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Paraskevopoulou, Kyriaki; Ioannidou, Eirini

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Mitglied der
Leibniz-Gemeinschaft

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Leibniz-Institut
für Sozialwissenschaften

The role of the leader in the resolution of conflicts and in the management of human resources

Kyriaki Paraskevopoulou
Alexander Technological Educational Institute of Thessaloniki, Greece

Eirini Ioannidou
Alexander Technological Educational Institute of Thessaloniki, Greece

Abstract: *This study aims to explore the principal's role in the resolution of conflicts and in the management of human resources. The basic purpose of this article is to study the issue of conflict in primary schools and the role of the principal in resolving it. In addition, it aims to clarify the role and the contribution of the principal as a school leader from the viewpoint of the principals themselves but also from the viewpoint of the teachers. The analysis was conducted based both on theoretical and empirical approaches. The basic research questions of this study were: i) the frequency and the reason for the conflicts, ii) the participants personal opinions about the conflicts and iii) the description of the main role and the characteristics that an effective school-leader should exhibit. The results revealed that there are conflicts between principals and teachers to a large extent. Finally, according to the analysis of the results it was ascertained that there are inconsistencies between the views of teachers and principals, in several parts of the research, and this probably can be attributed to the differences in their roles.*

1 INTRODUCTION

There is a great interest in the difference between principal's role of the modern times and in the role he had in the past. The modern principal is not only confined to his administrative and service duties but he has an important and complex role. The person who deals with any issue or problem in any business or organization and therefore every educational organization is the school principal. Consequently, success depends on that person and on the way power is exercised. However, it cannot be denied that principal is the person who is under pressure from the internal and external processes of the system. Equally important is the role of teachers and their contribution to educational units. The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the conflict phenomenon in primary schools for this reason, in addition to the theoretical investigation, quantitative research was

carried out and the questionnaire was used as a research tool. The research was conducted in December 2017 and was addressed to teachers and school principals of Primary Education in the prefecture of Thessaloniki.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEFORK

The meaning of leadership
Most of the time when successes or failures occur in educational units-organizations, they are mainly attributed to their leadership. More generally, in any social organization, leadership is one of the most important factors that determine its function and evolution. Leadership could be defined as "the process of influencing the attitudes and behavior of a small or large, formal or informal group of people by one person and in such a way that they willingly and with the appropriate cooperation and teamwork try to achieve goals

resulting from the group's mission, with the greatest possible efficiency" (Burandas, 2002).

The role and characteristics of the leader

The hardest and the most complex role within a group is the role of the leader. The traditional perception of the leader's role concentrates his activities on five functions: planning, organizations, leadership, control and implementation (Fayol, 1950). The person who primarily influences the team and takes the lead role is the "leader". It is the most important person of leadership, as it is the people who, through his behaviour, influences other people, facilitates their progress and follow him willingly and voluntarily (Burandas, 2005: 197-198).

According to researchers, the role of the leader can be categorized as follows: The first category concerns the interpersonal role, according to which the leader interacts with the employees and directs the course of the organization. The second category concerns the informative role, according to which the leader is related to the tasks necessary for the acquisition and transmission of information from management to the subordinates and vice versa. Finally, the third category concerns the role of decision-making and the methods used by the leader to create the strategy by which it will lead the organization to success (Mintzberg, 1990; Christou, 2002).

As Olmstead (2000: 227) states, the main processes followed by the effective leader are to create and maintain a team, to develop its members and to achieve its goals. The leader's role in the group is to push the team members to work and execute a project in such a way as to make the most of their potential. Another very important role of the leader is to define the target of the group. In order to achieve this, he should be fully aware of his object to make it known to the group. Therefore, the goals set by the leader and the team should be achievable, feasible and have a clear timeframe.

According to Cleveland (1986, in Pashiardis, 2004), in a survey of political and governmental leaders, he noted the characteristics that the effective leader should have. Although the survey was conducted on political leaders, the characteristics found fit well with educational leaders. Based on the above research, the effective leader has: intellectual curiosity, interest in everything that is happening around him, interest in how people think and he thinks that the dangers exist not to be avoided but to be treated, he believes that it's logical that there are conflicts and that he has a personal responsibility for the results of the school and their consequences for the wider society.

The leader is the one who expresses himself and inspires people around him to participate (by choice) in a vision and a common mission, helps them to excel, while at the same time they consider them responsible for their work guides by his example and takes the initiative to act as a leader, regardless of his position (Goleman, 2000). Leadership and leader are not necessarily the same as top management, but they coexist at each hierarchical level, so leadership is more closely related to initiative and influence power. In the majority of cases, leaders hold high positions in the administrative hierarchy. This is expected because leadership is expected to be primarily related to the behaviour of

individuals who have a formal power and a similar ability to influence (Karayiannis, 2014).

According to Covey (2001) the main features of a leader are:

i. Clear knowledge of the work entrusted to him. It is not possible to lead and direct a group to a particular project if it does not have a very good deal with the team.

ii. Objectivity. It is necessary for the leader to be able to objectively evaluate the results of the team members. This means that the leader must be characterized by stability and integrity. He must avoid creating personal sympathies or dislikes and especially not to manifest them.

iii. Hope and Determination. One of the most important elements a leader must have is persuasion. Determination is also necessary as he will often have to make a decision in the short term for the good of the team or will be called upon to help with a difficulty because team members cannot solve it.

iv. Creativity and Novelty. Both of these elements are linked to the implementation of new ideas, always enough to be able to judge how, when and where the new ideas will be implemented.

v. Inspiration. He should be able to gain the trust of his team members but also to inspire. In this way, he will manage to direct the group, the behaviour of the members and their way of thinking.

vi. Democracy. All members of the group should be able to express their opinion on any matter that arises and this opinion will be respected by everyone, whether they agree or disagree.

vii. Decentralization. It should allocate responsibilities to all members of the team.

Leadership and Management in Education

A separate type of leadership is the "educational" leadership that exists in the field of education. It is believed that the role of administration and leadership is to support and assist the core work of educational units - organizations, namely teaching and learning. Although no clear descriptions have been made, this type of leadership is thought to "focus on teachers' attitudes in engaging in activities that directly affect student development" (Leithwood & Duke, 1999: 47).

According to Katsaros (2008), the administration's definition of education is as follows: "Administration is the specialized human activity developed within the educational institutions of all kinds in the educational system as a whole and seeks to achieve, as far as possible, the objectives of education by making use of available resources - human and material - through functions such as planning, organization, management, coordination and control. Also, Saiti (2005: 30) defines management in education as "an action system consisting in the rational use of available resources - human and material - to achieve the goals pursued by the different types of educational institutions" while Bush 2003) considers the management of educational organizations to be the "process of coordinating resources (human, material and technical) to provide education in an effective way".

According to Katsaros (2008), each manager necessarily means that he is also a leader, although in order to be effective he should be able to exercise leadership. The manager can influence the behaviour of others because of the official power of his position, but this does not make him a leader, as mentioned earlier, leadership is related to the ability to

influence and is not only determined by the position. A leader can emerge from the dynamics of a group even if he does not hold official authority.

Human resource Management

According to Jackson and Schuler (2000), human resources are defined as follows: Human resources are the set of talents and moods to deliver all the people of a business that can help create and complete mission, vision, strategy, and goals.

Human Resource Management belongs to the Management functions and its importance is presented by the management definition itself, according to which: "Management is the set of activities aimed at achieving the goals of an organization through the exploitation of the materials and of human resources'. It therefore appears from the above that human resources are one of the two factors that play an important role in managing the results the company is aiming for. Moreover, it is stressed that both knowledge and a deeper understanding of the issues involved in human resources management is a necessity for business executives (Papalexandri & Bourantas, 2002).

Human Resources Management Goals

The Human Resource Management sector is considered to be one of the most important sectors in every business organization, as it is applied to the management of the most basic capital of a business that is human capital. For this reason, Human Resource Management plays its role by achieving five key objectives:
•   Optimizing productivity and quality
•   Increase competitiveness
•   Observance of Legal and Social Obligations
•   Personnel Development and Work Satisfaction
•   Achievement of business goals (Papalexandri & Burandas, 2002; Valachis et al., 2009).

Weaknesses of the Greek educational system and proposals.

The future of prosperity in Greece depends on the performance of education in order to boost productivity and at the same time bring about better social results. In the current era of the economic crisis, Greece is faced with a number of weaknesses and problems of the education system. The school network is characterized as inefficient because it does not provide qualitative educational opportunities for young people. In addition, Greece has no reliable and reliable indicators to inform about the quality and effectiveness of the system. The Greek educational system is characterized as a centralized one, while other European countries choose the decentralized one with a view to their development and improvement, as well as meeting the needs of the students (OECD 2011). The OECD 2011 report highlights the need, even in the wake of the economic crisis, for effective solutions to be implemented by which our country will improve its education system. The report summarizes key facts about why Greece needs to improve its performance and profitability. In summary, the proposals in the report concern reforms to Greek education on increasing teachers' workload, rationalizing the school network (mergers of school units), increasing the number of pupils per class, and improving the ratio of students to teachers.

Conflicts

According to Chitteri (2013), the conflict is defined as "the result of disagreement or opposition in the individual (with himself) or between two or more individuals or between groups/organizations. This is a competitive situation where one team tries to prevent the other team from achieving its goals. Also according to Saiti and Saitis (2011: 251), the conflict is defined as the energy of a person or group that consciously aims to prevent or limit the desired energy of another person or group to achieve its goals.

Sources and causes of conflict

The most frequent sources of conflict in an educational or non-business organization are in relations between executives, superiors and subordinates, upper and other administrative levels, different departments, a union of employees and administration, colleagues, the individual himself (Christou & Sigala, 2000, 2003; Chytteris, 2013).

Many times conflicts between individuals are directly linked to the creation of contradictions, about accepting or rejecting an action. Therefore, the main causes of conflict are: bad communication, different personalities, vague limits of responsibility, vague power limits, inability to cooperate, unfair competition, personal reasons or problems, different goals and values, differences in the way tasks function, different views on reward issues and contradictions to the organization's goals (Chytteris, 2013).

Effects of conflict

Conflicts, depending on the size and the causes that arise, have in any case some results. These results may be positive or negative. Positive results of the conflicts are: innovative new ideas, changes, better decisions, increasing participation, clear causes of problems, creating communication, strengthening relationships, increasing productivity. On the other hand, they also cause negative effects, which include: energy wastage, reduction of job satisfaction, polarization between groups, increase in differences, inability to co-operate, irresponsible behaviour, mistrust between conflicting people, decrease in productivity, biased decisions (May 2013). Therefore, in order to avoid negative results, it is essential that guidance is provided. Only with appropriate conflict resolution can the negative effects be reduced and the positive effects increased.

According to Saiti (2015), conflicts can occur in any organization and therefore in school. For schools, the conflict management style is a common activity, and its degree of effectiveness determines the type of impact of conflicts on school performance. This empirical study explores potential sources of conflict in Greek elementary schools, defines appropriate approaches to conflict management, and provides recommendations based on findings for a more creative conflict management style to improve school performance. The results showed that school conflicts often occur at school and that as often as conflicts arose, they were mainly attributed to interpersonal and organizational reasons. In addition, the results have shown that there is a greater likelihood that these conflicts occur in urban schools rather than in other areas. The study supports the view that integration, cooperation and cohesion are key factors in building a constructive conflict management strategy and in

enhancing better school performance. The results of the study show that school conflict is a major problem that often arises in Greek schools and mainly has interpersonal and organizational qualities. When conflicts were attributed to interpersonal relationships, the analysis of factors indicated "lack of adequate school leadership" as the cause of conflict, and when conflicts were attributed to organizational issues, the cause was attributed to "sharing students when the teacher is absent".

3   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Purpose and research questions

In the context of this study, a survey was conducted on the views of teachers and school principals on the role of the principal in the school unit and on its contribution to its smooth operation. The ultimate goal is to study the role of the principal as a school leader from both the principals themselves and the teachers who perform their work within the school unit.

The key research questions that emerged are the following:

1. The investigation of attitudes and perceptions of teachers and principals of primary education in the prefecture of Thessaloniki regarding conflicts.
2. The exploration of the frequency and the reasons of conflicts in the primary education units in the prefecture of Thessaloniki.
3. Exploring the role and characteristics of an effective leader-school principal according to the views of teachers and principals of primary education.

Research tool

In order to answer the survey questions, two different questionnaires were used which were shared on the basis of whether the interviewee is a principal or a teacher at the school unit where he works. Two main questionnaires were used as the main data collection tools, one for teachers and one for principals. The survey sample consisted of 67 school principals and 160 teachers. For the analysis of the data Statistical Package for Social Sciences (IBM SPSS 20) was used. The majority of questions in both questionnaires showed graduated responses according to a Likert four-step scale. The questionnaires took their final form and, for comparison purposes, questions from other questionnaires recently used in Greece for similar surveys were incorporated into them.

4   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings based on principals' answers

The first question asked to the principals concerns the frequency of conflicts in the school environment. 20 of them (29.9%) said that they sometimes observe conflicts. Instead, 31 (46.3%) responded that this phenomenon is common and 16 (23.9%) said it was a very common condition. They were also asked about the causes of these conflicts. Their answers are shown in Table 1. More than half of principals believe that poor communication is a key cause of conflicts between

teachers in the school unit. Quite high percentages (over 30%) also occur in the absenteeism of teachers - supplements, individual differences (value system), refusal to accept responsibilities, conflicting goals, and increased levels of anxiety.

Table 1
Causes of conflict between teachers according to principals

Causes of conflict	Number of principals	Rate
Bad communication	40	59,7%
Teacher absences - supplements	21	31,3%
Competition between teachers	18	26,9%
Lack of organization	12	17,9%
Individual differences (value system)	26	38,8%
Class distribution	10	14,9%
Limited resources (lack of staff, Financial and logistical resources)	19	28,4%
On-call issues	12	17,9%
Unit rating	5	7,5%
Denial of responsibility	21	31,3%
Conflicting objectives	23	34,3%
Politeness	0	0%
Teacher specialties	9	13,4%
Increased levels of anxiety	26	38,8%
Distinctions between colleagues	8	11,9%
Validity and enforcement issues	11	16,4%

However, principals' attitude towards their own failures is also interesting. Specifically, 37 (55.2%) replied that they sometimes admit their failures, 19 (28.4%) said that this often happens and 6 (9%) responded very often. On the other hand, only 5 (7.5%) responded that they never admit their mistakes to teachers. It followed the question of whether they had ever apologized to fellow teachers about a conflict created by them. Out of the 65 respondents, 48 (73.8%) responded positively and the remaining 17 (26.2%) negatively. In addition, managers were asked if they believe they are using the human resources of the school. 21 (31.3%) responded that they make good use of the teachers in the school unit they manage moderately, 38 (56.7%) responded very much and 8 (11.9%) declared the highest possible level.

Furthermore, principals were asked about the scope of action they are focusing on in the school management. Almost 1 in 4 managers are more interested in solving problems. The percentages of those who responded that their primary concerns are tasks and vision, and security is the focus of only 3% of managers. Additionally, the principals were asked about the Greek education system and in particular whether they believe that it allows them to exercise any kind of administration they prefer. Out of the 65 respondents, 44 (67.7%) consider that they have absolute autonomy, while 21 (32.3%) feel confined to the way they manage.

Finally, the principals answered the question about what they think they need to change in their administration. Out of the 44 respondents, 16 (36.4%) would be more involved in communicating with existing teachers in order to motivate them to take responsibility and create collective visions. Also, 8 managers (18.2%) replied that they would work on better utilization of human resources while there were 2 managers (4.5%) who consider it more important to spend more time on administrative tasks. In addition, there were 2 (4.5%) who stated that they would like to show more restraint, 1 (2.3%) who believes that there are not enough opportunities for teachers and managers (4.5%) to consider that there is no need to change the way they manage the school unit.

Findings based on teachers' answers

Initially, teachers were asked about the incidence of conflicts in the school environment. 102 (63.7%) responded that conflicts were sometimes encountered while 42 (26.3%) responded that it was commonplace. There were also 7 teachers (4.4%) who answered that this was a very common situation, while 9 (5.6%) of the sample members said they had never noticed conflicts between colleagues in the school environment. Teachers were also asked about how the manager was employed. Of the 159 respondents on the influence of the way of administration on their psychology, 98 (61.6%) respond positively, 41 (25.8%) negatively while 20 (12.6%) say they are not affected at all. In addition, 106 (66.3%) responded that the manager's management led to positive educational results, 34 (21.3%) considered the results to be negative, while again 20 (12.5%) believed way of administration has no effect. It is worth noting that 107 teachers (66.9%) consider that the principal contributes significantly to the improvement of school conditions, while 42 (26.3%) say they contribute little. On the contrary, there were 11 teachers (6.9%) who believe that the manager does not help at all to improve the conditions. Also, teachers were asked about the satisfaction they receive from the various aspects of the director's role. Their answers are listed in Table 2. As can only be seen in the case of teachers' trust, more than 30% of teachers responded that they are very satisfied. Extremely high are the percentages of teachers who said they were very satisfied with the role of the manager (over 40%). However, it is worth noting that with regard to the number of training seminars organized by the managers and the organization of discussions among teachers, more than 30% of the respondents state little satisfied. More specifically, for the training seminars, almost one in four teachers is not entirely satisfied with the manager. In addition, teachers responded to whether they maintain contact with each other outside of the school environment as well as the contribution of these contacts to improving their relationships. Of the 160 respondents, 131 (81.9%) responded that they were in contact with colleagues outside of the school environment while 29 (18.1%) responded negatively. In addition, there were 130 people who believe that outside contact can lead to improved interpersonal relationships, while 9 people feel that one event does not affect the other. Finally, teachers were asked whether they believe that the director has the freedom to exercise any kind of administration he prefers, according to the Greek education system and whether the authority of the directors is uncontrollable. The views on the first question are almost shared. More specifically, out of the 159 respondents, 71 (44.7%) consider that teachers are not limited by the Greek educational system in terms of management, while 74 (46.5%) responded negatively. There were also 14 people (8.8%) who did not want to answer. Regarding the second question, it is positive that 91 (57.2%) responded negatively, but there were 53 (33.3%) who gave a positive response and 15 (9.4%) did not accept to respond. Finally, the teachers answered a question about the rules that could be applied to restrict the power of the directors. Out of the 24 teachers who responded, there were 8 (33.3%) who felt they needed continuous training of the directors to fully understand their role and 8 people (33.3%) who consider it necessary to have control from a superior. In addition, there were 4 responses (16.7%) to the teacher's assessment by the Teachers' Club and 3 (12.5%) to allocate more responsibilities to existing teachers. Only 1 teacher responded that it was left to the manager's intention to apply his authority while there was one teacher who did not know whether there was any solution to limiting the manager's "uncontrollable" authority.

Findings based on both teachers' and principals' answers

Apart from the questions asked separately to managers and teachers, there were some questions that were common to both groups. This paragraph shows the percentages of answers to these questions by both principals and teachers. The first question put together in the two groups is about the degree of impact that some teachers have on developing interpersonal relationships with managers. As it turned out, demographics (gender, age, and marital status), external traits (physical attractiveness) and trade union status are not particularly important for either principals or teachers. Instead, both teachers and principals responded to more than 70% or 80% of the fact that increased qualifications and personality have a very or very large influence on the development of interpersonal relations between teacher-managers and teachers. The last common question for teachers and managers was about the features that the manager thinks necessary for him to be effective in his role. As it turned out, teachers believe that an efficient manager should have more qualifications than the managers themselves believe to be able to properly manage the school unit. From the high percentages of teachers, it appears that they are more demanding than the qualifications of directors than the directors themselves. However, teachers and managers have also opted for communication skills, decision-making and team coordination skills as the key features of an efficient manager.

into them.

5 CONCLUSION

After a thorough analysis of the research, it seems to be some mismatch between the view of educators and managers at several points of the research. However, this may come from the difference in their role. Teachers have competences that allow them to interact frequently and better understand the problems that may arise in the school unit. Directors, perhaps because of the many administrative tasks they have on a daily basis, are more easily aware of conflicts between teachers. One reason may be that they are called upon to resolve these differences. Finally, managers give less importance to many elements such as justice, ethics, and authenticity, which for teachers are necessary attributes of the manager to be effective. The research has begun with enthusiasm, while in the process different kind of difficulties arose in conducting it. Key driver was the distrust of the transparency of the research process and the hesitancy of the directors involved along with the indifference and reluctance of some teachers to cooperate.

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