

THE CONTRIBUTION OF EDUCATION STAFF TRAINING TO CRISIS MANAGEMENT AMONG TEACHERS: A CASE STUDY OF THE PREFECTURE OF ILIA

Zoe Karanikola, Kousavelos Nikos and Georgios Panagiotopoulos

Technological Educational Institution of Western Greece

ABSTRACT: *The purpose of the present study is to investigate the views of the directors and deputy directors of the schools in the prefecture of Ilia regarding their training and its contribution to crisis management among teachers. The sample of the survey consisted of 61 directors and deputy directors (out of a total of 79) of the elementary schools of the prefecture of Ilia. Quantitative methodology was used to analyze the data (Frequency method), while the internal cohesion index (Cronbach) was checked. According to the findings, the vast majority of the sample has faced some forms of crisis among teachers and considers that the most common type of crises is interpersonal. Directors and deputy directors believe that the main causes of crises are the individual factors, the style of management and the organizational weakness. Finally, the overwhelming majority of the sample argues that the manager needs to have specialized knowledge on crisis management issues between colleagues and therefore the training of education staff on these issues becomes necessary and obligatory.*

KEYWORDS: Training, Crisis Management, Manager, Deputy Director.

INTRODUCTION

It is commonly accepted that one of the key factors in shaping school reality and the school climate is the education staff. Education staff are those who have an administrative, disciplinary, supervisory and guidance role in the education system. According to the existing legislation, the directors and deputy directors of the school units are called to play this role (Georgogiannis, Piga & Kouneli, 2005: 56). The main axes influencing their role are the socio-economic environment of the school, the legislative framework, the pupil's potential and, of course, the teaching staff of these schools. However, provoking unexpected situations or conflicts among teachers can often alter the smooth functioning of the school and show events that determine the beginning of a crisis that can put the school community out of control.

Therefore, the main skills that directors should develop is understanding and considering the school as a living organism, where the human factor is the key to its balance and smooth functioning. Therefore, it is necessary for all directors to be trained, to develop their knowledge and skills, to obtain effective school crisis management strategies and to maintain a positive climate in school (Saiti, 2015). This present work deals with the exploration of the views of the directors and deputy directors of the school units of the prefecture of Ilia regarding the training and its contribution to crisis management among teachers, as evidenced both by bibliographic review and by empirical research.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

Identifying Training

Several definitions have been assigned to the concept of training. According to Kostika (2004), training is defined as the whole of the activities through which the already acquired knowledge evolves and adapts to the new needs, which may be technological, economic or political. In addition, it is linked to personal and social development, while at the same time it constitutes a process of continuous upgrading of the knowledge and skills of the employee (Griffin, 2009). Teacher education is constantly evolving and supported through successful programs that include learning activities that teachers perform and may use while working with their students. Teachers are encouraged to develop skills, knowledge, experiences as well as their further characteristics (OECD, 2009). In addition, vocational training can also contribute to the development of new teaching techniques and objectives, new educational research, change in curricula, and the exchange of information and experiences among teachers on the effective functioning of the school (OECD, 2009).

Though, training can be provided in many ways. It may be available through the exchange of experiences, in the form of courses, workshops or formal programs, through cooperation between schools or teachers inside schools. At the same time, it can be achieved through guidance, cooperative planning, teaching and exchange of good practice.

The importance of educating teachers and managers

Teacher education is necessary primarily because of the needs and constant changes that have been introduced in the educational system in recent years. Training can contribute to teachers' responding to these changes in order to evolve in their professional career (Schuler & Jackson, 2006). These changes include technology, which has been integrated into education and directly influences the educational process (Kostika, 2004). Another reason that suggests the importance of educating teachers is the growth of economic immigrants within the country who are trying to fit into new circumstances. Through this it becomes clear that the education sector is subject to change as the various linguistic and cultural minorities have to be integrated into the school environment (Kesidou, 2015).

In addition, a study conducted by Jones et al (2008) on a large sample of teachers in the UK has shown that teachers consider training very useful as it strengthens self-confidence, increases their knowledge and practices, improves the management skills of the ever-changing work environment, but and their satisfaction. Finally, it is worth mentioning that training is considered to be particularly basic for school unit managers. Directors can affect the school environment, as they should be able to offer the best quality and correct functioning of the school. Skills that have to be cultivated in order to achieve the goal of more effective school operation are human resource management, communication among teachers and the surrounding environment, effective administrative methods, sound planning educational task, proper allocation of powers and tasks, effective conflict management (Mavrogiorgos, 2003).

Types of Training

Planning and organizing training activities should be based on certain conditions. Initially, there are educational programs within the school environment, which aim to improve the efficiency of teachers while focusing on the needs of teachers and the school environment. Subsequently, there are training programs outside the school environment carried out in

Regional Training Centers. These training activities are of short duration and focus on teachers' needs. At this point, it should be noted that this type of training program has weaknesses as the cost is high. Educational actions are also carried out at Higher Education Institutions, while some other types include those that are based on employees' goals and aims. That is, if teachers want to further develop their skills and improve themselves personally and professionally (Papanaoum, 2005).

Another form of training is distance learning, which as an "organically structured set of tools and processes, whereby the learner, while away from the educational or training body, learns how to learn on his own and how to operate autonomously through a heuristic course of self-learning, using specially formulated educational material and with support from teacher-advisers" (Papadakis & Fragoulis, 2005: 278). In addition, action research is a modern type and aims at the participation of the teacher at all stages. That is, in design, observation, implementation and evaluation. In this type of training the teacher is called to ask questions about a subject he/she has to deal with in order to improve the learning process (Papanaoum, 2005). Through the bibliographic review, it is obvious that the training of teachers often follows the typology that is followed by economists as in a first level it is special and in a second general. In the first case, the training helps the employee to acquire specific knowledge and skills in order to become more efficient in a specific work environment, while in the latter he/she acquires knowledge and skills that will help him become more efficient in other working contexts. In this way, maximum effectiveness and efficiency, which are the main objectives of all types of training, is achieved (Garibaldi, 2006).

Crisis management in the educational organization

The concept of the crisis and its stages

The concept of crisis refers to a difficult situation experienced by a person or a group of people. The crisis is determined on the basis of specific features that accompany it. For this reason, the concept of the economic crisis defines a difficult economic situation, the concept of the humanitarian crisis refers to a generalized threat to human existence and the social crisis deals with generalized social problems (Somech, 2008). According to another approach, the crisis refers to a general deregulation and a moral decline of society and simultaneously to the inability of individuals to adapt to imminent changes. A common denominator in the types of crises is frustration, ambiguity and sometimes conflict (Somech, 2008). The crisis often provides little time for decision-making, and it can be combined with duality, risk and opportunity. The risk refers to the serious consequences the crisis may provoke in the school environment, while the opportunity refers to the possibility of changing and identifying new sources and solutions to problems bringing about crisis (Gagnon, Barber & Soyuturk, 2018). The undesirable situations of the crisis can diversify the functioning of the school, create unexpected situations and put the school community out of control. Forms of such crises are any traumatic event or anything that can work negatively on the personality of the teachers and students. The prediction of the crisis is often impossible, however, the long experience of managers can provide important information about the operation of the school as well as about unusual processes or behaviors within it (Guillotin & Mangematin, 2018).

The life cycle of the crisis refers to the duration of the crisis. During this period the crisis passes through several stages, which are identified as follows (Gagnon, Barber & Soyuturk, 2018):

- At the warning stage, there are some facts or indications that can be considered as precursors to the crisis.

- At the stage of presentation within the school framework there is a situation that has been put under control, but the occurrence of specific events determines the principle of the crisis.
- At the stage of full development there is a full-blown appearance of the events that create the crisis, which can be presented in a strong rhythm, occurring within the school unit and affecting its operation.
- Finally, at the recession stage, the school community returns to its former state on the basis of the existing treatment plan, the symptoms are eliminated and the incidents gradually decrease.

Each of these stages cannot be fully determined in time and depends on the magnitude of the crisis, the valid treatment plan, and whether it is implemented correctly and efficiently (Saiti, 2015).

Sources and ways of solving crises in the school environment

Tension and disagreements in the school environment can lead to a crisis. The main sources of the crisis focus on poor communication, organizational weakness, diversity of individuals, limitation of available resources, external environment and administration of school units (Crisci, Sepe & Malafronte, 2018 ; Brinj, 2014). However, how the conflict will be minimized or eliminated is directly related to the way the unit works. There are different ways in which the crisis can be addressed: avoidance, interference, adaptation, compromise and co-operation (Balay, 2006). In most cases, avoidance is understood as a diplomatic withdrawal in order to find the right space and the means to bring the conflict into the forefront and to smooth out the relations of the parties concerned. The intervention concerns the implementation of a proposal that will solve the issue that has arisen. In most cases the intervention process is completed by the school head. Adaptation refers to the fact that people accept the beliefs of others and adapt to it. A key point for the success of the adaptation case is the impartiality of the intermediary, as well as the creation of a communication channel between the parties concerned. The compromise is a temporary solution whereby all sides believe that they have gained something from the process. However, there is a risk of the crisis coming later. Finally, cooperation is the imposition of a solution that can serve the views of all the parties involved. In the case of cooperation, interested parties should jointly seek an acceptable and reciprocal solution and through communication to deepen the existing problem and to meet each other's own interest. Tackling the crisis is a serious issue that can affect the proper functioning of the training unit. For this reason, crisis resolution should work towards eliminating collisions and promoting a collective climate within members of the training unit.

The Role of the Director in the Educational Environment and the Importance of Training

Contemporary challenges in the role of a school leader are related to the widening of the school's obligations and its orientation to the needs of modern society (Bagakis, 2005). In addition, both the requirements and the modern challenges of education highlight the need for training managers in order to be capable of responding to the complex and continuously changing school environment and to develop initiatives for the better exercise of their role (Papanaoum, 2005). The training of directors has both direct and indirect benefits. The immediate benefits concern the personal professional development of the individual and the indirect concern the improvement in the quality of the school unit. Through the training, the

school leaders cultivate their skills and knowledge and, with the help of their experience, can influence the educational environment (Bagakis, 2005).

The professional development of the school managers is based on a three pillars approach. The first pillar is broadening knowledge and skills in relation to managerial work. Training programs contribute to this dimension by enhancing the knowledge of managers, who, based on their experience, can contribute to achieving the objectives of the pedagogical approach. The second pillar concerns the evolution and adaptability of the managers to their working conditions. The training seminars contribute to this pillar by providing them with the knowledge they need in their professional development and the implementation of leadership practices. This pillar is also referred to as self-awareness because it plays an important role in the development of personality and self-esteem. The third pillar refers to adapting to the environment, taking full responsibility and responding to changes (Bagakis, 2005). Therefore, the school principal is the person who has the appropriate training to solve educational management issues. Training focuses on issues of autonomy and freedom of school units as well as on their further development with a view to adapting to current pedagogical developments.

Crisis management should find the manager ready to intervene with the necessary knowledge and skills to deal with a specific incident. Proper crisis management contributes to the restoration of the smooth functioning of the school while at the same time it is also used as a feedback for future crisis situations. Preventing the crisis is an important issue for each manager, while each crisis situation should be evaluated individually by the Director, and under no circumstances should signs of the forthcoming crisis be underestimated. The measures taken by the Director to deal with crises relate both to the type of crisis and to the knowledge of the director (Celano & Michell, 2014).

Crisis Management requires the Director to adopt different roles to ensure a safe and calm environment for both students and employees. Communication skills are one of the main means of interacting with the crisis maker, and the overall behavior should be welcomed by all stakeholders (Celano & Michell, 2014). At the same time, the manager should also possess mediation skills in all the parties involved in the school community, both to limit any conflicts and inform parents, educators, etc. The leadership style used could contribute to building a robust basis for crisis management and differentiating between existing styles. Finally, the director should be protective towards all members of the school community, and sometimes his /her altruistic mood should be presented as the cornerstone of sound crisis management. Consequently, the school head should receive continuous training in order to bring the expected results and defend the smoothness of the school unit (Alba & Gable, 2011).

METHODOLOGY

Research Aim- Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to investigate the views of the school directors and deputy directors of the prefecture of Ilia regarding the training and its contribution to crisis management among teachers. The research questions of this paper are as follows:

- What are the views of directors and deputy directors on the types of crises that develop among educators?

- Which are the causes of these crises?
- Should they be trained or do they feel like being trained on issues related to crisis management?

Research Sample

The sample of the survey consists of 61 directors and deputy directors of elementary schools in the prefecture of Ilia (out of the 79 directors and deputy directors of the prefecture). The survey was conducted using an online questionnaire sent to school unit addresses. The questionnaires were sent and the responses were collected in the second half of 2018.

Description of the research tool

The construction of the questionnaire resulted from the detailed study of the relevant literature and consists of thirty-four closed-ended questions and four (4) open-ended questions. The questionnaire has a Likert five-stage scale and it is divided into two parts. The first part consists of four questions related to the demographics of the respondents, while the second consists of five sections divided as follows: The first section has the general title "Types of Crisis among Teachers" and consists of two questions. The second section has the general title "Sources and causes of crises" and consists of three questions. The third section is entitled "Consequences and Crisis Resolution" and consists of eight questions. The fourth section has the general title "Crisis management techniques and their effectiveness" and consists of twelve questions. Finally, the general title of the fifth module is "Training and crisis management issues" and consists of five questions. This article focuses on the findings in sections 1, 2 and 5.

Statistical data processing

The questionnaires were processed by using the IBM statistical statistics (SPSS 22). The data were analyzed by the Frequency method and the Cronbach's alpha internal cohesion index, which equals 0.797, was checked.

FINDINGS

Regarding the types of crises, 93.4% of the sample responded that they have faced a crisis among colleagues. At the same time, 37.7% of the sample responded that they sometimes observe crises among teachers, while 29.5% responded that they rarely observe this. In relation to the nature of the crises, the majority of managers responded that they are mainly interpersonal (75%), while sentimental (53.3%), personal (43.3%), domestic (28.3% and social (25%) crises follow. The crises among the teachers are the most frequent, since 41% of the managers responded that this is happening from "very to very often". Here are the crises between the manager and the educators (30.2%) and the crises between the deputy director and the teachers (14.7%).

With regard to the causes of the crises, it becomes apparent that most of the participants, and in particular 94.3%, believe that individual factors contribute to the crises, while 55.7% of the sample considers that the management of the directors is a cause of crises. Here are the weaknesses in the organization (47.5%), the economic crisis (21.3%) and the existing legal framework (18%). At the same time fewer were the directors who responded that they consider the participation of teachers in decision-making as a cause of crises (13.1%), followed by

cultural differences (9.8%), lack of logistical equipment (3.3%) and hygiene (1.6%). Regarding the views of directors and deputy directors on training and crisis management issues, the following were observed: 60.7% said that as a director / deputy director they have been trained in crisis management issues among teachers, while 39.3% of the sample consider that they have received appropriate training. At the same time, almost all directors and deputy directors (98.4%) consider that appropriate training could reduce the crises among teachers, while 95.6% of the sample think that they need to have specialized knowledge on crisis management issues among colleagues. Finally, the overwhelming majority of managers (96.7%) believe that it is imperative for them to be trained on relevant issues.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the research findings it is clear that crises occur often found in the school units, and this is not accidental as conflicts and crises take place in places where employees are called to work in a team and not individually (Brinia, 2014). In terms of types of crises, interpersonal (75%) dominate, followed by emotional (53.3%), personal (43.3%), internal (28.3%) and social (25%). The categorization of these types results from the review of the corresponding literature (Filley, 1975; Saitis, 2002; Singh, 1996). With regard to the sources of the crises, the individual factors are mostly responsible (94.3%), followed by the administration style (55.7%), weaknesses in the organization (47.5%), the economic crisis (21.3%) and the existing legal framework (18%). These findings are in agreement with the corresponding theoretical framework as well as with corresponding research. Thus, a survey by Dimitrakopoulos (2014) demonstrates the important role played by the administration not only in provoking or not crises, but also in their management. Teachers believe that better conflict management is achieved through multi-faceted support from the manager and by the way directors handle human resources at school. Similarly, the Page (2007) study highlights the responsibility of the school leaders for crisis management. In this research, school unit managers report that crisis management actions are related to the manager's knowledge, skills, leadership style and communication practices they choose. In addition, MacNeil (2013) in his research argues that school managers have multiple tasks in crisis management and require a step-by-step process by the director. This process should look at the tasks and scope for teachers to perform their duties, the ability to control tasks, and the scope for recovery after a conflict episode.

Finally, the significance of the contribution of the training process of education executives to crisis management issues both from this research and from related research becomes apparent. The school head should be continuously trained so that the crisis management effort should bring the expected results and defend the smoothness of the school unit (Alba & Gable, 2011). Similarly, in Heystek's survey (2007), leadership in the school unit seems to increase its activity according to its training. The training of directors poses wider concerns and enables the focus of management through a structured role with clear rules, limitations and limits for teachers. In addition, Dennison and Shenton (2006) argue that the training of school unit managers yields satisfactory results reflecting the possibility of changing actions in the school unit. The training completely catches the passive role of the leader in the school unit, identifies a clear role in the intervention of crisis situations and creates more room for dealing with administrative work.

Usefulness and research restrictions

This study attempts to highlight and make known the views of the directors and deputy directors of the prefecture of Ilia regarding the types, and causes of the crises among teachers. At the same time, the necessity and the contribution of the educational process of the educational staff on the respective issues of crisis management were investigated. It is worth noting that there has not been any similar research in this county. Therefore, findings can be used in designing and organizing effective and useful training programs both in this particular geographical area and more widely. However, it should be noted that these results cannot be generalized. Crisis management techniques could be investigated further with both qualitative and quantitative methods and in even larger population groups of school leaders and educational staff. In addition, a future research could examine the influence of independent variables, such as studies, specialization, and other demographic characteristics on the findings of this research.

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