

Conflict Management Strategies of the Leaders of Inspection Groups in Turkey

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore supervision group leaders' conflict management strategies in Turkey. This research was conducted as a survey using a descriptive method. The population of the study consisted of 2493 inspectors working in 81 provinces geographically divided in seven regions. The data were collected by "Conflict Management Strategies Questionnaire" which consisted of 32 items. The measurement model was tested using a confirmatory procedure. In the analysis procedure quantitative analysis techniques such as means, frequencies and standard deviations t-test and a one-way Anova were utilized. Group leaders perceived that firstly, they refer to problem solving strategies and secondly, compromising; the third and fourth strategies they used in managing conflicts were dominating and avoiding. Inspectors reported that firstly, they used problem solving, compromising, dominating and avoiding successively. It is significant to find that both group leaders and inspectors had the same evaluation about preferring conflict management strategies.

Key words: Educational administration, supervision, inspection, conflict management, school supervision

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to explore supervision group leaders' conflict management strategies in Turkey. In order to supervise educational institutions and staff, guidance and supervision headship was established in the Ministry of National Education as the central body. This body contains 81 provincial headships (Resmi Gazete, 2011; Resmi Gazete, 2014a). The duties of the inspectors appointed in the provinces are Guidance, on-the-job training, supervision, evaluation, research, investigation and questioning all kinds of educational institutions: pre-primary, primary, secondary and high schools. (Resmi Gazete, 2014b). In 2016,

approximately 2600 education inspectors have been employed in 81 provinces in Turkey. In order to provide effective supervision service considering criteria such as transportation, the number of teachers and students, supervision districts in each province were settled in Turkey. Adequate numbers of supervisors were appointed in each district and these are named as supervision groups. Schools are visited at least once in three years' time by means of ordinary inspection by the inspectors in each province. In Turkey, the terms inspectors and supervisors are used synonymously. The school inspections are realized by three to ten inspectors during three days average. One of the inspectors among the group has been assigned as group leader for one education year. The responsibility of the group leader is to lead the group in order to fulfil the responsibilities on the time and properly. Schools are subjected to inspection for educational, managerial and financial issues. In this process inspectors in the planned date, first of all control the data processed in e-inspection module by the school management and teachers. The inspectors, secondly, gather data from the class inspection, the school documents, school managers, teachers and if necessary students and parents. The inspectors, then, using the data prepare a school inspection report and share it with superiors and school using e-inspection module. Finally, the responsible parties (superiors and school personnel) start to improve inadequate parts designated in the report (MEB 2014; Resmi Gazete, 2011; Resmi Gazete, 2014a; Resmi Gazete, 2014b). Grek, Lawn, Ozga and Segerholm, (2013, p.500) reported that the growth of activity in the internal association of inspectors (SICI), especially within Europe, highlights a significant response by national inspectorates to the shift from hierarchical, bureaucratic forms and relations of government to more networked governing forms and practices, which are very much facilitated by, and dependent on, data. Data do some of the work of managing problems of coordination and standardisation that are so important in the new decentred education policy space of Europe. The main purpose of supervision in Turkey is to develop the instruction and increase student learning and success. Qualitative and quantitative success of the supervisors in fulfilling their responsibilities is one of the major determinants of providing qualitative success not only in student learning but also in the issues such as reducing stress, increasing motivation, providing job satisfaction for all of the staff in the process. In this sense it can be asserted that the better the conflicts are managed in the supervision groups the more effective supervision can be provided.

Rahim (2001, p. 17-18) asserted that the term "conflict" has no single clear meaning. Conflict is defined as an interactive process manifested in incompatibility, disagreement, or dissonance within or between social entities. According to Jeong (2009, p. 3), conflict is manifested through adversarial social action, involving two or more actors with the expression of differences often accompanied by intense hostilities. Wellington (2011, p.168.) refers to conflict as inevitable because the people in the organizations hold different opinions, interests, perspectives and cultures which work interdependently towards common (organizational) goals.

According to Rahim (2001, p.19) conflict occurs when there are activities that incongruent with the needs, incompatible behavioral preferences, resources that is in short supply, salient attitudes, behaviors, values, skills, and goals to be perceived exclusive, interdependent performance of functions or activities between social entity(ies). Montana and Charnov (2000,

p. 369, 366-369) stated that conflict between the groups in the organizations is inevitable given two basic factors of organizational life: (1) the competition for scarce resources and (2) the different managerial styles necessary for the effective operation of different departments. A conflict can obviously be between two or more parties, whether those parties are individuals, groups, departments, divisions, companies, political parties, or even entire nations. The most basic form of conflict within the organization is between individuals. The individual who does not agree with the group behavioral norms or with the values found within the corporate culture will be in conflict with the work group or with the entire organization. Single-party conflict may also arise when there are two methods of accomplishing an organizational goal or two choices of action, both equally bad.

Eunson (2007, p. 4-6) stated that among the causes of conflict the most basics are scarce resources, adversity, faulty communication, perceived differences, biology, environment and health. Montana and Charnov, (2000, p. 370) classify sources of conflicts as differences in goals, resource competition, communication failure and misinterpretation of information, disagreement over performance standards and organizational structure incongruities. According to Rahim (2001, p. 21-23) sources of conflicts are: 1) Affective conflict: it is about incompatible feelings and emotions 2) Substantive conflict: it is about disagreement on the task or content issues. 3) Conflict of interest: it is about inconsistency in the allocation of a scarce resource. 4) Conflict of values: it is about disagreement the values or ideologies on certain issues. 5) Goal conflict: it is about inconsistent outcomes. 6) Realistic versus non-realistic conflict: they are about incompatibilities in tasks, goals, values, means, ends and the need for releasing tension and expressing hostility, ignorance, or error. 7) Institutionalized versus noninstitutionalized conflict: it is about existence and nonexistence of following explicit rules, displaying predictable behavior, and providing continuity in relationships. 8) Retributive conflict: it is about the desire to punish the opponent. 9) Misattributed conflict: it is about the incorrect assignment of causes. 10) Displaced conflict: it is about directing frustrations or hostilities to social entities who are not involved in conflict. Armstrong (2006, p. 88-89) asserted that conflicts can arise because of a clash in values, different priorities, freedom versus control disputes.

Eunson (2007, p. 7-8) reported five kinds of handling interpersonal conflict. These are; 1) Competing (When quick, decisive action is vital), 2) Collaborating (To find an integrative solution when both sets of concerns are too important to be compromised), 3) Compromising (When goals are important, but not worth the effort or potential disruption of more assertive modes), 4) Avoiding (When an issue is trivial, or more important issues are pressing), 5) Accommodating (When you find you are wrong-to allow a better position to be heard, to learn and show your reasonableness). Rahim (2001, p. 28-30) also asserted five kinds as 1) Integrating Style (high concern for self and others. This style is also known as problem solving.), 2) Obliging Style (low concern for self and high concern for others. This is also known as accommodating.) 3) Dominating Style (high concern for self and low concern for others. This is also known as competing.), 4) Avoiding Style (low concern for self and others. This is also known as suppression), 5) Compromising Style (intermediate concern for self and others. It involves give and-take.). Wellington (2011, pp.169.-170) classified conflict resolution strategies into three

categories: avoiding, defusing and confronting. 1) Avoiding, (tendency to repress emotional reactions), 2) Defusing, (cooling the situation off or keeping the issues so unclear), 3) Confronting (Confronting can further be subdivided into power strategies and negotiation strategies. Power strategies include the use of physical force, bribery and punishment. Negotiation strategies include resolving the conflict with a compromise or a solution that is mutually satisfying to all parties involved in the conflict. Montana and Charnov, (2000, p. 375) stated the strategies for managing group conflicts as avoidance, smoothing, dominance or power intervention, compromise, and confrontation.

To McConnon and MConnon (2008, p. 44) a conflict is constructive only if as a result: the relationship is stronger, you understand each other more, there is greater willingness to meet each other's needs, there is greater trust, you have resolved the source of future conflicts, there are richer perspectives. If the conflict results in deeper frustration, negative feelings and a growing hostility, it is destructive to the relationship. Eunson (2007, p.1) points out to how the term conflict is perceived in common understanding. He asserted that we usually think of conflict as a negative, stressful experience, leading to verbal and to physical violence. But conflict can lead to both negative and positive image. Eunson (2007, p. 2-3) stressed well that conflict can lead to: negative emotions, blocked communication, increased negative stereotyping of those we are in conflict with reduced coordination between people who have to work and live together, a shift towards autocratic leadership when discussion-based, decision making breaks down, reduced ability to view other perspectives and a breakdown in empathy and vision. On the other hand, conflict can sometimes produce positive payoffs, for example: Pressures and frustrations are released, New perspectives and information can be gathered about the other side, New perspectives can be gained about our side, Better decision making and problem solving can take place., Cohesiveness can increase., Complacency can be challenged, Change can take place., Differences can be appreciated, Intrapersonal conflicts can be resolved. Montana and Charnov (2000, p. 367) claimed also that there is tendency to understand conflict as destructive at first hand. But conflict can stimulate innovation in problem solving and thereby be beneficial for the organization. Wellington (2011, p.169) stated that conflict is only productive if it is primarily collaborative, rather than adversarial. Jehn, Jonsen and Rispens (2014, p. 1) found that low relationship conflict, high member satisfaction, and high performance increased preferred task relationship continuation. When the level of interdependence was high among group members, low levels of task conflict increased members' preference to continue the task relationship. However, in groups with low levels of interdependence, individual members preferred to continue task relationships despite their perception of high levels of task conflicts.

Wellington (2011, p. 175) proposed the following steps in order to handle a conflict situation successfully. The first step is to define the conflict causes, the second step is to understand points of views, the third step is to clarify the preferences, the fourth is to examine the alternatives and the final step is to gain commitment to improvement and change. Jeong (2009, p. 24-25), on the other hand stresses prevention strategy because it is more effective and less costly. In order to prevent conflict the initial focus sheds light on controlling behavioral dynamics. But the essential focus must be on engendering a hospitable environment for

negotiation. As Wellington (2011, p. 173) stressed well conflict can ultimately be expensive and time-consuming. A manager's role is to ensure that conflict does not reach a total breakdown in communication stage.

The purpose of this study was to explore supervision group leaders' conflict management strategies in Turkey. In this study the focus was on conflict management strategies of the group leaders of inspection groups formed by a number of inspectors in relation to the geographical and demographic dispersion of the school population. For this purpose the following question were addressed:

1. What are the views of inspectors and their group leaders about group leaders' conflict management strategies?
2. How do group leaders' views differ about their conflict management strategies by means of gender, education background, seniority and working years in the same province variable?
3. How do group members (inspectors)' views differ about their group leaders' conflict management strategies by means of gender, education background, seniority and working years in the same province variable?

METHOD

This research was conducted as a survey using a descriptive method in order to ascertain the views of inspectors as members of supervision groups and group leaders about group leaders' conflict management strategies in Turkey.

Population and Sample

The population of the study consisted of 2493 inspectors working in 81 provinces geographically divided in seven regions: Aegean Region (8 provinces), Black Sea Region (18 provinces), Central Anatolia Region (13 provinces), Eastern Anatolia Region (14 provinces), Marmara Region (11 provinces), Mediterranean Region (8 provinces) and South-eastern Anatolia Region (9 provinces). In order to determine the sample, first cluster sampling was used and the regions were used as clusters. In the second stage, using random sampling 6 provinces were determined from each region. According to sample size tables the sample consisted of 266 questionnaires. The questionnaire was sent to the total number of inspectors working in the provinces determined. As a result the sample consisted of 573 questionnaires available for analysis (Krejcie and Morgan, 1970, p.608; Büyüköztürk, Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz and Demirel, 2010, p.94; Hair, Anderson, Tahtam and Black, 1998).

Instrument

In this research the data were collected by "Conflict Management Strategies Questionnaire" which consisted of 32 items. The questionnaire was, first, developed by Şahin (2007), to measure primary school managers' conflict management strategies: problem solving (Cronbach's Alpha=,96), avoiding (Cronbach's Alpha=,88), dominating (Cronbach's Alpha=,85) and compromising (Cronbach's Alpha=,80). The questionnaire was adopted to gather data from the inspectors as members of supervision groups and group leaders. The questionnaire was

designed as a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (coded as 1) to strongly agree (coded as 5).

The measurement model was tested using a confirmatory procedure employing the structural equation modelling software, Lisrel 8.54. The indices for evaluating four factor model are RMSEA (Root mean square error of approximation): ,060, GFI (Goodness of fit index): ,87, AGFI (Adjusted goodness of fit): ,85, PGFI (Parsimony goodness of fit): .66, CFI (Comparative fit index): ,98, RMR (Root mean square residual): 0,070, NFI (Normed fit index): 0,97, Chi-Square ($X^2/sd \leq 2$ or 3): 3,04, p-value: .0. The reliability of the "Conflict Management Strategies Questionnaire" for four factors were as follows: Problem solving ,959 (18 items); Avoiding ,857 (6 items); Dominating ,797 (5 items); Compromising ,776 (3 items) and Total reliability score was counted to be ,927 (32 items) (Akgül & Çevik, 2003; Büyüköztürk, 2003; Çokluk, Şekercioğlu, & Büyüköztürk, 2010; Hair, et al. 1998).

Data analysis

The data were analysed using quantitative analysis techniques. In the analysis SPSS package statistical program was used. In order to determine the views of the group leaders and inspectors means, frequencies and standard deviations were calculated. Additionally, in order to find out whether group leaders and inspectors' views differ in relation to their education background, gender, seniority and working years in the same province variables t-test and a One-Way ANOVA were utilized (Akgül & Çevik, 2003; Büyüköztürk, 2003; Büyüköztürk etc., 2010; Hair et al. 1998).

Findings

In this section the findings about views of inspectors as members of supervision groups and group leaders about group leaders' conflict management skills in Turkey were presented. First school managers and teachers' views were presented by comparison. Secondly, group leaders' views were presented in relation to demographic variables. Thirdly, the views of inspectors about their group leaders' conflict management skills in regard to their demographic variables were presented.

1. What are the views of inspectors and their group leaders about group leaders’ conflict management strategies?

Table 1. Views of inspectors about their group leader’s conflict management strategies according to their position

| Factors | Position | N | \bar{x} | Sd | df | t | p |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----|-----------|---------|-----|--------|------|
| Problem Solving | A- Group Leader | 126 | 4,1825 | ,47676 | 571 | 7,013 | ,000 |
| | B- Inspector | 447 | 3,7947 | ,74880 | | | |
| Avoiding | A- Group Leader | 126 | 2,5714 | 1,00519 | 571 | -2,097 | ,036 |
| | B- Inspector | 447 | 2,7796 | ,97833 | | | |
| Dominating | A- Group Leader | 126 | 2,9206 | ,87273 | 571 | -1,433 | ,152 |
| | B- Inspector | 447 | 3,0483 | ,88657 | | | |
| Compromising | A- Group Leader | 126 | 3,5635 | ,67523 | 571 | ,540 | ,589 |
| | B- Inspector | 447 | 3,5190 | ,85120 | | | |

According to the findings, group leaders perceived that they mostly refer to problem solving strategies ($\bar{x}=4,18$) in conflicts. The findings show that their second strategy was compromising ($\bar{x}=3,56$). The third and fourth strategies they used in managing conflicts were dominating ($\bar{x}=2,92$) and avoiding ($\bar{x}=2,57$) with lower mean scores accordingly. Inspectors reported that mostly used conflict management strategies by group leaders were respectively problem solving ($\bar{x}=3,80$), compromising ($\bar{x}=3,52$), dominating ($\bar{x}=3,05$) and avoiding ($\bar{x}=2,78$). It is significant to find that both group leaders and inspectors had the same evaluation about frequency of preferring conflict management strategies.

According to the data given in table 1, the views of group leaders and inspectors differ significantly in applying problem solving strategy [$t_{(316,398)}= 7,013$; $p<,01$] in conflict management. The group leaders ($\bar{x}=4,18$) reported higher scores in using problem solving strategy compared to inspectors ($\bar{x}=3,80$) accordingly. However, both groups’ scores were the highest in problem solving strategy compared to other strategies. The findings also show that there is a significant difference between their views in applying avoiding strategy [$t_{(571)}= -2,097$; $p<,05$]. The inspectors ($\bar{x}=2,78$) reported that group leaders referred more to avoiding strategy compared to group leaders views ($\bar{x}=2,57$). The group leaders and inspectors do not have significant difference in their views in dominating and compromising strategies.

2. How do group leaders’ views differ about their conflict management strategies by means of gender, education background, seniority and working years in the same province variable?

According to the parametric tests conducted in relation to gender, education background and working years in the same province variables views of the group leaders of the inspection groups about their conflict management strategies did not differ. For seniority variable because the assumptions were not met, non-parametric tests were conducted and again no difference in the views was found.

3. How do group members (inspectors)’ views differ about their group leaders’ conflict management strategies by means of gender, education background, seniority and working years in the same province variable?

According to the parametric tests conducted in relation to gender, education background and working years in the same province variables the views of the inspectors about their group leaders’ conflict management skills did not differ. On the other hand, their views were different according their seniority in avoiding, dominating and compromising strategies. The findings were presented in table 2.

Table 2. Views of the inspectors about their group leader’s conflict management strategies according to their seniority.

| Dimensions | Seniority | N | \bar{x} | S | F | p | Significant difference (Between) |
|--------------|----------------|-----|-----------|---------|-------|------|----------------------------------|
| Avoiding | A) 1-5 years | 59 | 2,6215 | 1,05583 | 3,013 | ,018 | A-E C-E D-E |
| | B) 6-10 years | 38 | 2,8421 | ,86294 | | | |
| | C) 11-15 years | 69 | 2,5700 | ,96821 | | | |
| | D) 16-20 years | 95 | 2,6684 | 1,00339 | | | |
| | E) 21+ | 186 | 2,9516 | ,94427 | | | |
| Dominating | A) 1-5 years | 59 | 2,8610 | ,99117 | 2,595 | ,036 | A-E C-E |
| | B) 6-10 years | 38 | 3,1474 | ,83787 | | | |
| | C) 11-15 years | 69 | 2,8725 | ,79333 | | | |
| | D) 16-20 years | 95 | 2,9958 | ,89347 | | | |
| | E) 21+ | 186 | 3,1796 | ,87525 | | | |
| Compromising | A) 1-5 years | 59 | 3,3446 | ,88184 | 3,418 | ,009 | A-E C-E |
| | B) 6-10 years | 38 | 3,5877 | ,80327 | | | |
| | C) 11-15 years | 69 | 3,2947 | ,81155 | | | |
| | D) 16-20 years | 95 | 3,4737 | ,88403 | | | |
| | E) 21+ | 186 | 3,6667 | ,82600 | | | |

According to table 6, views show significant difference in avoiding [$F_{(2-442)}= 3,013$; $p<,05$], Dominating [$F_{(2-442)}= 2,595$; $p<,05$] and compromising [$F_{(2-442)}= 3,418$; $p<,01$] in terms of seniority variable. However, Inspectors’ views do not differ significantly in problem solving strategy [$F_{(2-442)}= 1,426$; $p>,05$] according to the seniority.

According to the results of LSD test, participants who had 21 and over working years ($\bar{x}=2,95$) thought their group leaders used avoiding strategy more compared to the views of the inspectors who had 16-20 years ($\bar{x}=2,67$), 11-15 years ($\bar{x}=2,57$), and 1-5 years ($\bar{x}=2,62$).

According to the results of LSD test, participants who had 21 and over working years ($\bar{x}=3,17$) thought their group leaders used dominating strategy more compared to the views of the inspectors who had 11-15 years ($\bar{x}=2,87$), and 1-5 years ($\bar{x}=2,86$).

According to the results of LSD test, participants who had 21 and over working years ($\bar{x}=3,67$) thought their group leaders' referred to compromising strategy more compared to the views of the inspectors who had 11-15 years ($\bar{x}=3,30$), and 1-5 years ($\bar{x}=3,35$).

CONCLUSIONS

1. Group leaders perceived that they mostly refer to problem solving strategies in conflicts. The findings show that their second strategy was compromising; the third and fourth strategies they used in managing conflicts were dominating and avoiding with lower mean scores accordingly. Inspectors reported that mostly used conflict management strategies by group leaders were respectively problem solving, compromising, dominating and avoiding. It is significant to find that both group leaders and inspectors had the same evaluation about preferring conflict management strategies. Alper, Tjosvold, and Law, (2000, p. 13) found that managing conflict for mutual benefit was found to predict to the extent team members believed they could handle various conflicts and to their supervisor conclusions about their team effectiveness. Results of the correlational analyses support the reasoning that competitive conflict has a largely negative impact on conflict efficacy. Teams that relied on competitive conflict were found to exhibit low levels of conflict efficacy and reduced group performance. Lee (2009, p. 18.) indicated that among all the conflict styles, dominating and avoiding style tend to be used interchangeably. DeChurch and Marks (2001, p. 17) found that active group conflict management was proposed to maximize performance (group outcomes), while agreeable group conflict management was thought to improve satisfaction. Lee (2009, p. 18) found that subordinates were more satisfied with their superiors' supervision through their exercise of integrating, compromising, and obliging styles. On the other hand, subordinates who perceived their superiors as primarily utilizing dominating and avoiding style viewed them as incompetent in supervision and thus lowering their level of job satisfaction. Dominating was most related to avoiding style. The results revealed that integrating, compromising and to some degree obliging are found to be in association with each other.

2. The group leaders reported higher scores in using problem solving strategy compared to inspectors accordingly. However, both groups' scores were the highest in problem solving strategy compared to other strategies. The findings also show that there is a significant difference between their views in applying avoiding strategy. The inspectors reported that group leaders referred more to avoiding strategy compared to group Leaders' views. The group leaders and inspectors did not have significant difference in their views in dominating and compromising strategies.

3. According to the parametric and non-parametric tests conducted in relation to gender, education background, seniority and working years in the same province variables the group

leaders' views of about their conflict management strategies did not differ. Brewer, Mitchell and Weber (2002, p. 80) found that compared with the gender role orientations a masculine gender role orientation was more likely to be associated with a dominating conflict style, a feminine orientation with the avoiding conflict management style and androgynous orientation with the integrating conflict management style.

4. The views of the inspectors were different only according to their seniority in avoiding, dominating and compromising strategies. There was no significant difference in regard to gender, education background and working years in the same province variables. According to the results a) participants who had 21 and over working years thought their group leader used avoiding strategy more compared to the views of the inspectors who had 16-20 years, 11-15 years, and 1-5 years. b) participants who had 21 and over working years thought their group leaders referred dominating strategy more compared to the views of the inspectors who had 11-15 years, and 1-5 years. c) participants who had 21 and over working years thought their group leaders referred to compromising strategy more compared to the views of the inspectors who had 11-15 years, and 1-5 years. The conflict management styles were also found to be associated to an individual perception's of the source of conflict style. Superior who was perceived to exercise dominating style tends to exercise greater management control-giving little opportunity for the subordinate to be personally responsible for a meaningful portion of his/her works. In assessing the effectiveness of the various influence means, the results suggested that integrating, compromising and obliging should be emphasized to ensure subordinates' satisfaction with supervision. Dominating style should be minimized in any influence attempt except in situations that call for such approach, such as time of crisis or low performance. Lee (2009, p. 18). Gaertner, Wurster and Pant (2014, p. 501) in their research about the effect of supervision over the years, concluded that principals and teachers tend to judge the aspects of school quality as highly stable. Göksoy (2015, p. 291) concluded that educational Inspectors in Turkey, want to spare most of their time on counselling and investigations, educational seminars, in-service training activities, projects, post graduate education, domestic and outland trips.

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