

Interpersonal Communication Skills of the Leaders of Inspection Groups in Turkey

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore interpersonal communication skills of inspection group leaders in Turkey. This research was conducted as a survey using a descriptive method in order to ascertain the interpersonal communication skills of the leaders of inspection groups in Turkey. The population of the study consisted of 2493 inspectors working in 81 provinces geographically divided in seven regions. "Interpersonal Communication Skills Questionnaire" with 33 items was used to collect the data. In order to determine the views of the group leaders and inspectors, means, frequencies and standard deviations and parametric tests were calculated using SPSS package statistical program. Consequently, both inspectors and their group leaders think that group leaders perform high level in interpersonal communication skills. Further analysis showed that inspectors and group leaders' views show significant difference in empathic listening, effectiveness, feedback and trusting dimensions. Group leaders reported that they performed better in empathic listening, effectiveness, feedback and trusting dimensions compared to the views of inspectors.

Key words: Educational administration, supervision, inspection, communication, school supervision

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore interpersonal communication skills of inspection group leaders in Turkey. In order to provide an effective and efficient education system one of the major requirements is to have an effective inspection system and processes. Turkish education system has centrally organized structure and the inspection system is structured accordingly. It can be asserted that effectiveness and efficiency of the inspection system is strongly correlated with effectiveness and efficiency of the inspection groups' processes. The

process is likely to be most affected from mainly the intra-group relations. It is also likely to assert that this process include issues such as communication, job satisfaction, stress, motivations, performance etc. As Baxter (2014, p.11) stressed well inspection is 98% about communication.

Communication is the exchange of the ideas, opinions and information through written or spoken words, symbols or actions (Baird, Post & Mahon, 1990). Communication is the social process in which two or more parties exchange information and share meaning (Griffin & Moorhead, 2013, p.295). 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). In this sense, Stroh, Northcraft and Neale, 2002, p.181) proposed that to improve communication one must increase the probability that the receiver will accurately perceive a sender's communication attempt. Aamodt (2010, p.415) asserted three solutions on the part of the sender to this problem: thinking about what you want to communicate, practicing what you want to communicate and learning better communication skills. To Champoux (2011, p.338), communication effectiveness can be improved through training, asking for a receiver's feedback and understanding cultural differences in communication. To alleviate the numerous barriers to communication in organizations, managers should follow up on their messages, regulate information flow, use feedback, develop empathy, use message repetition, encourage mutual trust, simplify their language, effectively time the delivery of their messages, and become effective listeners (Gibson et al, 2011, p.458).

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). Interpersonal communication is fundamental to obtaining employment, succeeding on the job and being an effective colleague, subordinate or manager (Harris & Nelson, 2008). 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 et al., 2002, p.174). 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). Communication fosters motivation by clarifying for employees what is to be done, how well they are doing, what can be done to improve performance if it's subpar (Robbins, 2002, p.114). Communication creates the foundation for successful actions; it opens pathways to a more collaborative workplace. Collaboration requires effective communication. It 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). Parker, Axtell, and Turner (2001, p.223) found also that as well as supportive supervision, job autonomy and communication quality predicted safe working.

Organizational communication has several functions and dysfunctions. Robbins (2002, p.114) claimed that communication serves four major functions within a group or organization: control, motivation, emotional expression, and information. Champoux (2011, p.338) listed the

dysfunctions as selective perception, semantic problems and information overload. (Schermerhorn et al. 2010, p.256) stated that communication is the glue that holds organizations together. Similarly, Griffin and Moorhead (2013, p.295) stated that the primary purpose is to achieve coordinated action. Just as the human nervous system responds to stimuli and coordinates responses by sending messages to the various parts of the body, communication coordinates the actions of the parts of an organization.

Communication is one of the management functions and it is one of the most crucial aspects of effective leadership, planning control, coordinating, training, conflict management, decision making and all other management functions (Wexley & Yukl, 1984, p.74; Miller, 2000, p.25; Shochley-Zalabak, 2006, p.244). Research indicates that it is essential that managers not only communicate well but that their success is, in large measure, determined by their communication skills (Stroh et al. 2002, p.175). Effective managers and leaders are skilled at human relations, develop others, make decisions, provide role models, use humor, understand language, use positive nonverbal behaviour, develop networks and encourage upward and downward communication, listen effectively, develop strong symbolic messages, and apply power effectively (Harris & Nelson, 2008). 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, p.247-248; Ivancevich & Matteson, 1996, p.503; Lunenburg & Ornstein, 1991, p.189-209; Murphy, Hildeprant & Thomas, 1997, p.31; Robbins, 2000, p.129; 150-151; Schermerhorn, 2001; Sims, 2002; Steers, 1981, p.214; Tim, Peterson & Stevens, 1990, p.246). A holistic overview leads us to think that communication is in the core of all kinds of organizational behaviour (Aydın, 2000, p.123; Eren, 2003, p.449; Gürgen, 1997, p.25; George & Jones, 1996, p.399; Schermerhorn, 1996, p.209). It is important to note that communication skills are not inherent to an individual but can be learned and taught (William, 2004, pp.73-74). Communication itself is unavoidable in an organization's functioning, but ineffective communication is avoidable. Every manager must be a communicator. In fact, everything a manager does, communicates something in some way to somebody or some group. The only question is, "With what effect?" (Gibson et al. 2011, p.432).

Supervision and Communication

Guidance, on-the-job training, supervision, evaluation, research, investigation and questioning are carried on by district and province inspectors in all kinds of levels and sorts of educational institutions and processes schools under the control of the Ministry of Education of

National Education. In 2016, approximately 2600 education inspectors have been employed in 81 provinces in Turkey. Schools are visited at least once in three years time by means of ordinary inspection by the inspectors in each province. In Turkey, the terms inspectors and supervisors are used synonymously. The school inspections are realized by three to ten inspectors during three days average. One of the inspectors among the group has been assigned as group leader for one education year. The responsibility of the group leader is to lead the group in order to fulfil the responsibilities on the time and properly. Schools are subjected to inspection for educational, managerial and financial issues. In this process inspectors in the planned date, first of all control the data processed in e-inspection module by the school management and teachers. The inspectors, secondly, gather data from the class inspection, the school documents, school managers, teachers and if necessary students and parents. The inspectors, then, using the data prepare a school inspection report and share it with superiors and school using e-inspection module. Finally, the responsible parties (superiors and school personnel) start to improve inadequate parts designated in the report (MEB 2014; Resmi Gazete, 2011; Resmi Gazete, 2014a; Resmi Gazete, 2014b).

Research Review in Supervision

Memduhoğlu and Taymur, (2014, p.31.) asserted that both related literature and national advisory board on education lead us to think that the current educational supervision model is not adequate and there is a need for a reform in the area. Kayıkçı (2005, p.518) and Kayıkçı, and Şarlak, (2013, p.473) concluded that supervision system has structural problems including centralisation, promotional issues, statue and work load. Alternative supervision models such as supervision by the school principal or artistic supervision have also been discussed in the literature (Yılmaz, 2004, Yılmaz, 2009). Yılmaz (2009, p.31) proposed that the number of the schools, teachers and students and the number of the inspectors seem clearly to fail an effective inspection. We need to think of supervision models based on school principals. But on the other hand, there is evidence that such a model also has some weaknesses. For example, Altun, Şanlı and Tan (2015, p.82) found that because the principal and teachers work in an informal environment and that they have informal relationships with each other, it is not possible to realize a healthy inspection. In addition, the adequacy of the school principal for an effective inspection is also questionable. Such results draw us think that inspection requires proficiency.

The findings reported by Bakioğlu and Hacifazlıoğlu (2000, p.48) contributed to understand the effect and the importance of the communication in the supervision groups. They stated that 70% of the junior supervisors agreed on accepting leadership of the senior supervisors. 72% of the junior supervisors also stated that they were supervised in a positive manner by the senior supervisors. Uğurlu, Yildirim, Niyazi, Sincar and Beycioğlu (2012, p.102.) found that supervisors had high level of communication skills. Yıldız (2015, P.12) concluded that speaking skills of supervisors are inadequate or moderate enough. Yıldırım and Yılmaz (2014, p.146) and Gökçe and Baskan (2012, p.205) reported that school managers believed that supervisors had adequate communication skills whereas assistant principals and teachers reported moderate level. Teachers reported positive feelings about supervisors' honesty, reliability, feedback skills and emphatic communication skills (Gökkyer & Tuncer, 2014, p.1397). Tok (2013, p.134.) asserted that supervisors were effected most by democratic values. Kapusuzoğlu (2012, p.290) found that supervisors believed that they were successful at playing their compromiser role among the teachers. On the

other hand, the teachers did not think so. Aküzüm and Özmen (2013, P.114.) found that also that supervisors believed that they were very successful at fulfilling their professional roles whereas school managers reported moderate level and teachers low level. In a research by Şahin, Çek and Zeytin (2011, p.223) it was found that supervisors were satisfied in terms of the nature of the job and their personal contentment. On the other hand, it is not surprising that the supervisors were not satisfied with senior management, form of the job, job standards and process of supervision, the salary, their status and their position in the hierarchy. Özgözcü (2008, P.71) reported that in the views of the teachers, the supervisors did not use their oral communication as much as they expected to be. Gökçe (2009, p.46) concluded that supervisors did not exert the feeling of an effective member in their teams. Çopur, Olgun, Coşkun, Akgül, Doğan, Üzkurt and Özcan (2009, p.2646) and Yıldırım (2001, p.214.) analysing the e-inspection system concluded that interactive vertical, horizontal and diagonal communication will be provided, there will be less bureaucracy, technological innovations will lead to better group works.

In this study, we focused on communication in the inspection groups in general but the main purpose of this study was to explore interpersonal communication skills of the leaders of inspection groups, constituted by a number of inspectors based on the geographical and demographic dispersion of the school population in Turkey. For this purpose the following question were addressed:

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

Method

This research was conducted as a survey using a descriptive method in order to ascertain the interpersonal communication skills of the leaders of inspection groups in Turkey.

Population and Sample

The population of the study consisted of 2493 inspectors working in 81 provinces geographically divided in seven regions. Aegean Region (8 provinces), Black Sea Region (18 provinces), Central Anatolia Region (13 provinces), Eastern Anatolia Region (14 provinces), Marmara Region (11 provinces), Mediterranean Region (8 provinces) and 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).

Instrument

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 was tested using a confirmatory procedure employing the structural equation modelling software, Lisrel 8.54. The indices for evaluating four factor model are RMSEA (Root mean square error of approximation): .066, GFI (Goodness of fit index): .85, AGFI (Adjusted goodness of fit): .82, PGFI (Parsimony goodness of fit): .66, CFI (Comparative fit index): .99, RMR (Root mean square residual): ,027, NFI (Normed fit index): .98, Chi-Square ($X^2/sd \leq 2$ or 3): 3,48., p-value: .0. The values are in recommended acceptance levels. The reliability values counted of the “Interpersonal Communication Skills Questionnaire” for four factors were as follows: Emphatic Listening: ,921 (11 items); Effectiveness: ,921 (9 items); Feedback: ,936 (9 items); Trusting: ,831 (4 items) and Total reliability score was counted to be ,975 (33 items) (Akgül & Çevik, 2003; Büyükoztürk, 2003; Çokluk et al. 2010; Hair, et al. 1998).

Data analysis

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

Findings

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

1. The views of inspectors and their group leaders about interpersonal communication skills of the inspection group leaders.

Table 1. Views of inspectors about their group leader’s interpersonal communication skills according to their position

Factors	position	N	\bar{x}	sd	df	t	p
Emphatic Listening	A- Group Leader	126	4,2893	,48548	285,144	5,547	,000
	B- Inspector	447	3,9878	,69635			
Effectiveness	A- Group Leader	126	4,3236	,46910	307,578	6,371	,000
	B- Inspector	447	3,9804	,71903			
Feedback	A- Group Leader	126	4,2557	,51760	283,959	5,681	,000
	B- Inspector	447	3,9269	,73966			
Trusting	A- Group Leader	126	4,4980	,51429	263,778	5,162	,000
	B- Inspector	447	4,2081	,68725			

According to the data given in table 1, both inspectors and their group leaders think that group leaders perform high level in interpersonal communication skills. On the other hand, further analysis showed that there is statistically significant difference between the leader and the led. According to the analysis, inspectors and group leaders' views show significant difference in empathic listening [$t_{(285,144)} = 5,547$; $p < ,01$]. Group leaders reported that ($\bar{x} = 4,29$) they performed better in empathic listening compared to the views of inspectors ($\bar{x} = 3,99$). The analysis showed that the views of the inspectors and their group leaders differed in effectiveness variable [$t_{(307,578)} = 6,371$; $p < ,01$], Group leaders believed more that they ($\bar{x} = 4,32$) were effective in communication compared to the views of inspectors ($\bar{x} = 3,98$). Their views were also different accordingly in feedback variable [$t_{(283,959)} = 5,681$; $p < ,01$]. Again, group leaders thought that ($\bar{x} = 4,26$) they were more effective in giving feedback compared to the views of inspectors ($\bar{x} = 3,93$). Last of all, their views differed in trusting variable [$t_{(263,778)} = 5,162$; $p < ,01$]. According to the findings group leaders thought more that ($\bar{x} = 4,50$) they were adequate in creating a trusting communication process compared with the views of inspectors ($\bar{x} = 4,21$).

2. Group leaders' views about their interpersonal communication skills by means of gender, education background, seniority and working years in the same province variable.

According to the parametric tests conducted in relation to gender, education background and working years in the same province variables views of the group leaders of the inspection groups about their interpersonal communication variables did not differ. For seniority variable because the assumptions were not met non-parametric tests were conducted and again according to the results there were no differences in their views.

3. Group members (inspectors)' views about their group leaders' interpersonal communication skills by means of gender, education background, seniority and working years in the same province variable.

According to the parametric tests conducted in relation to gender, education background, seniority and working years in the same province variables the views of the inspectors about their group leaders' interpersonal communication skills did not differ.

On the other hand, their views were different according their experience (working years) in the same province only in trusting. (Emphatic Listening: $F_{(2-444)}= 2,043$; $p>,05$], effectiveness: $F_{(2-444)}= ,414$; $p>,05$] and feedback: $F_{(2-444)}= ,172$; $p>,05$], The findings were presented in table 2. Table 2. Views of the inspectors about their group leader’s interpersonal communication skills according to their working years in the same province variable.

Dimensions	Seniority	N	\bar{x}	S	F	p	Significant difference (Between)
Trusting	A- years	0-2	103	4,3034	,57485		
	B- years	3-6	236	4,2331	,66822	3,611	,028 A-C
	C- years	7+	108	4,0625	,80094		

Table 2 shows that in terms of trusting variable there was a significant difference [$F_{(2-444)}= ,028$; $p<,05$]. The results of the LSD test conducted to find the source of the difference, show that participants who had 0-2 working years of experience in the same province ($\bar{x}=4,30$) thought that their group leaders were more adequate in creating a trusting communication process compared to the views of the inspectors who had 7 years and more working years of experience in the same province ($\bar{x}=4,06$).

Conclusions

The main purpose of this study was to explore interpersonal communication skills of the leaders of inspection groups, constituted by a number of inspectors based on the geographical and demographic dispersion of the school population. “Interpersonal Communication Skills Questionnaire” was used to collect data form the sample of inspectors chosen among the inspectors’ population appointed in the whole country (81 provinces). Consequently:

Both inspectors and their group leaders think that group leaders perform high level in interpersonal communication skills. The agreement on the communication skills is significant which is likely to be evidence of a positive climate of communication between the leaders and the inspectors in the inspection groups. Similarly, Uğurlu, Yıldırım, Niyazi, Sincar and Beycioğlu (2012, p.102.) found that supervisors had high level of communication skills. There is also evidence for a positive climate in communication. Bakioglu and Hacifazlıoglu, (2000, p.48) showed that supervision climate is positive in subordinate-superior relationships and there is a mutual understanding between the leaders and the led. Gökyer and Tuncer, (2014, p.1397) found supportive results about inspectors’ values and skills. They stated that teachers reported positive feelings about supervisors’ honesty, reliability, feedback skills and emphatic communication skills. Tok (2013, p.134.) added that supervisors were effected most by democratic values. On the other hand, there is also evidence about opposing views. For example Yıldız (2015, p.12) and Özgözcü (2008, p.71) concluded that speaking skills of supervisors can be evaluated ranging more from inadequate to moderate level.

Further analysis showed that inspectors and group leaders’ views show significant difference in empathic listening, effectiveness, feedback and trusting dimensions. Group

leaders reported that they performed better in empathic listening, effectiveness, feedback and trusting dimensions compared to the views of inspectors.

According to the parametric and non-parametric tests conducted in relation to gender, education background, seniority and working years in the same province variables the group leaders' views did not differ in relation to their interpersonal communication variables. In regard to gender variable there seems to be found various research results. Yıldız (2015, p.13) found that male school managers and teachers reported that inspectors were adequate at concentrating on the interpersonal communication more than female managers and teachers. On the other hand, both groups found the inspectors less adequate at presentation, using their voices effectively, speaking styles and considering the listener. Uğurlu et al. (2012, p.99) found that male teachers believed that supervisors had high level of communication skills compared to female teachers. Yıldırım and Yılmaz (2014, p.145) reported that female teachers had more positive views compared to male teachers about inspectors' listening skills.

The views of the inspectors about their group leaders' interpersonal communication skills were only different in trusting dimension according their experience (working years) in the same province. Participants who had 0-2 working years of experience in the same province thought that their group leaders were more adequate in creating a trusting communication process compared to the views of the inspectors who had 7 years and more working years of experience in the same province.

Consequently, research results show that although the inspectors are satisfied with the nature of their job, they were not satisfied with senior management, form of the job, job standards and process of supervision, the salary, their status and their position in the hierarchy, in-service training facilities, in-effective guidance in the first three years training with senior inspectors (Şahin et al., 2011, p.223; Uslu, 2013, p.202). Related literature show that the current state of the supervision model needs to be reformed or re-organized by means of purpose, structure and process to provide better outcomes at learning of students and secondary benefits such as personal job satisfaction, motivation, stress etc. (Memduhoğlu and Taymur, 2014, p.31; Kayıkçı, 2005, p.518; Kayıkçı & Şarlak, 2013, p.473; Yılmaz, 2004; Yılmaz, 2009; Yılmaz (2009, p.31; Altun et al., 2015, p.82). In this sense on of the most recommended ways of communication can be organised by e-inspection using technological opportunities (Çopur et al., 2009, p.2646; Yıldırım, 2001, p.214).

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