

Interpersonal Communication Conflict and its Relation to Experienced Anxiety and the Work Environment among Primary School Teachers

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Abstract

Interpersonal conflicts are inherent to human relationships and are often associated with elevated stress levels. In the school workplace, communication marked by conflict, especially under pressure, may undermine organizational performance and quality, as well as teachers' safety, satisfaction, and collegial relationships. The aim of this study was to examine the association between conflictual interpersonal communication and stress and distress (stress/anxiety experiences and dysphoric situations) in the workplace among primary education teachers in Greece (PE70 specialty), and to assess differences by years of service and sector of employment. Participants were 248 primary school teachers who completed a self-report questionnaire. Findings indicated that non-conflictual (collaborative) communication was negatively associated with stress and distress (stress/anxiety experiences and dysphoric situations) in the school environment. Moreover, teachers with 11 - 20 years of experience perceived interpersonal communication as more conflictual and reported higher stress, while elevated stress levels were also observed among teachers employed in the private sector. These findings highlight the need for interventions that strengthen collaborative communication skills to reduce stress and support teacher well-being and the functioning of school organizations.

Keywords

Interpersonal Relationships, Conflictual Communication, Collaborative Communication, Anxiety, Work Environment, Primary School Teachers

1. Introduction

Communication is the essence of social interaction, and correspondingly, what takes place mainly during social interaction is communication. People, whether intentional or not, are constantly communicating information about their thoughts, perceptions, intentions, feelings, and identity through words, expressions, signals, gestures, and even electronic and written media (Hogg & Vaughan, 2010).

Of particular importance is the role played by communication in the workplace, as well as the ways in which it is achieved. A work group is almost always a coercive community, as its members work together because they have a duty to perform a specific task. Thus, during a working day, colleagues interact frequently and share a great deal with one another, primarily on professional matters but also on personal ones (Seibold *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, the relationships among them, and the manner in which they manage the conflicts that arise, play an important role.

Poor or lack of communication, limited resources, weakness in the organizational structure, different perceptions and values, task ambiguity, different social backgrounds of colleagues and different goals are among the causes of conflict in any workplace, including the school context (Παρασκευόπουλος, 2008).

Subsequently, in the modern school reality the role played by teachers is multifaceted and is not limited only to their teaching work within the classroom, but includes the interaction of many factors, such as educational changes, bureaucratic-procedural issues and communication relationships (Σπυρομήτρος & Ιορδανίδης, 2017). Cancio *et al.* (2018) in their study found that low pay, constant changes in the education system and degraded building facilities are factors that cause stress and burnout. Accordingly, Antoniou *et al.* (2003) report that occupational stress occurs in professions related to health services, social services and humanitarian services, which include the teaching profession. Teachers across all school levels face a high risk of experiencing work-related stress, regardless of their years of teaching experience (Conte *et al.*, 2024).

The situations that cause stress in the school environment are varied and multifactorial, and the manifestation of stress seems to affect the overall behavior, attitude and quality of life of a teacher. In fact, the more continuous and long-term the stress affects a person, the more drastic are its consequences. It seems, therefore, that conflictual communication in interpersonal relationships and the experience of stress are a reality in the modern school work context and the study of each parameter separately, as well as the relationship between them, is of particular interest. This study examines the association between conflictual interpersonal communication and stress and distress (stress/anxiety experiences and dysphoric situations) in the workplace among primary education teachers in Greece (PE70 specialty), and assesses differences by years of service and sector of employment.

2. Interpersonal Relationships: Concept and Significance for Human Life and School-Based Professional Practice

A concise overview of the concept of interpersonal relationships, together with an

account of selected benefits for human life and for professional practice in school settings is particularly important as a prerequisite for an in-depth examination of conflictual interpersonal communication, which constitutes a central focus and principal object of the research.

The union of the words “interpersonal” and “relationship” means the interaction of individuals, relating to each other and communicating (Παράσχου, 2023). Human relationships are built with the social coexistence of one or more individuals, cultivating interpersonal relationships, which have a dependency relationship with value and emotional elements, enhancing the development of the social person and social institutions (Ματσαγγούρας, 2003).

According to Μαρμαρινός (2008), interpersonal relationships are created when people coexist, who come into contact and communicate with each other having predetermined social roles and including interactive psychosocial factors. Also, Miell & Duck (1984) speaking of interpersonal relationships, refer to the relationship that develops between people, who exert influence on each other, for a long time, have high interdependence and take into account each other’s opinions of the other, so that they are led towards the achievement of common goals.

The development of human relationships begins with the satisfaction of human needs both at the vital and emotional as well as at the spiritual level (Κούλα, 2011). Every interpersonal relationship takes place through the behavior of humans, which depends on the situation in which it manifests itself, under the desire to realize any of its goals. According to Κούλα (2011), acceptance, empathy and respect are fundamental elements for creating healthy interpersonal relationships. In other words, good interpersonal relationships are distinguished by the influence exerted by both coexisting individuals, while maintaining the independence, respect and acceptance of each personality. Additionally, Gurung et al. (1997) report that the psychological support individuals receive from their social networks of friends, partners and acquaintances, in other words social support, has positive effects on people’s general mental health. Accordingly, the emotional support offered by friends or a partner has the potential to reduce the momentum with which stress attacks health and the person is better able to resist it (Seibold et al., 2021).

Interpersonal relationships are a driving force in our daily lives, and people with good relationships live longer and report fewer physical and psychological illnesses and greater life satisfaction (Duck, 1982). In fact, most Americans report that their quality of life is determined by the number and quality of their interpersonal relationships (Ahmad & Chowdhury, 2022).

It would be remiss not to mention that the cultivation of interpersonal relationships contributes to the development of the self but also to the sense one acquires of oneself, as through communication everyone has the opportunity to see themselves through their eyes elsewhere. Also, it contributes to the existence of social life, to meeting social needs and to the expression of emotions, taking for granted the contribution of the appropriate space and time of interaction, which forms a

condition, which can change even the social establishment (Μαρμαρινός, 2008).

As far as the school is concerned, there seems to be a multitude of benefits that can arise from colleagues and healthy interpersonal relationships. Good interpersonal relationships between teachers have a positive effect on their morale and well-being and contribute to increasing the motivation for cooperation, reducing their isolation (Kolleck, 2019). As a result, when teachers feel they have developed relationships with their colleagues, their self-efficacy, confidence and enthusiasm for their profession are enhanced, burnout is reduced, and teachers are more likely to take risks and innovate (Shah, 2012). Additionally, according to Schleifer et al. (2017), teachers are more likely to improve their educational practices through collective and collaborative work, rather than individual work. Therefore, one of the factors that play a vital role in the cooperation and effectiveness of the school culture, is the development of interpersonal relationships between the members of the school organization, let alone its teachers (Hargreaves, 1994).

It is worth pointing out that the role of the director of the school unit is decisive in the creation of healthy interpersonal relationships. With his/her attitude and his/her behavior, he/she can create a climate of cooperation, making teachers feel that they belong to a group, in which they can express themselves and thus, perform in their work, developing good relationships (Gero, 1983).

In light of the foregoing, the significance and value of human communication become evident, as it enables the cultivation of sound and healthy interpersonal relationships. Through interpersonal communication, individuals are able to form their own opinions about other people's personalities, motivations, education, and interests, as well as the way they think and interact (Τυρή, 2015).

3. Communication: Concept and Significance in Personal and Professional Life

3.1. Conceptual Delimitation and Importance

“Only they, who went through this whole situation, can understand the thirst I felt to communicate, to talk with everything: my toys, the stones, the trees, the birds and the silent animals... My desire to express myself, to communicate was constantly growing...” (Κωσταρά, 2016: pp. 41-42).

Communication could rightly be characterized as a generative cause of human coexistence, as it plays a vital role in the development of their relationships by contributing to the cultivation of shared values, understanding and coordination of activities (Hung & Lin, 2013). Over the years, various definitions of it have been formulated, a fact which proves its complex nature.

According to Γκόβαρης (2001: p. 29), communication is “an intentional process, which aims to transmit thoughts, desires, feelings, judgments and any mental or emotional expression between people. It is the main means of developing the abilities that make up the identity of the Ego, i.e., empathy, critical attitude towards roles and tolerance of contradictions”. Furthermore, according to Σταμάτης (2009: p. 37), communication is “a complex phenomenon of life, in which, participating

as a whole, the human beings as a psycho-spiritual and physical entity utilize internal motivations and environmental stimuli through all of their senses, which they transform into coded signals, with the aim of exchanging understandable information, thoughts and feelings, serving numerous goals at multiple levels (communication contexts) of the professional, scientific, family, personal and every social reality". Accordingly, Στασινός (2015: p. 159) states that the term "communication" constitutes a polysemous concept referring to "that active, dynamic and productive process of daily practice, in which those involved in it have the opportunity to exchange information, thoughts, concerns and ideas, to express feelings, attitudes, needs, desires, etc." Additionally, Μπουραντάς (2001) defines communication as a means of connecting people, which results in the formation of small or large groups.

It is understood that people benefit from communication, not only because it is a means of exchanging information, but also because through it an exchange of opinions, concerns, experiences, thoughts and feelings takes place (Σταμάτης, 2013). Individuals socialize, common goals are achieved, relationships are created, etc. Ring & Van de Ven (1974) state that communication between parties gradually produces a consistent and shared understanding of a rigid world, which is a critical experience in the context of a social-psychological process, aimed at making meaning and forming psychological contracts. It is one of the most effective relationship-building strategies and has a significant impact on the perception of relationship quality, which includes factors such as trust, commitment and satisfaction, as effective communication helps to resolve differences, clarify misunderstandings and increase opportunities for healthy constructive discussion (Massey & Dawes, 2007).

The process of communication, which is intertwined with the interaction of people, presupposes the existence-coexistence or participation of at least two persons or parties, who have the role of transmitter or sender of a message using a medium, verbal or non-verbal, and the receiver or the receivers of this message respectively (Στασινός, 2015). This process takes place in a specific space, time and socio-cultural context, i.e. it does not only include the parties, who interact by operating at the level of transmitter-receiver and more general interaction, but also the context (physical and socio-cultural), as well as the purpose that the interlocutor aims for each time, either as a transmitter or as a receiver based on their intentions, knowledge, needs and experiences (Στασινός, 2015). In other words, those elements that contribute to the success of the communication activity are the transmitter, the receiver and the message. Simply transferring a message from the transmitter to the receiver is not enough, as a feedback mechanism is necessary so that the transmitter is able to understand if the message has been understood (Στεργίου, 2008).

It is therefore evident that communication is central to social interaction; indeed, social interaction primarily involves communicative processes (Hogg & Vaughan, 2010). People, whether intentionally or not, are constantly communicating infor-

mation about their thoughts, perceptions, intentions, feelings, and identity through words, expressions, signals, gestures, and even electronic and written media (Hogg & Vaughan, 2010). Thus, communication becomes social, it involves relationships between people and requires them to acquire a common understanding of the meaning of certain words, sounds, gestures and signs, while at the same time it is the means by which individuals influence others and are influenced by others (Hogg & Vaughan, 2010). Through communication, people learn to behave by weighing the limits of tolerance and acceptance of others and of the rules that any coexistence presupposes and has the potential to even change the quality of their life (Σταμάτης, 2013).

In conclusion, it is worth devoting a few lines to the case of Helen Keller, a great American writer and educator, who at the age of nineteen (19) months, due to illness, lost her hearing, voice and sight. With the help of her tutor, named Sullivan, she managed to find an outlet for the urge to communicate that existed in her soul and thus free her spirit, satisfy her burning desire for knowledge, learn foreign languages, travel, do charity work, and develop strong social ties. Helen Keller's means of communication was touch, through which "her entire spiritual being was channeled" (Κωσταρά, 2016: p. 31). In short, this urge to communicate on Keller's part shows a strong tendency to actively participate in the phenomenon of life, which she succeeded in demonstrating the greatness of her soul and her power.

3.2. Forms of Communication

According to Σταμάτης (2013), the term "communication" is often accompanied by adjectives, in order to clarify the purpose, form or context in which this multi-dimensional phenomenon takes place. Indicatively, some of the forms of communication found in the literature are "verbal" and "non-verbal", "intrapersonal" and "interpersonal", "formal" and "informal".

In more detail, verbal communication is related to speech, whether written or spoken, the highlighting of which is done through a common language code, following specific syntactic, grammatical and pragmatic rules (Σταμάτης, 2013). Through the written or spoken word, concepts and feelings are expressed, things and situations are described, and quantities are classified. Then, non-verbal communication concerns the ability to express and communicate through body language and although it is considered complementary to speech, there are many cases where it completely replaces it (Ζεργιώτης, 2007). That is, people exchange information and signals of cognitive and emotional characteristics, using facial expressions, gestures, nods, body posture and other paralinguistic signals. Both of these forms of communication can either work independently or act in complement. However, for the sake of the clarity of the communication process they must be in harmony with each other (Μερκούρη, 2015).

Then, intrapersonal communication concerns the communication of the individual with themselves, this internal dialogue that anyone can have with them-

selves (Lederman, 2002). It is about the way in which the person makes sense of the messages and events that surround their life. On the other hand, interpersonal communication takes place during human interaction with another human being, and face-to-face communication reflects the individual's personal characteristics and the relationship between them (Hartley, 1999).

Last but not least, formal communication is determined by laws, ministerial decisions and presidential decrees, it is hierarchically structured and restrictive, while informal communication is not determined by regulations, nor is it developed in a planned and meaningful way, it concerns the personal relationships of people regardless of hierarchy (Μερκούρη, 2015).

In conclusion, it is worth mentioning that Helen Keller proved that “the most subtle, most beneficial forms of communication with the environment are ultimately created through touch” (Κωσταρά, 2016: p. 115). Consequently, the rest of the senses and the innate elements for the realization of the communicative drive of each person constitute a balance compensation for the missing senses.

3.3. Communication Barriers

A person's communication ability can be enhanced depending on how interested they are in a communicative relationship, how much they believe they can achieve, and what they believe they will gain from the process (Ζεργιώτης, 2007). Furthermore, the urge to communicate—biological, social and spiritual—does not show the same intensity and power in all people, which if it did, then all people would be the same and as a result the need for communication would not exist (Κωσταρά, 2016). As a result, during the process of communication there may be obstacles, which may originate both from the transmitter and the receiver and from the context in which it takes place.

Often people talk to each other without understanding what the other means. These are the so-called parallel dialogues, which harm understanding, often interrupt and fragment genuine communication, with the result that people do not get to know each other in depth and they become estranged from life, given that the differences in language code and language view, people's experiences and values can also hinder communication (Κωσταρά, 2016). Effective communication is related to the consideration of increasing opportunities for understanding others in order to reduce tension from interpersonal value incongruence (Hung & Lin, 2013).

In addition, some other barriers to communication can be poor choice or lack of appropriate communication space and time, information overload, the tendency of people to focus on giving answers rather than listening, ignoring information that conflicts with what someone already knows, as well as perceptions or prejudices about the information transmitter (Χυτήρης, 2001). Also, when it comes to intrapersonal communication, negative dialogues with ourselves often lead to hasty conclusions, incorrect and one-sided evaluation of situations, and irritation, putting ourselves under pressure (Seibold et al., 2021).

In conclusion, it is worth noting that when there are barriers to communication, confusion and misunderstanding can occur, reducing the opportunity to develop better knowledge of others and to create mature interpersonal relationships (Hung & Lin, 2013). Human relationships are closely tied to communicative relationships and, in light of the communicative process, are shaped either positively or negatively (Μπουραντάς, 2002; as cited in Πότσου, 2021).

3.4. Communication in the Workplace

Of particular importance is the role played by communication in the workplace, as well as the ways in which it is achieved and linked to the effectiveness of the organization. In fact, communication as a social phenomenon is the cornerstone of the interpersonal relationships that exist between colleagues (Πότσου, 2021).

All organized communities through the process of communication acquire characteristics depending on the communicative ability of its members. Thus, the quality of the operation of a working environment depends directly on the quality of communication of its members either at an interpersonal level or at an organizational level (Αθανασούλα-Ρέππα, 2008). A communication with an integrated structure can create the necessary framework of information and understanding, in order to develop a team and efficient effort, contributing to the creation of a good working climate, the development of a spirit of cooperation and trust, the strengthening of team morale and therefore the strengthening of their will to work (Richmond *et al.*, 2009).

It is worth mentioning that Helen Keller's rule of life has been the belief that people must follow a system of timeless values, so as not to encounter daily difficulties of cooperation and understanding, as these can lead to fierce conflicts, contradictions, reduced performance, even diseases. It is therefore important to articulate a shared framework of values among colleagues—a set of norms within which all are expected to conduct themselves—while affording each individual sufficient autonomy to act and live creatively (Κωσταρά, 2016).

It becomes clear, then, that effective communication is crucial for maintaining interpersonal relationships, resolving conflicts, and improving workplace decision-making (Ahmad & Chowdhury, 2022). In fact, in dialogues and confrontations with colleagues, superiors and subordinates, it is important for everyone to be able to assert their rights, to express positive and negative feelings, to be able to oppose questions on which they have a different opinion with confidence, but without the latter implying “brutal imposition”, but instead meaning a friendly and sincere disposition (Seibold *et al.*, 2021).

3.5. The Role of Communication in the School Unit

Like all work organizations, the school unit as an educational organization has a clear hierarchy and structure and a prerequisite for the harmonious cooperation of its members and the achievement of the school's goals is effective communication. Within the school unit, all its members (teachers, students, parents) com-

municate with everyone, in order to solve problems and settle issues for the benefit of the educational process, making the role of communication crucial, in terms of interpersonal relationships and their interactions during the teaching process (Σταμάτης, 2015).

According to Φασουλής (2006), teachers interact with each other through interpersonal communication, emphasizing on students' learning and socialization and contributing together with their ideas to solving school problems. During two-way communication between the external and internal environment of the school unit, the administration of education becomes more effective, as managers have the ability to collect information and use it in decision-making. Also, through communication, conflicts and misunderstandings between educational administrators are reduced and team relations and team spirit are developed among the members of the school community (Σαΐτης, 2014). In fact, the degree of effectiveness of a school unit's communication depends to a large extent on the ability of the managers to have proper communication with all its members (Σαΐτης, 2014). Thus, the principals of a school unit have the ability through their behavior and action to develop effective communication and thus can create a positive climate in order to promote the goals of the school unit and encourage the educational staff to increase their efforts.

Next, it is worth mentioning that pedagogical communication refers to the communicative process that develops during the interaction between teacher and student and is a participatory, interactive and empathetic process aimed at creating relationships of reciprocity and equality (Σταμάτης, 2005). This kind of communication fosters the establishment of a positive learning climate, where each child has the potential to develop and succeed, and to face any difficulty (Μαλικιώση-Λοϊζου, 2001).

In conclusion, it is understood that communication plays a catalytic role in the proper functioning of the school unit, since it contributes to the formation of a positive cooperative climate, the creation of healthy interpersonal relationships, the strengthening of team dynamics and the increase of its performance. For this reason, it is important for the members of a school unit to develop their communication skills. Every person can be taught and learn how to communicate, and since communication is identified with behavior, it becomes clear that changing the way of communicating means changing behavior (Johnson & Johnson, 1996).

4. Communication Conflict: An Inevitable Aspect of Personal and Professional Life

4.1. Definition of Conflict

Conflicts are an inevitable phenomenon of human life, both personal and professional. According to Burns (1978), "conflict is a phenomenon of social relations which is as natural as harmony and as important as unanimity". Accordingly, Hawes & Smith (1973) argue that conflict is a normal, functional, and inherent element of human relationships.

Reviewing the literature, much of the definition of conflict refers to an incompatible situation experienced by individuals or groups with different and/or overlapping interests. More specifically, as early as 1967 Pondy defined conflict as an interactive process, manifested by incompatibility, disagreement or reaction between individuals or groups, while Deutsch (1973) refers to conflict as a pursuit of incompatible goals in such a way, so that the benefits of one side are at the expense of the other. Later, Thomas (1992) defined conflict as a process that begins when one side perceives that another is hindering its pursuit or interest, a definition that is consistent with that of Μπουραντάς (1992), according to which conflict is a situation where the behavior of one individual or group seeks to hinder the achievement of the goals of another individual or group.

In addition, Wilmot & Hocker (2017) refer to conflict as a dispute between two or more interdependent individuals, regarding their irreconcilable differences in values and goals but also in their desire for control and connection. This definition is also consistent with Fisher's (1990) view, according to which conflict is related to incompatibility of goals or values between two or more parties in a relationship combined with attempts at controlling each other and competitive feelings towards each other. Additionally, Putnam and Poole (Ιορδάνογλου, 2008: p. 279) define conflict as “the interaction of interdependent individuals who realize the contradiction of their goals, purposes and values and who believe that the opposing party can intervene in the accomplishment of those goals”.

Rubin *et al.* (1994) also place particular emphasis on the time at which the conflict takes place. They argue that conflict is not only about diversity in the beliefs or interests of the parties involved, but also about the realization that these cannot take place at the same time, pointing out the importance of temporal framing as a factor in creating conflicts. Also, individuals and groups that come into conflict at a certain time does not mean that they will be constantly in conflict.

Putnam & Poole (1987) point out that there seems to be a large family of general definitions, which include the following central points: the interdependence between the parties, the perception of incompatibility between their interests and their interaction.

The above definitions demonstrate at a first level how frequent and inevitable conflicts are in people's daily lives. Whether on a personal or professional level, it is not possible for people not to come into conflict, as everyone's perceptions and personal values differ and this in itself often leads to conflict.

4.2. Conflict Categories

The conflict literature happens to have not only a variety of definitions but also various categorizations, which are classified according to the parameter being studied at a time. More specifically, taking into account the number of people involved, conflicts are divided into intrapersonal, interpersonal and group conflicts (Manesis *et al.*, 2019). In particular, personal conflict, or role conflict, refers to the internal conflict of the individuals themselves, when they are asked to choose be-

tween mandatory, but contradictory solutions and thus come face to face with expectations, which require mutual behaviors, competitive and conflicting (Olk & Friedlander, 1992). Interpersonal conflict often arises in the workplace when the individual is required to perform different roles and tasks, which are contrary to their expectations and values. As a result, the individual is faced with a situation of conflicting goals, experiencing so-called work stress, which negatively affects the individual's behavior (Μπούρη, 2017), as, facing this situation, they feel a certain degree of confusion, embarrassment, doubt and uncertainty (Παππά, 2006). The intensity of role conflict is proportional to the intensity of the pressures exerted by the transmitters but also to the ability of the receiver to respond (Αργυράκης & Καλουψής, 2011).

Continuing, interpersonal conflicts occur when one person's goals, expectations, and desires conflict with those of another person (Rahim, 2002). In more detail, interpersonal conflict takes place between two or more individuals, either of the same or different hierarchical level, affecting the cohesion, structure and functioning of a social organization (Ιορδανίδης, 2014). According to the researchers, interpersonal conflict is considered the most basic form of conflict in the workplace (Montana & Charnov, 2002) and is often found in the way of communication between the sender and the receiver of a message, in the attitude and behavior of one towards the other.

Concluding with this classification, group conflicts refer to those that occur between different groups of people, who may have different perceptions on various issues or have different goals and therefore different tactics to achieve them (Σπυράκης & Σπυράκη, 2008). Group conflict can occur either among themselves (intragroup conflict) or between different groups (intergroup conflict), which coexist within an organization and have a negative effect on the organizational climate and group cohesion (Καλτουριμίδου, 2018).

Additionally, depending on the hierarchical position of those involved in the conflict, conflicts can be categorized into vertical and horizontal. Vertical conflict occurs between members of an organization who belong to different levels of hierarchy, while horizontal conflict occurs between people of the same hierarchical level (Χυτήρης, 2017).

Subsequently, it is worth mentioning the distinction of conflicts into functional and dysfunctional, taking into account their effects, both for the individuals themselves and for groups or an organization (Manesis *et al.*, 2019). Conflicts that serve the interest of an organization, generate new ideas, encourage flexibility and contribute to learning and creativity, are considered functional (Ζαβλανός, 1991). Functional conflicts support the group's goals and improve their performance, as the solutions that emerge through brainstorming are superior to individual solutions and proposals, thus achieving the adoption of best practices to achieve the goals (Fernández Jiménez de Cisneros *et al.*, 2002). On the other hand, dysfunctional conflicts hinder communication and disrupt group cohesion, having negative effects on its performance (Ζαβλανός, 1991). Usually, these conflicts are char-

acterized by strong emotions, lack of trust, frustration and happen due to interpersonal incompatibilities between the members (Παπαγεωργάκης & Σισμανίδου, 2016). Therefore, it is understood that conflicts should not be considered only as something negative, which brings about negative consequences, but should be considered as having the possibility to function positively, contributing to the quality of relationships and the personal development of individuals.

It would be remiss not to mention that considering the source of conflict in a work environment, Rahim (2001) categorizes it into cognitive and emotional. Cognitive conflict is related to some disagreement regarding the content of tasks to be performed in a workplace, including differing beliefs, perceptions and ideas (Rahim, 2001). Usually, cognitive conflicts are characterized as functional, because with the correct management they lead to the improvement of the functioning of the organization. According to Jehn (1995), emotional conflicts usually involve tension and discomfort in the relationships between members of a group and are related to their interpersonal incompatibilities. That is why they are often characterized as dysfunctional, reducing the satisfaction and work performance of those involved (Janssen *et al.*, 1999).

4.3. Causes and Antecedents of Conflict

As mentioned above, conflicts are part of people's daily lives, and it is human diversity that makes them inevitable. The causes that lead to the conflict are varied, sometimes they are visible and sometimes not and they depend on various factors.

The main cause of any conflict is poor communication or lack of communication (Κάντας, 2009). More specifically, poor transmission of messages from transmitter to receiver, lack of information and incorrect translation of messages by the receiver lead to lack of understanding and as a result to conflict (Μπουραντάς, 2002). Also, both verbal and non-verbal communication can be a cause of conflict. Especially in verbal communication there are often wrong perceptions, since body language or facial expressions are sometimes decoded incorrectly (Μπουραντάς, 2002).

Furthermore, incompatibility of goals and overlapping interests lead to conflict, as achieving one goal of one individual or group may lead to the inability to achieve the goal of another individual or group (Singleton *et al.*, 2011). Especially in the workplace, individuals, in order to achieve their goals, make efforts to achieve them by hindering the attainment of the goals that the other person has, as they do not realize that often the individual goals are part of the general goals of an organization (Μπουραντάς, 2002).

Then, different perceptions and values are often a factor in causing conflicts. Every person is unique and different, therefore the way they try to satisfy their expectations, both in terms of their social position and their professional life, is also different (Αθανασούλα-Ρέππα, 2012). In other words, each person has shaped their perceptions, values and beliefs, acting on their own to achieve their goals (Μπουραντάς, 2002), with the result that these different perceptions sometimes

make cooperation difficult and are a source of conflict situations, both in personal and professional life. Also, individuals differ in terms of identity, culture, needs, the way they participate in the decision-making process, and even the age, interests, and self-concept of each person play an important role in the aforementioned (Jenifer & Raman, 2015).

Additionally, in the workplace limited resources are another cause of conflict, as not everyone's needs can be met. Limited resources concern, for example, problems related to the building infrastructure or the lack of logistical infrastructure (Σαϊτης, 2007). According to Mullins (2014), in order to avoid conflict, it is necessary to ensure, make the best possible use of and distribute available resources fairly. Similarly, it is often possible that in an organization there are weaknesses in the organizational structure, such as the unclear definition of roles, responsibilities, duties, lack of coordination and incomplete information regarding daily operations (Παπαγεωργάκης & Σισμανίδου, 2016), situations that can be a motivation for the manifestation of conflicts between individuals and groups.

It would be remiss not to mention unequal treatment as a cause of conflict. People working in an organization are likely to perceive discrimination against them or behaviors disproportionate to their colleagues, so this inequality is a generating factor in reactions and demands for justice (Mullins, 2014).

In conclusion, the problematic conditions of a work context cause tension. Excessive workload, role confusion, overlapping of responsibilities, low sense of job justice, organizational changes, weak leadership, diversity of individuals and groups are key factors causing stress and insecurity, leading to conflictual communication (Seibold et al., 2021).

4.4. Stages in the Conflict Process

Each conflict goes through several stages, as it is a dynamic process. As a result, a conflict episode is seen as the gradual culmination of events leading to a state of disorder (Appelbaum et al., 1999). More specifically, a conflict episode starts from the conditions that create a possible confrontation, continues with the perception of the situation and emotional involvement, leading to conflictual behavior and depending on the management way, leads either to the increase or decrease of the performance of a team (Appelbaum et al., 1999).

In the conflict literature Pondy (1967) identified five (5) stages of conflict, which include the following elements: latency, perception, sensation, manifestation and aftermath of conflict. More specifically, according to the model of Pondy (1967), in the first stage of latent conflict, there are causes for the manifestation of conflict, such as miscommunication, incompatible goals, competition and diversity. In other words, there is a situation of underlying conflict. In the second stage, the conflict becomes perceived as individuals become aware of the existence of these incompatible goals, expressing their opinion and seem to prevail a concern. In the third stage of felt conflict, the sense of conflict is intense, individuals may experience anxiety about the development of the situation and focus on the causes

that caused it. In the fourth stage of manifest conflict, the confrontation between individuals or groups becomes more recognizable to others as individuals react. At this stage, the parties to the conflict adopt a specific style of behavior in order to deal with it, choosing between open conflict (aggression, competition), which is mainly based on emotion or trying to resolve it through cooperation and discussion (Rahim, 2002). Finally, the fifth stage refers to the results obtained through the management of the conflict (conflict aftermath), i.e., to consequences that may be either positive or negative, depending on the outcome. Thus, the final outcome of the conflict can be either functional or dysfunctional (Σπυράκης & Σπυράκη, 2008). The resolution of the conflict usually results in establishing new bases of cooperation for the conflicting parties, while its dysfunctional outcome most often leads to the creation of new conflicts in the future (Βακόλα & Νικολάου, 2012).

Of course, Pondy's model is not the only one. It is also worth mentioning the model of Thomas (1976, as mentioned in Westmaas, 2022), according to which a conflict begins with its awareness. Consequently, this awareness leads to specific thoughts and feelings about the conflict as well as possible ways to resolve it, which in turn generate certain intentions about managing the conflict by applying a certain behavior. As a result, a form of interaction develops between the specific parties, from which the results of the conflict will also emerge.

Similar is the model of Robbins (Appelbaum *et al.*, 1999) which includes four (4) stages in the process of conflict, starting from the conditions that produce the potential conflict and ending with its results.

Additionally, a more modern pattern for the stages of conflict is Wanger's model (Westmaas, 2022), which presents the escalation of the conflict as a tornado comprising thirteen (13) stages. This model shows how conflict can quickly spiral out of control. By observing and listening to challenged individuals, it is often possible to identify where they are in the escalation process and anticipate what might happen next, thus being able to develop timely and appropriate approaches to conflict resolution.

In conclusion, each conflict episode is dynamic, since each party that participates in it seeks to cause a reaction-response to the stimulus that the other side has caused (Αθανασούλα-Ρέππα, 2012). The sooner the causes of the conflict are perceived, the more likely it is to find an appropriate way of managing it and thus prevent the conflict episode from becoming large.

4.5. Conflict Management and Resolution

Conflict management relates to how an individual or group chooses to behave and act during conflict. According to Rahim (2002) there is a difference between conflict resolution and conflict management. More specifically, conflict resolution aims to end or minimize conflict within the existing system. Conflict management includes any action aimed at designing effective strategies to limit dysfunctions and enhance the positive effects of a conflict, leading to effective resolution of tensions and enhancing learning (Rahim, 2002).

Conflict management is an act in which conflict is recognized and managed reasonably, fairly and effectively, and for this some skills of problem solving, effective communication and negotiation are necessary. In fact, according to [Good-year \(2006\)](#), conflict management is the “key” to communication, human interaction and strategic decision-making, making its importance evident both for the quality of interpersonal relationships between individuals and groups, and for the performance and success of an organization.

4.5.1. Conflict Management Techniques

Both in moments of calm and in moments of tension-conflict, the interaction of each person with their fellow human beings is different, as each human being has its own experiences and patterns of behavior.

[Rahim \(2001\)](#), taking into account people’s concern for themselves and those around them, presents five (5) different ways to manage conflicts: integration, avoidance, concession, enforcement and compromise. In more detail, during integration the person shows an increased interest both in itself and in others. People collaborate, communicate and exchange information trying to find a mutually acceptable solution. This is a time-consuming process, so it is important to use it on important issues that deserve so much effort ([Παπαδοπούλου, 2015](#)). In contrast, avoidance is characterized by a lack of concern for oneself and others. Individuals try to abdicate their responsibilities, are indifferent to the conflict, do not participate in its settlement and even postpone it. Essentially, the parties involved in the conflict take a neutral stance, avoid any kind of action and ignore the friction, downplaying the importance of the conflict either because they believe that the costs of resolving it are greater than the benefits, or because they have more urgent matters to attend to, or because they believe that in this way it can be resolved by itself ([Chen & Tjosvold, 2002](#)). As a technique, it can be chosen, when there is not enough time to deal with the problem, in order to give time for the tones to drop and to give appropriate attention calmly in secondary time ([Παπαδοπούλου, 2015](#)).

Then, in concession the interest in the self is low, but it is high in others and for this reason it is characterized by selflessness. The person focuses on similarities, not differences, in order to satisfy the opposite side. In other words, it is a conciliation, as one side deals with the other, making concessions and giving priority to the needs of the other side ([Παπαδοπούλου, 2015](#)). This technique is preferred when it is particularly important to maintain harmonious relationships, to avoid disruption and when the issue is more important to the other side ([Παπαδοπούλου, 2015](#)). However, concession is not appropriate when the issue is particularly important or when one party to the conflict is objectively wrong ([Chan et al., 2006](#)).

On the contrary, imposition has an increased interest in the self and a low interest in others, as what interests the individual is to impose his opinion at all costs, not focusing on the needs of the other party to the conflict. This technique is usually used when there is a superior-subordinate relationship between the parties

involved. However, in the long run, it may prove detrimental to cooperation and labour relations owing to the heightened expression of emotions (Παπαδοπούλου, 2015). Imposition is usually used when a quick and decisive action is required or when the conflict exists between members who are not of the same hierarchical level and one member follows the instructions of the dominant member because he/she does not have the appropriate knowledge to make a decision (Παπαδοπούλου, 2015).

Overall, according to Rahim (2001) compromise presents an ever-changing and redefined interest in oneself and others, which depends on the interest shown by the opposite side. In the compromise, more concessions are made than in the imposition but less than in the concession. Essentially, none of the parties to the conflict loses, nor does it win, making dissatisfaction a major disadvantage, since neither party is fully satisfied. Compromise can be exploited when goals are mutually exclusive, when parties to the conflict have equal power and when issues are of moderate importance (Παπαδοπούλου, 2015). However, it is not advisable when one side has more power or when the problem is complex (Chan et al. 2006).

Subsequently, the model of Thomas & Kilmann (1976), according to which there are five approaches to conflict depending on the attitude and behavior of the individual, is also interesting. Thus, there is competition where individual interests are what they are trying to satisfy, retreat where the interests of the opposing side are promoted, compromise in which both sides are partially satisfied, cooperation in which there is complete satisfaction of both parties and avoidance, whereby neither side is satisfied, and the conflict persists.

It would be an omission not to mention that in a conflict when its parties cannot find a mutually acceptable solution, they may seek the intervention of third parties, in order to identify ways to satisfy the needs of the conflicting parties, eliminate misunderstandings and achieve good communication (Ιορδανίδης, 2014). In order for third party intervention to have a successful outcome, a basic prerequisite is the adaptation of the mediator's behavior to the circumstances related to the mediation situation. In other words, the third person has a duty to identify and combine conflict management techniques and intervention strategies in order to lead to the de-escalation of the conflict (Σίμωνη, 2007).

In conclusion, the above models are applicable both in the management of conflicts that occur in the workplace, as well as in interpersonal relationships. It is worth noting that in behavior related to conflict management, there is no one right type, as each technique is useful in specific circumstances and each represents a set of useful social skills. According to Barney & Griffin (1992), the settlement of conflict situations is important to focus on the individual and aim to increase awareness of the sources of the conflict, as they believe that much of it is due to interpersonal misunderstandings and communication problems.

4.5.2. Outcome-Based Conflict Management Strategies

It is worth mentioning that every conflict is different depending on the data that activates it, its management strategy and the results it produces. Based on the lat-

ter, various researchers distinguish three basic strategies for dealing with conflicts: Win-Lose, Lose-Lose and Win-Win (Μπουραντάς, 2002).

In more detail, in the “Win-Lose” strategy someone wins and someone loses and is usually used when there are situations of direct conflict of goals and inequality of power (Χυτήρης, 2013). That is, there is competition and one of the two parties will be harmed.

In the “Lose-Lose” strategy both sides find themselves at a loss and the conflict is resolved to their detriment without achieving their goals (Milton, 1981). Indeed, according to Σπυράκης & Σπυράκη (2008), if the proposed solution does not lead to the elimination of the causes of the conflict, then it will almost certainly be repeated and tougher negotiations will take place.

Finally, in the case of “Win-Win”, which is an ideal situation, both parties to the conflict are winners. The conflicting parties try to achieve their goals in a spirit of cooperation, communication and trust (Μπουραντάς, 2002), focusing on eliminating the causes of the conflict in order to better resolve it.

4.6. Consequences of Conflict

Taking into account the conflict literature, it becomes clear that conflict situations, whether they occur at the individual level, or at the level of a group or organization, can bring both positive and negative results. In other words, when a conflict is handled appropriately, it leads to an improvement in interpersonal relationships and thus increases people’s cooperation, tolerance and understanding towards the different (Thomas, 1976). Conversely, when conflict is not satisfactorily resolved, it has the effect of reducing trust and creating fertile ground for more conflict. Therefore, a conflict cannot be defined in advance as entirely positive or negative.

When a conflict is dealt with effectively, it has positive consequences for individuals and groups, especially when they are addressed at an early stage (Σαΐτης, 2007). Resolving a conflict at an early stage has the potential to act as a measure to prevent a more intense conflict, as problems are addressed in a timely manner, without taking on large dimensions. That is, through early discussion and confrontation, stress and tension are reduced and a climate of cooperation and trust is developed (Chen & Tjosvold, 2002).

Additionally, within the group, through discussion to resolve a dispute, a mutually acceptable solution can emerge, which is more creative and serves all sides. According to Βακόλα & Νικολάου (2012), when two groups with different interests intensify their efforts to find solutions, better quality decisions or new and more innovative ones are made. Also, during group conflict it is common for the members of each group to unite their efforts towards a common goal. Thus, levels of cooperation and performance are increased and members follow common rules in order to avoid any potential conflict, which may hinder the execution of their work (Ιορδανίδης, 2014).

It is worth noting that through the process of conflict, individuals express their opinions, put forward their arguments, develop understanding and communica-

tion skills for the productive solution of problems, perceive the dynamics of their relationships and as a result comes personal development (Καλτουριμίδου, 2018). Also, dealing with problems and expressing feelings boosts a person's self-confidence and helps them develop their already existing communication skills or develop new ones so that they can face challenges and develop (Manesis *et al.*, 2019).

Therefore, since conflicts are inevitable, the right way to manage them has a positive impact both for the individual and within a group or organization. It becomes clear that the main consequence of any conflict is the change it brings. The individuals make their self-assessment about the management of the conflict episode, while in the group the relationships and goals of the members are re-defined.

Conflicts, however, are not invariably handled in a constructive manner and a dysfunctional conflict prevents the achievement of individual and group goals (Παπαδοπούλου, 2015). When a conflict is not managed effectively, it can trigger strong emotions such as frustration, sadness, anxiety, anguish and creates a bad and unpleasant climate (Καλτουριμίδου, 2018). More specifically, the intense competition of the conflicting parties can cause disturbances in interpersonal relationships, as they can use distorted perceptions of the other side's motivations, focusing on their negative and not their positive traits (Αθανασούλα-Ρέππα, 2008). As a result, the quality of communication decreases, suspicion and mistrust are caused between conflicting parties and a negative climate is formed (Σαϊτης, 2007).

In addition, one factor that is negatively affected after a dysfunctional conflict is the trust that develops between individuals, groups and colleagues. The parties to the conflict feel insecure, keep a cautious attitude in their interactions and thus do not easily trust those around them (Manesis *et al.*, 2019). In fact, when conflicts are so frequent and ineffective, they lead to a drop in the morale of individuals, especially those who feel that they have been damaged by their results (Σαϊτης, 2007).

Then, regarding the workplace, negative conflicts reduce organizational productivity and proper organization, as individuals stop taking initiatives and are not in the mood to cooperate (Σαϊτης, 2007). There are also not a few cases where the conflict leads to an increase in work stress, which is an unpleasant experience causing negative emotions and possibly the manifestation of psychosomatic symptoms (such as stomach pain, headache and even depression), and as a result of these professional burnout comes; when this conflict-borne communication is systematic, lasts for a long time, remains unprocessed and acts subconsciously, developing an aggressive irritant mood among partners, there is a possibility that it can be upgraded and transformed into harassment (Seibold *et al.*, 2021).

Therefore, the important role of proper conflict management in maintaining healthy interpersonal relationships, preventing work-related stress and maintaining good psychosomatic health of people becomes apparent.

4.7. Intra-School Conflict

Conflicts inevitably exist in the school environment, as in any organization, many different people with different needs and obligations coexist in school. Indeed, Αθανασούλα-Ρέππα (2008) emphasize that the success of an educational organization is significantly influenced by its cooperative character rather than by the hostile conflict between its parts. The school climate is directly affected by the existence of conflicts, as the relations of the teaching staff are also affected.

The most frequent forms of conflict in the school environment are between students and school leadership, interpersonal conflicts either between educational staff or students or between educational staff and parents but also conflicts between teachers and the government and the Ministry of Education (Αθανασούλα-Ρέππα, 2008). Additionally, Κατράνα & Αλεξανδρόπουλος (2020) argue that, from teachers' perspectives, one source of conflict is the manner in which the school is administered.

In the field of education, an important role for conflicts is played by the culture of each school unit, the school environment, the interpersonal relationships of teachers, their cultural and social origin, the role of the principal and the way he/she manages conflicts (Παρασκευόπουλος, 2008). Indeed, different scientific subjects, the depreciation of public education systems, competition, limited resources, inadequate logistical infrastructure, different teaching practices of teachers and different objectives are only some of the causes of conflicts in the school context (Παρασκευόπουλος, 2008).

According to Φασουλή (2006), the ideal method for resolving conflicts at school is creative dialectics, which is based on the communication of the conflicting parties, the friendly mood, the search for justice and truth. Communication plays an important role, as it strengthens the cohesion of members of the school community, contributes to the motivation of educational activities and is a main tool in the management and administration of school units.

It is worth mentioning that the role of the director is catalytic in effective conflict management, as his/her behavior can contribute to the formation of relationships of educational staff by providing them with support and shaping the appropriate climate of communication (Κούλα, 2011). Also, teachers themselves feel more satisfaction from their work when they also experience support from their colleagues (Koutrouba & Michala, 2017).

In conclusion, the consequences of conflicts, as in any organization as well as in the educational, can have either a positive or a negative connotation. It is necessary to understand that conflict situations should not be treated as something undesirable, because they are part of life and social interaction, as long as they are treated in time and function as a pedagogical opportunity (Μαυροσκούφης, 2007).

5. Anxiety

5.1. Definition of Anxiety

Undoubtedly, we live in a time of considerable challenges, in which individuals

must contend with ever-changing economic, social, cultural, and even moral issues in daily life. Notably, anxiety is not a new phenomenon. Ancient Greek and Latin authors documented instances of pathological anxiety as medical disorders, and Stoic and Epicurean therapeutic practices presage techniques now standard in cognitive psychotherapy (Crocq, 2015). It is also evident that human emotions play a decisive role in shaping life outcomes and perceived quality of life. In recent years, escalating professional and social demands—together with the rapid pace of technological developments—have intensified psychological pressures and precipitated pronounced anxiety symptoms. Anxiety “seems to hit modern human beings every day: what affects them the most, what appears unchanged in our lives is Anxiety” and it has been highlighted by the World Health Organization as one of the greatest risks to human health in the twenty-first century. As a result of this, the preservation of health must be the central goal of each person by taking personal responsibility and choosing the appropriate—for their internal symmetry—lifestyle (Seibold *et al.*, 2021).

The concept of anxiety is multidimensional and appears in various areas of human activity, being a risk factor for a multitude of health disorders and diseases. In a broader conceptual approach, anxiety captures the changes that take place at a psychological and physical level, responding to situations that cause pressure on a human being (Μπουλιώνη, 2023). In other words, anxiety refers to qualitative emotional disturbances and is an unpleasant feeling, caused by some impending danger (Χριστοδούλου, 2002).

It is worth noting that on the one hand there is positive anxiety, which is called constructive and motivates people, while on the opposite side there is negative anxiety, called deconstructive (Selye, 1976). In addition, anxiety is not exclusively individual, but also interpersonal, social and collective and overcoming it results in a meaningful and joyful life (Seibold *et al.*, 2021).

Analyzing more thoroughly the concept of anxiety, according to Arnold & Randall (2020) anxiety is defined as a psychological process, which takes place as a reaction to the pressures of the environment, while, according to Moorhead & Griffin (1998), it is the adaptive reaction of the individuals to a stimulus, which places excessive demands on both their psychological and physical health.

Moreover, according to Spielberger (1972), anxiety is defined as an unpleasant emotional state, in which the subject presents feelings of tension, fear, worry, as well as increased activity of the autonomic nervous system. Selye (1976) in his definition of anxiety points out the relationship of the total body response to stressful factors, which can be physical, mental or social. In fact, the experience of anxiety is affected by the frequency, intensity, duration and multiplicity with which stressful factors exert an effect on a person. Also, each person experiences the state of anxiety in a different way and intensity, depending on their personality, the phase of life they are in and the current conditions in their environment (Εφραιμίδου, 2017). In other words, people may objectively experience the same burdens, however they may perceive them subjectively in a different way, but the same person may feel a burdensome condition completely differently in different situations, as

the stressors are processed differently according to the opinions, experiences and momentary moods of each person (Seibold *et al.*, 2021).

In addition to the aforementioned, it is worth mentioning that according to Κάντρας (1995) anxiety refers to the individuals' inability to respond to the demands of their environment and this inability is not only superficial but can cause serious problems to human health. Κάκουρος & Μανιαδάκη (2006) refer to effective anxiety, which largely motivates the individual, but also to excessive anxiety, which leads to an imbalance between the existing stimulus and the tension it causes, losing its functional purpose and raising obstacles in the adaptive functioning of the individual.

In conclusion, anxiety is a normal but also inevitable function of the body, which has strong elements of subjectivity, as it is perceived, given meaning and treated differently by each person and as a result, its study is of strong research interest.

5.2. Causes and Manifestations of Anxiety

Anxiety is part of people's daily lives and there are a number of changes that occur in their lives that may be a source of anxiety. Anxiety is divided into primary, when its cause is not obvious, and secondary, when its causes are due to physical, psychological or environmental stress (Αλεβίζος, 2008). The majority of people experience stressful situations daily both in the social and professional environment as well as in the family. There are not a few times when the individuals, trying to satisfy the needs and desires of themselves and others, are emotionally pressured. Family environment, potential personal misfortunes, lack of self-confidence, reduced quality time, high expectations, and economic crisis are just some of the stressors of the 21st century (Montgomery & Baldwin, 2007).

In more detail, stressful factors are divided into physical, mental and social. Physical stressors include noise, temperature fluctuations, injury, vigorous physical work, and hunger. Mental stressors are related to overload, fear of failure, lack of time and loss of control, while social stressors are related to conflicts, harassment, loss of trusted people and isolation (Seibold *et al.*, 2021).

Additionally, according to Cohen *et al.* (2007) stressors, which create pressure and obstacles to the individual's adaptation to new situations, stem from a dichotomy of individual characteristics and heredity or are due to purely environmental challenges, which can cause agitation and imbalance. In fact, according to Lazarus & Cohen (1977), stressful life events, due to environmental factors, can be classified into three (3) categories. The first category includes changes that may affect a large number of people, the second includes anxiety disorders, which refer to one or a few people, and the third includes all the difficulties of everyday life.

It is noteworthy that anxiety disorders constitute the most prevalent psychiatric conditions; large population-based samples suggest that as many as 33.7% of the population will develop an anxiety disorder across the lifespan (Bandelow & Michaelis, 2015). Anxiety disorders are characterized by unrealistic fears and anxieties

that cause mental discomfort. According to the DSM-V (as cited in Hooley *et al.*, 2020), these disorders include specific phobia, social phobia, obsessive-compulsive disorder, panic disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Also, it would be remiss not to mention that the concept of social anxiety refers to the concern experienced by the individual against social situations, which are perceived as threatening and thus the social situation can develop into an anxiety factor, as it threatens the individual's self-image, according to Schwarzer (Seibold *et al.*, 2021: p. 69).

According to Allman (Seibold *et al.*, 2021) people's anxiety mechanism is not set for today's life and often there is difficulty in escaping from today's stressful situations or struggling. Stressful factors set the biological mechanism in motion and the stressful reaction is distinguished on five (5) levels: cognitive functions, emotions, the neurophytic-hormonal system, the muscular system and behavior (Seibold *et al.*, 2021).

Epigrammatically, the cognitive effects of anxiety are the reduction of thinking and attention, the reduction of objectivity, critical and creative thinking, while there is an increase in the frequency of stress. In relation to emotions, due to anxiety hypochondria increases, self-esteem suffers, there is a feeling of helplessness and personality traits are likely to change. Then, in terms of the neurophytic-hormonal system as well as the muscular one, anxiety manifests itself with a drier mouth, a lump in the throat, shortness of breath, tightness in the chest, sweating, nausea, sleep disorders, fatigue but also with a stiff posture, teeth chattering, pains on the back, nervous movements, etc. Last but not least, when the person experiences intense anxiety, the effects observed in behavior are related to decreased interests and lack of enthusiasm, previously important persons are ostracized, speech problems increase, strange behavior patterns appear, while problems are solved superficially and an attitude of apathy is often created towards in the stressful factor (Seibold *et al.*, 2021).

Therefore, it is understood that the causes that cause anxiety are varied and multifactorial and the manifestation of anxiety seems to affect the overall behavior, attitude and quality of life of a person. In fact, the more continuous and long-term anxiety affects a person, the more drastic are its consequences.

5.3. Consequences of Anxiety

Continuous and prolonged stress can have harmful effects on humans, disrupting their immune system and predispose them to certain diseases (Lyon, 2000). According to Sarafino & Smith (2010) the association between illness and stress can arise both directly and indirectly through the changes, caused by stress in the functioning of organs and affecting human habits and behaviors such as, for example, diet, sleep, alcohol abuse and smoking. For example, people often, due to stress, eat more than the feeling of satiety allows, either because the latter occurs later due to tension, or because food seeks relaxation. As a consequence, weight problems come (Seibold *et al.*, 2021). Similarly, the relaxing effect of alcohol and smok-

ing are pursued by many people to reduce stress, while putting their health at risk and leading to opposite results in the long run.

Anxiety not only affects people physically but can have psychological and behavioral influences. Due to constant stress, the person may become nervous and restless internally and find it difficult to relax. Deconstructive stress not only reduces the capacity for performance but leads to a decrease in general mental health and the person becomes more passive, fearful and aggressive.

Then, under the suffocation and pressure caused by anxiety, individuals are confronted with feelings of frustration, worry and even unhappiness. The more sustained and intense the person's exposure to anxiety, the more intense their emotional reactions are, and this accumulation of negative emotions gives the person the feeling that they are helpless, that they cannot react, making them feel exhausted (Vargas Rubilar & Oros, 2021). There is also a decrease in mental performance capacity, as high mental functions, let alone creativity, are affected by anxiety.

It is worth noting that according to Vester (Seibold et al., 2021: p. 91), the long-term consequences of stress are particularly serious when the person has no or minimal recreational phases, when the generated alarm readiness cannot be manifested by attack or flight, and when the symbolic transformation of alarm readiness itself is not possible.

Anxiety can also have positive consequences, referring to constructive anxiety. More specifically, according to Strollreiter et al. (Seibold et al., 2021) anxiety often guarantees quick ability to act and make quick decisions without reflection and sets in motion and alertness learning processes, leading to increased effort and progress. It also has the ability to mobilize the last reserves of our forces, while there are many times that excessive stress has protected people from overwork, as it acted as an indication to take a break. In other words, when stress exists to a normal degree, it is useful, as it motivates people to action and makes them work productively to achieve a goal (Ρούσσου, 2020).

In conclusion, stress has positive consequences, however, when fatigue signals are ignored and momentary-normal stress becomes permanent, then it leads to particularly negative consequences, which harm the person manifold.

5.4. Occupational Stress

In today's society, anxiety is related to work, as it is one of the most basic parts of modern human daily life. In the workplace, people collaborate, interact and produce a project together, which can cause stress in the worker (Στάγια & Ιορδανίδης, 2014).

Definitions of occupational stress and stress theories do not show significant differences. According to Lazarus & Folkman (1984), occupational stress refers to the disturbance of the balance between the cognitive, emotional and environmental systems by external factors. Also, Κάντας (1995) defines work/occupational stress as those stressful situations, which are related to work or caused by a specific

work situation. Accordingly, Βακόλα & Νικολάου (2019) refer to work stress as that reaction that many people have when they are under pressure in the workplace.

In addition, Cox (1985) refers to work stress as the result of the characteristics of the workplace that the individual finds themselves in, which exert pressure. According to Ρούσσου (2020), work stress is closely related to the individual's perception that there is an imbalance between abilities and needs, with the demands of the profession and can come as the result of a process where the stressful situations of a work environment accumulate.

When occupational demands and social rewards are reversed, employees face a crisis. According to Brooks & Leeper Piquero (1998) work stress arises both from the specific work demands and from the lack of work resources and the way each person reacts depends on whether they perceive a given situation as a threat or not.

Usually, people who are dedicated to their profession and feel that they will be appreciated for their work, feeling that they belong to the organization, do not show strong symptoms of stress even in case of excessive workload. On the contrary, when there are feelings of frustration and injustice, when costs and profits are not balanced and there are professional ups and downs, then employees are faced with stress and its negative consequences. Moreover, employees who feel able to control a stressful situation are less at risk of suffering the consequences of stress, while employees who behave passively and feel heteronomous become slaves to stress.

In conclusion, the perception of work-related stress does not have the same degree and intensity from all people and is differentiated based on the personal and social characteristics of the employees, the skills they have cultivated and the expectations that the individuals have from themselves and others from them. The art of avoiding unnecessary stress is to find the appropriate boundary between acceptance and change (Seibold *et al.*, 2021).

Teacher Anxiety

In the modern school reality, the role played by teachers is multifaceted and is not limited only to their teaching work within the classroom, but includes the interaction of many factors, such as educational changes, bureaucratic-procedural issues and communication relationships (Σπυρομήτρος & Ιορδανίδης, 2017).

Research data ranks the teaching profession in the list of the most stressful professions worldwide (Cranwell-Ward & Abbey, 2005). Anxiety constitutes a substantial liability for both employees and employers, particularly within the teaching profession (Jones-Rincon & Howard, 2019). Cancio *et al.* (2018) in their study found that low pay, constant changes in the education system and degraded building facilities are factors that cause stress and burnout. Accordingly, Antoniou *et al.* (2003) report that occupational stress occurs in professions related to health services, social services and humanitarian services, which include the teaching profession.

Teachers are called upon to take responsibility for the execution of their pedagogical work and, in addition to students, they must also interact with parents, their colleagues, their superiors and the wider society. They have a duty to identify learning dysfunctions and at the same time they must provide support not only to the learning but also to the more general needs of their students, such as psychosocial (Danilewitz, 2017).

Subsequently, according to Greenglass & Burke (2003), teaching can bring personal satisfaction, but at the same time it can be a stressful factor due to the increased demands from parents, colleagues and managers, but also due to issues related to the management of student behaviour, work overload, lack of recognition of achievements, role ambiguity, low sense of autonomy and level of conflict with students and colleagues. It is worth mentioning here that the role of the mentor in schools is important, as with the right guidance, support and cooperation, it can help teachers face the difficulties of their profession, improve their skills and reduce stress in the field of their work (Konstantopoulou et al., 2024).

In conclusion, it is perceived that the teaching profession is characterized to a large extent by emotional loading and a feeling of stress. Teachers are judged every day, both for their teaching work and for their role as role models towards their students, increasing the sense of responsibility towards their profession.

6. Conflictual Interpersonal Communication and Experiences of Anxiety: An Examination of Their Relationship

Conflicts are a natural and integral part of interpersonal relationships in human daily life and in fact, in every workplace there is a conflict-laden communication. Conflictual communication is due to basic psychological needs of people: to belong, to have our point of view heard, to be in control (Μαυροσκούφης, 2007). Depending on how conflictual communication is handled, it can have both positive and negative consequences. Possibly, one reason communication may become limited and less effective in more intense conflicts is that these interactions are permeated by a particular degree of anxiety (Seibold et al., 2021). High levels of anxiety reduce the complexity of human information processing during a conflict, and indeed, many cognitive and behavioral aspects of communication during conflict are affected by this tendency of anxiety to reduce the complexity of thought (Sillars & Parry, 1982). For example, Borah (1963) found that interpersonal negotiations were poorer under anxiety, due to a reduction in the parties' ability to perceive the thoughts, intentions, and motivations of others, thus giving space for anxiety to interfere with complex thinking.

In addition, a conflict becomes problematic when it remains unprocessed for a long time and affects subconsciously. An aggressive, irritating mood can easily develop between people, let alone between colleagues. The behavior of the person who feels affected by the conflict, is distinguished by delusion, irritability and logical argumentation in favor of his own position, and at the center there is an effort to logically remove the conflict, but insecurity, anger and anxiety play a subcon-

scious role (Seibold *et al.*, 2021).

Therefore, it is necessary for people to create a climate in which they are able to comfortably discuss conflict issues without excessive emotionality or harshness, thereby reducing stress-causing factors. In fact, the acceptance of the interlocutor without criticism, the authenticity of the thoughts and the recognition of everyone's feelings as unique, observing and paying attention to each other, without identifying and treating them with empathy are elements that contribute to the conduct of the communication (Διαμαντίδου, 2014) and as a result make it less conflict—charged.

In conclusion, it is understood that a conflictual communication both in an interpersonal relationship in the individual's personal life and in the professional area, if it is not handled properly and occurs constantly and in an intense way, can bring about negative consequences and be connected to situations of stress.

7. Research Rationale and Hypotheses Development

In the field of education, as a workplace, there is often conflict-laden communication and teachers experience situations of stress. According to relevant research, it seems that teachers have higher stress compared to other professional groups and show higher levels of stress compared to the general population (Hodge *et al.*, 1994). In fact, teachers, in today's era, are called to respond to often contradictory and conflicting expectations regarding the performance of their work, receiving intense pressure from many fronts such as parents, students, colleagues and the superior authority (Hargreaves, 1972, as cited in Βασιλόπουλος, 2012).

Through this research, the existence of confrontational communication in the interpersonal relationships of primary education teachers in Greece is examined, as well as its relationship with the experiences and stress situations of teachers. The present research, therefore, will contribute to strengthening the literature regarding the relationship of conflictual interpersonal communication with the experiences and stress situations found in the professional area of primary education schools in Greece. Similar research evidence with this specific correlation in Greece is limited. Starting from the examination of this relationship, future research can identify more clearly the ways of managing stress and conflictual communication, as well as the changes that need to be implemented in the education system, in order for the school environment to be a healthy and fair workplace.

The research hypotheses of the present study are summarized as follows:

1. Non-confrontational interpersonal communication is negatively correlated with stress experiences and distressing situations in the school workplace.
2. The levels of stress and the degree of conflictual communication of interpersonal relationships among teachers differ according to the years of service.
3. The levels of stress and the degree of conflictual communication of interpersonal relationships among teachers differ according to the work sector (public or private).

7.1. Research Methodology

7.1.1. Participants

Two hundred forty-eight (248) people, 207 women (83.5%), 40 men (16.1%) and one person who did not choose gender self-identification (0.4%), 18 years and older, participated in the survey during the period March - April 2024. All participants were primary school teachers. Moreover, the sample comes mainly from urban centers (74.6%) and is mainly employed in the public sector (69%). In terms of years of experience, 46% work in the education sector 11 - 20 years, 29.4% more than 21 years, 11.7% 1 - 5 years and 12.9% 6 - 10 years.

7.1.2. Procedure

The study protocol received approval from the Ethics Committee of the Harokopio University of Athens (4521/2018). The participants were initially informed about the voluntary nature of their participation in the research and provided informed consent to contribute to the research. They were assured that their answers are completely confidential and anonymous, while, at the same time, they were informed that the aim of the research was to capture the levels of stress experienced by teachers in their workplace and to evaluate the conflictual communication of their interpersonal relationships. They were presented with a series of statements and asked to read them carefully and indicate their degree of agreement, using a five-point scale (1 = Never to 5 = Very often).

7.1.3. Data Collection Instruments

The research conducted is quantitative and the data collection instrument used is the self-report questionnaire. The questionnaire was sent to the participants online, using Google Forms; it was distributed to primary schools and also sent personally to teachers. The use of the questionnaire was considered the most appropriate method, as it provides the possibility of collecting data from a large number of people, ensures the anonymity of the participants and due to the distance between the researcher and the respondents, the levels of reliability, validity and objectivity increase (Κυριαζή, 1999).

More specifically, the self-report questionnaire designed for the purposes of this research was based on the questionnaire of Blankenstein *et al.*, (as reported in Seibold *et al.*, 2021), which is a self-assessment of “experiential anxiety” and the questionnaire of Frese (as reported in Seibold *et al.*, 2021), according to which a detailed overview of the professional and private stressors of an individual can be derived. Having as a starting point these two (2) tools, their specific questions were utilized and to these were added some questions, designed appropriately for the needs of the present research, for the evaluation of conflictual interpersonal communication.

This questionnaire includes twenty-one (21) closed-ended questions, of which the first five (5) concern the individual-demographic-characteristics of the participants and their declaration of consent to the completion of the questionnaire. The remaining questions, which constitute the main part of the questionnaire, focus

on the subject of the survey and the measurement tools are summarized as follows:

Conflictual Interpersonal Communication. The specific scale was constructed for the needs of this research. The total of 6 sentences makes up the single Non-Conflictual Communication index (6 sentences, e.g. “In my work environment there are no conflicts and there is calmness.”, $\alpha = .721$). The sentence “Workload leads to conflicts among my colleagues.” used inverted.

Experiencing anxiety. For the assessment of experiential anxiety, suggestions from the tools developed by Blankenstein and Frese (as cited in Seibold et al., 2021) were used. The total ten sentences of the resulting scale constitute the single indicator Experience of Anxiety (10 sentences, e.g. “I often feel an inner worry that does not say to leave me”, $\alpha = .876$). The sentences “I feel calm in my workplace.” and “I can do my tasks without unexpected disturbances.” were used inverted.

Demographics. Data on the gender, place of residence, years of service and sector of employment of participants were requested.

The analyzes were performed using the IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 29) statistical package.

8. Results of the Study

According to the results of the analysis (see Table 1), a high negative correlation ($r = -.623$, $p < .001$) is observed between non-conflictual interpersonal communication (average = 3.41, S.D. = .68) and experiences of anxiety in primary school teachers (average = 3.30, S.D. = .83).

Table 1. Averages, standard deviations and correlation between stress experience and non-confrontational communication

<i>N</i> = 248	Average (S.D.)	1	2
1. Experiencing Stress	3.30 (.83)	1	
2. Non-Conflict Communication	3.41 (.68)	-.623**	1

** $p < .001$.

A One-Way ANOVA Variance Analysis was performed for stress experience and non-conflictual interpersonal communication (see Table 2). Based on the results, there are statistically significant differences between groups in terms of both the experience of anxiety ($F(3, 247) = 3.068$, $p = .029$) and the existence of non-conflictual interpersonal communication ($F(3, 247) = 5.933$, $p < .001$). Specifically, it was shown (Multiple Comparisons Test Bonferroni) that teachers with the longest experience (average = 3.13, S.D. = .75) experience less stress compared to those who have 11 - 20 years of experience (average = 3.65, S.D. = 1.12). Statistically significant differences are not observed between the other groups.

Table 2. Averages and standard deviations of experience of anxiety and non-confrontational communication based on years of service.

<i>N</i> = 248	1 - 5 years	6 - 10 years	11 - 20 years	More than 21 years	ANOVA (<i>F</i> , <i>df</i> , <i>p</i> value)
	(<i>n</i> = 29)	(<i>n</i> = 32)	(<i>n</i> = 114)	(<i>n</i> = 73)	
	Average (S.D.)	Average (S.D.)	Average (S.D.)	Average (S.D.)	
Experiencing Stress	3.34 ^{ab} (.77)	3.20 ^{ab} (.78)	3.65 ^b (1.12)	3.13 ^a (.75)	<i>F</i> (3, 247) = 3.068, <i>p</i> = .029
Non-Conflict Communication	3.43 ^a (.63)	3.33 ^{abc} (.56)	2.98 ^b (.91)	3.59 ^{ac} (.64)	<i>F</i> (3, 247) = 5.933, <i>p</i> < .001

Note: ^{a, b, c} Averages with different exponents show statistically significant differences at *p* level < .05.

Regarding non-confrontational interpersonal communication, teachers with 11 - 20 years of experience (average = 2.98, S.D. = .91) face more confrontational communication in their interpersonal relationships in their workplace compared to both teachers with the smallest (average = 3.43, S.D. = .63) and those with the longest experience (average = 3.59, S.D. = .64). Statistically significant differences are not observed between the other groups.

Table 3. Averages and standard deviations of stress experience and non-conflictual communication by employment sector.

<i>N</i> = 248	Public (<i>n</i> = 171)	Private (<i>n</i> = 77)	<i>t</i> (246)	<i>p</i>
	Average (S.D.)	Average (S.D.)		
Experiencing stress	3.15 (.72)	3.63 (.95)	-3.921	.001
Non-Conflictual Communication	3.46 (.61)	3.31 (.82)	1.459	.147

According to the results of the analysis (see **Table 3**), teachers employed in the private sector (average = 3.63, S.D. = .95) experience more intense stress compared to those employed in the public sector (average = 3.15, S.D. = .72) (*t* (246) = -3.921, *p* < .001). Statistically significant differences are not observed in the assessment of interpersonal communication (*p* = .147).

9. Discussion and Conclusions

Regarding the first research hypothesis, which studies the relationship of non-conflictual interpersonal communication with the experience of stress and dysphoric situations in the school workplace, taking into account the results of the analyses carried out, it seems that non-conflictual interpersonal communication shows a high negative correlation with the experience of stress, thus confirming this hypothesis. In other words, the more stress teachers experience, the more conflictual the communication between them, and conversely, less confrontational interpersonal communication is associated with less anxiety. This finding is confirmed by other studies, such as that of Μπρούζος (2011) on primary school teachers, which states that bad and conflictual relationships between teachers lead to stressful situations. Similarly, Πατσάλης & Παπουτσάκη (2010) cite conflicts and lack of communication with colleagues as stressors in teachers' work, while Παπαγεωργάκη (2021) points out that negative work climate and conflictual or

disrupted interpersonal communication in relationships between colleagues leads to a drop in morale and an increase in teachers' anxiety.

In addition, in a published postgraduate thesis of the University of Macedonia, which studies teachers' work-related stress factors, it is reported that the interpersonal communication of research subjects is usually negative, with disagreements and conflicts negatively affecting teachers, adding pressure and stress (Τσέτσος, 2017). The same is shown in the research of Σούγια (2018), where disruption of interpersonal relationships and increased anxiety are tightly linked to the existence of conflicts.

But also, outside Greece, according to the views of teachers who participated in the research of Göksoy & Argon (2016), conflictual communication between colleagues creates negative emotions such as frustration and anxiety, but also vice versa a person, who experiences intense anxiety, feels conflictual communication and relationships as threatening (Moberg, 2001).

According to Σαϊτης (2007), the mood of individuals shapes the climate prevailing in the workplace and many teachers believe that conflicts have negative consequences, thus negatively affecting their mood, manifesting anxiety, anger and inequality.

Therefore, it is perceived that teachers are often faced with conflictual communication in interpersonal relationships in their workplace, constituting a negative condition related to uncomfortable situations and experiences of stress.

Then, regarding the second research hypothesis that examines the differentiation of stress levels and the gradation of conflictual communication of interpersonal relationships between teachers according to years of service, the results of the present research indicate that teachers with more service experience less stress compared to those who have 11 - 20 years of experience and in fact the latter (teachers with 11 - 20 years of experience) experience communication as more conflictual in their interpersonal relationships in the workplace compared to both teachers with the least and those with the longest service. It seems, therefore, that teachers with 11 - 20 years of experience face more stress in the school workplace and feel communication in their interpersonal relationships as more conflictual compared to the rest of the teachers in the sample.

More in detail, regarding the increased levels of stress in teachers with 11 - 20 years of experience, the results of the present research contradict the research of Τάσκου (2012), in which, regarding the time of experience, it was found that teachers with more experience do not face lower or higher levels of stress and indeed, these findings are in line with other research in which it is not so much the age and personal factors that play an important role in increasing stress, but conditions and the workplace (Τάσκου, 2012). However, similar findings to the present research can be found in Laughlin's (1984) earlier research, according to which younger teachers—and therefore with less experience—present higher levels of stress compared to their older colleagues, a result that is also shown in other research (Albert, 2015).

Furthermore, in the research of Αθανασίου (2023), it was found that primary

school teachers belonging to the age group of 26 - 35 years show higher levels of stress compared to their colleagues belonging to the age group of 46 years and over, a finding similar in proportion to years of service in terms of the current result.

Continuing, regarding the relationship between years of service and the experience of interpersonal communication as conflictual, it appears that teachers with 11 - 20 years of service experience communication in their interpersonal relationships as more conflictual, without statistically significant differences being observed between the other groups. This result shows relevance to the research of Τσεκούρα (2022), in which the percentage of participants who stated that they observe conflicts in the working environment of the school, decreases as the age increases, leading to the conclusion that the younger teachers (under 50 years) are more likely to recognize the existence of conflicts between teachers.

However, it is worth noting that the workplace of educational organizations is an environment where frictions and disagreements inevitably arise between teachers, regardless of age and years of experience, which can often lead to conflictual relationships (Msila, 2012), which leads us to realize that all teachers should be trained in managing conflictual communication situations in their interpersonal relationships, so that they do not hinder their performance and satisfaction with the workplace. In fact, collaboration, effective communication, and sharing experiences among teachers contribute to lowering stress levels (Botirova *et al.*, 2024). The more teachers participate in supportive discussions with their colleagues, effectively addressing conflictual communication in their interpersonal relationships, feeling that they receive appropriate peer support, the more they feel psychological security and satisfaction from their work (Καφέτσιος *et al.*, 2006). Positive communication and relationships with students, colleagues, and the school community play a crucial role in reducing teacher stress. Supportive, collaborative interactions help buffer against burnout and enhance overall well-being (Conte *et al.*, 2024). While work overload, role conflict, and ambiguity increase burnout, supportive communication practices can reduce its impact (Omondi *et al.*, 2023). Such supportive communication not only provides emotional resources for coping with workplace stressors but also enhances individuals' sense of self-worth, thereby reducing the likelihood of stress and burnout (Ray & Miller, 1991).

Regarding the third research hypothesis, it was found that teachers working in the private sector experience more intense stress compared to those employed in the public sector. This can to some extent be supported by the fact that each employer in many cases has its own requirements, which can be more complex, and this often results in the teaching staff feeling more stressed. This finding also agrees with the research of Shivendra & Kumar (2016), according to which teachers working in private schools, experience more intense stress compared to those working in public schools. However, in Redina's (2015) research paper, teachers' responses to experiencing stress were similar whether they came from private or public education.

To summarize, through this research, it is understood that teachers often experience feelings of stress and discomfort in their workplace, with interpersonal communication between colleagues being characterized by a degree of conflict. As a result, it is important for teachers to be able to create a climate in which they can comfortably discuss issues of conflictual interpersonal communication, with respect and without harshness or excessive emotionality (Sillars & Parry, 1982), thus reducing to a certain extent the experience of stress and discomfort in their workplace. As teachers practice communicating with each other through meaningful dialogue, the stress they experience gradually decreases, building a solid and understanding relationship with their colleagues.

10. Research Limitations and Recommendations

The research conducted offered an enlightening picture regarding conflictual interpersonal communication, stress experiences and uncomfortable situations in the workplace of primary education teachers in Greece. The results of the research aspire to empirically enrich the topics of the already existing literature and contribute to a better understanding of the specific topic.

However, it must be mentioned that in this research there are some limitations. Conducting a larger-scale nationwide survey would contribute to a more thorough capture and generalization of the results regarding conflictual communication in interpersonal relationships, stress experiences and difficult situations experienced by teachers. Also, a qualitative or mixed methodological approach would be valuable, so that a deeper investigation of the topic would be possible.

In addition, of all teachers who participated in this study, the largest percentage were women, which to a certain extent is expected, as the educational work is mainly carried out by the female gender (Γιουβανάκη, 2017). However, it would also be interesting to correlate experiences of stress and discomfort in the workplace with the demographic characteristic of gender, as well as its correlation with the frequency of conflictual communication in interpersonal relationships.

Finally, given that teachers' conflictual interpersonal communication is a stressor factor for teachers, but also vice versa, and given that a large number of teachers experience stress daily, it would be useful for teachers to receive systematic training in managing conflictual communication situations and ways to manage stress, so that they feel safe and satisfied in their workplace.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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