that headteachers give an identical evaluation to the recognition of their work by teachers and actually give 8.1 to the trust placed in them.

The scores have been subdivided into four opinions: poor (up to 5), satisfactory (6 and 7), good (8 and 9), excellent (10). It must be noted that overall only 12% of teachers give "poor" to their headteachers. Female teachers give "excellent" more often than their male counterparts and this

aids in explaining, but not alone, the fewer top-ranking assessments given in high schools. On the other hand, younger teachers (max. 39 years of age) are harsher in their judgements, only a fifth of the total, however. In geographical terms, "excellent" is given increasingly frequently by teachers as they pass from the Northwest to the South and Islands. It must be remembered that valuations of high school headteachers are harsher: over half of respondents do not go beyond 'satisfactory, while scarcely a third do so in primary schools and not many more in lower secondary schools. While the more positive relationships between teachers and headteachers in primary schools are well known, the lower secondary school result was actually less expected: the frequency of comprehensive schools – a combination of primary and lower secondary schools - might have influenced this result.

There is a particularly interesting relation between the overall valuation and headteacher typology. While "leaders and guarantors" are actually the only ones above average among those given "excellent" (five percentage points versus an average of 18), they figure substantially within the "poor" average, however. Moreover, by adding "good" to "excellent", it is revealed that teachers' opinion of "guarantors" is almost just as positive and merely 15% of "absentees" is considered "poor", however, while 58% consider them "satisfactory".

Again with the two variables used for headteachers, "guaranteeing the functioning of educational service to students and families" and "providing an overall vision of basic school issues", a four-group typology was also constructed for teachers regarding the expected headteacher role. A first group (9%), defined as "indifferent", since they have extremely low averages in both variables (corresponding to the "absentees" of the typology constructed using headteachers' replies). A second group (39%) called "minimalists", due to its below average score in both variables. A third group (29%) defined "guarantors and leaders", due to the top and far above average scores in the first and the second variables, respectively. A fourth group (23%) defined as "leaders", due to high scores in the second variable, but lower than average in the first. Teachers' ideas of how headteachers should be appear considerably different from those of headteachers, therefore: almost four in ten teachers appear to prefer "minimalist" and one in ten, actually prefers "indifferent" headteachers. They also appear to be more interested in the role of guarantor than in that

of leadership. This last aspect possibly indicates that the teachers prefer to see their headteacher as providers of help rather than of stimulus, probably due to a certain reluctance to accept any greater involvement in school organisation, although aware of headteachers' new tasks: for example, teachers rank the headteacher's task of "encouraging teaching innovation" only 17 (out of 29 roles). The relation between this typology, constructed on teachers' opinions and that on the opinions of headteachers, is particularly interesting: a revealing connection can be seen between "absentees" and "indifferent", between "leaders and guarantors" and "guarantors and leaders", between "guarantors" and "leaders" and between "minimalists" in the two typologies. Teachers' opinions on the nature of the headteacher role are possibly conditioned to some extent by certain kinds of headteachers.

The prevailing attitude of teachers towards their profession seen in headteacher typology terms (constructed on the valuations of the latter) reveals that teachers who are more nervous, anxious, insecure, demotivated and, above all, detached from their jobs, appear to have the "absentee" type of headteacher more often. Teachers who state they are serene, motivated and involved figure more frequently among those with a "guarantor leader" headteacher. Teachers who feel more secure in their work, on the other hand, are more likely to have a "minimalist" headteacher. This correlation demonstrates that while an "absentee" headteacher is always negative, having a "minimalist" headteacher can provide security, while "guarantor leader" headteachers stimulate their teachers by motivating and involving them more than anyone else.

An analysis of the teaching profession based on three regulatory models, defined as "academic teacher", "pedagogue" and "organiser" (Hirschorn, 1993), has been ongoing in France for the past fifteen years. These are abstract models, so it is obviously almost impossible for a real teacher to actually be one, while individual teachers will partly come close to each one of them. The "academic", the oldest and most traditional model, focuses on the subject knowledge, which is an absolute value in itself: the teachers' job is to transmit it to the pupils, so their skill is essentially the command of the subject matter, due to a highly intellectual development, and university professors are their reference point. The "pedagogue" who appears when general secondary school access (second grade included) makes it increasingly difficult for teachers to

identify with the master, is the student-centred model: here teaching is subordinate to education, and the main task is to interpret pupils' needs. The "organiser" is the third model, according to which the essential task is the direction of teachers' actions so that the school functions in the best way possible, which now becomes the focus of attention. This survey (the questionnaire reserved for teachers) contains a question aimed precisely at checking which of the three models the respondents felt closest to: "The teacher's profession can be performed by pursuing more than one objective. If you could choose, you would concentrate mainly on: 1) the transmission of knowledge; 2) the learning needs of each pupil; 3) the educational aims of the type of school where you teach": categorie 1) was chosen by 17%, 2) by 49% and 3) by 34% of teachers. Some revealing relations are highlighted when this teacher and headteacher typologies are seen together. The "academic" teacher is significantly more prevalent with "absentee" headteachers, but also above average with "minimalists" and "guarantors": it should be remembered that there is a majority of minimalist and absentee headteachers in all high schools and it is the school level where this type of teacher is still largely present. There are above-average numbers of pedagogue teachers where there are "guarantors and leaders". Finally, the "organiser" teacher is relatively more common with "minimalist" headteachers, in this case, almost as if the teachers feel driven to make up for their headteachers' poor efforts.

Conclusion

The three quantitative surveys effected in our country up to now reveal an interesting development in headteachers' attitudes towards their role. With the "delegated laws" (1973) headteachers, already without any real powers previously but limited by bureaucratic tasks, suffered further weakening by the new elected bodies, which had vaguely defined powers, but were convinced they possessed democratic representativeness (TRELLLE 2007). For almost two decades, schools had no real internal power, as it was substituted externally by ministerial bureaucracy and the unions.

The public administration reform debate begun in the 90s enabled a consistent part of headteachers to assume new roles, which were later

ratified by the managerial status granted by the 1998 legislative decree. Problems remained, mainly due to the failure to reform collegiate bodies, still frozen at the time of the "delegated decrees", but the surveys continue to reveal that, for some time now, a large part of head teachers have internalised their new role, no longer that of a simple bureaucratic guarantor, but now that of leader and organiser of increasingly complex schools.

As seen in 1997, the typology that emerged from the survey was typical of a period of transition: among almost a third of innovators (mainly men) and 15% of conservatives (slightly more women), there was a majority of moderates assuming two different kinds of positions (those with a managerial vocation, mainly men, and those with a teaching vocation, mainly women).

The typology constructed on the basis of the 2000 survey focussed on the specific qualities of the headteachers new role: boosting the educational service's qualitative development, cultural and pedagogical leadership and the ability to govern organisational processes. The emergent professional and cultural profiles were far more complex than those of the previous survey, regarding leadership, in particular. The sum of "innovative" and "moderate" leaders touched close on two thirds of respondents, who were fully up to performing the new role required by school autonomy. In reality, the "undecided" type was also well aware of the principles of autonomy, although made up of headteachers rather unwilling to assume their responsibilities: only 13% of "ultra-conservatives" (mainly elderly) still adhered to a completely traditional vision of the headteacher's role. It is important to remember that female headteachers belonged more frequently to the "innovator leader" type and less frequently to the "ultra-conservative" type (as was also the case of the younger respondents).

The *panel* revealed how a large number of headteachers has developed positively in only three years: women, in particular, who were relatively more numerous both among those that have always had a special liking for the new managerial profile, and those who acquired it at a later date. The last survey refers to a profoundly changed group: over half of headteachers were tenured between 2004 and 2007, mainly via internal competition (seeing that half of "historical" headteachers had not passed any open competition) (TREELLLE 2007).

The typology constructed, although based solely on the answers to two items regarding the nature of the headteacher's role, was excellent in differentiating between both objective facts and respondents' opinions and attitudes. Four groups were identified: "absentees" (4%) due to the scarce significance they attribute either to the role of guaranteeing or to that of providing a *vision*, "minimalists" (21%) who gave a low score to both variables used, the "guarantors" (33%) with high scores in the first variable and "leaders and guarantors" (42%) with above average scores in both variables, the importance attributed to *vision*, in particular. It must be remembered that half of female headteachers are "leaders and guarantors", versus just a third of their male colleagues, far more numerous among "minimalists" and "absentees". As a result of the different gender composition of the different school levels, primary schools have a majority of "leaders and guarantors", secondary schools have a majority of "guarantors" and high schools the total of "minimalists" and "absentees".

The "leader and guarantor" group can be defined more precisely if the strategies they often use to motivate teachers professionally (in ascending order from 56% to 83%) are recalled: involving teachers in school governance decisions, providing teachers with clear school governance guide lines, stressing the sense of belonging to the school community, supporting teachers in difficult relationships with families, promoting and sustaining continual teacher training and teachers' innovative initiatives, making proposals regarding activities to the teaching body, recognising teachers' individual merits and involving teachers in the preparation and successive organisation of the school's educational plan.

An important and positive feature that differentiates "leaders and guarantors" is the satisfaction rating that they give to their work: they are the only group whose is rating above average. This type of headteacher is also the only one who hardly ever sees teacher punctuality as a motive of conflict, which is headteachers' most common reason for potential conflict, on the other hand. It must be remembered, however, that while "leader and guarantor" headteachers receive very positive teacher assessments (beyond expectations, in reality, and the sole ones with a maximum score well over the average) they are on average among those judged "poor". This fact appears to highlight the fact that, even if the 'best' headteachers get higher overall valuations, it does not necessarily follow that they are liked by

everyone. In fact, some "minimalists" or even "absentees" are particularly appreciated by their teachers.

We believe this article can be terminated with the consideration that the quantitative surveys on headteachers in Italy, carried out in over a decade marked by profound changes, appear to indicate how the acquisition of a role able to cope with the features of the autonomous school has been progressively consolidated. By now there are many (Fondazione Giovanni Agnelli 2009) who admit that school autonomy, "after an initial period of enthusiasm and possibly a more generous supply of resources, has got bogged down " (ibidem, p. 86). It must be remembered that not only have our country's schools policies not aided in the development of schools from 2001 on, but actually appear to have forgotten it, almost as if it were some legacy left over from the end of the century, impossible to eliminate, but which it would be preferable to put aside.

The conclusion of our 2000 survey highlighted how headteachers' positive attitude towards the development of school autonomy required the co-operation of a significant part of the teaching body and a supporting schools policy. The 1999 IARD survey (Cavalli 2000) highlighted that overall over four fifths of teachers were in favour of this innovation. The 2008 survey reveals that fewer than a fifth of respondents believes that autonomy has caused a worsening (slight or considerable) in school quality: despite the serious stalemate situation and the disenchantment probably following on the initial optimism, very few teachers can state that school conditions have worsened. Political power has failed to intervene, unfortunately, and, as already mentioned, after years of inertia, appears more worried about saving money and meeting the reactionary demands of those who think that any problems will be solved by going back to the 'good old days. We certainly do not believe that this is the best way to solve the very real problems of the Italy's schools – not the entire school system, however, given our primary schools results - up among the best in Europe, whether in terms of quality or equality - but regularly forgotten by public opinion and by the government itself.

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