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Analyzing organizational climate to measure employee well-being: A case study

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Abstract. This article explores the relationship between organizational culture, climate, and employee well-being, emphasizing their significance for long-term company success. It investigates the impact of various stressors on individuals' well-being and highlights the growing recognition of human capital and the increasing focus on employee well-being. Climate analysis is a valuable tool for identifying strengths, weaknesses, and promoting employee involvement. The research utilizes a case study approach, using a questionnaire to assess employee well-being and organizational climate. The results indicate positive overall well-being, particularly considering dimensions such as communication, cooperation, autonomy, and accountability. However, trust requires improvement. The findings suggest targeted interventions to managers in order to enhance trust and engagement.

Keywords: Organizational climate, Organizational culture, Employee well-being, Case-study.

1 Introduction

An individual's psycho-physical balance gets shaken by stress, economic problems, family worries, job uncertainties, exams, or tests to get through [1]. Other factors influencing well-being can also come from emotional excesses such as anger, fear, or sadness. Negative influences on an individual's mind can disrupt emotional and physical well-being. Within an organization, human capital represents the most crucial and valuable resource, which is why it is necessary to take care of it. Fortunately, in recent years, organizations have also been focusing part of their attention on the well-being of their employees by conducting internal climate analyses, precisely because it has been realized that human resources are crucial to the company's survival [2]. In addition to considering the concepts of organizational climate and well-being, it is also important not to overlook the notion of organizational culture. Organizational culture is rooted within an organization as it relates to the values, beliefs, and principles that implicitly characterize it [3]. These cultural elements are transmitted to employees as a correct way of thinking and behaving in alignment with organizational ethos [4]. The present study aims at examining the interplay between organizational culture, climate, and well-being, recognizing them as essential factors contributing to the enduring

viability of companies. Specifically, an empirical investigation is undertaken within a well-established medium-sized Italian company with a history of more than 40 years of success using a case study approach to assess employee well-being. This assessment is conducted through an in-depth analysis of organizational climate using a complete questionnaire consisting of 56 items already tested in the academic literature.

2 Literature review

2.1 Organizational culture

The concept of organizational culture was developed in the late 1970s and early 1980s [5 – 6 – 7] emphasizing how it can be the way to understand how people within organizations operate to achieve their goals [8]. Currently, there is no universally accepted definition of organizational culture; in fact, some studies have found there are at least 54 different definitions [9]. Among the most important definitions is that of Schein [3], who states that culture is the set of basic assumptions that the organization shares and uses that determines how the group perceives, evaluates and reacts to the external environment. These cultural elements are transferred to employees as a correct way of thinking and behaving in line with the organizational ethos [4]. More than culture per se, how members of organizations perceive culture is a factor that influences employees' attitudes and behaviors [10]; therefore, it can be understood as a system of values and beliefs that define employees' behaviors within an organization [11]. It is understood how organizational culture is a key element in generating success in organizations [12] and in understanding certain organizational behaviors more easily [3]. Several studies have confirmed that leaders play a key role in shaping organizational culture [13]. Indeed, a leadership style aimed at motivating intellectual stimulation enables the generation of an innovative culture in the organization [14 – 15]. Considering that organizational culture can be viewed as a glue that binds the organization to its employees, it consequently generates positive and innovative work behavior [14]. Interest in understanding it has been fomented especially by Japan's economic success relative to the United States [16 – 17 – 18]. Scholars such as Lincoln and Kalleberg [19, p. 757] conducted a comparative study of Japanese and American companies, stating the presence of feelings of community and pride in Japanese companies: "*The higher commitment of the Japanese workforce can be attributed to management practices and organizational structure*". Scholars have also observed a low presence of precariousness and the use of social and recreational programs, symbols and rituals aimed at employee engagement and the creation of a "strong culture" that has led to the country's economic development [16 – 20 – 21 – 22]. Thus, organizational culture represents a holistic aspect of work environments that interacts with changes in both individual [23] and organizational [24] well-being. In addition, individuals immersed in a specific organizational culture have cultural perceptions that guide their emotional and behavioral reactions [25].

2.2 Organizational climate

Organizational climate indicates the sociopsychological conditions that occur within an organization. The concept of organizational climate has its origin in a formula (1) proposed by Kurt Lewin in 1951 [26]:

$$B = f(P, E) \quad (1)$$

According to that formula (so-called “field theory”), the individual’s behavior (B) is a function of personality (P) and the environment in which the person lives and works (E). Lewin was an important exponent of Gestalt Psychology. Together with him, in 1939, Lippitt and White discussed the topic of social climate and group dynamics within youth groups, analyzing the consequences on individuals’ behaviors in relation to different leadership styles (authoritarian, democratic and laissez-faire) within these groups; showing that the democratic style leads individuals to have greater participation and cooperation with the group [27]. The idea of an environment capable of influencing the behavior of individuals in the organization is a foreshadowing of the concept of organizational climate, which is in fact also specified by Argyris. Argyris [28] is the first to coin the term organizational climate, giving the idea of an environment capable of influencing the behavior of individuals in the organization. Forehand and Gilmer [29] define organizational climate as a set of relatively enduring characteristics that characterize each organization and influence the behavior of individuals within it. It represents a significant variable not only for the quality of work life, with its impact on motivation, commitment and effectiveness [27], but also for interpersonal relationships and the trust that can be generated toward the organization [30]. According to sociologist De Masi [31], climate represents the soul of the enterprise and reveals the happiness or unhappiness of those who work there; it can foster the growth or death of the soul of the enterprise itself. Therefore, a well-designed and managed climate analysis is undoubtedly one of the few tools that can understand and photograph the essence of the organization so that it can eventually intervene with ad hoc managerial practices to impart the desired changes. Organizational climate is perceived as a set of relatively enduring [32] and specific characteristics that can be inferred from how the organization relates to its members and environment [29]. Therefore, a well-designed and managed climate analysis is undoubtedly one of the few tools that can change the essence of the organization simultaneously with the acquisition of information.

2.3 Well-being

Until a few decades ago, work organization was mainly focused on achieving the best result, in terms of economic cost-benefit, which were considered the only relevant elements, without any consideration for the work environment or the health status of the worker. In fact, Taylor’s Scientific Management [33], was based on the standardization of work procedures. This approach, however, came under significant criticism because of the argument that the repetitive nature of the tasks assigned to workers increased their susceptibility to “distractions” and accidents at work [34]. With the passage of time, the importance of human resources within an organization was understood [35], so people began to talk about the possible harm to the welfare of

individual workers caused by the standardization of work performed. During the 20th century many steps were taken toward the understanding that work should not demean human beings or deprive them of their state of well-being by damaging their safety and health. [36]. The work environment has thus changed profoundly. While economic well-being used to be a priority, even at the expense of the conditions in which employees were forced to work, this is no longer the case today [37]. Fortunately, people no longer look at health as the pure absence of illness, but as a process of improving physical and psychological well-being. Therefore, many organizations have also begun to understand the importance of the work contexts in which individual workers spend much of their time and in which they invest their energy and emotions [38]. The presence of high levels of organizational engagement, which means strong commitment and involvement of people within the organization, is crucial [39].

Considering that nowadays all organizations are particularly attentive to the issues of organizational well-being and, therefore, to optimize indicators of well-being and reduce those of discomfort, it is important to analyze a negative phenomenon that unfortunately affects many workers: burnout, i.e., so-called work-related stress. Several studies have shown that stressful situations cause individuals to be vulnerable to illness and can lead to the onset of anxiety, depression, gastrointestinal disorders, and cardiovascular disease. Specifically, stress in the workplace is a major cause of reduced productivity and organizational competitiveness, leading to poor performance, absenteeism, and high health costs [40]. A demanding society, where performance and results are the new priorities of organizations, can lead to work burnout. The expression burnout syndrome literally means “burned out from work”, that is, exhausting every personal resource. According to Maslach and Leiter, it is characterized by three dimensions [41]:

- exhaustion (psychophysical fatigue);
- cynicism (negative and detached attitude toward work activity);
- reduced self-efficacy (feeling that one’s skills are diminished/lost and that one does not deserve success).

It, therefore, leads to lower work performance and lower physical and mental well-being. Work-related stress is a type of stress that arises as a result of prolonged pressures and emotionally and interpersonally stressful factors related to work (so-called indicators of malaise). It can affect, to varying degrees, various professionals constantly engaged in interpersonal relationship-intensive activities [36]. It generally affects those engaged in the helping and social professions such as doctors, nurses, police officers, firefighters, and caregivers, but it can also affect other types of workers who find themselves “squeezed” by the many commitments between work and family.

2.4 Existing relationship between organizational culture, organizational climate, and well-being

Organizational climate and, consequently, the well-being of individual employees are factors that influence both employee innovation [42] and perceived organizational

culture [23]. In fact, organizational climate acts as an absorption mechanism for their culture [43]. Within the same organization, employees may perceive multiple cultural orientations, depending on the subculture to which they are exposed [44]. Lund [45], who studied the relationship of job satisfaction with types of organizational culture, and Mendonça et al. [23], who investigated individual well-being by measuring cultural values and practices, have shown that organizational culture generates positive or negative influence that can manifest differently according to organizational values, beliefs, and practices imposed by management. For example, clan culture, which relies on mutual aid and cohesion [46], implies strong solidarity and support among members of a group [45], developed internal communication, cooperation, and a sense of appreciation toward employees [47]. In such a culture there is definitely an emphasis on collectivism rather than individualism. In an organizational culture based on collectivism, cooperation and behaviors aimed at collective achievement are encouraged and well valued [48]. In contrast, in a culture that emphasizes individualism, individual goals are paramount and rewards are derived solely from individual achievements.

In addition, organizational culture has a direct impact on employee creativity. Indeed, if management provides resource support in developing new ideas, employees perceive what is considered valuable and how they should act in the workplace [49]. When employees feel good and enjoy the activity in question, they are usually more willing to explore, experiment, and, thus, engage in innovative behaviors [50], improving business performance.

3 Methodology

3.1 The case-study

The company analyzed was founded in 1987 and, nowadays, it is controlled by a large Holding Company that deals with the provision of services in the field of energy production. *“To be first in tailor-made production, to guarantee the maximum satisfaction of our customers”* is the mission that the company has set itself to follow since 1987. It strives to offer high-quality products by providing diversified product lines and products customized to specific requirements. Therefore, situated at the apex of the company’s production process, lies the customer, as the organization has progressively cultivated an inherent predisposition towards fulfilling the diverse requirements and demands of its clientele. The company vision can be summarized in the word *“inGenius”*, aimed at indicating the way of thinking and working of the company and its subsidiaries, combining research, development, creativity, and innovation. The values that have always characterized the Holding Company are trust and honesty (both towards employees, customers, and suppliers). Generally, companies usually base their organization on mere control and procedures, but, in this way, workers’ attention may be focused more on following the processes rather than achieving the company’s goals. The company analyzed aims to stimulate the employee’s innovative and creative ability through these two corporate values. The

organization, thanks to this *modus operandi*, offers a reliable and collaborative work environment characterized by open and honest communication that can ensure the professional and personal growth of the employee itself. Thanks to these values, the company also can limit worker stress and burnout, precisely because of its collaborative, transparent, and communication-based environment. In terms of business organization, the company presents a functional organization. This model offers a “hierarchical” view in which at the head there is the sole director and CEO, then (moving down a level) there are the sectors or offices that answer to the general manager and, further down, other departments or individual figures that are responsible for increasingly specific activities. Employees, consequently, are clustered by specialization and supervised by a function manager, who will be responsible for the performance of its sector. A functional-type organizational chart allows the company to develop the skills and competencies of its employees, considering the standardization of the processes performed. In addition, corporate functions become authentic “schools” that ensure not only the development of workers’ skills and abilities but also promote the spread of organizational culture, with positive repercussions on communication and coordination processes [51]. Through this type of organization, the company presents a linear information flow, proceeding without interference, interruptions, or barriers, consistent with the degree of autonomy of employees along the hierarchical chain [52]. However, this organizational model could slow response times with an accumulation of decisions all about top management. For this reason, the company adopts cross-functional integration mechanisms (for example, project or product groups) by which specialists from different business functions organize themselves into a team to seek a solution to a problem and then disband [51].

3.2 Data collection and method

The empirical analysis is concerned with measuring employee well-being through the analysis of organizational climate, using a questionnaire consisting of 56 items proposed in the form of statements to which the respondent answers by expressing a level of preference through a 5-point Likert scale. This methodology was chosen because *“the effectiveness of the research can be seriously compromised by its length. An excessive number of items discourages even the most motivated employee, risking increasing the percentage of unfilled questionnaires and, consequently, compromising the robustness of the results. Consequently, it is necessary to maintain a good compromise between the desire to use comprehensive, structured scales in many questions and the level of attention and motivation of those who are asked to fill out the questionnaire”* [53, p. 67]. The items, moreover, were divided into four macro-areas: Climate and Culture; Engagement; Trust; and Communication, Cooperation, Autonomy and Responsibility. The questionnaire was administered to all employees through SurveyMonkey software. After the survey, 60 questionnaires were completed, compared with a total population of 106 employees; therefore, the response rate was 56.6%. Subsequently, the data obtained were processed with the help of Microsoft Excel, XLSTAT, and SPSS programs. Through descriptive statistics, medians were calculated for each one of the macro-areas considered and existing relationships were

worked out through Chi-square calculations (taking general sample data as independent variables).

3.3 Sample description

The sample analyzed is characterized by a massive male presence (Figure 1). This is mainly related to the small female presence in the organization. The reason for this is that, until a few years ago, the company's management was predominantly male, as was the rest of the organization. In the last decade, the company has been hiring women into the organization, providing them with total guarantees.

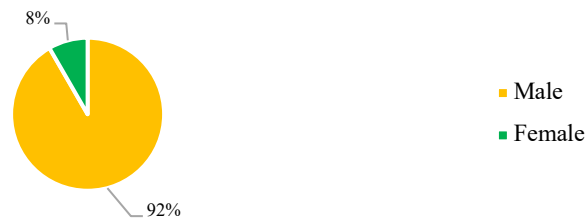


Figure 1: Sample gender

Moreover, the majority of the sample places itself in the average age group of 31 to 50 years. 10% of the sample is in the “youngest” age group, those under 25, and only 2% in the “oldest” working age group, those over 60. While the intermediate age groups (i.e., 25-30 years and 51-60 years) have a response rate of 13% (Figure 2). This is a trend that mirrors Italian employment: in fact, the age group that is most employed in Italy in 2021 is 45-54 years old (Istat data, 2021).

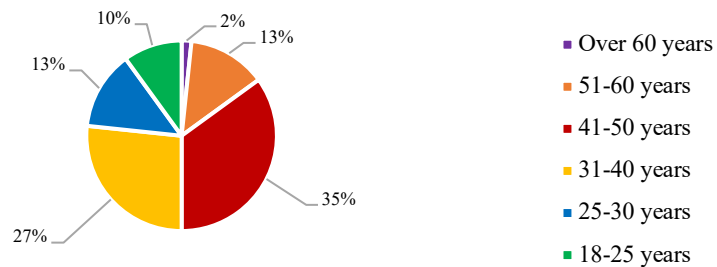


Figure 2: Sample age

Regarding education, the sample has an average level of education (Figure 3). The majority of them have a high school diploma from secondary school (so we are mainly talking about blue-collar workers), and 22% have a bachelor's or master's degree from a university.

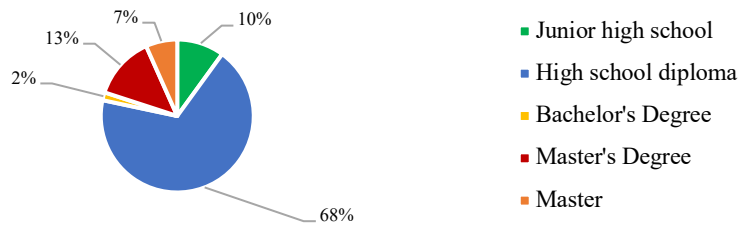


Figure 3: Education level of the sample

It can be seen in Figure 4 that the sample consists of 61% blue-collar workers (more than half of the sample). Meanwhile, the percentage of white-collar workers and middle managers is 39%.

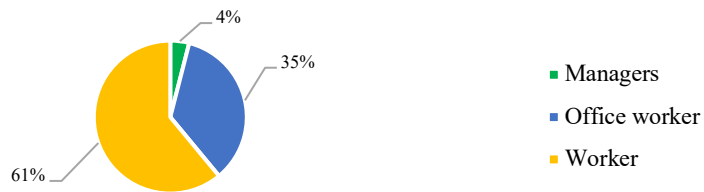


Figure 4: Sample profession

Regarding the type of contract, it can be seen in Figure 5 that there is a small share of fixed-term contracts and a majority of people with permanent contracts.

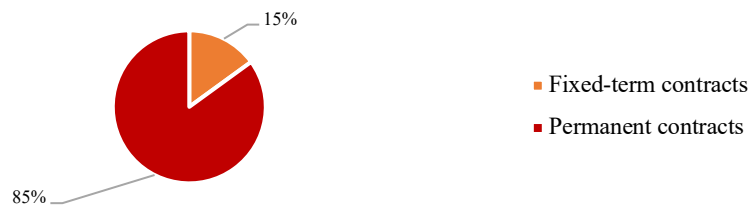


Figure 5: Sample contract type

Lastly, regarding the length of service (Figure 6) and the organizational seniority (Figure 7): there is a presence in both cases of a majority of individuals who have been working for more than ten years. In particular, regarding organizational seniority, there is the presence of employees who have been working in the company for less than five years (30%), and it is on them that the company must focus on transmitting its culture and values to create engagement in them and increase organizational success [39].

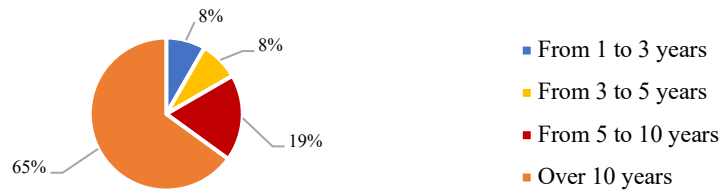


Figure 6: Length of service of the sample

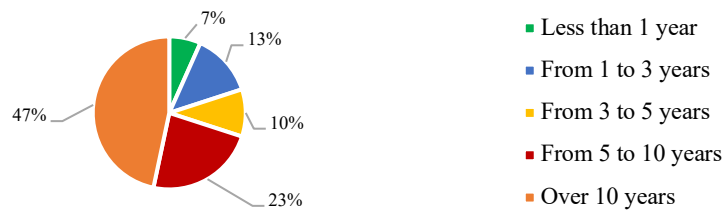


Figure 7: Organizational seniority of the sample

4 Results and discussion

As anticipated, the questionnaire administered was divided into four macroareas: climate and culture; engagement; trust; and communication, cooperation, autonomy and responsibility. In general, the macroareas analyzed had a positive result, leading to the identification of the existence of a positive climate.

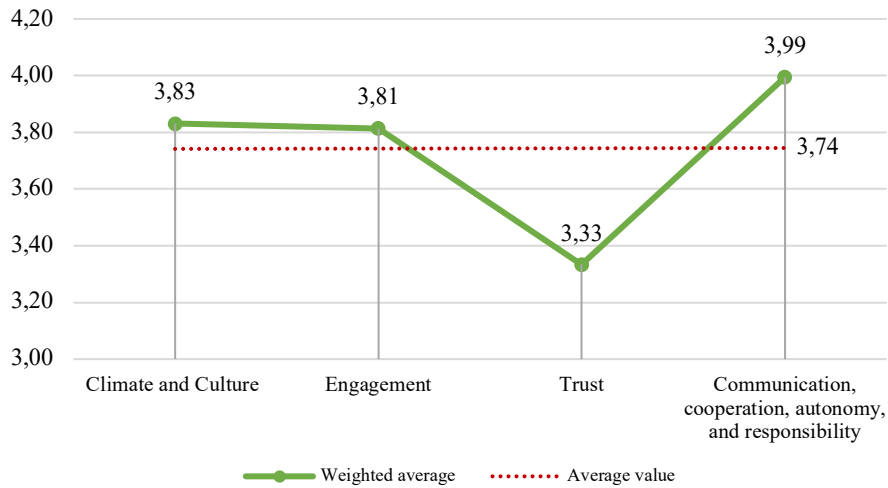


Figure 8: The overall organizational well-being

The graph depicted in Figure 8 refers to the average score obtained in its totality in each of the macroareas considered and allows for immediate comparison. In fact, all macroareas that exceed the overall mean value (obtained from an arithmetic average of the weighted averages calculated above and indicated in the graph with a dotted line) are the macroareas perceived by the sample as most positive from an organizational health perspective. All dimensions, on the other hand, whose score is below the overall average are the areas of organizational health that the sample perceives as most critical [38]. It is possible to say, therefore, compared to an overall mean scale of 3.74 (dashed line), that “communication, cooperation, autonomy and accountability” are perceived as very positive. With the concept of communication, interpersonal relationships among colleagues have been measured, allowing different personalities to coexist and able to ensure their cohesion, effectively limiting the chances of each member entering into conflict [54]. Good communication is thus generative of a cooperative environment, as is a good degree of responsibility and autonomy in employees. The concept of responsibility is understood according to the definition provided by Litwin and Stringer [55] according to which it means how much workers feel they are their own bosses. In addition, autonomy means how much employees are encouraged to make autonomous decisions and be self-sufficient [56 – 57]. According to a study conducted by Karasek [58], job satisfaction depends on the employee’s decision-making autonomy. Quoting Pescatore et al. [12], “*working in groups and creating cohesion facilitates the achievement of work goals and the exchange of ideas, learning from the experiences and practices of others, as well as the sharing of time*”. Finally, cooperation among employees ensures the creation of an excellent work environment, both financially and organizationally [59]. Therefore, this macro area can be considered the strength of the enterprise.

Although this is a non-negative value, the macro-area considered “with problems” is that of trust. Trust is one of the essential elements for an excellent organizational

environment to be generated between the individual and the organization, and as many studies show, a climate of distrust is always a cause of problems and costly and fatal events. When members of an organization create a sense of trust and empathy that allows for a collective state of mind in which individual intentions harmonize and are in sync with group members, what is called “group thinking” is achieved [60]. This feeling of “moving along the same direction” leads individuals to improve productivity and organizational performance precisely because they are more motivated and happier to work [61]. In this sense, it seems relevant for the company to strengthen the confidence of its employees and could do so through [54]:

- the identification of one’s intellectual potential by experimenting with new and different ideas;
- appreciation for those who perform their work even outside of procedures, so as to “keep the fire of goodwill burning”;
- increasing optimism and energy, as organizations that have these qualities are confidence generators and face the future with dedication.

After calculating the medians concerning each macro area, the existence of potential relationships between the independent variables (demographic characteristics of the respondent) and the macro areas considered were analyzed through the Chi-square test. In addition, all macro areas were also analyzed graphically using the violin plots, which show the complete distribution of the data. Summarizing some of the results obtained, in Figure 9 it can be understood that the employees who have the most trust in the organization are both those who have been working in the company for more than ten years and those who have been hired in the last three years (this is also related to the ability of the company to avoid discriminatory situations between employees belonging to different generations in the organization through the use of mutual mentoring).

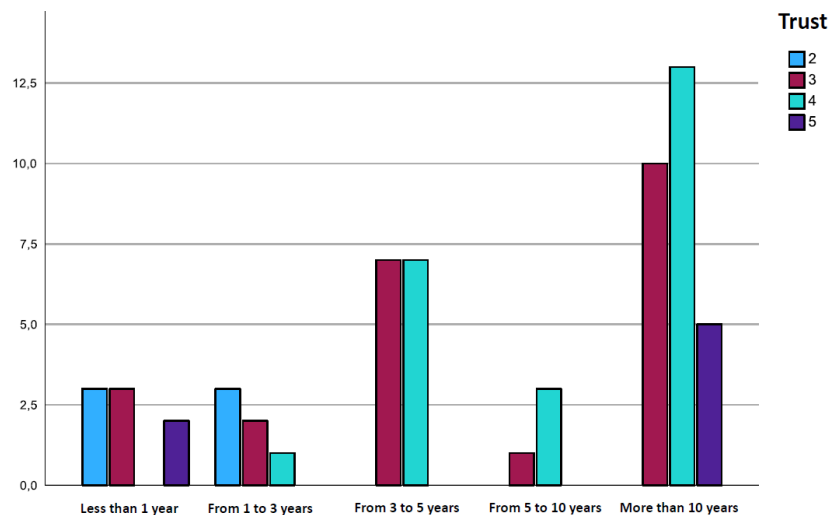


Figure 9: Organizational Seniority and employee trust

Analyzing the distribution of answers in the violin plot represented in Figure 10, it can be observed that employees who have been working in the company for more than ten years show greater trust in the organization; in fact, there is a distribution of votes between 3 and 5 (with a concentration in 4), and that employees who have been hired for less than three years have expressed a vote that is equally distributed between 2 and 5. Regarding newly hired employees (less than one year), it can be observed that their responses are concentrated between 3 and 4. Probably, this is because they have not fully “absorbed” themselves in the culture of the organization and therefore the company could implement organizational policies aimed at increasing their engagement, making them part of the organization’s reality. In addition, the relationship between employees who have been in the company for 3 to 10 years should also be improved to avoid the risk of incurring organizational discontent.

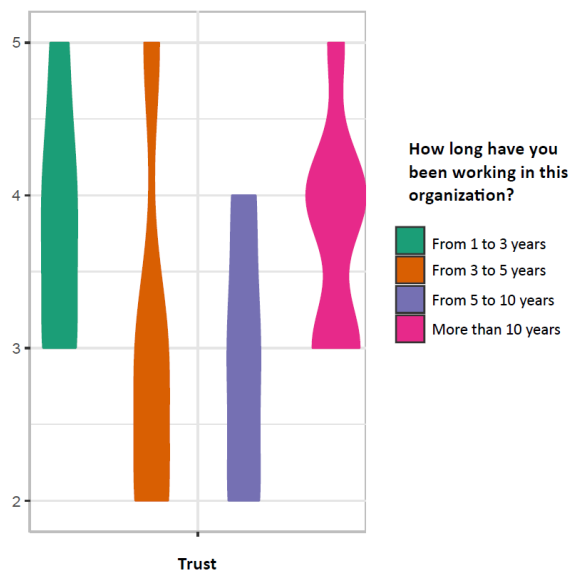


Figure 10: Violin Plot - Organizational Seniority and employee trust

Concerning the type of contract, it is immediately noticeable in Figure 11 how those with an open-ended contract have more trust in the company. This is related to the nature of the contract itself: in addition to the fact that it does not have a term, this type of contract guarantees many more protections for the worker. The employer can dismiss only in the case of “just cause”, “objective justification” or “subjective justification” (this would make it easy to reach retirement age).

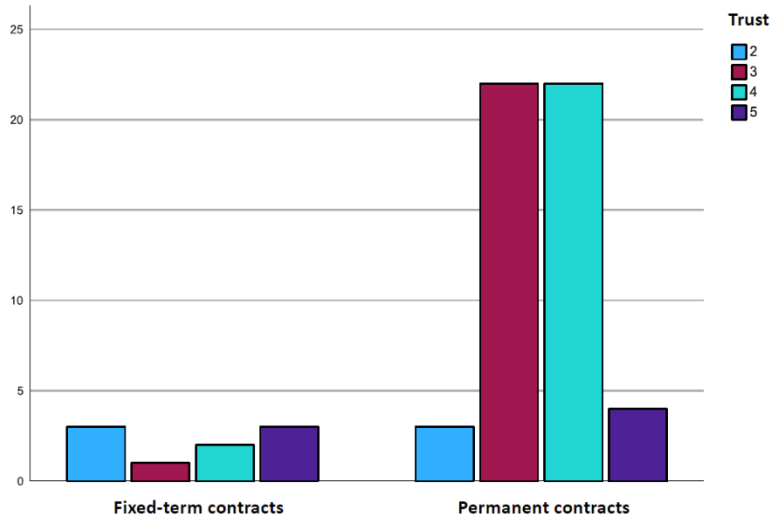


Figure 11: Type of contract and trust of the sample

On the other hand, looking at the violin plot represented in Figure 12 it can be understood how the confidence of employees with fixed-term contracts is equally distributed between 2 and 5; while for employees with permanent contracts, the trust is medium-high as the votes are mainly concentrated between 3 and 4.

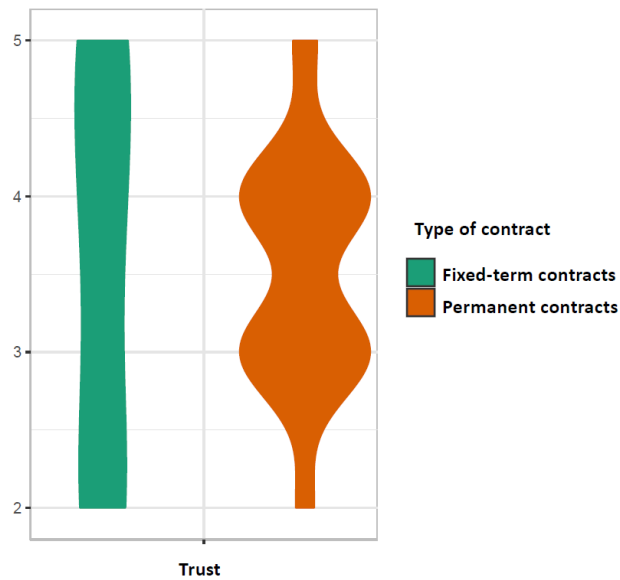


Figure 12: Violin Plot - Type of contract and trust of the sample

In addition, the last item in the administered questionnaire made it possible to analyze what is known as the Net Promoter Score [62], which is an index that allows us to understand how much a company’s employees would recommend working in that organization by subtracting the percentage of detractors from the percentage of promoters in the company (Table 1).

Table 1: Percentage of detractors, neutrals, and promoters

	Answers range	Total answers	%
<i>Detractors</i>	0-6	14	23
<i>Neutrals</i>	7-8	19	32
<i>Promoters</i>	9-10	27	45
		60	100

This result is also positive because 45 percent of employees would recommend working in the company, however, the company should try to “win over” the high number of “neutral” employees. The latter, in fact, are undecided whether to take a positive or negative side and, therefore, turn out to be the most critical category since, if ad hoc policies are not put in place in order to motivate them, they risk becoming detractors, consequently ruining the corporate image.

5 Conclusion

The climate analysis conducted in the company has provided valuable insights into the quality of existing relationships between people and the work environment, thus obtaining crucial information on the company’s strengths and weaknesses [63]. In addition, it is a useful tool for companies to “give voice” to employees, fostering a sense of being heard and involved [30]. However, in order for it to be truly effective, the organization must understand the “alarm bells” that emerge from the analysis before it is too late and has a responsibility to be consequential [38], since an organization’s internal climate affects the individual and collective well-being of employees, affecting individual employee behaviors and influencing company performance [64].

The case study is a company that was founded as a family business in which people have been working for a long time and average age and seniority are therefore high. A context in which this type of analysis is not normally done because it is difficult for employees to respond with sincerity because they fear being spotted. So, the paper highlights how in these cases it becomes even more interesting to conduct climate analyses. In fact, it is possible to segment and make reflections on particular segments of employees (e.g., older ones versus younger ones or new entrants). An important limitation to the research conducted is the presence of a small sample analyzed; in fact, the analysis took place at one of the many Holding Company branches taken into consideration. So, in order to better understand the state of the company climate, it would be necessary to conduct the same analysis at all of the Holding’s branches, so as to understand whether the final result reflects the result obtained in the present research. The practical contribution of the paper is that the use of climate analysis can give

managers practical indications on how to behave in specific situations. For example, to increase corporate engagement, management can use employer branding, corporate welfare and wellbeing, an excellent corporate reward system, and the adoption of the shorter work week.

In recent years, especially as a result of the Covid19 pandemic, the outlook and desires of individuals have changed: a greater focus on individual well-being is characterizing individuals' choices. In Italy, in 2022 there were more than 2 million voluntary resignations caused more by job dissatisfaction and poor engagement (known in the United States as "Great resignation"). This is related to an "increased propensity not to settle" of the worker, who is looking for a job that allows him or her to have a good work-life balance and better conditions from both a pay and professional perspective. Not surprisingly, in a report prepared by Gallup on the "Global State of the World of Work" (2023), Italy is the state with "the saddest workers in Europe". This sadness could result in quite quitting, that is, doing one's job by doing the bare minimum and also resigning without having job alternatives. In light of what has been happening in recent years, in order for organizational climate analysis to be truly useful to the organization, management must have a responsibility to be consequential.

The decision to address this issue arose from a desire to emphasize the need to change what was the basis of work until a few years ago. Work should not be done for the sole purpose of earning money, but should be satisfying, challenging and rewarding. Today the sensitivity of society and businesses to the employee well-being is increasing. In fact, if employees were previously considered "machines", they are now considered subjects with emotions. It must be said that there is still a long way to go to arrive at a general well-being of workers but, quoting Olivetti, one day it will be possible to arrive at the common idea that there is "*the factory for man, not man for the factory*".

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