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Strategic Planning Awareness, Problem Solving and Conflict Management Relationship on Medical Representatives

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Abstract: In this study, it is aimed to determine the mediating effect of conflict management (CAS) on the effect of strategic planning awareness (SPA) on problem solving (PS) of the Medical representatives (MR) working in pharmaceutical companies and to contribute the results to the strategic decision-making process of pharmaceutical company managers. In the study, it was aimed to determine the path analysis between variables with structural equation modeling. The sample of the study consists of 379 MRs between the ages of 24-50 working in pharmaceutical companies in Turkiye. The questionnaire, which includes the CAS, PS, SPA Scales and socio-demographic characteristics in the international literature. In the path analysis model with the variables observed in this study, it was determined that the effect of the Perception dimension, one of the sub-dimensions of SPA, on the Compromise and Confrontational sub-dimensions of CAS sub-dimensions was not significant, while all other direct effects were significant. In mediating effects; Knowledge variable affects PS variable negatively through Avoidant and Coercive variables, while it affects it positively through Facilitative and Confrontational variables. The perception variable positively affects the PS variable through the Avoidant and Coercive variables, while it negatively affects it through the Facilitative variable

Keywords: *Medical representative, Pharmaceutical representative, Strategic planning, Problem solving, Conflict management.*

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Introduction

“Pharmaceutical companies”, which are included in the category of health services within the health industry, are elements that are not addressed as frequently as hospitals in health management but have an important place (Odabaşı, 1994). Pharmaceutical companies have strategic importance due to their unique characteristics such as their contribution to the national economy and employment, their importance in terms of public health and the sustainability of healthy life. For this reason, it is necessary to adopt the strategic management approach from the top management and ensure that all employees adopt it (Leventeli and İncaz, 2021; Azak Sungur et al, 2023). Pharmaceutical companies have a large number of generic human medicinal products as well as original human medicinal products. According to the legislation, medical representatives, or “Product Promotion Representatives (PPR)” as they are called in the legislation in our country, who are involved in the promotion of all these products, i.e. marketing and sales in general, can only be in contact with health professionals such as physicians, dentists, pharmacists, etc. In order to communicate with this highly educated target group, PPRs are expected to be highly qualified. In addition to the qualification certificate issued by the Ministry of Health after training and examination, which is necessary for them to be able to perform this profession, it is also expected that the HCWs will be successful in the trainings received and reflect the gains they have gained from these trainings to the field. (Düzcü, Akyol, Sancar 2017). For this reason, their performance is evaluated monthly, quarterly, semi-annually and annually, depending on the pharmaceutical company. In these evaluations, it is thought to be important to measure “problem solving, conflict management, strategic planning awareness”, which are considered important for the sector where intense competition is experienced and which are some of the characteristics that should be possessed in such professions in the literature (Başdeğirmen, 2019). In this study, it is aimed to determine the mediating effect of conflict management on the effect of strategic planning awareness on problem solving of the 24-50 years old PPRs/medical representatives (MR) working in pharmaceutical companies in Türkiye and to contribute the results to the strategic decision-making process of pharmaceutical company managers.

Literature Review

Strategic Planning

Pharmaceutical companies should focus on strategy-making and infrastructure development to enhance performance, as it impacts diverse stakeholder groups like patients, health professionals, media, regulators, and the public, and the success or failure of strategy-making impacts health system policy (Abolfazli et al, 2019).

The health and pharmaceutical sector demands a strategic management approach to adapt to rapid environmental changes, enabling efficient resource use and strategic goals planning (Salepçioğlu & Bayram, 2020).

Strategic planning (SP) is crucial for organizations to gain a competitive advantage and achieve success, especially in the highly competitive pharmaceutical sector. The first studies on strategy and SP were conducted by Ansoff (1965), Andrews (1971), Porter (1981, 1991), Mintzberg (1978, 1990), Hamel and Prahalad (1993). Top management's strategies serve as a business roadmap that requires constant control and renewal (Martinsuo et al., 2024 Gurcaylilar-Yenidogan, & Gul, 2021). To ensure successful implementation of Strategic Planning (SP), it must be perceived correctly by all employees, planning team, and top management (Sandhu et al., 2024). Creating awareness about SP among employees will lead to the expected success of this management tool (Palupiningtyas et al., 2024; Çubukçu et al.,

2024). The success of strategically important businesses such as pharmaceutical companies is closely related to the effective use of strategies, plans, programs and tactics (Alzuod, 2024).

Awareness of strategic planning can be examined in two basic dimensions that show how much an individual or institution knows what strategic planning is, why it is yielding and how it is implemented, and how it approaches this planning: the knowledge dimension and the perception dimension (Yakut, Korkmazyürek, 2012):

Information Dimension of Strategic Planning

The knowledge dimension refers to the extent to which a person or institution has a good command of theoretical knowledge and process knowledge related to strategic planning. The knowledge dimension of strategic planning includes knowing the following elements: Knowledge of the basic concepts of strategic planning such as vision, mission, goal, SWOT analysis, strategic objectives; to know the stages of preparation, analysis, strategy development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation in the strategic planning process; to know why this process is important and how it contributes to the success of the organization; To know the short, medium and long-term effects of strategic planning (Kumar, 2024).

The information dimension can be explained by the capacity of businesses to accurately analyze and evaluate their current conditions (e.g., the dynamics of the rapidly changing health sector) and the resources they have (financial, human resources, etc.). In pharmaceutical companies, senior managers, marketing and sales teams are often knowledgeable about strategic planning (Tiwari et al., 2024). Competitive market, regulations, R&D investments and relations with health authorities necessitate strategic planning (Stephen, 2025). But in terms of medical representatives, the situation may change. Agents who often focus on operational goals in the field may have limited knowledge of the company's long-term strategic plans, as they are not directly involved in this type of planning (Al-Assaf et al., 2024). In order to increase the size of information, it is important to share trainings, internal communication activities and strategic goals more transparently.

The Perception Dimension of Strategic Planning

The perception dimension includes personal attitudes, biases, or positive/negative opinions about strategic planning. In addition, understanding the importance of strategic planning and adapting to change is possible with a high level of perception on this issue. High awareness is crucial to adapt flexibly and quickly to changing environmental conditions (Yakut, Korkmazyürek, 2012). If a person has knowledge about strategic planning, but there is a perception that strategic planning is unnecessary or dysfunctional, then the perception dimension is low. The perception dimension of strategic planning includes the following elements: how necessary and useful strategic planning is, general belief in whether strategic planning adds value to the organization, trust and motivation in this process (Vandersmissen et al., 2024).

In terms of perception, pharmaceutical companies often see strategic planning as a necessity and an element of success. For this reason, the perception dimension is usually high (Tetteh et al., 2024). The perception of medical representatives, on the other hand, may vary depending on the situation and conditions. When strategic planning is not directly reflected in their day-to-day work in the field, or when it is simply felt as target pressure, agents may see strategic planning as abstract, distant, or unnecessary. This reduces the size of perception. If the company makes agents feel like they are part of the strategic plan and incorporates their feedback into the process, this perception dimension can increase (BinDhim, et al., 2024). In order to strengthen the perception dimension, it can be explained how strategic plans contribute

to the field, the participation of medical representatives in the process can be supported and feedback can be given about the results obtained.

In Türkiye's pharmaceutical industry, where generic drugs dominate, companies need to understand strategic planning awareness (SPA) to gain an edge over competitors. Companies measure SPA and MR skills using aptitude tests like the Myers-Briggs Personality Inventory and recruit suitable individuals. MRs make daily plans, plan weekly and monthly, and conduct personal sales visits to physicians and pharmacists (Özbucak Albar, 2024). Medical representatives (MR) emphasize the importance of SPA in planning and managing plans effectively. They believe that central management has expectations for their planning. The study reveals that MRs are trained on how to manage interviews and make plans in advance, from opening the subject in interviews to giving messages and closing the interview. This approach ensures high realization rates (Petek, 2021). Geographical information system, IQVIA and applications/systems where companies plan their own visits and enter the realized visits into the system are used in these plans (Çolak, Nişancı, 2010). The high level of importance of SP for the health sector in a broad context where change is intensely experienced with digitalization is once again emerging.

Problem Solving

Problem solving involves multidimensional thinking, determining the right solutions, choosing the most suitable one, and making decisions (Tezel et al., 2009). Problem solving ability is an important entrepreneurial trait (Gibb, 1987; Kleiner & Roth, 1997; Young & Sexton, 1997; Deakins & Freel 1998). Problem-solving skills are crucial for quality, efficiency, and competence in organizations. In the pharmaceutical industry, training programs foster these skills, enhancing teamwork and division of labor, and increasing success within teams (Mete, 2011). In addition, maintenance reliability, information reliability and preventive conflict management directly affect customer orientation and customer satisfaction. It indirectly affects customer loyalty through customer satisfaction (Ndubisi, 2012).

Human resources are crucial in the pharmaceutical sector, especially for personal selling. Qualified medical representatives (MRs) are essential for representing the organization and gaining a competitive advantage. MRs should possess problem-solving and problem-solving (PS) skills for rational thinking, planning, and goal achievement. Some pharmaceutical companies include problem-solving skills in recruitment competencies using methods like “General Aptitude Tests and Competency-Based Interviews” (Kocabacak, 2011; Petek, 2021). Skills such as problem solving, communication, conflict management, individual development and motivation are of great importance for effective management.

SPA adapts to goals. With this awareness, the team solves problems that align with the company's priorities. SPA allows to see the big picture, analyzes not only the technical but also the strategic aspects of the problems. In addition, it provides data-based thinking, flexible and adaptive thinking, and develops solutions according to KPIs and performance indicators in problem solving. Solutions are flexible in line with the strategy. Cross-departmental cooperation works in harmony with other teams in line with common strategic goals (Veríssimo et al., 2024).

Conflict Management

Conflict arises from disagreements in relationships due to contradicting behaviors or values, and well-managed conflicts can yield valuable results for individuals, organizations, and relationships (Johnson, 1981; Prutzman et al., 1988; Johnson & Johnson, 2003). In conflict management literature, CAS are generally considered as a five-dimensional structure (Johnson

& Johnson, 2008; Karadağ & Tosun, 2014). The five conflict styles are avoidant, coercive, facilitative, compromising, and confrontational. The avoidant style avoids conflict, prioritizing one's own interests and disregarding the other's. The facilitative style sacrifices for the other party's, while the compromising style seeks mutual compromise. The confrontational style focuses on creative solutions, defending both parties' interests. These styles are influenced by an individual's personality traits, experiences, and current situation, and vary depending on the conflict.

The Myers-Briggs Personality Inventory (MBTI) is a tool used in conflict management, particularly in the pharmaceutical industry. Effective conflict management is crucial for MRs to effectively communicate their message and make sales. They need to recognize emotions, handle them constructively, display a decisive attitude, and be assertive to solve problems effectively. Psychology plays a significant role in managing organizations and solving managerial problems (Kocabacak, 2011).

A study in Lagos State, Nigeria, found no significant relationship between conflict management and organizational performance in pharmaceutical companies. The study suggests that poor conflict management can weaken employee performance, create stress, and distract them from focusing on goals and priorities. Previous studies have found that conflict management has a positive impact, with strategies like adaptation, compromise, and collaboration having positive effects. However, avoidance and competition strategies have a negative impact. The study recommends pharmaceutical companies invest in developing ICT tools, organizing seminars and workshops on conflict management, and creating a comprehensive business policy implementing a contemporary conflict management approach across all departments (Olubiyi et al, 2024).

The pharmaceutical industry's sales-oriented approach, intense work, competitive conditions, economic uncertainties, and job and future concerns can lead to stress and anxiety among MRs (Petek, 2021). MRs under stress must manage conflict effectively to promote products through visits to physicians, dentists, and pharmacists, as per legislation (Regulation on Promotional Activities of Medicinal Products for Human Use, 2015). MRs communicate with educated individuals like physicians, dentists, and pharmacists, but also reach diverse educational levels and competitors. Effective conflict management is crucial for team communication, and this study aims to measure conflict management, SPA, and problem-solving skills.

Strategic planning is a management practice developed to provide solutions to potential future problems in organizations. It is aimed for institutions to anticipate future opportunities and threats, identify their strengths and weaknesses, and plan accordingly. This way, potential conflicts are also prevented. Or, from the opposite perspective, conflict management can contribute to the realization of the institution's strategic plans. Because conflict management can lead to new ideas, effective conflict management can combine strengths with opportunities, increasing positive aspects and reducing negatives (Yelkikalan, 2006). To manage conflict, problem-solving strategies are necessary. Effective problem-solving skills involve positive emotions and lead to an emotionally similar approach to conflict management (Rahim et al, 2018).

The relationship between conflict management and problem-solving is also present in the literature. Teaching the adoption of a problem-solving approach in interpersonal conflict situations can enhance individuals' abilities to cope more effectively with conflict and other normative life stressors. The development of conflict resolution skills regulates maladaptive interpersonal problem-solving skills (Colsman & Wulfert, 2002).

In the literature, no study has been found that uses these three variables together. The importance of these variables in the pharmaceutical sector has been mentioned in the literature. The absence of a study in Türkiye examining these variables in the pharmaceutical sector indicates that the research aims to fill this gap in the field as an original and niche study.

Conflict management can improve organizational performance by improving the quality of communication, supporting psychological safety, and nurturing a positive organizational culture. When employees are comfortable expressing their ideas, this environment increases creativity and problem-solving capacity. Healthy conflict management processes strengthen the perception of justice and equality within the organization (Badriyah et al., 2024).

Methodology

Purpose of the Study

In this study, it is planned to determine the mediating role of conflict management in the effect of strategic planning awareness level of medical representatives between the ages of 24-50 working in pharmaceutical companies in Türkiye on problem solving and all these results are planned to contribute to the strategic decision-making process of pharmaceutical company managers.

Method of the Study

This study was conducted using descriptive research technique, one of the quantitative research methods, and a fully structured interview form was used in the interviews. In the study, it was aimed to determine the path analysis between variables with structural equation modeling.

Population and Sample of the Study

The population of the study consisted of the PPT/MRs responsible for medicinal products for human use working in pharmaceutical companies in Türkiye. The sample consisted of 379 PPT/ MRs between the ages of 24-50 working in pharmaceutical companies in Türkiye. The sample size was calculated according to Bartlett et al.

Assumptions and Limitations of Research

PPTs who are involved in the promotion and sale of non-pharmaceutical products such as food supplements other than medicinal products for human use and who do not require a qualification certificate were not included in the study. Only PPTs between the ages of 24-50 were included in the study.

Data Collection Tools

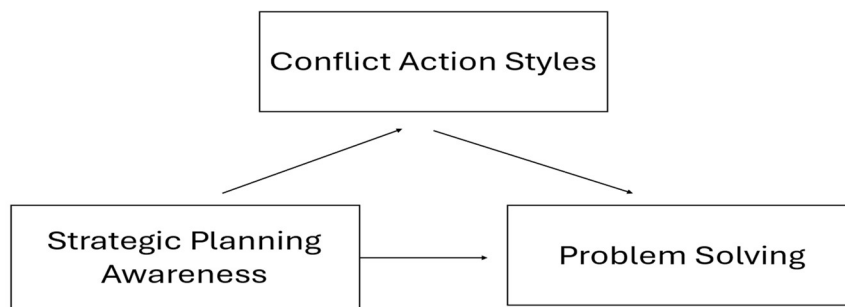
Conflict Action Styles Scale (Johnson & Johnson, 2008; Karadağ & Tosun, 2014), Problem Solving Inventory Scale (Çınar et al., 2018) and Strategic Planning Awareness Scale (Yakut, Korkmazyürek, 2012) were used in the questionnaire prepared in accordance with the purpose of the study. The questionnaire, which includes socio-demographic characteristics in the first part, consists of four sections and 73 items in total. All of these scales are available in open access. After the pilot study and data analysis, the final version of the questionnaire was created and then approved by Istanbul Medipol University Non-Interventional Clinical Research Ethics Committee on 15/09/2023 with the number E-10840098-772.02-5833. The data were collected between October 2023 and July 2024 as a result of the application of the questionnaire on the online platform through Google Forms by snowball sampling method. At the beginning of the survey, participants were informed that their data would not be shared with third parties and informed consent was obtained.

Research Model

In the research model, the mediating effect of Conflict Action Styles (CAS) on the effect of Strategic Planning Awareness (SPA) on Problem Solving (PS) of Strategic Planning Awareness of medical representatives working in pharmaceutical companies in Turkiye was investigated (Figure 1).

In mediation, a mediator variable, which is an intermediate variable, is considered to help explain how or why an independent variable affects an outcome. For example, in the context of a treatment study, it can be used to identify the mechanisms through which an intervention exerts its effects. By investigating the mediation processes that clarify how the treatment reaches its outcome, we not only advance our understanding of the disease's pathology and treatment mechanisms but also identify alternative, more effective intervention strategies. Mediation helps explain how an intervention affects an outcome and assumes both causal and temporal relationships (Gunzler et al, 2013). Therefore, in this study, structural equation modeling and mediation effect have been preferred. Based on the information shared in the literature, and considering the unique dynamics of the pharmaceutical sector, the model was developed with feedback from expert managers in the field, where Conflict Action Styles was chosen as the mediating variable. Strategic Planning Awareness is the independent variable, while Problem Solving is the dependent variable (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Research Model



Data Analysis

Data from 379 participants were evaluated using an SEM framework via SPSS and AMOS (version 25.0). Following the calculation of percentage-based descriptive statistics for participant demographics and employment backgrounds, the measurement model was assessed. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses were applied to the partially adapted SPA and PS scales, whereas only a CFA was required for the fully adopted CAS scale. The study verified measurement robustness through Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and AVE, alongside discriminant validity checks to confirm construct independence. After confirming normal distribution via skewness and kurtosis metrics, the final structural model was executed to determine whether CAS mediates the impact of SPA on PS.

Results

Demographic characteristics of the sample

Of the participants, 77.6% were male, 53.3% were in the 31-37 age group, 80.7% were married, 88.9% had a bachelor's degree, 51.2% had 6-10 years of professional experience, and 70.2% had an income of 30.001 and over (Table 1).

Table 1: Percentage distribution of demographic characteristics of the sample

		n	%
Gender	Female	85	22,4%
	Male	294	77,6%
Age	24-30	57	15,0%
	31-37	202	53,3%
	38-44	91	24,0%
	45-50	29	7,7%
Marital Status	Single	68	17,9%
	Married	306	80,7%
	Other	5	1,3%
Education	University-Undergraduate	337	88,9%
	Master Degree	40	10,6%
	Doctoral Candidate	2	0,5%
Experience	0-5 year	69	18,2%
	6-10 year	194	51,2%
	11 year and over	116	30,6%
Income (Turkish Lira-TL)	19.000-25.000	51	13,5%
	25.001- 30.000	62	16,4%
	30.001 and over	266	70,2%

Source: Authors own work

Factor Analyses for Scales in the Model

The evaluation strategy for the measurement models varied depending on how the scales were deployed in the survey. Because the Strategic Planning Awareness (SPA) Scale and the Problem-Solving (PS) Scale only utilized partial components (specifically, the knowledge/perception dimensions for SPA and the PS Skills sub-dimension for PS), both exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) were executed. Conversely, because the Conflict Action Styles (CAS) Scale was administered in its complete five-dimensional format, it was evaluated using only CFA. Model adequacy and the validity of the measurement instruments were established relying on the relative Chi-square ratio (χ^2/df), supplementary goodness-of-fit statistics, and the standardized residual covariance matrix (Bayram, 2013).

Factor Analysis for the Strategic Planning Awareness (SPA) Scale

An initial EFA was conducted on the 21 items comprising the SPA scale. The dataset met the prerequisites for factorability, demonstrating a KMO value of .931 and a statistically significant Bartlett's test ($p < 0.05$). Three items (3, 6, and 12) were discarded due to insufficient factor loadings. The remaining 18 items successfully grouped into two distinct dimensions—Knowledge and Perception—with loading ranges between .612 and .899. This two-factor structure explained 62.11% of the total variance. A subsequent CFA corroborated the EFA findings, yielding standardized loadings between .610 and .920, which confirmed the SPA scale's validity for this sample.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis for the Conflict Action Styles (CAS) Scale

The structural integrity of the 35-item, five-dimensional CAS scale was directly tested using CFA. Items failing to achieve a minimum factor loading threshold of 0.50 (items 2, 4, 5, 9, 11, 16, 18, and 30) were removed from the analysis. The 27 retained items exhibited acceptable standardized loadings ranging from .61 to .84. Overall goodness-of-fit metrics indicated that the modified CAS model remained within acceptable parameters.

Factor Analysis for the Problem-Solving (PS) Scale

An EFA was applied to the 11 items representing problem-solving confidence within the PS Skills sub-dimension. Sampling adequacy was robust ($KMO = .901$, Bartlett's test $p < 0.05$). Due to weak correlations, items 1, 4, and 9 were excluded. The finalized 8-item instrument formed a single unidimensional structure, displaying factor loadings between .662 and .913 and accounting for 60.79% of the total variance. A follow-up CFA verified this single-factor model with loadings between .66 and .93, confirming the reliability of the PS scale in this context.

Convergent and Discriminant Validity Evaluation

Construct validity was assessed using composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) metrics derived from the CFA standard loadings. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), convergent validity is supported when CR scores exceed 0.70 and AVE values are at least 0.50 (or $AVE \geq 0.40$ provided that $CR \geq 0.70$).

Internal consistency was robust across all primary instruments: Cronbach's alphas were .901 for SPA, .745 for CAS, and .848 for PS. At the sub-dimension level, the SPA components showed high reliability (.912 for Knowledge; .893 for Perception). The CAS sub-dimensions also demonstrated strong consistency: Avoidance (.739), Coercive (.707), Facilitative (.802), Conciliatory (.713), and Confrontational (.706).

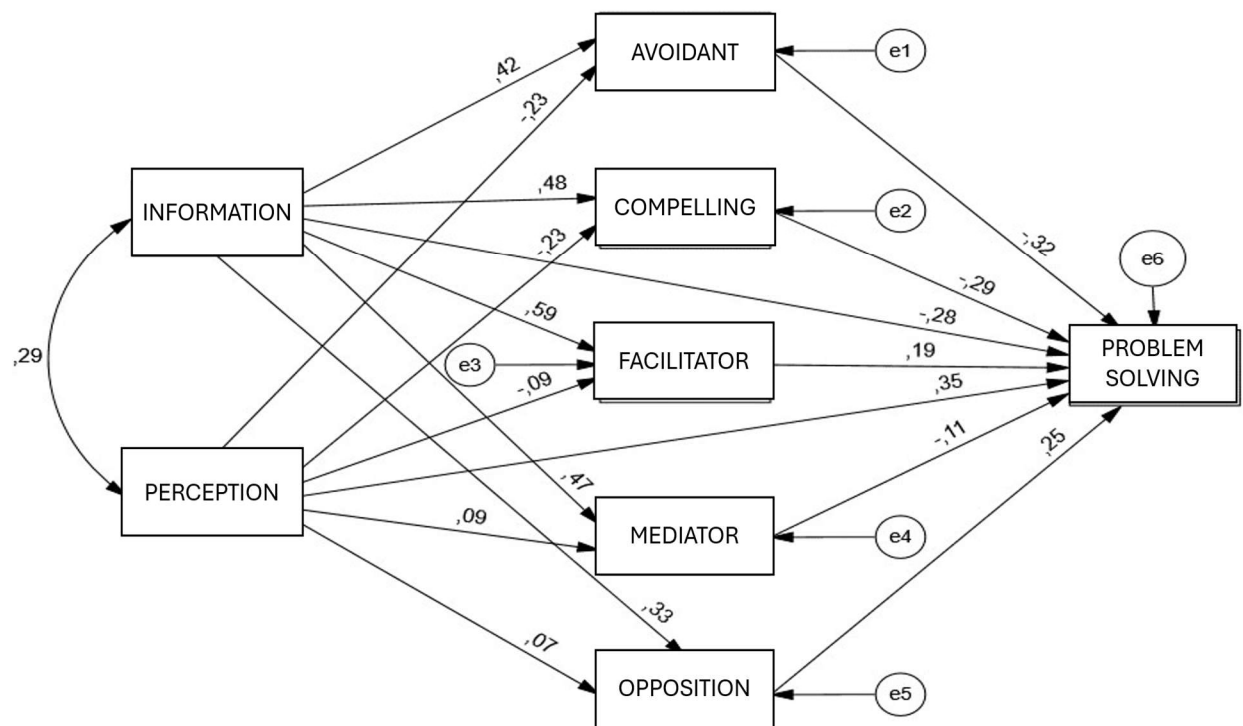
Furthermore, the overall CR scores for the main constructs were .910 (SPA), .755 (CAS), and .832 (PS). Because all sub-dimensional CR values surpassed the 0.70 threshold, the calculated AVE scores ($AVE \geq 0.40$) fulfilled the necessary condition for convergent validity. Discriminant validity was similarly confirmed, as the square root of the AVE for each respective construct (indicated in parentheses) exceeded the inter-construct correlation values in the corresponding rows and columns.

Structural Equation Modeling and Path Analysis

In large-sample structural equation models ($n > 200$), the Chi-square (χ^2) statistic tends to inflate, frequently producing significant p-values. As a result, model adequacy was primarily evaluated using the degrees of freedom-corrected Chi-square metric (χ^2/df), standardized residual covariances, and alternative fit indices (Bayram, 2013).

Models evaluating mediator or moderator variables form the conceptual foundation of structural equation modeling and operate as targeted structural pathways. The theoretical model depicted in Figure 2 was tested via path analysis utilizing AMOS software (version 25.0) (Kline, 2005). To accurately determine the statistical significance of indirect effects, a bootstrapping procedure utilizing 5,000 resamples to generate a 95% Confidence Interval (CI) was applied. This resampling approach is currently preferred over the traditional Sobel test, as it bypasses the strict assumption of multivariate normality (Preacher & Hayes, 2004, 2008).

Figure 2: Mediator Model Path Analysis with Observed Variables (Bootstrap n=5000)



Source: Authors own work

In Figure 3, the variables of structural equation modeling are presented in summary form along with their sub-dimensions.

Figure 3: Summary of Structural Equation Modeling with Subdimensions



Source: Authors own work

To determine if the data met the assumption of normality, skewness and kurtosis metrics were evaluated for all constructs in the research model. As detailed in Table 2, these coefficients fell strictly within the acceptable thresholds of -1.5 to +1.5, confirming a normal distribution. Consequently, the maximum likelihood (ML) technique was adopted to estimate the parameters within the structural model.

Table 2: Skewness and kurtosis coefficients for variables included in the model

Variables	Minimum	Maximum	Skewness	Kurtosis
Strategic Planning Awareness Scale				
Information	1,44	5,00	-1,415	1,263
Perception	1,00	5,00	-,601	1,207
Conflict Action Styles Scale				
Avoidant	1,40	5,00	-,789	,138
Compelling	2,20	5,00	-1,067	,469
Facilitator	2,00	5,00	-1,450	1,490
Mediator	1,67	5,00	-1,288	1,482
Opposition	2,33	5,00	-1,274	1,453
Problem Solving Scale				
Problem Solving	2,86	5,00	,623	-,750

Source: Authors own work

The primary objective of the structural model was to examine how Conflict Action Styles (CAS) mediates the relationship between Strategic Planning Awareness (SPA) and Problem-Solving (PS). Given that the SPA construct comprises two sub-dimensions and the CAS construct includes five, a comprehensive set of ten distinct mediation pathways was hypothesized and tested, as illustrated in Figure 2. The structural analysis yielded a statistically significant model, evidenced by a Chi-square (χ^2) value of 29.37 and a relative Chi-square (χ^2/df) of 2.937 ($p < 0.05$). Furthermore, the overall goodness-of-fit indicators—specifically GFI (.954), CFI (.967), SRMR (.00672), and RMSEA (.0733)—confirmed that the model falls well within acceptable threshold limits. Finally, Table 3 outlines the corresponding regression parameters, while Table 4 provides an in-depth statistical breakdown of the ten mediation hypotheses.

Table 3: Significance test of direct effect regression coefficients in the model

Indepen dent		Dependent	Coefficient	Std.coefficient	Z	P	Hypothesis
INF	→	AVI	,471	,419	8,572	***	Accept
INF	→	CMP	,443	,477	10,062	***	Accept
INF	→	FCL	,574	,588	13,316	***	Accept
INF	→	MDT	,414	,467	10,032	***	Accept

Indepen dent		Dependent	Coefficient	Std.coefficient	Z	P	Hypothesis
INF	→	OPS	,245	,335	6,682	***	Accept
PRC	→	AVI	-,315	-,226	-4,627	***	Accept
PRC	→	CMP	-,267	-,233	-4,903	***	Accept
PRC	→	FCL	-,115	-,095	-2,144	,032 *	Accept
PRC	→	MDT	,098	,089	1,911	,056	Reject
PRC	→	OPS	,062	,068	1,366	,172	Reject
AVI	→	PS	-,210	-,321	-8,221	***	Accept
CMP	→	PS	-,227	-,286	-7,125	***	Accept
FCL	→	PS	,146	,194	4,502	***	Accept
MDT	→	PS	-,094	-,114	-2,767	,006 **	Accept
OPS	→	PS	,249	,249	6,533	***	Accept
INF	→	PS	-,208	-,283	-5,019	***	Accept
PRC	→	PS	,319	,350	8,804	***	Accept

*** $p < 0,001$ ** $p < 0,01$ * $p < 0,05$

Source: Authors own work

Table 3 presents the direct regression coefficients derived from the path analysis model. With the exception of the Perception dimension's non-significant influence on the Conciliatory and Confrontational conflict styles ($p > 0.05$), all other direct relationships tested in the model demonstrated statistical significance ($p < 0.05$). Specifically, the findings reveal:

- *Impact of Knowledge (INF)*: This sub-dimension exhibited significant, positive relationships across all five CAS variables: Avoidance ($\beta = .419$), Coercive ($\beta = .477$), Facilitative ($\beta = .588$), Conciliatory ($\beta = .467$), and Confrontational ($\beta = .335$). Conversely, its direct effect on the Problem-Solving construct was significant but negative ($\beta = -.283$). All of these associations were significant at the $p < 0.05$ level.
- *Impact of Perception (PRC)*: The Perception factor negatively and significantly influenced the Avoidance ($\beta = -.226$), Coercive ($\beta = -.233$), and Facilitative ($\beta = -.095$) styles. As previously noted, its effects on the Conciliatory ($\beta = .089$) and Confrontational/Responder ($\beta = .068$) variables were statistically non-significant. On the other hand, Perception exerted a strong, positive, and significant effect on Problem-Solving ($\beta = .350$, $p < 0.05$).
- *Impact of CAS on Problem-Solving*: Analysis of the mediating variables showed that the Avoidance ($\beta = -.321$), Coercive ($\beta = -.286$), and Conciliatory ($\beta = -.114$) styles each negatively and significantly impacted Problem-Solving capabilities. In contrast,

both the Facilitative ($\beta = .194$) and Confrontational ($\beta = .249$) styles yielded positive and significant effects on Problem-Solving (all $p < 0.05$).

Table 4: Significance test of indirect effect hypotheses (mediation) included in the model

	Coefficient	Min	Max	P	Hypothesis
INF→AVI→PS	-,099	-,140	-,063	,001**	Acceptance
INF→CMP→PS	-,100	-,150	-,062	,001**	Acceptance
INF→FCL→PS	,084	,034	,140	,009**	Acceptance
INF→MDT→PS	-,039	-,079	,000	,099	Rejection
INF→OPS→PS	,061	,030	,103	,001**	Acceptance
PRC→AVI→PS	,066	,034	,107	,001**	Acceptance
PRC→CMP→PS	,061	,030	,103	,001**	Acceptance
PRC→FCL→PS	-,047	-,062	-,013	,042*	Acceptance
PRC→MDT→PS	-,009	-,030	,000	,097	Rejection
PRC→OPS→PS	,016	-,009	,046	,279	Rejection

Source: Authors own work

Besides the direct relationships within the research model, the intermediary influences of CAS on the association between SPA and PS were explored. Table 4 presents the significance testing for these indirect pathways. Consequently:

- The structural assessment revealed a significant negative indirect influence of the Knowledge variable on PS via the Avoidance variable ($\beta = -.099$; $p < 0.05$). Consequently, the Avoidant dimension functions as a partial mediator in this relationship, meaning the Knowledge variable inversely impacts the PS variable through the Avoidant mechanism.
- It was observed that the indirect linkage from the Knowledge variable to the PS variable through the Coercive variable is significant and negative ($\beta = -.100$; $p < 0.05$). Thus, the Challenging factor acts as a partial mediator here, with the Knowledge variable affecting the PS variable in the opposite direction by way of the Challenging dimension.
- The indirect pathway connecting the Knowledge variable to the PS variable via the Facilitator variable proved to be significant and positive ($\beta = .084$; $p < 0.05$). As a result, the Facilitator dimension provides partial mediation, indicating that the Knowledge variable positively shapes the PS variable through this specific route.
- Analysis of the indirect effect from the Knowledge variable to the PS variable mediated by the Conciliator variable showed no statistical significance ($\beta = -.039$; $p > 0.05$). Therefore, the Reconciling construct fails to mediate the relationship between the Knowledge variable and the PS variable.

- A significant positive indirect association was detected from the Knowledge variable to the PS variable operating through the Confrontational variable ($\beta=.061$; $p<0,05$). This implies that partial mediation occurs via the Confrontational dimension, where the Knowledge variable positively influences the PS variable through this path.
- The indirect influence of the Perception variable on the PS variable operating through the Avoidant variable was determined to be positive and significant ($\beta=.066$; $p<0,05$). Hence, the Avoidant dimension acts as a partial mediator, resulting in the Perception variable positively affecting the PS construct through the Avoidant variable.
- An examination of the indirect effect of the Perception variable on the PS variable via the Coercive dimension revealed a significant and positive result ($\beta=.061$; $p<0,05$). This indicates partial mediation by the Coercive factor, wherein the Perception variable positively drives the PS variable through the Challenging variable.
- The intermediary effect of the Facilitator variable on the link between the Perception variable and the PS variable was found to be significant and negative ($\beta=-.047$; $p<0,05$). Thus, partial mediation is present through the Facilitator dimension, meaning the Perception variable negatively influences the PS variable via this variable.
- The indirect connection from the Perception variable to the PS variable through the Conciliator construct lacked statistical significance ($\beta=-.009$; $p>0,05$). Consequently, no mediation is provided by the Reconciling dimension for the effect of the Perception variable on the PS variable.
- Lastly, the indirect impact of the Perception variable on the PS variable via the Confrontational factor was non-significant ($\beta=.016$; $p>0,05$). This demonstrates that the Confronting dimension does not serve as a mediator between the Perception variable and the PS variable.

Discussion

In the path analysis model with the variables observed in this study, it was determined that the effect of the Perception dimension, one of the sub-dimensions of SPA, on the Compromise and Confrontational sub-dimensions of CAS sub-dimensions was not significant, while all other direct effects were significant.

In this study, the effect of Knowledge (INF) variable, which is the sub-dimension of SPA, on all sub-dimensions of CAS is positive and significant, while its effect on Problem- Solving (PS) variable is negative and significant. In other words, as SP knowledge increases, conflict management (CM) skills also increase. On the other hand, it is considered to be an interesting result that this increase has a negative effect on problem solving. In Çakar and Esen's (2023) study, it is revealed that “In municipalities that can improve their ability to solve problems in the planning and implementation stages, the level of contribution to society is expected to increase effectively”. However, the positive and significant effect of PS on SP is mentioned here.

In this study, the effect of Perception (PRC) variable, which is the sub-dimension of SPA, on Avoidance (AVI) variable is negative and significant. A decrease in perception will lead to an increase in “avoidance” from CAS. Because it is expected that people who have no perception of SP will avoid the conflict instead of solving it. It is thought to be interesting that an increase in perception leads to a decrease in the Facilitative (FCL) CAS and an increase in the Coercive

(CMP) action style. The effect of the perception dimension on the Problem- Solving (PS) variable was found to be positive and significant, similar to the literature (İpekoğlu, 2019).

While it is an expected result that the Avoidance (AVI) and Coercive (CMP) variables, which are among the conflict sub-dimensions, have a negative effect on the PS variable, it is thought that the negative effect of the Conciliator (MDT) variable on the PS variable is an interesting result. The effect of Facilitator (FCL) and Confronter (OPS) variables on Problem- Solving (PS) is positive and significant. When CM is done well, it contributes to the realization of relevant problems, increases energy and motivation for problem solving, and reveals small problems perceived as big problems (Çam and Akgün, 2007).

In the research model, in addition to the direct effects, the mediating effects of CAS on the effect of SPA on Problem- Solving were also investigated. While the knowledge variable affects the PS variable negatively through the Avoidant and Coercive variables, it affects it positively through the Facilitative and Confrontational variables. While the Perception variable positively affects the PS variable through the Avoidant and Challenging variables, it negatively affects it through the Facilitator variable. In other words, it is possible to say that in cases where problem solving skills cannot be directly affected, indirect effects can be achieved through SP and CM. For example, it is possible to say that by increasing SPA, PS skills can be increased by increasing facilitation from CAS.

There is no study in the pharmaceutical sector in which the scales and variables used in this study were used in relation to medical representatives. In the study investigating the factors affecting the managerial competencies of pharmaceutical company managers in terms of competitive strategies in the literature, Leventeli and Incaz (2021) tried to determine the variables that affect the competency levels of companies by applying Porter's five forces analysis and value chain analysis model. By examining the findings related to the managerial competence of pharmaceutical company managers in terms of competitive strategies, they concluded that 54.1% were competent and 45.9% were not competent.

Songur et al. (2013) conducted a SWOT (Strengths-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats) analysis in the Health Sector. They found that declining mortality and morbidity rates, developing population and demographic indicators, increasing awareness of health care, professionalization of health personnel, harmonization efforts with the European Union (EU) in the health sector are the strengths of the Turkish health sector. The ÜTT Certificate program in the pharmaceutical sector in this context also supports these studies.

In another study related to conflict in the pharmaceutical sector, the effects of conflict on performance and sales, which are very important for the pharmaceutical industry, were evaluated. Task and relationship conflicts in sales teams negatively impact performance and mediate the negative relationship between team information exchange and task and relationship. This combination hinders knowledge sharing, interpretation, and implementation. Increased interaction in teams leads to cooperation, success in work performance, and the pursuit of strategic plans and goals. A study in the pharmaceutical sector found that high consensus within teams enhances team strength, and collaboration and role sharing translate into performance. By increasing interaction, teams can help each other more, prevent negative conflict environments, and develop each other, ultimately leading to better performance and success in the pharmaceutical sector (Ünsal, 2020).

Conclusion

Fundamental management failures can be a separate cause of failure for companies, independent of external factors. Therefore, addressing the lack of internal management in companies can play an important role in overcoming the problems that arise in this area. For this purpose, process-oriented PS approaches can be developed in companies instead of flexible management processes. In addition, instead of avoiding or reducing conflict, it is necessary to develop effective strategies by reducing the harmful aspects of conflict and increasing its positive aspects (Rahim, 2002). Conflict resolution advocates the complete elimination of conflict. In CM, it is thought that the emergence of conflict in some situations increases the efficiency and continuity of the organization (Rahim, 1992: 423). It can be said that organizational conflict is a factor that will lead businesses to success if it is managed in a way that will increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the organization.

While medical representatives working in pharmaceutical companies are under stress due to factors such as working and living conditions, they have to manage CM and stress management very well while trying to create trust in the eyes of physicians and pharmacists and represent their organizations in the best way. For this, it is very valuable for pharmaceutical companies to provide them with trainings in this direction and for them to digest these methods, especially by practicing them through methods such as role playing. The organizational commitment of employees who can overcome these negative situations will increase and a positive climate will be created in the organization. In addition, in organizations where a constructive conflict environment is created at the desired level, it will contribute positively to the organization in terms of promoting change, making better decisions, increasing the communication and commitment of the teams. In this way, it will be possible to create the right strategies directly and indirectly from the pharmaceutical sector, where competition is very intense, and thus increase success.

In this study, it was tried to emphasize the importance of SP, CM and PS skills of medical representatives who have a busy and stressful work in the pharmaceutical sector and to produce strategies to contribute to both the employees in this group and their organizations in the sector. In addition, it is aimed to contribute to pharmaceutical company managers and macro-level health managers on the issues of which strategies should be used to affect the variables mentioned directly and indirectly, and the necessity of measuring and improving the skills and awareness of medical representatives on these issues.

This study, which is considered to be original, is aimed to be a source for future studies with a larger sample and different statistical methods and to contribute to academicians, healthcare professionals, pharmaceutical industry managers, health managers and outpatients working in this field.

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Appendices

Table I: Goodness of fit indexes and fit values used in confirmatory factor analysis

İndeks	Good Fit	Acceptable Compliance	SPF	CES	PCO
χ^2	-	-	382,907	343,758	40,572
χ^2 / df	$0 \leq \chi^2/df \leq 2$	$2 < \chi^2/df \leq 3$	2,936	2,162	2,898
GFI	$\geq 0,90$	0,85-0,89	,867	,852	,972
CFI	$\geq 0,97$	$\geq 0,95$	,913	,935	,982
SRMR	$\leq 0,05$	$,06 \leq SRMR \leq ,08$	,0782	,0800	,0712
RMSEA	$\leq 0,05$	$,06 \leq RMSEA \leq ,08$	,0727	,0629	,0311

SPA: Strategic Planning Awareness, CAS: Conflict Action Styles, PS: Problem Solving

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Table II: Convergent and discriminant validity values calculated from standard factor loadings

Dimension	AO	SS	BLG	ALG	KCN	ZRL	KLY	UZL	KKO	PCO
INF	4,43	,64	(,838)							
PRC	4,04	,51	,286**	(,789)						
AVI	3,57	,71	,354**	-,106*	(,714)					
CMP	4,05	,59	,411**	-,096	,646**	(,645)				
FCL	4,51	,62	,561**	,073	,486**	,605**	(,719)			
MDT	4,08	,56	,492**	,222**	,553**	,501**	,629**	(,669)		
OPS	4,18	,47	,354**	,164**	,344**	,352**	,569**	,581**	(,644)	
PS	4,09	,46	-,275**	,363**	-,529**	-,498**	-,203**	-,225**	,039	(,775)
Cronbach's Alpha (CA)			,912	,893	,739	,707	,802	,713	,706	,848
Composite reliability (CR)			,910	,871	,764	,711	,791	,710	,703	,813
Average Variance Explained (AVE)			,703	,623	,511	,417	,517	,448	,416	,602

***p<0,001 **p<0,01 *p<0,05 INF:Information, PRC :Perception, AVI:Avoidant CMP:Compelling,

FCL:Facilitator, MDT:Mediator, OPS:opposition, PS:Problem solving