

## Relationship Between School Managers' Conflict Management Styles and Interpersonal Cognitive Distortions

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**ABSTRACT** This paper was carried out with 68 school managers selected from central districts of Erzurum through stratified sampling, with the purpose of determining the relationship between school managers' interpersonal cognitive distortions and the conflict management styles they employ. The data was analyzed using SPSS 16 statistics software. It was found that significant correlations that were at the same direction and close to the medium-level were between general scores of school managers' interpersonal cognitive distortions and the conflict management styles of "compromising", "dominating" and "avoiding". There was no significant correlation at the sub-dimensions of "integrating" and "obliging", and there were significant correlations between the sub-dimensions of school managers' interpersonal cognitive distortions and several conflict management styles.

### INTRODUCTION

In organizations that are created by individuals who have to work together for the same purpose but come from different backgrounds and experiences with different characteristics, occasional conflicts between workers in different forms and at different levels are considered normal.

Conflict, which is not unique to human beings as it is experienced by all other species to continue their lives, can be defined as a set of incidents, which stem from the individuals' and groups' obligation to work together for the organization, and which stops or disrupts the operation of normal activities (Eren 2006).

This is among the issues, which affect functions of an organization (Pourghaz et al. 2014). While the state of stress created by problems obstruct the elimination of physiological and socio-psychological needs (Erdogan 2008), the perception related to contrasting attitudes, behaviors and preferences of two or more individuals constitutes interpersonal conflict (Hellriegel and Slocum 2008). According to Rahim (1992), conflict is an interactional process that is manifested as differences or disagreements within or among social entities such as individuals, groups and organizations.

There exists no common definition as to what conflict is, as many different definitions have been

and continue to be proposed depending on people's perspectives. As it can also be understood from these differences, conflict is not a concept that can be simply explained and analyzed.

Conflict is everywhere, and it is inevitable. It arises from many sources. In addition to being the antecedent for negotiation, conflict may also arise during negotiation (Msila 2012). Conflicts that occur in an organization can be solved in a way that might be detrimental or beneficial towards fulfilling the aims of the organization. Therefore, learning how to manage conflict is unavoidable in organizations for a high performance (Nwosu and Makinde 2014).

Given the fact that conflicts that arise occasionally between all workers at schools cannot be avoided and conflicts at an optimum level are useful for the organization's accomplishing its goals in today's management understanding, the conflict management styles, defined as internal mechanisms used by certain authorities in conflict management (Adeyemi and Ademilua 2012), to be used by school managers are of great importance. According to Thomas and Kilmann (2008), the behavior of a person in conflict situations can be defined with two main dimensions. The first is self-confidence or assertiveness. In this dimension, individuals attempt to fulfil their concerns. The second dimension, on the other hand, is cooperativeness. In this dimension, in-

dividuals try to fulfil others' concerns. These two dimensions of behavior can be used to determine five styles as to conflict, which are competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating.

There are numerous studies in the literature related to the conflict management styles of school administrators. Ghaffar et al. (2012) compared the conflict management styles of principals working at public and private schools. Saiti (2015) scrutinized the conflicts arising in Greek primary schools, conflict management styles and the role of school leaders on this matter. Altinok (2009) examined the conflict management styles of school administrators, and Monteiro et al. (2012) the relations between conflict management styles and personality traits of administrators. Carlos et al. (2012) studied the relations between sentimentality of groups and the conflict management styles used. According to Liu and Zihai (2011), there is a negative significant relationship at medium level between extroversion and compromise, personality traits of administrators. Conflict management styles are affected by personality and other situational variables. The conflict management styles that are used vary among peers, supervisors, and intimates in terms of the product technical complexity and simplicity, product certainty, task interdependence, conflict intensity, the size of team, cultural point of view and emotional intelligence.

Although the relation between the conflict management styles of school administrators and numerous variables is examined in the literature, no study was found that reveals the relation between the interpersonal cognitive distortions of school administrators and their conflict management styles. In this paper, it was intended to study the interpersonal cognitive distortions of school administrators as to relations and the conflict management styles they use in order to bridge this gap in the literature and to lead the implementers.

According to Hamamci and Buyukozturk (2003), individuals might have cognitive distortions they can generalize to all human relationships. These distortions have three main sub-dimensions, that is, avoidance of intimacy, expectation of unrealistic relationships, and mindreading.

The sub-dimension of avoidance from intimacy is based upon distrust of others, including cognitive distortions that are not understood

by others, that intimacy would cause problems that real friendship does not exist in life, and so forth. On the other hand, the sub-dimension of expectation related to unrealistic relationships include expectations such as, "The people I interact with should share all their feelings and opinions with me", "Others should have positive feelings and opinions about me in order to make me feel good", or "I should constantly make compromises in order not to upset people around me". The sub-dimension of mindreading, finally, involves cognitive distortions related to people or relationships with people such as, "I can read people from their eyes", "She should be able to know what I think even though I do not express it" or "I can get what the other person thinks even though she does not express it" (Hamamci and Büyüköztürk 2003).

It is worth investigating whether there is a correlation between the dimension of cognitive distortions that pertains to interpersonal relationships and the conflict management strategies that managers utilize. In this research, therefore, it was aimed to explore if there is a correlation between the school managers' interpersonal cognitive distortions and their conflict management styles.

To this end, answers were sought to the following sub-problem:

Is there a correlation between school managers' interpersonal cognitive distortions (avoidance of intimacy, expectation of unrealistic relationships and mind reading) and their conflict management strategies (integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising)?

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

The research was designed in the screening model, which aims to describe a past or present situation as it was/is (Karasar 2005). A relational screening model was performed for revealing the correlation between school managers' interpersonal cognitive distortions and their conflict management styles. Relational researches are the ones in which the relations between two or more variables are described and these relations are completely analyzed (Tanriogen 2011). Besides, it could also be stated that relational researches are important studies, which are influential in revealing the correlations between variables and

determining their levels, and provide the clues required for the execution of a more advanced level research on these relations (Buyukozturk et al. 2011).

School managers' interpersonal cognitive distortions and conflict management styles were learned from themselves through the relevant questionnaire. Totally 70 questionnaire forms were distributed to them and 68 of those forms were returned. As the sample of this research, the data collected from these 68 forms was used. The data was analyzed using Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation Analysis on SPSS 16.0 software.

### Participants

The population of the research comprised of elementary school managers who carried on their duties at schools in the central Palandoken, Yakutiye, and Aziziye districts in Erzurum in 2011-2012 academic year.

As presented in Table 1, there were 66 (33.8%) percent school managers carrying on their duties in Aziziye, 55 (28.2%) percent managers were working in Palandoken and 74 (38%) percent were working in Yakutiye. In the sample, on the other hand, 23 (34%) school managers were working in Aziziye, 19 (28%) managers were working in Palandoken and 26 (38%) were carrying on their duties in Yakutiye.

**Table 1: Numbers and percentages of school managers in population and sample**

	<i>School manager</i>			
	<i>Population (N)</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Sample (N)</i>	<i>%</i>
Aziziye	66	33.8	23	34
Palandoken	55	28.2	19	28
Yakutiye	74	38	26	38
Total	195	100	68	100

Source: <http://erzurum.meb.gov.tr/www/dosyalar/icerik/9>

The research sample included 68 elementary school managers. In this research, the stratified sampling method was employed. Stratified sampling is a sampling method that aims to determine the subgroups in the population, and then to ensure their representation in the sample with respect to their percentages in the population size (Buyukozturk et al. 2011). In this method, subsets of data were selected. They were called

strata. Each stratum was regarded as a population, and the subsets were attributed to each of them. From these sets, a sample was created through random sampling. Each sample was represented in proportion to the sample unit (Tanriogen 2011).

Table 2 showed that six percent of school managers were female and ninety-four percent of them were male. Seven percent had an associate degree, seventy-seven percent had undergraduate degrees and sixteen percent had a graduate degree. Twelve percent had 6-10 years professional experience, forty-three percent had 11-20 years and forty-five percent had 21 years or more professional experience.

**Table 2: Statistical data of sample**

<i>Statistical data regarding school managers in sample</i>			
		<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Gender</i>	Female	4	6
	Male	64	94
<i>Education</i>	Associate degree	5	7
	Undergraduate degree	52	77
	Graduate degree	11	16
<i>Professional Experience</i>	6-10 years	8	12
	11-20 years	29	43
	21 years and more	31	45

### Data Collection Instruments

The school managers' perception of their interpersonal cognitive distortions was examined using a 19-item Interpersonal Cognitive Distortions Scale developed by Hamamci and Büyüköztürk (2003), who also confirmed its validity and reliability. This scale had three sub-dimensions including "Avoidance of Intimacy" (8 items), "Expectation of Unrealistic Relationships" and "Mind Reading". The scale's reliability was controlled using internal consistency and test-retest methods. Then, the internal consistency coefficient for the entire scale was found as .67, for "Avoidance of Intimacy" as .73, for "Expectation of Unrealistic Relationships" as .66, and for "Mind Reading" as .49. The entire scale's test-retest correlation coefficient was found to be .74. In the paper performed to determine the validity of the scale, it was found that its correlation with other scales was positive and significant (Hamamci and Buyukozturk 2003).

The school managers' perceptions of their conflict management strategies were examined

using “The Organizational Conflict Inventory” (Rahim 1983), which was adapted into Turkish by Gümüşeli (1994), who also examined its validity and reliability. Gümüşeli (1994) found the following test-retest coefficients for the scale with respect to its sub-dimensions, namely, integrating .83, obliging as .81, dominating as .76, avoiding as .79, and compromising as .60. Cronbach’s Alpha coefficients of these sub-dimensions ranged between .72 and .77.

## RESULTS

Results of the Pearson’s Product-Moment Correlation Analysis, which was performed for revealing the relationship between school managers’ interpersonal cognitive distortions and the conflict management styles they used, were presented in Table 3.

Table 3 shows, according to the Pearson’s Product-Moment Correlation Analysis, that the cognitive distortion of “Avoidance of Intimacy” had a negative low-level correlation (-0.251) with the conflict management style of “Integrating”, whereas it had positive low-level correlations with “Obliging” (0.350), “Dominating” (0.386), and “Avoiding” (0.242). These findings indicate that as the participant school managers’ “Avoidance of Intimacy” scores increased, their “Integrating” scores decreased and their “Obliging”, “Dominating” and “Avoiding” scores increased.

The cognitive distortion of “Expectation of Unrealistic Relationships” had positive low-level correlations with the conflict management styles of “Obliging” (0.377) and “Dominating” (0.295). This proved that as school managers’ cognitive distortions related to expectation of unrealistic relationships increased, they preferred the conflict management styles of obliging and dominating more.

The cognitive distortion of “Mind Reading” had positive low-level significant correlations with the conflict management styles of “Obliging” (0.392), “Dominating” (0.285), and “Avoiding” (0.317). This suggested that as school managers’ cognitive distortions related to mind reading increase, they preferred the conflict management styles of obliging, dominating and avoiding more.

Positive significant correlations close to the medium-level were found between the school managers’ Interpersonal Cognitive Distortions general score and the conflict management styles of “Obliging” (0.466), “Dominating” (0.412), and “Avoiding” (0.298). This finding indicated that school managers preferred the conflict management styles of obliging, dominating and avoiding more, as their Interpersonal Cognitive Distortions general score increased.

It could also be seen, in the same table, that there were insignificant ( $p > 0.05$ ) correlations between “Avoidance of Intimacy” and “Compromising”, between “Expectation of Unrealistic Relationships” and “Integrating”, “Avoiding” and “Compromising”, between “Mind Reading” and “Integrating” and “Compromising”, and between Interpersonal Cognitive Distortions general score and “Integrating” and “Compromising”.

## DISCUSSION

According to the results of Pearson’s Product-Moment Correlation Analysis, which was conducted in order to understand the relationship between school managers’ interpersonal cognitive distortions and the conflict management styles that they utilize, school managers’ interpersonal cognitive distortion of “avoidance of intimacy” was found to be negatively correlated with the conflict management style of “in-

**Table 3: Results of Pearson’s product-moment correlation analysis**

	1. Avoidance of intimacy	2. Expectation of unrealistic relationships	3. Mind reading	4. Interpersonal cognitive distortions (general)
5. Integrating	-0.251*	0.039	-0.128	-0.132
6. Obliging	0.350**	0.377**	0.392**	0.466**
7. Dominating	0.386**	0.295*	0.285*	0.412**
8. Avoiding	0.242*	0.191	0.317**	0.298*
9. Compromising	0.049	0.147	0.043	0.111

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

tegrating" and positively correlated with those of "obliging", "dominating" and "avoiding". No significant correlation was found between "avoidance of intimacy" and "compromising". It could be concluded, based on these findings, that school managers prefer, under the sub-dimension of "avoidance of intimacy", the conflict management styles of "obliging", "dominating" and "avoiding" more and that of "integrating" less. It is an important finding, for the science of management, that a negative correlation exists between the interpersonal cognitive distortion of "avoidance of intimacy" and "integrating", which requires cooperation between the parties, in which concern for self and others is high, which is also known as "problem-solving" (Rahim 2001).

In the study carried out by Hamamci (2007) with late teenagers, a negative correlation was similarly found between the adolescents' interpersonal cognitive distortions and their conflict resolution behaviors. In the studies by some researchers, significant correlations were revealed between the individuals' emotional intelligence and personality traits and the conflict management styles they use (Yurur 2009; Ahmed et al. 2010; Liu ve Zihai 2011; Komarraju et al. 2012; Monteiro et al. 2012; Riaz et al. 2012; Yaslioglu et al. 2013). These findings support the finding of the current paper that school managers' interpersonal cognitive distortion general scores are positively correlated with conflict management styles of "dominating", "avoiding" and "obliging".

School managers' interpersonal cognitive distortion of "expectation of unrealistic relationships" was found to be positively correlated with the conflict management styles of "obliging" and "dominating", whereas no significant correlation was found with "integrating", "avoiding" and "compromising". These findings suggest that those school managers with higher expectations for unrealistic relationships prefer the conflict management styles of obliging and dominating more.

Although the styles of "obliging" and "dominating" seem to be antipodes, they meet on the common ground that they are both extreme styles, because in the former, the individual tries to satisfy others without concerning for herself, whereas in the latter she is obsessed with her own desires without paying attention to those of others. It is not a surprising finding that those

school managers, who have cognitive distortions manifested in the forms of all-or-nothing thinking, overgeneralization, mental filtering, disqualification of the positive, magnification or minimization (exaggeration), constantly drawing negative conclusions, emotional thinking, should statements, personalization, labeling and mislabeling, prefer extreme conflict management styles of "obliging", "dominating" and "avoiding" more.

The school managers' interpersonal cognitive distortion of "mindreading" was found to be positively correlated with the conflict management styles of "obliging", "dominating" and "avoiding", and no significant correlation was found with "integrating" and "compromising".

School managers' interpersonal cognitive distortions general scores were positively correlated with the conflict management styles of "obliging", "dominating" and "avoiding" close to the medium level, and no significant correlation was found with "integrating" and "compromising".

When these findings are addressed generally, it is concluded that those school managers with more interpersonal cognitive distortions prefer the conflict management styles of "obliging", "dominating" and "avoiding" more. Another notable finding is that no correlation exists between the school managers' interpersonal cognitive distortions and the conflict management style of "compromising", whereas a negative correlation exists between school managers' interpersonal cognitive distortions and the conflict management style of "integrating" only in the sub-dimension of "avoidance of intimacy".

Rahim (2001) accepts that effective leadership depends on leadership styles that coincide with the context. For this reason, it is hard to say that a certain conflict management style can be effective in all situations. Although it contradicts with the contemporary management understanding and a conflict management that will help the school accomplish its targets, according to the research findings, it is possible for school managers who have high interpersonal cognitive distortions to utilize the conflict management styles of "avoiding", "dominating" and "obliging" more.

Wallinius et al. (2011) found a relation between cognitive distortions of adults and anti-social behaviors. Coban (2013) reported that individuals who avoid building close relations

use avoidance as a strategy to cope with stress. Carlos, Damaso and Gonzalo (2012) revealed that there are relations between the sentimentality of groups and the conflict management styles they use. Koydemir and Demir (2008) found a positive significant correlation between interpersonal cognitive distortions and shyness, while Whisman and Friedman (1998) determined that there is a correlation between non-functional beliefs and perceived interpersonal problems. These findings support the finding of the current study that school managers' interpersonal cognitive distortion general scores are positively correlated with conflict management styles of "dominating", "avoiding" and "obliging".

### CONCLUSION

It can be said that the cognitive distortions of school principals about their relationships cause them to use some of the conflict management styles more often. It was concluded that the cognitive distortions of school principals, who have a great role in the effectiveness of schools, about their relationships might influence school administration negatively through the conflict management styles they prefer.

It was determined that those principals who avoid getting closer and keep themselves at a distance may use the integration style less and compromise, avoidance and domination styles more. It was seen that school principals that have unrealistic relationship expectations more might use domination and compromise styles more often, while those principals who read mind might use conflict management strategies at domination, compromise and avoidance dimensions more. The cognitive distortions of school principals about their relationships mean that they mostly prefer conflict management strategies at domination, compromise and avoidance dimensions.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of these findings, informing school managers about interpersonal cognitive distortions and conflict management styles might help them renew themselves and improve their motivations. For this reason, it could be suggested that researchers should carry out more

studies on this subject, discuss it and obtain healthier results.

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