



## THE CORRELATION BETWEEN INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS OF INSPECTION GROUPS AND THEIR CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

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### Abstract:

The purpose of this study was to explore the correlation between interpersonal communication skills and conflict management strategies in the case of inspection groups constituted by a number of inspectors based on the geographical and demographic dispersion of the school population in Turkey. This research was conducted as a survey. The population of the study consisted of 2493 inspectors working in 81 provinces geographically divided in seven regions. In this research, the data were collected by “Interpersonal Communication Skills Questionnaire” which consisted of 33 items and “Conflict Management Strategies Questionnaire” which consisted of 32 items. In the analyses of the study, Pearson correlations coefficient and Hierarchical regression were conducted. Consequently, the findings show that both the leaders’ and the supervisors’ views were congruent in that positive and significant correlations were found between two conflict management strategies (problem solving and compromising) and all interpersonal communication skills. The results of Hierarchical regression analysis further showed that feedback and trusting variables had statistically significant positive effects on problem solving, avoiding and dominating strategies and finally effectiveness variable had statistically significant positive effects on compromising strategy.

**Keywords:** educational administration, supervision, inspection, communication, conflict management

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## **1. Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to explore the correlation between interpersonal communication skills and conflict management strategies in the case of inspection groups constituted by a number of inspectors based on the geographical and demographic dispersion of the school population 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 (MEB, 2011; MEB, 2016a; MEB, 2017). 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 (MEB, 2017). 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; MEB, 2011; MEB, 2016b; MEB, 2016c; MEB, 2016d; MEB, 2016e; MEB, 2017). 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.

### **1.1 Communication**

Communication is the exchange of the ideas, opinions and information through written or spoken words, symbols or actions (Baird, Post & Mahon, 1990). Effective communication is the result of a common understanding between the communicator

and the receiver. Communication is successful only if the communicator transmits that understanding to the receiver (Gibson, Ivancevich, Donnelly & Konopaske, 2011, p.432). Communication is one of the most important interpersonal processes in organizations. Effective communication allows employees, groups, and organizations to achieve their goals and perform at a high level (George & Jones, 2012, p.428). In interpersonal communication, the major emphasis is on transferring information from one person to another. Communication among individuals and groups is vital in all organizations. Communication is probably the most visible of all group activities and it is critical to effective group functioning (Stroh, Northcraft and Neale, 2002, p.174). Communication is the way we share information, ideas, goals, directions, expectations, feelings, and emotions in the context of coordinated action. Successful organizations value and promote effective communication both at the interpersonal level and across organizational boundaries (Schermerhorn, Hunt, Osborn & Uhl-Bien, 2010, p.256). Without communication, an organization would be merely a collection of individual workers doing separate tasks. Organizational action would lack coordination and would be oriented toward individual rather than organizational goals (Griffin & Moorhead, 2013, p.295).

Robbins (2002, p.114) claimed that communication serves four major functions within a group or organization: control, motivation, emotional expression and information (Wexley & Yukl, 1984, p.74; Miller, 2000, p.25; Shochley-Zalabak, 2006, p.244). Research has repeatedly shown that groups and organizations spend enormous amounts of time communicating. The centrality of communication to the overall job of the administrator is evident when we consider how much time administrators spend communicating in organizations (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2012, p.158; Schermerhorn, 1996, p.209; Wexley & Yukl, 1984, p.74). Research findings proved that managers spend most of their time for organizational communication. In some occupations, more than half of all time on the job is spent communicating (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 1991; Stroh et al. 2002, p.175, Schermerhorn, 1996; Wexley & Yukl, 1984). Literature review showed that studies in interpersonal communication skills concentrated mainly on the dimensions of empathy, comprehension, active listening, feedback, effectiveness (openness, clarity, transparency, brevity, kindness, concreteness, consideration), persuasion, trusting and being an effective sender (effective body language, effectiveness in verbal and non-verbal communication) (Cohen, Fink, Gadon, Willits & Josefowitz, 2001, p.240; Daft, 2002, p.589; Devito, 2001; Dubrin, 1997; Gordon, 1998, p.191; Hartley & Bruckmann, 2002, pp. 247-248; Ivancevich & Matteson, 1996, p.503; Lunenburg & Ornstein, 1991, pp.189-209; Murphy, Hildeprant & Thomas, 1997, p.31; Robbins, 2000, pp.129; 150-151; Schermerhorn, 2001; Sims, 2002; Steers, 1981, p.214; Tim, Peterson & Stevens, 1990, p. 246).

## **1.2 Conflict Management**

Rahim (2001, pp.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. 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 behavioural preferences, resources that is in short supply, salient attitudes, behaviours, values, skills, and goals to be perceived exclusive, interdependent performance of functions or activities between social entities. Montana and Charnov (2000, pp.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.

Eunson (2007, pp.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, pp.21-23) sources of conflicts are: 1) Affective conflict, 2) Substantive conflict, 3) Conflict of interest, 4) Conflict of values, 5) Goal conflict, 6) Realistic versus non-realistic conflict, 7) Institutionalized versus noninstitutionalized conflict, 8) Retributive conflict, 9) Misattributed conflict, 10) Displaced conflict. Eunson (2007, pp.7-8) reported five kinds of handling interpersonal conflict. These are; 1) Competing, 2) Collaborating, 3) Compromising, 4) Avoiding, 5) Accommodating. 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.

To McConnon and McConnon (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. Montana and Charnov (2000, p.367) claimed 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. Jeong (2009, pp. 24-25) addresses prevention strategy because it is more effective and less costly. In order to prevent conflict the initial focus sheds light on controlling behavioural dynamics. But the essential focus must be on engendering a hospitable environment for negotiation.

Rahim (2002, p.218), based his theory, "A Two-Dimensional Model of the Styles of Handling Interpersonal Conflict Management" on Vroom and Yetton's Normative Leadership Theory, House's Path-Goal Theory, and Fiedler's Contingency Model. According to these models, there is no one way of handling various circumstances

effectively. Developing his model, he analysed his pioneers' ideas about conflict management dispersed in various styles first. Rahim (2001, p.25) adopted five styled model which he based on Follet (Integration, Suppression, Avoidance, Domination, Compromise), Blake and Mouton (Confrontation, Smoothing, Avoiding, Forcing, Compromise), Thomas (Collaborating, Accommodating, Avoiding, Competing, Compromising). Rahim (2001, pp.28-31) handled conflict management in five styles which are integrating, dominating, obliging, avoiding and compromising.

### **1.3 Communication and Conflict**

In the literature, there are studies with different results discussing the relationship between communication and conflict. For example Fisher (2006, pp.176, 177) claimed that as individuals and within groups, human beings are not well, equipped to deal with important differences between themselves and others. They often engage in behaviours that make the situation worse, unless social processes and institutions are available to them to manage their incompatibilities effectively. When differences are handled constructively, such conflict can be a source of learning, creativity, and social change. At all levels of human interaction, poorly handled conflict between authorities and constituents or between majorities and minorities can lead to frustration and alienation on both sides. Jehn, Jonsen, Rispens (2014, p.1) found that when there is low relationship conflict, high member satisfaction, and high performance preferred task relationship continuation increased accordingly. Mao and Hale (2015, p.146.) concluded that Chinese employees' intercultural sensitivity level was correlated with organizational communication conflict management styles. On the other hand Krauss and Morsella (2006, pp.155-156) asserted that communication is not a panacea, and in the absence of genuine desire to resolve conflict it is as likely to intensify the parties' disagreement as to moderate it. Conflicts often serve multiple functions, and the parties may approach resolution with some ambivalence. They may find that the perceived benefits of continuing conflict outweigh its costs. Good communication cannot guarantee that conflict is ameliorated or resolved, but poor communication greatly increases the likelihood that conflict continues or is made worse. Timm, Peterson and Stevens (1990, p.223) argue that conflicts are always related to communicational behaviours. In related literature, many researchers agree that effective use of communication plays a vital role in handling conflict. Using some specific communication strategies, conflict management process can be constructive and functional (Shapiro, 2004, p.3; Wilson and Waltman, 1988, p.367). Communication plays an intrinsic role in every phase of conflict development. Communication plays a central role in conceptualizing the controversy, in choosing ways to handle disputes, and in enacting conflicts (Putnam, 1988, p.295). Certainly one of the more challenging problems that organizational members face is handling conflicts with subordinates, supervisors, peers, and clients (Putnam, 1988, p.293).

The purpose of this study is to contribute to educational discussions by clarifying the correlation between interpersonal communication skills and conflict management strategies. For this purpose, the following research question was addressed: What is the

correlation between interpersonal communication skills and conflict management strategies?

## 2. Method

This research was conducted as a survey using a descriptive method in order to ascertain the correlation between interpersonal communication skills of supervision group leaders and their conflict management strategies.

### 2.1 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 Southeastern 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 & Morgan, 1970, p.608; Büyüköztürk, Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz & Demirel, 2010, p.94; Hair, Anderson, Tahtam & Black, 1998).

### 2.2 Instruments

In this research, the data were collected by “Interpersonal Communication Skills Questionnaire” which consisted of 33 items. The questionnaire was, first, developed by Şahin (2007) to measure primary school managers’ communication skills: emphatic listening (Cronbach’s Alpha=,95), effectiveness (Cronbach’s Alpha=,92), feedback (Cronbach’s Alpha=,93) and trusting (Cronbach’s Alpha=,79). 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 about interpersonal communication skills was tested using a confirmatory procedure employing the structural equation modelling software, Lisrel 8.54. The indices for evaluating four factor model are RMSEA (=,066); GFI (=,85); AGFI (=,82); CFI (=,99); RMR (=,027); standardized RMR (=,036); NFI (=,98); NNFI (=,99); IFI (=,99); RFI (=,98) and  $\chi^2/sd$  (=3,48). The values are in recommended acceptance levels. The reliability values (Cronbach’s Alpha) counted of the “Interpersonal Communication Skills Questionnaire” for four factors were as follows: Emphatic Listening= ,92 (11 items); Effectiveness= ,92 (9 items); Feedback= ,93 (9 items); Trusting= ,83 (4 items) and Total reliability score was counted to be ,97 (33 items) (Akgül & Çevik, 2003; Büyüköztürk, 2003; Çokluk et al. 2010; Hair, et al. 1998).

The data about conflict management 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 about conflict management was again tested using a confirmatory procedure employing the structural equation modelling software, Lisrel 8.54. The indices for evaluating four factor model are RMSEA (=,060); GFI (=,87); AGFI (=,85); CFI (=,98); RMR (=,070); standardized RMR (=,061); NFI (=,97); NNFI (=,98); IFI (=,98); RFI (=,97) and  $\chi^2/sd$  (=3,04). The values are in recommended acceptance levels. The reliability (Cronbach’s Alpha) of the “Conflict Management Strategies Questionnaire” for four factors were as follows: Problem solving= ,95 (18 items); Avoiding= ,85 (6 items); Dominating= ,79 (5 items); Compromising= ,77 (3 items) and Total reliability score was counted to be ,92 (32 items) (Akgül & Çevik, 2003; Büyüköztürk, 2003; Çokluk, Şekercioğlu, & Büyüköztürk, 2010; Hair, et al. 1998).

### 2.3 Data Analysis

In the analyses of the study, Pearson correlations coefficient, Hierarchical regression were conducted to examine the extent to which communication skills of school managers predict conflict management strategies of the leaders of inspection groups. The predictors were entered step by step. In order to validate the model, the Durbin Watson coefficient was calculated and the results show that there was no autocorrelation between any factors. The D-W coefficient was calculated 1,927 for problem solving; 1,805 for avoiding; 1,757 for dominating and 1,868 for compromising. All of the assumptions for regression analysis were met (Akgül & Çevik, 2003; Bryman & Cramer, 2001; Büyüköztürk, 2001; Hair et al., 1998; Leech et al. 2005; Muijs, 2004).

## 3. Findings

In the findings section: 1) the views of group leaders about correlations between group leaders’ interpersonal communication skills and conflict management strategies; 2) the findings based on the views of supervisors were presented.

### 3.1 The correlations between group leaders’ interpersonal communication skills and conflict management strategies were presented according to the views of group leaders

**Table 1:** Correlations among the interpersonal communication skills and conflict management strategies of group leaders according to group leaders' views

		N=126	Problem Solving	Avoiding	Dominating	Compromising
Empathic Listening	Pearson Correlation		,719**	-,121	,120	,336**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000	,178	,181	,000
Effectiveness	Pearson Correlation		,714**	-,106	,104	,377**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000	,238	,248	,000
Feedback	Pearson Correlation		,722**	-,046	,138	,362**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000	,612	,123	,000
Trusting	Pearson Correlation		,674**	-,142	,026	,257**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000	,114	,769	,004

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

Table 1 shows the correlations among the variables of conflict management strategies and interpersonal communication skills of group leaders. Positive and significant correlations were found between problem solving and all interpersonal communication skills and between compromising and all interpersonal communication skills as well.

There were high positive linear correlation ( $r=,72$ ) between problem solving and empathic listening; high positive linear correlation ( $r=,71$ ) between problem solving and effectiveness, high positive linear correlation ( $r=,72$ ) between problem solving and feedback, and high positive linear correlation ( $r=,67$ ) between problem solving and trusting.

There were low positive linear correlation ( $r=,34$ ) between compromising and empathic listening; low positive linear correlation ( $r=,38$ ) between compromising and effectiveness, low positive linear correlation ( $r=,36$ ) between compromising and feedback, and low positive linear correlation ( $r=,26$ ) between compromising and trusting.

**Table 2:** Hierarchical regression analyses about the effects of interpersonal communication skills on problem solving

Variable		B	Std. Error	$\beta$	t	p	r zero-order	r partial	
Model 1	Constant	1,154	,265		4,362	,000			
	Empathic listening	,706	,061	,719	11,517	,000	,719	,719	
	$\Delta R^2 = ,517$ $p = ,000$								
	$F_{(1-124)} = 132,653$ $p = ,000$ $R = ,719$ $R^2 = ,517$								
Model 2	Constant	,758	,270		2,805	,006			
	Empathic listening	,403	,097	,411	4,180	,000	,353	,247	
	Effectiveness	,392	,100	,386	3,925	,000	,334	,232	
	$\Delta R^2 = ,054$ $p = ,000$								
$F_{(2-123)} = 81,732$ $p = ,000$ $R = ,755$ $R^2 = ,571$									
Model 3	Constant	,767	,266	2,886	2,886	,005			
	Empathic listening	,282	,109	2,580	2,580	,011	,227	,150	
	Effectiveness	,270	,113	2,394	2,394	,018	,212	,139	
	Feedback	,244	,110	2,226	2,226	,028	,198	,129	
	$\Delta R^2 = ,017$ $p = ,028$								
$F_{(3-122)} = 57,893$ $p = ,000$ $R = ,766$ $R^2 = ,587$									
Model 4	Constant	,586	,267		2,193	,030			
	Empathic listening	,162	,115	,165	1,412	,160	,127	,080	
	Effectiveness	,196	,113	,193	1,737	,085	,156	,098	
	Feedback	,246	,107	,267	2,307	,023	,205	,131	
	Trusting	,223	,081	,241	2,767	,007	,244	,157	
$\Delta R^2 = ,025$ $p = ,007$									
$F_{(4-121)} = 47,705$ $p = ,000$ $R = ,782$ $R^2 = ,612$									



Table 2 shows the hierarchical regression for the prediction of problem solving strategy. In the first step, empathic listening variable was entered into the equation. This produced a statistically significant increase in  $R^2$  ( $\Delta R^2=,517$ ;  $p<,01$ ). In the second step, effectiveness variable was entered into the equation. In step 2 (model 2) empathic listening and effectiveness variables together produces a statistically significant increase in  $R^2$  ( $\Delta R^2=,054$ ;  $p<,01$ ). In the third step (model 3) feedback variable was entered into the equation. This resulted in a statistically significant increase in  $R^2$  ( $\Delta R^2=,025$ ;  $p<,01$ ). In the last step, trusting variable was entered into the equation. In this step (model 4) empathic listening, effectiveness, feedback and trusting variables together produces a statistically significant increase in  $R^2$  ( $\Delta R^2=,025$ ;  $p<,01$ ). The final model shows that empathic listening, effectiveness, feedback and trusting variables together predict problem solving strategy significantly ( $R=,787$ ;  $R^2=,612$ ;  $F_{(4-121)}=47,705$ ;  $p<,01$ ). 61,2% of the variance in problem solving strategy was accounted for by the four predictors used in Model 4.

Regarding the predictor variables, a statistically significant effect of feedback on problem solving strategy can be seen ( $\beta=,267$ ;  $p<,05$ ). There was also a statistically significant positive effect of trusting on problem solving strategy ( $\beta=,241$ ;  $p<,01$ ). However, empathic listening ( $\beta=,165$ ;  $p>,05$ ) and effectiveness ( $\beta=,193$ ;  $p>,05$ ) do not have significant effects on problem solving strategy. Consequently, the final model shows statistically significant positive effects for feedback and trusting variables on problem solving strategy.

**Table 3:** Hierarchical regression analyses about the effects of interpersonal communication skills on compromising

	Variable	B	Std. Error	$\beta$	t	p	r zero-order	r partial
Model 1	Constant	1,560	,508		3,072	,003		
	Empathic listening	,467	,118	,336	3,970	,000	,336	,336
	$\Delta R^2=,113$ $p=,000$ $F_{(1-124)}= 15,763$ $p=,000$ $R=,336$ $R^2=,113$							
	<hr/>							
Model 2	Constant	1,124	,540		2,082	,039		
	Empathic listening	,134	,193	,097	,696	,488	,336	,063
	Effectiveness	,431	,200	,299	2,160	,033	,377	,191
	$\Delta R^2=,032$ $p=,033$ $F_{(2-123)}= 10,446$ $p=,000$ $R=,381$ $R^2=,145$							
Model 3	Constant	1,131	,540		2,094	,038		
	Empathic listening	,041	,222	,030	,185	,853	,336	,017
	Effectiveness	,337	,229	,234	1,472	,144	,377	,132
	Feedback	,188	,223	,144	,843	,401	,362	,076
	$\Delta R^2=,005$ $p=,401$ $F_{(3-122)}= 7,185$ $p=,000$ $R=,387$ $R^2=,150$							
Model 4	Constant	1,190	,559		2,127	,035		
	Empathic listening	,080	,241	,057	,331	,741	,336	,030
	Effectiveness	,361	,236	,250	1,525	,130	,377	,137
	Feedback	,187	,223	,143	,837	,404	,362	,076
	Trusting	-,072	,169	-,055	-,424	,672	,257	-,039
$\Delta R^2=,001$ $p=,672$ $F_{(4-121)}= 5,397$ , $p=,000$ $R=,389$ $R^2=,151$								

Table 2 shows the hierarchical regression for the prediction of compromising strategy. In the first step, empathic listening variable was entered into the equation. This

produced a statistically significant increase in  $R^2$  ( $\Delta R^2=,113$ ;  $p<,01$ ). In the second step, effectiveness variable was entered into the equation. In step 2 (model 2) empathic listening and effectiveness variables together produces a statistically significant increase in  $R^2$  ( $\Delta R^2=,032$ ;  $p<,05$ ). In the third step (model 3) feedback variable was entered into the equation. This model did not provide a statistically significant increase in  $R^2$  ( $\Delta R^2=,005$ ;  $p>,05$ ). In the last step, trusting variable was entered into the equation. In this step (model 4) empathic listening, effectiveness, feedback and trusting variables together did not produce a statistically significant increase in  $R^2$  ( $\Delta R^2=,001$ ;  $p>,05$ ).

Since the variables feedback and trusting did not produce significant changes in  $R^2$  in the third and fourth models, the second model were discussed. The second model shows that empathic listening and effectiveness variables together predict compromising strategy significantly ( $R=,381$ ;  $R^2=,145$ ;  $F_{(2-123)}=10,446$ ;  $p<,01$ ). 14,5% of the variance in compromising strategy was accounted for by the two predictors used in Model 2. Regarding the predictor variables, a statistically significant effect of effectiveness on compromising strategy can be seen ( $\beta=,299$ ;  $p<,05$ ). However, emphatic listening ( $\beta=,097$ ;  $p>,05$ ) does not have significant effect on compromising strategy. Consequently, the second model shows statistically significant positive effects for effectiveness variable on compromising strategy.

Finally hierarchical regression analyses about the effects of interpersonal communication skills on avoiding and dominating were conducted, however no significant models were found.

### 3.2 The views of supervisors about correlations between group leaders' interpersonal communication skills and conflict management strategies

In this section, the findings about correlations between group leaders' interpersonal communication skills and conflict management strategies were presented according to the views of supervisors.

**Table 4:** Correlations among the interpersonal communication skills and conflict management strategies of group leaders according to supervisors' views

N=447		Problem Solving	Avoiding	Dominating	Compromising
Empathic Listening	Pearson Correlation	,829**	,008	,151**	,607**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,862	,001	,000
Effectiveness	Pearson Correlation	,808**	,043	,185**	,598**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,362	,000	,000
Feedback	Pearson Correlation	,816**	,057	,205**	,606**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,231	,000	,000
Trusting	Pearson Correlation	,704**	-,062	,088	,474**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,188	,064	,000

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

Table 4 shows the correlations among the variables of conflict management strategies and interpersonal communication skills of group leaders according to supervisors' views. Positive and significant correlations were found between problem solving and all interpersonal communication skills and between compromising and all interpersonal communication skills as well.

There were high positive linear correlation ( $r=.829$ ) between problem solving and emphatic listening; high positive linear correlation ( $r=.808$ ) between problem solving and effectiveness, high positive linear correlation ( $r=.816$ ) between problem solving and feedback, and high positive linear correlation ( $r=.704$ ) between problem solving and trusting.

There were moderate positive linear correlation ( $r=.607$ ) between compromising and emphatic listening; moderate positive linear correlation ( $r=.598$ ) between compromising and effectiveness, moderate positive linear correlation ( $r=.606$ ) between compromising and feedback, and low positive linear correlation ( $r=.474$ ) between compromising and trusting.

There were weak positive linear correlation ( $r=.151$ ) between dominating and emphatic listening; weak positive linear correlation ( $r=.185$ ) between dominating and effectiveness, weak positive linear correlation ( $r=.205$ ) between dominating and feedback.

**Table 5:** Hierarchical regression analyses about the effects of interpersonal communication skills on problem solving according to supervisors' views

	Variable	B	Std. Error	$\beta$	t	p	r zero-order	r partial	
<b>Model 1</b>	Constant	,238	,115		2,065	,039			
	Empathic listening	,892	,028	,829	31,317	,000	,829	,829	
	$\Delta R^2=,688$ $p=,000$								
	$F_{(1-445)}=980,776$ $p=,000$ $R=,829$ $R^2=,687$								
<b>Model 2</b>	Constant	,144	,113		1,279	,202			
	Empathic listening	,576	,063	,535	9,113	,000	,829	,397	
	Effectiveness	,340	,061	,327	5,563	,000	,808	,255	
	$\Delta R^2=,020$ $p=,000$								
$F_{(2-444)}=538,866$ $p=,000$ $R=,842$ $R^2=,708$									
<b>Model 3</b>	Constant	,167	,112		1,488	,138			
	Empathic listening	,455	,077	,423	5,911	,000	,829	,270	
	Effectiveness	,250	,069	,240	3,594	,000	,808	,168	
	Feedback	,208	,077	,206	2,690	,007	,816	,127	
	$\Delta R^2=,005$ $p=,007$								
$F_{(3-443)}=366,702$ $p=,000$ $R=,844$ $R^2=,713$									
<b>Model 4</b>	Constant	,145	,121		1,200	,231			
	Empathic listening	,443	,081	,412	5,469	,000	,829	,252	
	Effectiveness	,242	,071	,233	3,403	,001	,808	,160	
	Feedback	,208	,077	,205	2,683	,008	,816	,127	
	Trusting	,024	,050	,022	,482	,630	,704	,023	
	$\Delta R^2=,000$ $p=,630$								
$F_{(4-442)}=274,608$ $p=,000$ $R=,844$ $R^2=,713$									

Table 5 shows the hierarchical regression for the prediction of problem solving strategy. In the first step, empathic listening variable was entered into the equation. This produced a statistically significant increase in  $R^2$  ( $\Delta R^2=,688$ ;  $p<,01$ ). In the second step, effectiveness variable was entered into the equation. In step 2 (model 2) empathic listening and effectiveness variables together produces a statistically significant increase in  $R^2$  ( $\Delta R^2=,020$ ;  $p<,01$ ). In the third step (model 3) feedback variable was entered into the equation. This provided a statistically significant increase in  $R^2$  ( $\Delta R^2=,005$ ;  $p<,01$ ). In the last step, trusting variable was entered into the equation. In this step (model 4)

empathic listening, effectiveness, feedback and trusting variables together did not produce a statistically significant increase in  $R^2$  ( $\Delta R^2=,000$ ;  $p>,05$ ).

Since the variable trusting did not produce significant change in  $R^2$  in the fourth model, the third model was discussed. The third model shows that empathic listening, effectiveness and feedback variables together predict problem solving strategy significantly ( $R=,844$ ;  $R^2=,713$ ;  $F_{(3-443)}=366,702$ ;  $p<,01$ ). 71,3% of the variance in problem solving strategy was accounted for by the three predictors used in Model 3.

Regarding the predictor variables, a statistically significant effect of emphatic listening on problem solving strategy can be seen ( $\beta=,423$ :  $p<,01$ ). There were also statistically significant positive effects of effectiveness ( $\beta=,240$ :  $p<,01$ ) and feedback ( $\beta=,206$ :  $p<,01$ ) on problem solving strategy. Consequently, the third model shows statistically significant positive effects for emphatic listening, effectiveness and feedback variables on problem solving strategy.

**Table 6:** Hierarchical regression analyses about the effects of interpersonal communication skills on avoiding according to supervisors' views

	Variable	B	Std. Error	$\beta$	t	p	r zero-order	r partial
Model 1	Constant	2,733	,270		10,139	,000		
	Empathic listening	,012	,067	,008	,174	,862	,008	,008
	$\Delta R^2=,000$ $p=,862$							
	$F_{(1-445)}=,030$ $p=,862$ $R=,008$ $R^2=,000$							
Model 2	Constant	2,663	,272		9,789	,000		
	Empathic listening	-,226	,152	-,161	-1,482	,139	,008	-,070
	Effectiveness	,255	,147	,188	1,732	,084	,043	,082
	$\Delta R^2=,007$ $p=,084$							
$F_{(2-444)}=1,515$ $p=,221$ $R=,082$ $R^2=,007$								
Model 3	Constant	2,708	,272		9,966	,000		
	Empathic listening	-,460	,186	-,327	-2,470	,014	,008	-,117
	Effectiveness	,079	,168	,058	,469	,639	,043	,022
	Feedback	,406	,187	,307	2,168	,031	,057	,102
$\Delta R^2=,010$ $p=,031$								
$F_{(3-443)}=2,585$ $p=,053$ $R=,131$ $R^2=,017$								
Model 4	Constant	3,045	,290		10,500	,000		
	Empathic listening	-,274	,194	-,195	-1,412	,159	,008	-,067
	Effectiveness	,193	,170	,142	1,133	,258	,043	,054
	Feedback	,411	,185	,311	2,216	,027	,057	,105
	Trusting	-,369	,119	-,259	-3,116	,002	-,062	-,147
$\Delta R^2=,021$ $p=,002$								
$F_{(4-442)}=4,405$ $p=,002$ $R=,196$ $R^2=,038$								

Table 6 shows the hierarchical regression for the prediction of avoiding strategy. In the first step, empathic listening variable was entered into the equation. This variable did not produce a statistically significant increase in  $R^2$  ( $\Delta R^2=,000$ ;  $p>,05$ ). In the second step, effectiveness variable was entered into the equation. In step 2 (model 2) empathic listening and effectiveness variables together did not produce a statistically significant increase in  $R^2$  ( $\Delta R^2=,007$ ;  $p>,05$ ). In the third step (model 3) feedback variable was entered into the equation. This provided a statistically significant increase in  $R^2$  ( $\Delta R^2=,010$ ;  $p<,05$ ). In the last step, trusting variable was entered into the equation. In this step (model 4) empathic listening, effectiveness, feedback and trusting variables together produced a statistically significant increase in  $R^2$  ( $\Delta R^2=,021$ ;  $p<,01$ ).

The final model shows that empathic listening, effectiveness, feedback and trusting variables together predict problem solving strategy significantly ( $R=.196$ ;  $R^2=.038$ ;  $F_{(4-442)}=4,405$ ;  $p<.01$ ). 3,8% of the variance in avoiding strategy was accounted for by the four predictors used in Model 4.

Regarding the predictor variables, a statistically significant effect of feedback on avoiding strategy can be seen ( $\beta=.311$ ;  $p<.05$ ). There was also a statistically significant positive effect of trusting on avoiding strategy ( $\beta=-.259$ ;  $p<.01$ ). However, empathic listening ( $\beta=-.195$ ;  $p>.05$ ) and effectiveness ( $\beta=.142$ ;  $p>.05$ ) do not have significant effects on avoiding strategy. Consequently, the final model shows statistically significant positive effects for feedback and trusting variables on avoiding strategy.

**Table 7:** Hierarchical regression analyses about the effects of interpersonal communication skills on dominating according to supervisors' views

	Variable	B	Std. Error	$\beta$	t	p	r zero-order	r partial
<b>Model 1</b>	Constant	2,280	,241		9,440	,000		
	Empathic listening	,193	,060	,151	3,231	,001	,151	,151
	$\Delta R^2=$ ,023 $p=$ ,001							
	$F_{(1-445)}=10,437$ $p=$ ,001 $R=$ ,151 $R^2=$ ,023							
<b>Model 2</b>	Constant	2,192	,243		9,024	,000		
	Empathic listening	-,103	,136	-,081	-,759	,448	,151	-,036
	Effectiveness	,319	,132	,258	2,419	,016	,185	,114
	$\Delta R^2=$ ,013 $p=$ ,016							
	$F_{(2-444)}=8,202$ $p=$ ,000 $R=$ ,189 $R^2=$ ,036							
<b>Model 3</b>	Constant	2,245	,242		9,290	,000		
	Empathic listening	-,380	,166	-,299	-2,296	,022	,151	-,108
	Effectiveness	,110	,149	,089	,735	,463	,185	,035
	Feedback	,480	,166	,400	2,882	,004	,205	,136
	$\Delta R^2=$ ,018 $p=$ ,004							
	$F_{(3-443)}= 8,326$ $p=$ ,000 $R=$ ,231 $R^2=$ ,053							
<b>Model 4</b>	Constant	2,443	,259		9,413	,000		
	Empathic listening	-,271	,173	-,213	-1,562	,119	,151	-,074
	Effectiveness	,177	,152	,143	1,160	,247	,185	,055
	Feedback	,483	,166	,403	2,910	,004	,205	,137
	Trusting	-,217	,106	-,168	-2,044	,041	,088	-,097
	$\Delta R^2=$ ,009 $p=$ ,041							
	$F_{(4-442)}= 7,334$ $p=$ ,000 $R=$ ,249 $R^2=$ ,062							

Table 7 shows the hierarchical regression for the prediction of dominating strategy. In the first step, empathic listening variable was entered into the equation. This produced a statistically significant increase in  $R^2$  ( $\Delta R^2=.023$ ;  $p<.01$ ). In the second step, effectiveness variable was entered into the equation. In step 2 (model 2) empathic listening and effectiveness variables together produces a statistically significant increase in  $R^2$  ( $\Delta R^2=.013$ ;  $p<.01$ ). In the third step, (model 3) feedback variable was entered into the equation. This resulted in a statistically significant increase in  $R^2$  ( $\Delta R^2=$  ,018;  $p<.01$ ). In the last step, trusting variable was entered into the equation. In this step (model 4) empathic listening, effectiveness, feedback and trusting variables together produces a statistically significant increase in  $R^2$  ( $\Delta R^2=.009$ ;  $p<.05$ ). The final model shows that empathic listening, effectiveness, feedback and trusting variables together predict dominating strategy significantly ( $R=.249$ ;  $R^2=.062$ ;  $F_{(4-442)}=7,334$ ;  $p<.01$ ). 6,2% of the

variance in dominating strategy was accounted for by the four predictors used in Model 4.

Regarding the predictor variables, a statistically significant effect of feedback on dominating strategy can be seen ( $\beta=,403$ ;  $p<,01$ ). There was also a statistically significant positive effect of trusting on dominating strategy ( $\beta=,168$ ;  $p<,05$ ). However, empathic listening ( $\beta=,213$ ;  $p>,05$ ) and effectiveness ( $\beta=,143$ ;  $p>,05$ ) do not have significant effects on dominating strategy. Consequently, the final model shows statistically significant positive effects for feedback and trusting variables on dominating strategy.

**Table 8:** Hierarchical regression analyses about the effects of interpersonal communication skills on compromising according to supervisors' views

	Variable	B	Std. Error	$\beta$	t	p	r zero-order	r partial	
<b>Model 1</b>	Constant	,562	,186		3,013	,003			
	Empathic listening	,742	,046	,607	16,099	,000	,607	,607	
	$\Delta R^2=,368$ $p=,000$ $F_{(1,445)}=259,164$ $p=,000$ $R=,607$ $R^2=,368$								
<b>Model 2</b>	Constant	,472	,187		2,529	,012			
	Empathic listening	,439	,104	,359	4,203	,000	,607	,196	
	Effectiveness	,326	,101	,275	3,218	,001	,598	,151	
	$\Delta R^2=,014$ $p=,001$ $F_{(2,444)}=137,485$ $p=,000$ $R=,618$ $R^2=,382$								
<b>Model 3</b>	Constant	,498	,187		2,668	,008			
	Empathic listening	,303	,128	,248	2,365	,018	,607	,112	
	Effectiveness	,223	,115	,188	1,930	,054	,598	,091	
	Feedback	,236	,129	,205	1,838	,067	,606	,087	
$\Delta R^2=,005$ $p=,067$ $F_{(3,443)}=93,273$ $p=,000$ $R=,622$ $R^2=,713$									
<b>Model 4</b>	Constant	,636	,201		3,169	,002			
	Empathic listening	,379	,134	,310	2,823	,005	,607	,133	
	Effectiveness	,269	,118	,228	2,286	,023	,598	,108	
	Feedback	,238	,128	,207	1,858	,064	,606	,088	
	Trusting	-,151	,082	-,122	-1,841	,066	,474	-,087	
$\Delta R^2=,005$ $p=,066$ $F_{(4,442)}=71,179$ $p=,000$ $R=,626$ $R^2=,392$									

Table 8 shows the hierarchical regression for the prediction of compromising strategy. In the first step, empathic listening variable was entered into the equation. This produced a statistically significant increase in  $R^2$  ( $\Delta R^2=,368$ ;  $p<,01$ ). In the second step, effectiveness variable was entered into the equation. In step 2 (model 2) empathic listening and effectiveness variables together produces a statistically significant increase in  $R^2$  ( $\Delta R^2=,014$ ;  $p<,01$ ). In the third step, (model 3) feedback variable was entered into the equation. This model did not provide a statistically significant increase in  $R^2$  ( $\Delta R^2=,005$ ;  $p>,05$ ). In the last step, trusting variable was entered into the equation. In this step (model 4) empathic listening, effectiveness, feedback and trusting variables together did not produce a statistically significant increase in  $R^2$  ( $\Delta R^2=,005$ ;  $p>,05$ ).

Since the variables feedback and trusting did not produce significant changes in  $R^2$  in the third and fourth models, the second model were discussed. The second model shows that empathic listening and effectiveness variables together predict compromising strategy significantly ( $R=,618$ ;  $R^2=,382$ ;  $F_{(2,444)}=137,485$ ;  $p<,01$ ). 38,2% of the

variance in compromising strategy was accounted for by the two predictors used in Model 2.

Regarding the predictor variables, a statistically significant effect of emphatic listening ( $\beta=.359$ ;  $p<.01$ ) and effectiveness ( $\beta=.275$ ;  $p<.01$ ) on compromising strategy can be seen. Consequently, the second model shows statistically significant positive effects for emphatic listening and effectiveness variables on compromising strategy.

#### 4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to explore the correlation between interpersonal communication skills and conflict management strategies in the case of inspection groups constituted by a number of inspectors based on the geographical and demographic dispersion of the school population in Turkey. The findings show that both the leaders' and the supervisors' views were congruent in that positive and significant correlations were found between two conflict management strategies (problem solving and compromising) and all interpersonal communication skills. In a study conducted by Şahin (2007, p.150) all correlations among primary school administrators' interpersonal communicational skills and conflict management strategies were significant and positive according to the views of school administrators. This result shows the tendency of the managers to use situational approaches in case of conflicts. Many research results show that enhancement of interpersonal communication skills will help using appropriate conflict management strategies (Euwema, Vliert and Bakker, 2003, p.120; Munduate, Ganaza, Peiro and Euwema, 1999, p.5; Rahim, 2002, p.218).

Consequences of Hierarchical regression for the prediction of the extent to which communication skills of school managers predict using problem solving strategy: According to the views of the group leaders there are statistically significant positive effects of feedback and trusting variables on problem solving strategy. According to supervisors' views emphatic listening, effectiveness and feedback variables had statistically significant positive effects on problem solving strategy. Similar results were found by Şahin (2007, p.151). He found that according to school managers' and teachers' views, emphatic listening, effectiveness, feedback and trusting had significant positive correlations with the managers' problem solving strategies. Jehn et al. (2014, p.1) focusing on interdependence also found that when the level of interdependence was high, low levels of task conflict increased members' preference to continue the task relationship. However, empathic listening and effectiveness do not have significant effects on problem solving strategy.

Consequences of Hierarchical regression for the prediction of the extent to which communication skills of school managers predict using avoiding strategy: According to the supervisors' views, there are statistically significant positive effects of feedback and trusting variables on avoiding strategy. Şahin (2007, p.151) also found that according to school managers' views, emphatic listening, effectiveness, feedback and trusting had significant positive correlations with the managers' avoiding strategies in conflict

management. Teachers on the other hand reported weak correlations about the same strategies on avoiding strategy.

Consequences of Hierarchical regression for the prediction of the extent to which communication skills of school managers predict using dominating strategy: According to the supervisors' views there are statistically significant positive effects for feedback and trusting variables on dominating strategy. Şahin (2007, p.151) also found that according to school managers' views, emphatic listening, effectiveness, feedback and trusting had significant positive correlations with the managers' dominating strategies in conflict management. Fisher (2006, p.178) asserted that when there are attempts to control the other party in order to deal with the incompatibility, and when such interactions result in and are fuelled by antagonistic emotions, destructive conflict exists.

Consequences of Hierarchical regression for the prediction of the extent to which communication skills of school managers predict using compromising strategy: According to the group leaders' views there are statistically significant positive effects on effectiveness variable on compromising strategy. According to the supervisors' views there are statistically significant positive effects on emphatic listening and effectiveness variables on compromising strategy. Şahin (2007, p.151) also found that according to school managers' and teachers' views, emphatic listening, and trusting had significant positive correlations with the managers' compromising strategies in conflict management. Fisher (2006, p.192) asserted that interpersonal conflict requires many of the commonly trained communication and relationship-building skills such as the skills of reflective, empathic listening and the ability to give and receive feedback.

Consequently, congruent with the related literature this study concludes that communication skills are significant predictors of conflict management strategies. Although Krauss and Morsella (2006, p.156) asserted that communication can do little to change the state of affairs, they admitted that communication can be a facilitator and the fruit of communication is to establish understanding. On the other hand, the related literature signifies high correlations between interpersonal communication skills and conflict management. Fisher (2006, pp.194-5) added that through a combination of skills in interpersonal communication, group facilitation, intergroup problem solving, and system-level consulting, outside third parties or balanced teams of representatives can assist groups to confront their differences effectively and build long-term partnerships. Umiker (1993, p.30) argues that weak communication in organizational settings may cause unpleasant relations and interpersonal conflicts. As Enehaug, Helmersen, and Mamelund, (2016, p.83) asserted well that unaddressed conflicts and nonresponsive or conflict-involved managers fuel already existing conflicts, and also pave the way for new ones. If conflicts are not handled at an early enough stage, they seem to "paralyze" the organization and serve as an interlocking mechanism that contributes to hindering the necessary action from management. Şahin (2007, p.153) concluded that both managers' and teachers' views showed that interpersonal communication skills are significant predictors of conflict management strategies. This result implies that the



managers who have better communication skills are more likely to manage conflicts better.

The findings imply that specific to educational organizations the more communication skills of the supervisors as well as school managers and teachers are developed the better conflicts are managed in all levels. In this sense, there is a need to carry on on-the-job training programmes and workshops in order to develop the communication skills of the staff in the schools and the supervisors cooperatively. This study provided a valuable basis for the correlations between communication skills and conflict management based on the quantitative method in educational organizations. More research on the issue based on experimental and/or qualitative methods including more observations in educational/organizational settings is likely to help us understand how the determined correlations occur and function.

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