The Correlation Between The Principal's Leadership Style And The School Organisational Climate

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May, 2008

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that:

The Correlation Between The Principal's Leadership Style And The School Organisational Climate

is my own work, that all the resources used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references, and that this dissertation was not previously submitted by me for a degree at any other university.

T.M. Motsiri

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to a wonderful and supportive mother, Manana Lydia Motsiri, whose efforts in educating me contributed to my success as a mother, educator and leader. At the age of 71, she always prepared food for us and took full responsibility of caring for my only daughter, Ntebaleng Neria Motsiri.

My twin sister, Tlhatswane Martha Motsiri, for her continuous support, encouragement and willingness to help at all times.

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Lebohang Queneeth, Mokhele Solomon and Ntebaleng Neria, all Motsiris, for their endurance and patience when it was impossible for me to spend enough time with them while I was occupied with my studies.

Above all, my entire family for their unfailing support throughout the duration of this research.

> "May the Grace of God be with you, and may God bless you all the time. It was very tough but, I have seen that with God everything, is possible."

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ABSTRACT

This study sets out to investigate how conflict is managed at schools. The literature review clearly indicated the complexity of the management of conflict in school organisations. Schools, by virtue of being social organisations aiming at providing education services to learners, cannot thrive under conditions of dysfunctional conflict. However, it is also clear that not all conflict is bad and can be functional in school improvement and renewal.

The most important aspect pertaining to conflict in schools, is that it must be managed. This actually implies that conflict has to be managed from its sources, apparent or potential and that, this must involve a process that ranges from conflict diagnosis to school organisational learning and effectiveness. This clearly relates to all types of conflict and includes, conflict resolution, prevention and management.

The empirical study established that school principals largely used the dominating and avoiding styles of handling conflict. The variance between categories of responses indicated that conflict handling styles were used contingent on situational conditions. To this end, it was found that educators from big schools showed statistically significant differences with educators from small schools in so far as principals' conflict handling styles are concerned.

Based on this finding and nothwistanding the results of the frequency analysis which generally indicated almost equal responses in terms of the agree and disagree responses, it was concluded that the dominating and avoidng styles, and to an extent, the compromising styles were used predominantly in the surveyed schools.

The study thus recommends that peer group and needs-specific capacity building programmes for school principals should be initiated so as to expose principals to

conflict management learning experiences from practice, and in relaxed atmospheres facilitated by peer coaching and mentoring.

Keywords: conflict; conflict management; conflict management styles, conflict theories, conflict models; conflict resolution; organisational conflict

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CHAPTER 1

ORIENTATION

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

School organisations are systems with various parts aimed at achieving educative teaching goals. All activities in schools are carried out by different people, all aiming at achieving school organisational goals. In fact, the school staff consists of people with complementary skills and who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable (The Foundation Coalition, http://www.foundationcoalition.org/publi_cations/brochures/conflict.pdf).

However, because school activities are carried out by many people who interact on a daily basis and from various areas of the school, conflict is bound to be a feature of their relationships. Indeed, conflict will always be there in schools and is to be expected (Kirtman, 1996[2]). Bondesio and De Witt (2002:303) assert that conflict situations can develop in any organisation, including schools where the management tasks of an educational leader are people-oriented. This implies that conflict is inevitable in school organisations.

Conflict is defined as a process in which one party perceives its interests being opposed or set back by another party (Kreitner & Kinicki, 1998:335). It is important to note that according to this definition, conflict emanates from perceptions. On the other hand, Wagner and Hollenberg (2002:322) see conflict as a process of opposition and confrontation that can occur in an organisation between individuals or groups, when parties exercise power in the pursuit of valued goals or objectives and obstruct the progress of other parties. In both senses, it is clear that conflict involves the pursuit of own interests and indeed, it can be a disturbing situation in a

[2] Page numbers not inidcated in source. The same applies to all other sources where page numbers are not indicated.

school environment where the pursuit of educative teaching should be the primary goal of parties and should thus be a common interest pursued by all.

It can, however, be argued that while conflict disturbs the achievement of school goals, it is not necessarily bad. Wagner and Hollenberg (2002:323) argue that conflict is often functional and may have positive effects such as:

- lessening social tensions and helping to stabilise relationships;
- letting opposing parties express rival claims and provide the opportunity to readjust the allocation of valuable resources;
- helping to maintain the level of stimulation needed to function innovatively;
- supplying feedback about the state of interdependencies and power distribution in an organisational structure; and
- providing a sense of identity and purpose by clarifying differences and boundaries between individual and groups and serving as a red flag signalling the need for change.

Taking into cognisance the fact that conflict can hinder progress towards desired goals and that it can also be beneficial to the school in terms of necessitating change, it clearly is important that conflict should not be left unattended, but should be managed. Left unattended, conflict can bring about difficulties in decision-making, can breed suspicious behaviour and lack of trust, can make people loose sight of the goals of the school, can create "cold wars" when conflict is not brought into the open and is allowed to become a smouldering grievance. This will affect the school climate negatively and can cause staff divisions, which will result in canvassing for support and power plays (compare with Bondesio & De Witt, 2002:309).

Managing conflict is therefore very important. More critical, is the management of conflict in its earliest stages (Kirtman, 1996). It must be noted that conflict occurs at two levels in an organisation. Kreitner and Kinicki (1998:336) refer to these levels as the interpersonal conflict and the inter-group conflict. Bondesio and De Witt (2002:305) describe the former as the most common conflict in schools, which may be between colleagues or between learners and staff and is usually in low profile situations. The latter level of conflict is described as conflict within the school organisation and may be between groups or within groups (Bondesio & De Witt, 2002:309).

Clearly then, there is a need for conflict in schools to be managed. The Ohio Commission on Dispute Resolution and Conflict Management (Undated) refers to conflict management as programmes that teach individuals skills and concepts for preventing, managing and peacefully resolving conflicts. Kirtman (1996) argues that unless conflict is looked at systematically and managed, it may continue to emerge. In this way many benefits can be derived from conflict management that is purposeful and systematic. Among other benefits, the following are cited (The Ohio Commission on Dispute Resolution and Conflict Management, Undated):

- knowledge of non-violent options to resolve conflict situations is greatly increased;
- interpersonal communication skills are enhanced;
- school climate is improved;
- the ability to respect different perspectives is improved; and
- teaching time is increased by reducing time spent on managing other conflicts.

Taking into account the many changes that have been introduced in South African school education, it can be anticipated that there will be many conflict situations in

schools. There will, for instance, be conflict over the allocation of scarce resources in the school, over positions that come with new post establishments and promotion post allocations, over appropriate teaching methods and assessment, over management and leadership styles of school managers and over the re-deployment of educators as a result of transformation-related rationalisation. In fact, from personal experience, many conflicts in schools stem from and include the above mentioned factors. For this reason, it is important for school principals to gain insight into what conflict is and, most importantly, how conflict should be managed.

This research investigates the phenomenon of managing conflict in schools. The following questions guide the study:

- What is the nature of conflict management?
- Which conflict management styles do school principals currently use to manage conflict?
- How can conflict in schools be managed?

These questions basically inform the study aim and objectives.

1.2 RESEARCH AIM

The aim of this research study is to investigate the phenomenon of managing conflict in schools. To achieve this aim, the study focuses on the following objectives:

- to determine the nature of conflict management;
- to investigate conflict management styles school principals currently use to manage conflict; and
- to recommend how conflict in schools can be managed.

A specific research method was followed to address these objectives.

1.3 RESEARCH METHOD

1.3.1 Literature review

A literature review was undertaken to get a clearer understanding of the nature of the problem that has been identified, help to focus and shape the research question and to show a path of prior research and how the current research is linked to previous research (Fouche & Delport, 2002:127). This study is therefore based on a literature study, which includes primary and secondary sources to outline accumulated knowledge in the mentioned field of interest, which in this study, is the nature of managing conflict in schools. The following keywords were used for data search purposes:

conflict; conflict management; conflict management styles, conflict theories, conflict models; conflict resolution; organisational conflict.

Various data-search tools were used to gather information on the conflict management phenomenon, including the internet, ERIC , SABINET, EBCOHOST and Google searches.

Literature data informed the design of the empirical research process.

1.3.2 Empirical research

This study engaged a quantitative research design through the use of questionnaires. A quantitative research approach uses, *inter alia*, descriptive statistics as a method of organising data, facilitating the organisation and interpretation of numbers obtained from measuring a characteristic or variable (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:30; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001:191). Leedy and Ormrod (2005:180) contend that the focus in quantitative research is typically on

one aspect of behaviour, which is quantified in some way to determine its frequency.

1.3.2.1 *Aim*

The aim of the empirical investigation was to investigate conflict management styles school principals use at schools. The questionnaire was based on conflict management constructs as was derived from the literature review.

1.3.2.2 *Measuring instrument*

Data for this study was gathered with the use of the questionnaire survey technique which was developed on the basis of the literature review (Annexure B).

1.3.2.3 *Population*

The target population comprised educators in the Gauteng Province. Due to the expanse of the province, the study population was delimited to the southern Gauteng districts, which include Sedibeng districts 7 and 8. Primary schools were purposely targeted due to my being an educator at a primary school and my interest in the concept of conflict as it pertains to primary schools.

Information obtained from the district offices revealed that in districts 7 and 8 there are 98 primary schools in the Sedibeng West district and 56 primary schools in the Sedibeng East district. A snap survey of 20 schools indicated an average of 25 educators per school. This would mean that there is a total of approximately 3850 educators in the two districts, which was considered the target population for this study.

1.3.2.4 *Sampling*

Various authors on sampling in research advocate different sample sizes for populations in quantitative research. Among other sampling guidelines, sample

sizes of between 10% and 20% are suggested as representative of population sizes larger than 1000 (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005; Strydom & Venter, 2002; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). In this research, it was decided to sample 10% of the educator population in line with guidelines on sample sizes. Therefore a simple random sample of educators (n=400) was drawn from the population. Random sampling sought to ensure that schools, and thus educators in both Districts were represented.

1.3.2.4 *Pilot survey*

The questionnaire was pre-tested by presenting it to a selected number of respondents from the target population regarding its qualities of measurement and to review it for clarity with regard to aspects such as the duration it would take to complete, the clarity of instructions and to detect any ambiguities. (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001:267).

The pre-test also served the purpose of ensuring that the questionnaire was valid and reliable. In this regard, the questionnaire had to measure what it was intended to measure and would have to be usable elsewhere and still measure what was intended, given the same circumstances for which it was developed (Delport, 2002:166; Welman & Kruger, 2001:97). For these purposes, the pre-test population comprised educators (n = 50) drawn from the neighbouring Johannesburg South District. This was meant to ensure that the pilot population does not form part of the final sample.

1.3.2.5 *Data collection procedure*

Questionnaires were personally distributed to schools and were administered by contact persons in schools. A follow-up was carried out in the case of outstanding questionnaires.

1.3.2.6 *Ethical considerations*

The prescribed research request form of the Gauteng Department of Education was completed and submitted to the Department for approval to administer the research questionnaire to the target population. Only then were the questionnaires administered to educators at schools.

The questionnaire was accompanied by a covering letter (Annexure A) requesting respondents to complete it and assuring them of the confidentiality with which their responses would be handled.

1.3.2.7 *Statistical techniques*

The statistical consultancy services of the North-West University: Vaal Triangle Campus was approached for assistance in the analysis and interpretation of data collected from questionnaires. Descriptive data were used to interpret the data collected. Frequency counts and tests for statistical differences in data analysis techniques were used from data presented in tabular form.

1.4 DIVISION OF CHAPTERS

1. Orientation: An outline of the research plan in terms of the problem statement, research aim and research method.

2. The nature of conflict management: An exposition of literature pertaining to the phenomenon of conflict management in organisations and schools as organisations.

3. Empirical research: A detailed outline of the research process.

4. Data analysis and interpretation: A presentation of the research results in terms of data analysis and interpretation.

5. Findings, conclusions and recommendations: A presentation of the study summary in terms of research findings, conclusions and recommendations.

1.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter provided the general orientation to this research study by outlining the problem statement and justification of the study and the research method. The next chapter responds to the first research objective namely, the nature of conflict management.

CHAPTER 2

THE NATURE OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN SCHOOLS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the literature review on the nature and management of conflict in schools. A theoretical framework is presented to foreground the study orientation in terms of the phenomenon of conflict in schools.

2.2 RATIONALE

Conflict is an inherent aspect of life. Cloke and Goldsmith (2000:1) point out that conflict can have significant hard and soft costs and it remains an ever difficult issue, as differences arise between people almost on a daily basis. This can be more of an issue in school organisations. In this regard, Robbins (2003:394) contends that conflict can be a serious problem in an organisation and conflict situations can be an obstacle in the way of schools achieving their goals. For this reason, when conflict interferes with the smooth functioning of a school, there is a need to face it and to deal with it, especially because it can create chaotic conditions that can make it nearly impossible for employees to work together (Folger, Poole & Stutman, 2001:1).

Glanz, (2006:74) emphasises that "conflict is present within our schools whether we like it or not and some conflict involves us directly, while some, we may observe." According to Collins (2005:1), when conflict is experienced directly, people may feel more inclined to describe the situation as unnecessary, perplexing, frustrating, ridiculous or even as a personal attack. However, conflict is an inevitable feature of all organisations, which implies that no educator can permanently escape conflict in the school environment, and though the type of conflict experienced may vary from day to day, one thing remains unchanged, that is, the existence of conflict (Van der Merwe, 2003:26). In this regard, Loock,

(2003:23) assert that conflict can arise, for example, when educators differ as to the best practice to use in support of a learner who faces barriers to learning and development or sometimes, conflict can arise between the class educator and the parents or between learners themselves.

It is therefore important to ensure that conflict at schools is managed effectively. This, as Rosen (2005:93) contends, is because even though most schools are safe places to be in, every effort must be made to ensure that a climate of peace and stability exists. Because conflict exists everywhere, even in schools, it is clear that there will be individuals and groups with their own dreams and objectives and thus it is important to consider this as being a human phenomenon. However, according to Potterton, Baker and McCay (2002:2), when these differences among individuals and groups undermine the overall aim of the school, then conflict has to be dealt with.

It is for this reason that it is important to have a clear understanding of the nature of conflict in schools. This calls for the understanding of conflict within a theoretical orientation of the school as an organisation.

2.3 THEORETICAL ORIENTATION: THE SCHOOL AS AN ORGANISATION

This study regards conflict as an inherent aspect of school life. For that reason, conflict is understood from the perspective of a school as an organisation.

According to Van Deventer (2003:72), the word "organisation" is derived from the word "organ" and is therefore an analogy for the body and its various organs. Accordingly then, a school may be viewed as an organisation that is the result of the grouping of work and allocation of duties, responsibilities and authority to individuals in order to achieve specific organisational aims. According to Theron (2007:82), the school as an organisation comprises a particular composition and structure, consists of more than one person with prescribed and differentiated tasks, is exposed to external influences and is managed to achieve specific aims

and objectives. Most importantly, the school as an organisation is qualified by educational factors.

It is this nature of the school's composition and functioning to achieve educational aims and objectives that subjects it (the school) to everyday occurrences of conflict. Theron (2007:107) makes the point that the school is an organisation within a human resource frame, which implies that the focus at school is on people who inhabit the institution. To this end, Theron (2007:108) argues that schools, like other large organisations, increasingly face many problems created by the human resource frame, which includes such elements as power and conflict.

The fact that the school as an organisation consists of people and groups makes it a social organisation. As a social organisation, the school has what Theron (2007:102) refers to as a "people" dimension. In terms of this dimension, people have unique personalities and qualities and so each person can give expression to his or her deepest feelings and beliefs, which might not be consistent with his or her expected school organisational role. This may result in conflict.

Theron (2007:103) also makes the point that the formal role expectations and personal expectations of people in organisations might be influenced by groups in the organisation, which might result in conflict when individuals do not submit to group pressure and are for instance, rejected by the group.

The school is not only an organisation, but is also a human social system. In this regard, Owens (1991:244) makes the point that people, as part of the human social system, are interdependent and are constantly engaged in the dynamic processes of defining and redefining the nature and extent of their interdependence. This occurs in an organisational environment that is in itself constantly changing. Owens (1991:245) maintains that inherent in the concept of free will in a changing environment, are social patterns characterised by negotiating, stress and conflict.

It is clear that schools as organisations will inevitably experience conflict as an aspect of their daily lives. In this regard, Loock (2003:22) suggests that schools as organisations should accept that:

- conflict is intrinsic to human existence;
- conflict embraces a wide spectrum of social relationships;
- conflict occurs because of conflicting interests between people and groups in organisations; and that
- there are disparate opinions, attitudes, outlooks and motives within any organisation.

From the foregoing exposition, it is clear that conflict is inherent in the school as an organisation. It is also clear that schools as organisations are also social organisations that display characteristics that may result in conflict due to tensions in organisational, individual and group roles and expectations. These factors will be made even clearer with the explanation of what conflict is and how it is manifested in school organisations.

2.4 WHAT IS CONFLICT?

Many writers define conflict in different ways and emphasise different aspects. Robbins (2000:290) describes conflict as a process that begins when one party perceives that another party has negatively affected something that the first party cares about.

Mayer (2000:3) views conflict as a feeling, a disagreement, a real or perceived incompatibility of interests, inconsistent world views or set of behaviours.

According to Rollinson, Broadfield and Edwards (1998:401) conflict is the behaviour of an individual or group, which purposely sets out to block or inhibit another group or individual from achieving their goals.

Wilmot and Hocker (2001:41) point out that conflict is an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from others in achieving their goals.

Potterton *et al.* (2002:2) describe conflict as a situation where there are serious differences between individuals as a result of differing views. They stress the fact that conflict can be an opportunity for growth in relationships and in oneself, although unhealthy conflict can have serious negative implications if it is not dealt with appropriately.

A scrutiny of these definitions indicates that conflict occurs for reasons relating to disagreement. In this regard, Robbins (2005:4) argues that in organisations, conflict encompasses a wide range of disagreements that people experience, such as, the incompatibility of goals, differences over interpretations of facts and disagreements based on behavioural expectations.

The foregoing definitions of conflict raise the question as to whether conflict in organisations, or conflict generally for that matter, is good or bad. In answering this question, an understanding of transitions in conflict in terms of different views is crucial.

2.4.1 Views on conflict

2.4.1.1 *The traditional view of conflict*

According to Robbins (2003:394), the traditional view posits conflict as bad, harmful, negative and destructive and as something to be avoided at all costs. Robbins and Coulter (2002:404-405) and Rollinson *et al.* (1998:401-402) point out that in terms of the traditional view, conflict became synonymous with violence, destruction and irrationality.

Accordingly then, conflict in this view is seen as a dysfunctional outcome resulting from poor communication, a lack of openness and trust between people and the

failure of managers to be responsive to the needs and aspirations of employees (Robbins, 2005:5; Slabbert, 2004:84).

2.4.1.2 *The human relations view of conflict*

Hellriegel, Slocum and Woodman (1998:364) point out that from the human relations point of view, conflict is a natural, positive and an inevitable outcome in any group. This implies that conflict should be accepted because it cannot be eliminated and that conflict may even benefit a group's performance. Therefore conflict should be accepted as a natural phenomenon and that it is inevitable and should be managed (Slabbert, 2004:84).

2.4.1.3 *The interactionist view of conflict*

According to the interactionist view, conflict is not only a positive force in an organisation, but it is absolutely necessary for the organisation to perform effectively (Robbins, 2005:6; Robbins *et al.* (2001:384). In this regard, Nydegger (http://www.cobracm.org/quality_initiative/picspresentations/Dealing%20With%20Conflict.ppt#2) points out that in terms of the interactionist view, an organisation without conflict is probably dead or stale and thus, conflict should be managed and not eliminated. From an interactionist view, managers should work with conflict to keep the organisation from being dysfunctional and conflict should be encouraged on the grounds that an harmonious, peaceful, tranquil and cooperative organisation is prone to become static, apathetic and unresponsive to the needs for change and innovation (Robbins, 2001:394; Robbins & Coulter, 2002:404-405). Rollinson *et al.* (1998:401-402) argue that conflict is neither bad nor good, but simply inevitable and that too much conflict will hamper an organisation's welfare, and absorb a greater deal of energy that could be devoted to doing other things.

It can be deduced from the three views on conflict outlined above that conflict in schools organisations is a phenomenon caused by the ever-changing nature of the school organisational environment and the human social systems' dynamics. It can

also be deduced that conflict is neither bad nor good as it has the potential to stimulate organisational effectiveness or create organisational dysfunctionality. This implies that conflict should be accepted as inevitable in schools and should be managed. In this regard, it can be asserted that conflict, being an organisational aspect, should be measured in terms of whether it promotes or inhibits organisational performance and effectiveness.

Slabbert (2004:84) concurs with this and states that it is now generally accepted that conflict should be measured in terms of its functionality. It manifests itself as functional when it contributes to personal or organisational growth, and as dysfunctional when it impedes individual or organisational performance. This calls for an understanding of what functional and dysfunctional conflict entails.

- *Functional conflict*

  Functional conflict according to Robbins (2005:7), is conflict that supports the goals of the organisation and improves performance. Van Der Merwe (2003:26) articulates that functional conflict emanates from an honest difference of opinion resulting from the availability of two or more alternative courses of action and is a valuable part of life. These writers assert that this kind of conflict helps to ensure that different possibilities are properly considered and further courses of action may be generated from the discussion of the recognised alternatives.

- *Dysfunctional conflict*

  Dysfunctional conflict relates to conflict that hinders organisational performance and harms or interferes with organisational members (Robbins, 2005:14; Nydegger, http://www.cobracm.org/quality_initiative/picspresentations/Dealing%20With%20Conflict.ppt#2). According to Van Der Merwe (2003:27), this kind of conflict is dangerous and disruptive and involves personal "glory" being staked on the outcome because the further the

conflict develops, and the more "glory" is staked, the more bitter the conflict becomes and the less easy it is to achieve a solution. Dysfunctional conflict in organisational terms thus refers to any confrontation or interaction between groups that harms the organisation or prevents the achievement of organisational aims (Anstey *in* Van Der Merwe, 2003:27).

Figure 2.1 illustrates the differences between functional and dysfunctional conflict.

Figure 2.1 Functional and dysfunctional conflicts

Functional conflict	Dysfunctional conflict
Increases cooperation	Increases competition
Is mostly cognitive	It is mostly emotional
Separate the person from the problem	Involves personal attacks
Solves problems	Does not solve problems
Strengthens relationships	Weakens relationships
Leads to personal and professional growth	Leads to hurtful behaviors

Source: Collins, 2005:10).

It can be seen from the figure above that conflict must be managed, since both functional and dysfunctional conflicts have an effect on the organisation. Quite clearly, dysfunctional conflict necessitates effective management.

In order to manage conflict successfully and effectively at school, it is necessary to have a clear insight into what causes conflict or what the sources of conflict are.

2.4.2 Sources on conflict

Sources of conflict in school organisations are varied and are described differently by many writers. However, there seems to be agreement on most of them. According to Potterton *et al.* (2002:2), the following seem to incorporate most

sources mentioned by other authors. According to these authors, conflict in schools can be identified by a number of signs such as:

- Poor communication between people and within a school;
- Poor discipline;
- Interpersonal friction;
- High rates of absenteeism or late arrival;
- Inter-group hostility and jealousy;
- Demotivated educators and learners;
- Too many rules;
- Low morale;
- Aggression in the school;
- Few staff meetings; and
- Deliberate obstruction.

According to Calitz, Fuglestad and Lillejord (2002:225), most sources of conflict emanate from:

- communication barriers;
- role ambiguity;
- unclear expectations;
- regulations or rules;
- unresolved prior conflicts;

- conflicting interests;
- disagreement on task and content issues;
- competition for scarce resources;
- differences in values; and
- inconsistencies.

According to Daft (1999:286-287), leaders can be aware of several factors that cause conflict among individuals or teams, *inter alia*:

- scarce resources, such as money, information or supplies;
- unclear task responsibilities;
- disagreement over responsibility for specific tasks;
- who has a claim on resources; and
- individuals or teams pursuing conflicting goals.

Mullins (in Van der Merwe, 2003:30), classifies the main sources of organisational conflict as follows:

- *Individual differences*, which implies that the potential for conflict is increased because people differ in respect of their socio-economic backgrounds, values, attitudes, expectations, personalities and perceptions and sometimes have little respect between them regarding their differences.
- *Limited resources*, which relates to most organisational resources being limited. In that case, individuals and groups have to fight for their fair share. In other words the greater the limitation of resources, the greater the potential for conflict.

- *Departmentalisation and specialisation*, which relates to the fact that most organisations, including schools, are divided into separate departments with specialised functions, with each department tending to turn inwards and to concentrate on the achievement of their own particular aims. This is a frequent source of conflict when departments need to cooperate with each other.

- *Inequitable treatment,* whereby a person's perceptions of unjust treatment, such as in the implementation of personnel policies and practices, or in reward and punishment systems can lead to tension and conflict.

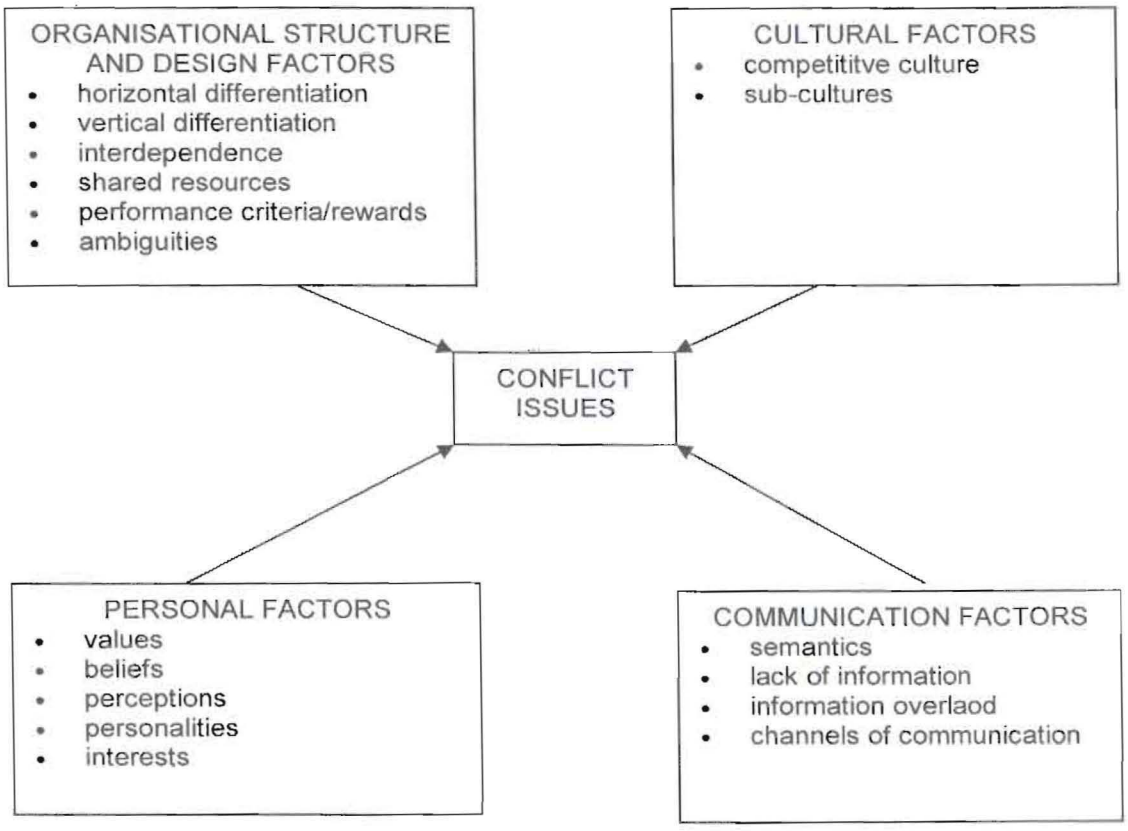
- *Violation of territory,* whereby people tend to become attached to their own "territory" within work organisations. In the school situation, for example, educators become attached to their own classrooms, chairs in the staff room and own parking spaces. Conflicts erupt because of, for instance, an "intruder" parking in the wrong spot.

- *Environmental changes*, which relates to the fact that changes in an organisation's external environment can cause major areas of conflict, for example, multicultural school populations which, in turn, have increased conflict potential.

- *Communication*, which relates to the fact that communication problems frequently lead to conflict between people. In this regard, should a problem with a colleague arise, it is best by far to talk it over immediately before antagonism, which can complicate the conflict situation, is allowed to escalate.

According to Robbins (2000:536) and Rollinson *et al.* (1998:401) the sources of conflict can generally be separated into four areas as illustrated in figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2 Sources of conflict



Source: Adapted from Rollinson, Broadfield & Edwards, 1998:404.

As illustrated in figure 2.2, the sources of conflict are:

- *Communication differences*, which are disagreements arising from semantic difficulties, misunderstanding, and noise in the communication channels. For example, people are quick to assume that most conflicts are caused by lack of communication and thus they equate good communication with having others agree with their views.

- *Structural differences*, which create problems of integration, whereby individuals disagree over goals, responsibilities, decision alternatives,

performance criteria and resource allocations. These conflicts are rooted in the structure of the organisation itself.

- *Personal differences*, which implies that conflict can evolve out of individual idiosyncrasies and personal value systems. The chemistry between some people makes it hard for them to work together. Factors such as background, education experience, and training mould each individual into a unique personality with a particular set of values, including people who may be perceived by others as abrasive, untrustworthy, strange, or difficult to work with.

- *Cultural factors*, which relate to the competitive culture and sub-cultures. This stems from the fact that an organisation's culture gives its members a guide as to how they should conduct themselves. However, parts of the organisation usually have sub-cultures and where these result in an issue being viewed in different ways, sub-cultures can give rise to conflicts.

An analysis of the different sources of conflict can best be understood within the context of the human social system of organisations and thus be classed into individual, group and organisational conditions. These include among others, communication modes, resource allocation and utilisation of and human resource deployment and utilisation. A common factor which invariably transcends all these aspect concerns disagreements that usually surface in terms of organisational operations.

The foregoing outline of sources of conflict indicates that conflict in school organisations occurs at different levels and that there are different types of conflict.

2.4.3 **Types of conflict**

Types of conflict can be classified broadly into the, interpersonal, intrapersonal, inter-group and the intra-group conflicts.

2.4.3.1 ***Interpersonal conflict***

Champoux (2006:257) defines interpersonal conflict as the most basic form of conflict behaviour in organisations and it happens for many reasons, including a basic difference in views about what should be done, efforts to get more resources to do a job or differences in orientation to work and time in different parts of an organisation. Thus interpersonal conflict happens for reasons that include (Champoux, 2006:257):

- Basic differences in views about what should be done;
- Efforts to get more resources to do the job; and
- Differences in orientation to work and time in different parts in an organisation

According to Wood, Chapman, Fromholtz, Morrison, Wallace, Zeffane, Schermerhorn, Hunt and Osborne (2003:508), interpersonal conflict occurs within the individual as a result of actual or perceived pressures from incompatible goals or expectations, while Dick and Ellis (2006:197), point out that interpersonal conflict occurs when two or more individuals perceive that their attitudes, behaviours or preferred goals are in opposition.

According to Luthans (2005:391), interpersonal conflict occurs the most in organisations and can more often be attributed to a personality. Luthans (2005:391) mentions four major sources of interpersonal conflicts, namely:

- *Personal differences*

Everyone has a unique background because no one has the same family background, education and values. The differences can be a major source of conflict.

- *Information deficiency*

  This results from a communication break-down in the organisation. The causes may be that two people in conflict are using different information or that one or both have misinformation.

- *Role incompatibility*

  This type of interpersonal conflict draws from both the intra-individual role conflict and inter-group conflict (discussed below). The resulting conflict from role incompatibility may have to be resolved by higher-level management or systems development through advanced information technology.

- *Environmental stress*

  Conflict in this case, can be amplified by a stressful environment. In environments characterised by scarce or shrinking resources, downsizing, competitive pressures or high degrees of uncertainty, conflict of all kinds will be more probable.

Interpersonal conflict can be seen as emanating from roles that people play in organisations. A role is the group of tasks and behaviours that others expect a person to perform while doing a job (Slocum & Hellriegel, 2004:227). Indeed, Slocum and Hellriegel (2004:227-228) argue that interpersonal conflict is based on some type of role conflict or role ambiguity. According to them, three different role types that collectively describe interpersonal conflict are:

- *Role Conflict*

According to Wikipedia (2007), roles create regular patterns of behaviour and thus a measure of predictability, which not only allows individuals to function effectively because they know what to expect of others, but also makes it possible to make generalisations about society. Furthermore, roles, in this conception, are created by society as a whole, are relatively inflexible, are more-or-less universally agreed upon, and individuals simply take on their designated roles and attempt to fulfil them as best they can. To this end, Wikipedia (2007) describes role conflict as a special form of social conflict that takes place when one is forced to take on two different and incompatible roles at the same time.

An example of role conflict can be seen where an educator whose child is a learner in his/her class might be faced with role conflict where in certain situations he/she has to decide whether to act as an educator or as a parent. This can also be seen where a school principal is also a subject educator under a head of department (HOD). Role conflict can emanate from situations where, as principal and subordinate to the HOD, he/she has to consider decisions that call on his/her role as principal.

Slocum and Hellriegel (2004:250) identify four types of role conflict and describe them as:

- *Intra-sender role conflict*, which may occur when different messages and pressures from a single member of the role set are incompatible.
- *Inter-sender role conflict*, which may occur when messages and pressures from one role sender opposes messages and pressures from another or more senders.

- *Inter-role conflict*, which may occur when role pressures associated with membership of one group are incompatible with pressure stemming from membership of others.

- *Person role conflict*, which may occur when role requirements are incompatible with the focal person's own attitudes, values or views of acceptable behaviour.

Role conflict can therefore be seen as a disjuncture or incompatibility between what individuals do in their roles and the expectations of the roles.

- *Role ambiguity*

  Role ambiguity refers to the uncertainty and lack of clarity surrounding expectations about a single role (Slocum & Hellriegel, 2007:251). Edward (2006:562) defines role ambiguity as "... uncertainty about what the occupant of a particular office is supposed to do" and postulates that role ambiguity may result from a lack of or vague articulation of policies and procedures, a supervisor who has trouble communicating effectively, or uncommon events for which there are no precedents.

  Slocum and Hellriegel (2007:251) claim that severe role ambiguity causes stress and triggers subsequent coping behaviours, which often include initiating aggressive action, withdrawing, approaching the role sender or senders to attempt joint problem-solving.

  Venter (2006:86) point out that role ambiguity originates:

  - from the complexity of modern organisations or companies, which may lead to the overlapping of roles, the fast changing pace of technology and the change outside an organisation or company;

- when there exists a good downward communication structure, but which lacks good upward communication; and
- when the worker is not sure where the boundaries of his/her authority are regarding the application of rules and punishment when they are broken and when objects are unclear.

- *Role overload*

  Role overload occurs when too much work is expected of the individual (Schermerhorn *et al.*, 2003:200). In this regard, four different types of role overload describe interpersonal conflict namely:

  - *Quantitative role overload*: When a worker experiences increasing work and still has to complete it in a certain time, he/she will experience conflict from within.
  - *Qualitative role overload*: When workers feel that they haven't got the necessary skills to do a certain work project, they experience inner conflict.
  - *Quantitative role under load*: When there is too little work available for the workers to do, they become bored and experience inner conflict.
  - *Qualitative role under load*: When workers must do routine tasks over and over again without being cognitively stimulated by the work, they may experience inner conflict.

2.4.3.2 ***Intrapersonal conflict***

Champoux (2006:258) views intrapersonal conflicts as conflict occurring within an individual. The conflict arises because of a threat to the person's basic values, a feeling of unfair treatment by the organisation, or from multiple treatment by the organisation's socialisation processes (cf. Dick and Ellis, 2006:196).

Slocum and Hellriegel (2007:249) indicate that intrapersonal conflict occurs within an individual and usually involves some form of goal, cognitive or affective conflict. It is triggered when a person's behaviour will result in outcomes that are mutually exclusive. According to Wood *et al.* (2003:508), intrapersonal conflict occurs within the individual as a result of perceived pressures from incompatible goals or expectations.

Intrapersonal goal conflict comprises three basic types (Slocum & Hellriegel (2004:227-228; Hellriegel *et al.*, 1998), namely:

- *Approach-approach conflict*, where an individual must choose between two choices which may both have a positive outcome. This kind of conflict can be seen where a principal has for instance, to recommend one of two equally competent educators to a promotion post (cf. Havenga, 2004:63);
- *Avoidance-avoidance conflict*, where an individual must choose between one or more alternatives which may both have a negative outcome, like where a person has to choose between being redeployed to a school he/she dislikes or resign. This results in fear, powerlessness and anger and can cause a person to attempt to withdraw from the situation in the form of fantasy or regression (cf. Havenga, 2004:64); and
- *Approach-avoidance*, where an individual must choose if he/she must do something which will have both positive and negative outcomes.

2.4.3.3 ***Inter-group conflict***

Inter-group conflict, according to Luthans (2005:391) occurs whenever individuals in one group interact, collectively or individually, with another group or its members in terms of their reference group identification. According to Kreitner and Kinicki (2004:491), inter-group conflict occurs between workgroups, teams and departments. Slocum and Hellriegel (2007: 252) agree that inter-group conflict

refers to opposition, disagreements and disputes between groups or teams and further explain that inter-group conflict tends to be drawn out and costly to those involved. These authors further point out that inter-group conflict occurs horizontally across teams, departments or divisions and vertically between different levels of the organisation, such as between top management and first-level employees.

Champoux (2006; 257) points out that inter-group conflict is a conflict between two or more groups in an organisation, and often has its roots in the organisation's design. Dick and Ellis (2006: 196) refer to inter-group conflicts that occur when one part of the organisation has a dispute with another.

Luthans (2002: 410) states that there are different sources of inter-group conflict and that there are different antecedent conditions that have been identified for explaining it, *inter alia*:

- *Competition for resources*: Most organisations today have very limited resources. Groups within the organisation vie for budget funds, space, suppliers, personnel and support services.

- *Task interdependence*: If two groups in the organisation depend on one another in a mutual way or even a one-way direction, there tends to be more conflict than if groups are independent of one another.

- *Jurisdictional ambiguity*; This may involve "turf" problems or overlapping responsibilities and conflict might occur when one group attempts to assume more control or take credit for desirable activities, or give up its part and any responsibility for undesirable activities.

- *Status struggle*: This conflict occurs when one group attempts to improve its status and another group views this as a threat to its place in the status

hierarchy. One group may feel it is being inequitably treated by comparison with another group of equal privilege, level or status.

Slocum and Hellriegel (2007:252) identify four sources of inter-group conflict. These are:

- *Perceived goal incompatibility*, which is the greatest source of inter-group conflict. The potential conflict exists because of the possible variance in the goals aspired to in each group.
- *Perceived differentiation*, which relates to the fact that the greater the number of ways in which groups see themselves as different from each other, the greater the potential for conflicts between them.
- *Task interdependency*, which refers to the interrelationships required between two or more groups in achieving their goals.
- *Perceived limited resources*, which relates to the notion that the perception of limited resources creates the condition for groups to compete for and engage in conflict over available resources.

2.4.3.4 ***Intra-group conflict***

According to Champoux (2006:258), intra-group conflict occurs among members of a group, and is likely to be highest during the early stages of group development when there are strong differences among members and can be about ways of doing tasks or reaching the group's goals. Intra-group conflict refers to disputes among some or all of a group's members and often affects a group's dynamics and effectiveness (Slocum & Hellriegel, 2007:251).

According to Bondesio and De Witt (2002:306), intra-group conflict includes conflict that occurs between two or more separate units within the same organisation and originates as a result of the efforts of both units to do their best for the organisation.

An example could be that of a group of educators who want to take learners on an educational excursion outside the school campus. Another group of educators may not want to release learners as they would miss their classes. Conflict thus may occur between the two groups of educators mainly because both groups are geared towards doing the best for learners.

Two types of intra-group conflict are discernable namely, the *task conflict and the relationship conflict*. According to Medina, Munduate, Dorato, Martinez and Guerra (2005:220), task conflict is a perception of disagreement among group members or individuals about the content of their decisions and involves differences in viewpoints, ideas and opinions. Examples include conflicts about the distribution of resources, about procedures or guidelines and about the interpretation of facts. Task conflict, according to these authors, has a positive relationship with the quality of ideas and innovation, the increase of constructive debate, the affective acceptance of group decisions and the prevention of "groupthink".

Relationship conflict relates to the perception of interpersonal incompatibility and includes annoyance and animosity among individuals and involves disagreements about values, personal or family norms or personal taste (Medina *et al.*, 2005:220). Relationship conflict is thus negatively associated with employees' affective reactions such as job satisfaction and reduces team effectiveness.

Van der Merwe (2003:30) classes intra-group conflict at schools into four categories namely:

- *vertical conflict*, which relates to problems within the hierarchical structure of authority in schools;
- *horizontal conflict*, which occurs across the ranks of educators;
- *line-staff conflict*, which occurs between the principal and central office personnel; and

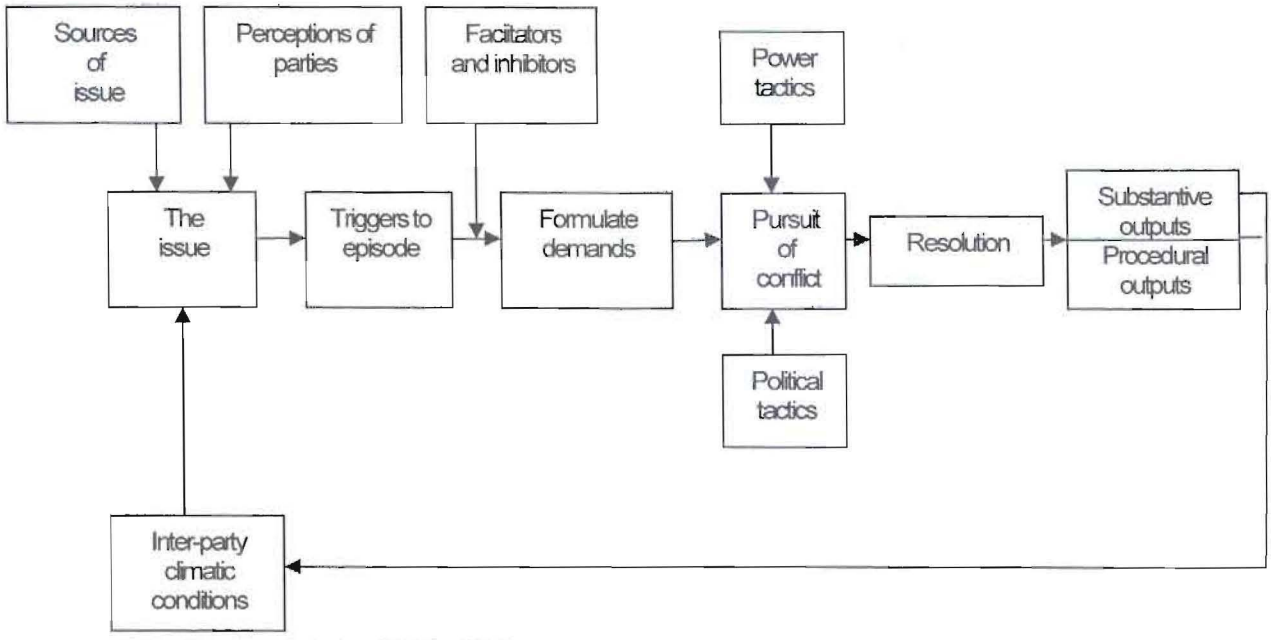
- *role conflict*, which occurs if there is inadequate or inconsistent information about the requirements of a position in a school due to lack of clarification.

An analysis of the types of conflict presented in the foregoing section demonstrates clearly that in a school organisations, such conflict types are inevitable and that while they can mostly lead to dysfunctionality, they can also present an environment for functionality. This is evident in consideration of the conflict process in organisations.

2.4.4 **The conflict process**

Rollinson *et al.* (1998:407) make the point that one of the things that encourages the view that conflict is abnormal is that organisations tend to be characterised by long periods of apparent calm, interrupted by outbreaks of visible conflict (conflict episodes), which does not mean that prior to such outbreaks, there was no conflict. Indeed, the different types of conflict indicate that conflict occurrences mostly seem to follow a pattern of some sort. Accordingly, conflict episodes often follow a predictable pattern of stages. Figure 2.3 illustrates this phenomenon.

Figure 2.3 A simplified model of conflict causation and process



Source: Rollinson *et al.*, 1998:407.

Rollinson *et al.* (1998:407) describe the conflict process as unfolding in the following manner (as illustrated in figure 2.3):

The first stage, comprising the *pre-episode factors,* indicates that all conflict involves an *issue*, and points to an existence of factors or circumstances in which conflict might occur. Perceptions of parties about the issue may trigger a conflict episode or outbreak, in which case there may be facilitating or inhibiting factors that will either promote or inhibit the conflict. In the event of the conflict episode being facilitated, the parties will begin formulating demands, which will lead to the actual conflict. These factors can be, at an individual level, two people in the same unit seeing each other as a logical choice for promotion or at a departmental or group level, two departments being forced to compete for the same territory.

The second stage, the actual *conflict process* comprises both parties having a clear aim of emerging victorious and may use different tactics to achieve victory,

inter alia, power tactics, where the aim is to force the other party to comply, or political tactics, which are used to undermine the opponent's power.

The final stage, the *outcomes*, consists of outputs from conflict and these are mostly substantive and procedural outputs. The feedback loop indicated in figure 2.3, which runs from the outputs to the inter-party climatic conditions, reflects the notion that the terms on which conflict is resolved, have a huge impact on what happens in the future.

Substantive outcomes relate to the terms of settlement that result in parties abandoning the conflict, while procedural outcomes are in part, a result of the substantive terms of settlement and can have long-term climatic effects in terms of who or what emerges as the winner or solution to the conflict.

Wilson (2004) describes the conflict process as consisting of the following temporal dimensions:

- *Latent conflict stage*, at which stage there is no actual conflict. However, the potential for conflict to arise is present and is latent.
- *Perceived conflict*, which begins when one party, individual or group becomes aware that its goals are being thwarted by the actions of another party. Each party searches for the origins of the conflict, defines why the conflict is emerging and analyses the events that led to its occurrence and constructs a scenario that accounts for the problems it is experiencing with other parties.
- *Felt conflict*, at which stage the parties in the conflict develop negative feelings about each other. Each group closes ranks, develops an us versus them attitude and blames the other group for the problem. As the parties battle and argue for their point of view, the significance of the dispute issue is likely to be blown out of proportion.

- *Manifest conflict*, where one party decides how to react to or deal with each other and thwart each other's goals. It takes many forms such as, open aggression or violence between people and groups or lack of co-operation between people or functions.

- *Conflict aftermath*, at which stage every episode leaves a conflict aftermath that affects the way both parties perceive and respond to a future conflict episode.

The foregoing exposition clearly shows that conflict unfolds in stages and that by the time it breaks out, many factors would have contributed to its manifestation. In the context of functional and dysfunctional context, these could be good or detrimental to the school's performance and progress. Invariably then, conflict outbreaks will have consequences for the school organisation.

2.4.5 **Consequences of conflict**

Much as there are different types of conflict in schools, the consequences thereof are as varied and dependent on the type of conflict. This study recognises this fact, but a differentiation of consequences per conflict type is not pursued and only an all-embracing exposition is given. This is in recognition of the fact that, regardless of the type, conflict can result in functionality or dysfuntionality of the school. As highlighted earlier in this text, dysfunctional conflict can have negative effects on performance and consequently, on the school climate (cf. Tompkins & Rogers, 2004:1).

Uline, Tschannen-Moran and Perez (2003:782) argue for well-managed conflict and argue that conflict in this sense can be useful to the school as it:

- breathes life and energy into the organisational relationships and can cause individuals to be much more innovative and productive. This is because differences of opinion, individual interests, outside influences and even

active discord, all have the capacity to inform and advance collective efforts by providing a provocative stimulus, moving people to think deeply and to act prudently;

- enables learning to appreciate and make constructive use of people's different perspectives and experiences, thus helping to create a context where trust and respect are cultivated rather than depleted;
- in a cooperative context, it allows for individuals to work together to achieve mutual goals and allows for open and honest communication of relevant information. Thus, perceptions of others and their actions tend to be accurate and characterise relationships, with individuals recognising the legitimacy of each other's interests.
- promotes a sense of interdependence and goal congruence and thus facilitates constructive conflict itself;
- allows for groups in problem-solving, a high degree of uncertainty and benefit from the diverse ideas of group members;
- has the potential to improve the effectiveness of group processes as well as the quality of decisions and their implementation;
- allows for open-mindedness and a discussion of opposing views; and
- can lead to improved thinking in that, for instance, debate among people of different developmental stages promotes the adoption of more adequate ways of reasoning for the people involved.

Uline *et al.* (2003:783) further describe consequences of conflict within groups and state that within groups, conflict results in:

- *Increased cohesiveness*, where external threats motivate group members to ignore minor differences and close ranks.

- *Emphasis on loyalty,* which implies that once the group is perceived as being the primary vehicle through which individuals achieve their long-term objectives, group loyalty intensifies. This is especially true when the threat to the group is perceived as external to the group.

- *Acceptance of autocratic direction,* where under conditions of high stress, the status quo is no longer acceptable, and mechanisms are often insufficient to move the group effectively in one direction. Under these conditions, autocratic direction becomes more acceptable.

- *Focused activity*, where the group places greater emphasis on task oriented behavior.

- *Taking extreme positions,* which implies that the group, when compared to individuals, tends to take on extreme positions.

Uline *et al.* (2003:783) further explore the consequences of conflict between groups and state that conflict results in:

- A clear distinction and comparison between "we" and "they".

- Decreased interaction and communication where group members do not only reduce social and professional contacts, but also reduce the number of attempted communications directed towards the other group.

- Distorted perceptions wherein threatened group members feel superior and overestimate their strength and underestimate that of members of other groups.

- Decreased members' cohesion if a group is losing in a conflict such that they experience tension among themselves and look for a scapegoat to blame their failure on.

Consequences of conflict indicate clearly that conflict must be handled, especially at the micro level. This basically involves how conflict is handled as indicated by various models.

2.4.6 **Conflict handling models**

Conflict handling models provide different views of the conflict management process. In most cases, the models tend to focus on modes of handling interpersonal conflict and mostly present a two dimensional approach. Among the numerous conflict handling models encountered in literature, the competence-based conflict management model, the Thomas-Killman two-dimensional model, the behavioural style model and Rahim's dual-concern model will be discussed.

2.4.6.1 ***The competence-based conflict management model***

The competence-based model of conflict management describes how people manage their disputes. The model essentially sees conflict management as a function of the effectiveness and appropriateness of communication. According, to Suppiah and Che Rose (2006:1906), appropriateness refers to communication that avoids violation of relationally and situationally sanctioned rules, whereas effectiveness refers to communication that achieves the valued objectives of the interactant. Gross and Guerrero (2000:201) point out that this model focuses on three dimensions of communication, *viz.*:

- *Effectiveness*, which achieves the valued objectives or goals of the organisational member. In this regard, communication that is personally rewarding, helpful, useful and successful is perceived as effective;

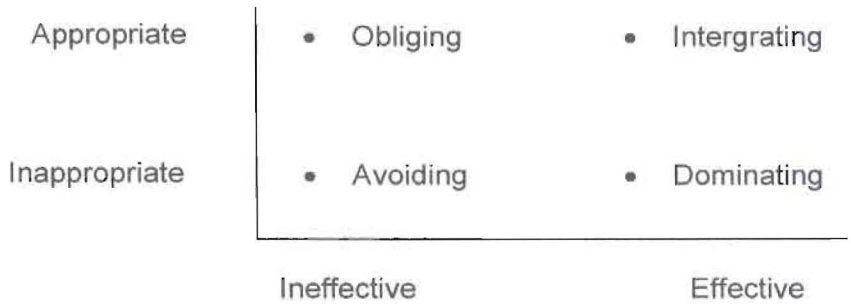
- *Relational appropriateness*, which relates to behaviour that is generally prosocial and constructive in nature. In a sense, individuals who are rude or make tactless remarks will be perceived as low in relational appropriateness. Thus, relational appropriateness relates to an individual's

acted behaviours during the conflict episode (cf. Suppiah & Che Rose, 2006:1906).

- *Situational appropriateness*, which refers to a more global assessment of a speaker's style and includes the ability to carry on a smooth conversation and to successfully adapt to the needs of a given situation. Suppian and Che Rose (2006:1906) see this dimension as focusing evaluation of an individual's behaviour on the whole conflict episode.

The competence-based model of conflict management thus espouses competence in managing conflict as dependent on perceptions of effectiveness and appropriateness. Figure 2.4 depicts a simple representation of the model.

Figure 2.4 The competence-based model of conflict management



(Adapted from Gross and Guerrero, 2000:204)

As illustrated in figure 2.6 above, from the various combinations of appropriateness and effectiveness, an individual who is inappropriate and ineffective tends to use avoidance. According to Suppiah and Che Rose (2006:1906), such an individual does not follow rules and does not attain desired goals. An individual who is appropriate but ineffective tends to be obliging and such an individual is neither doing anything wrong nor does he/she attains valued objectives through interaction (Suppiah & Che Rose, 2006:1906).

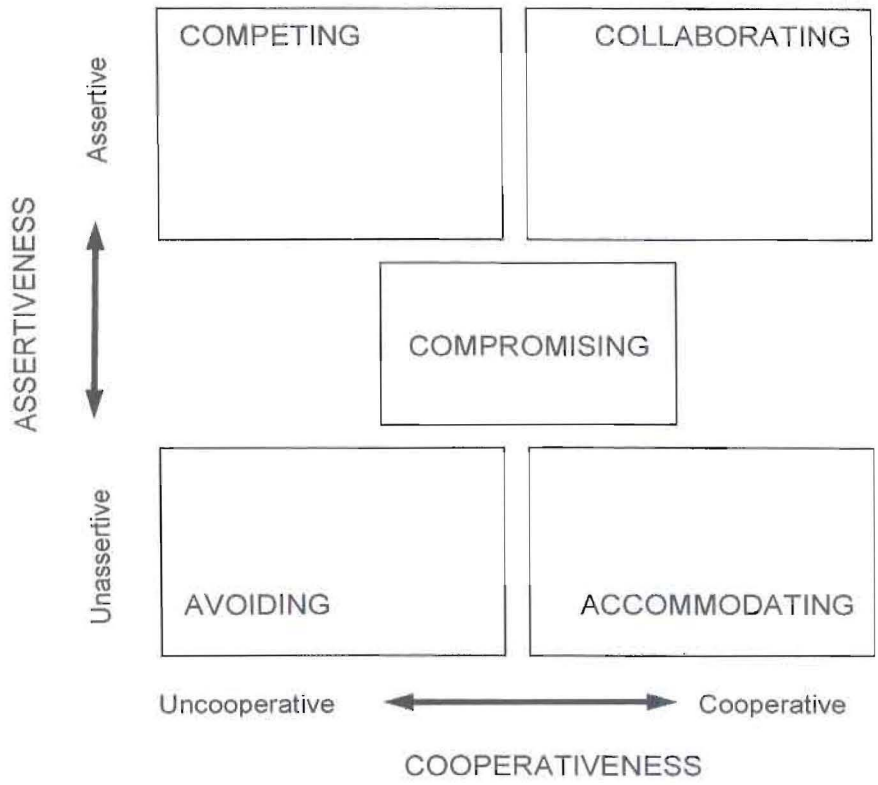
> An individual who is inappropriate and effective tends to be dominating and such an individual is able to attain valued objectives but violates standards of relational preference, while an individual who is both appropriate and effective is integrating in interactions and obtains valued objectives while maintaining the integrity of the interaction (Suppiah & Che Rose, 2006:1906).

Clearly therefore, as Gross and Guerrero (2000:202) argue, the more effective and appropriate an organisational member is perceived to be during a conflict situation, the more competent he or she will be judged. This implies that when two conflicting parties manage a conflict successfully in terms of appropriateness and effectiveness, the relationship between them is preserved in addition to having the conflict resolved.

2.4.6.2 *The Thomas-Killman two-dimension model*

According to Thomas (www.cpp.com/content/conflict_whitepaper.pdf), conflict is the condition in which people's concerns appear to be incompatible and as such, when people find themselves in conflict, their behaviour (which determines how the conflict will be handled) lies between two independent dimensions namely, *assertiveness* and *cooperativeness* (Figure 2.5). Assertiveness refers to the degree to which one tries to satisfy his/her concerns, while cooperativeness refers to the degree to which one tries to satisfy other people's concerns.

Figure 2.5 The Thomas-Killman *two-dimension model*



Source: Thomas, www.cpp.com/content/conflict_whitepaper.pdf.

As illustrated in figure 2.5 above, the model presents five main conflict-handling modes, which entail the (Thomas, www.cpp.com/content/conflict_whitepaper.pdf):

- *competing mode*, which is assertive and uncooperative. The competing mode implies that an individual tries to satisfy his/her own concerns at the other individual's expense;

- *accommodating mode*, which is unassertive and cooperative. This mode implies that individuals sacrifice their concerns to satisfy the other person's concerns;

- *compromising mode*, which is partially assertive and partially cooperative and implies that an individual looks for an acceptable settlement that only partially satisfies both his/her concerns and the other individual's concerns;

- *avoiding mode*, which is unassertive and uncooperative and implies that an individual tries to sidestep or postpone the conflict thus satisfying neither individual's concerns; and

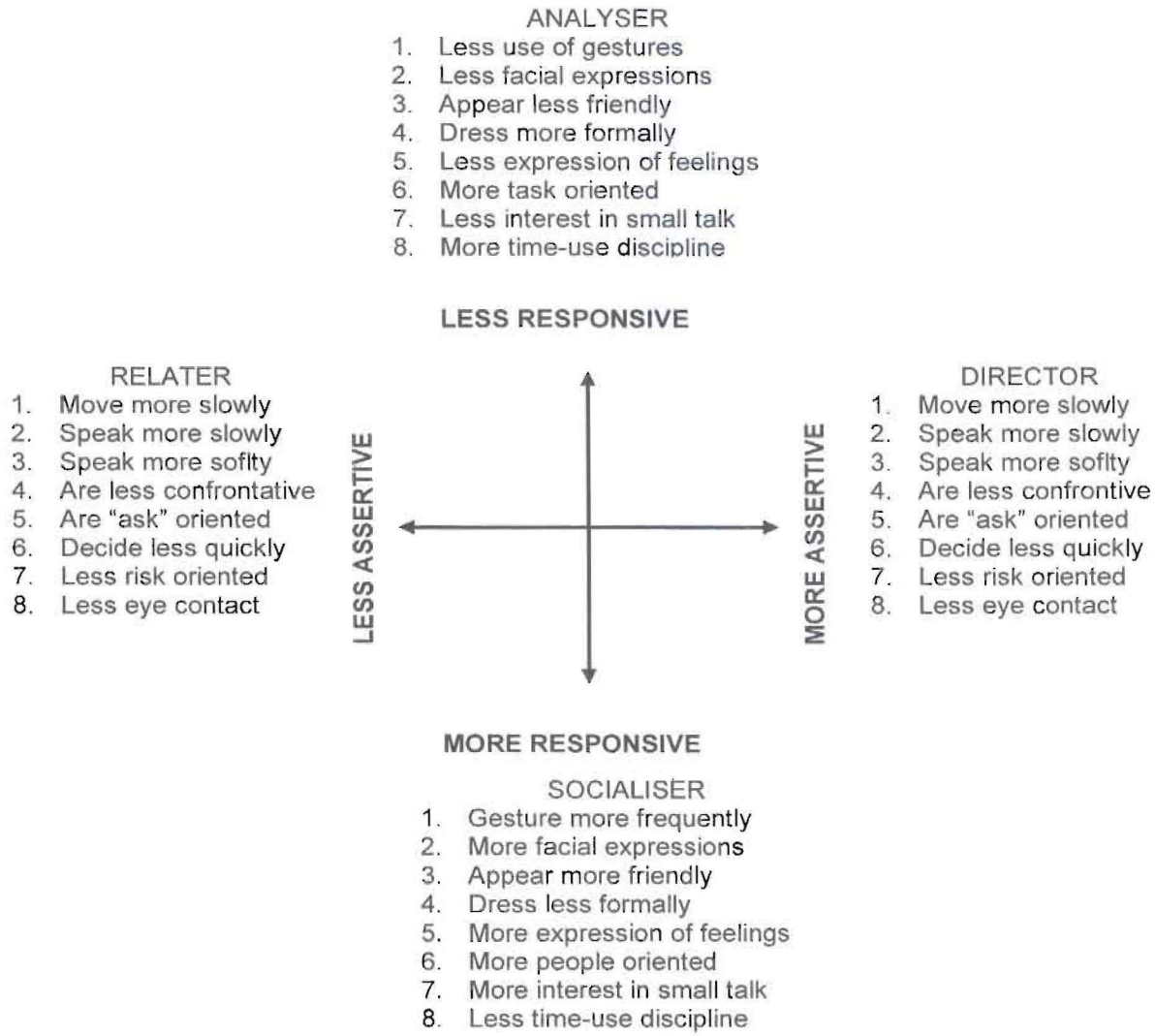
- *collaborating mode*, which is assertive and cooperative and implies that an individual tries to problem-solve to find a solution that completely satisfies both his/her concerns and the other's concern.

2.4.6.3 ***The behavioural style model***

According to Darling and Walker (2001:231), the behavioural style reflects a pervasive and enduring set of interpersonal behaviours and essentially focuses on how a person acts, that is, what he/she says and does. Thus, according to the behavioural style model, the foundation for behavioural styles rests on the clusters of behaviours people exhibit in interactive situations. Two major dimensions of interactive behaviour are featured in this model. These are *assertiveness* and *responsiveness*. Darling and Walker (2001:232) explain that assertiveness relates to the degree to which behaviours are seen by others as being forceful or directive; and responsiveness relates to the degree to which behaviours are seen by others as emotionally expressive or emotionally controlled.

The two dimensions form the two axes of the model with each quadrant representing one of the four behavioural styles namely, *relater, analyser, director* and *socialiser* (see figure 2.6 below).

Figure 2.6 The behavioural styles model: interactive dimensions



Source: Darling & Walker, 2001:233

According to Darling and Walker (2003:232), as illustrated in figure 2.6 above:

- the *relater* combines a higher-than-average responsiveness with a comparatively low level of assertiveness and tends to be sympathetic to the needs of others and is sensitive to what lies below someone's surface behaviour. Relaters are thus congenial team players who like stability more than risk and who care greatly about relationships with others;

- the *analyser* combines low levels of emotional responsiveness and a low level of assertiveness and tends to take precise, deliberate and systematic approaches to their work and usually gather and evaluate much data before they act. They are thus self-controlled and generally cautious people who prefer analysis over emotion;

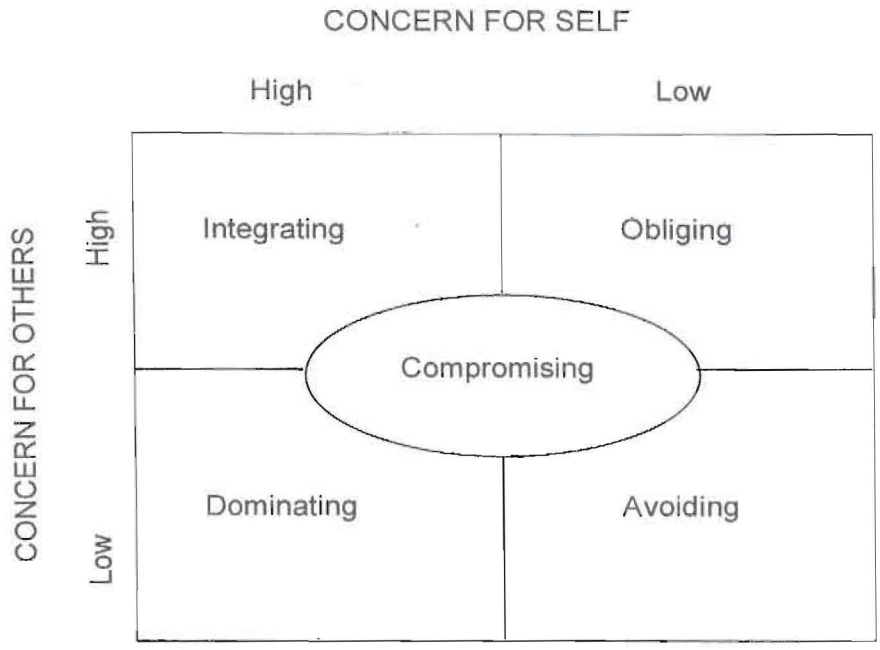
- the *director* blends low levels of emotional responsiveness with a relatively high degree of assertiveness and tends to be task-oriented. They know where they are going and what they want, express themselves succinctly and get to the point quickly. They are often pragmatic, decisive, results-oriented, objective and competitive, independent and willing to take risks. They leave no doubt as to who is in charge of the conflict issue under consideration; and

- the *socialiser*, who integrates high levels of both emotional responsiveness and assertiveness and tends to look at the bigger picture, often takes fresh, novel and creative approaches to problems and is willing to take risks in order to seize opportunities, particularly in conflict situations.

2.4.6.4 ***Rahim's dual-concern model***

Rahim's dual-concern model addresses conflict handling on two basic dimensions, namely, the concern for self and the concern for others (Rahim, Antonioni & Psenicka, 2001:195). The grid below (figure 2.7) illustrates this model.

Figure 2.7 Rahim's dual-concern model



Source: Rahim, 2002:217.

As illustrated in figure 2.7, the dual-concern model provides the basis for a discussion of the following styles of conflict resolution (Rahim, 2002:219):

- the *integrating* style portrays a high concern for self and others and is associated with problem-solving, that is, the diagnosis of and intervention into the right problems and involves the use of openness, exchange of information, looking for alternatives and examining the differences to reach an effective solution. This style is useful for dealing with the strategic issues pertaining to an organisation's objectives and policies and long-range planning.

- the *obliging* style which exhibits a low concern for self and a high concern for others, is associated with attempting to play down the differences and emphasise commonalities to satisfy the concerns of others. This style is

useful when a party is not familiar with the issues involved in a conflict or the other party is right and the issue is much more important to him/her.

- the *dominating* style exhibits a high concern for the self and low concern for others and is identified as the win-lose orientation and employs forceful behaviour to win one's position. A dominating person goes all out to win his/her objective and ignores, as a result, the needs and expectations of others.

- The *avoiding* style exhibits a low concern for the self and for others and is associated with withdrawal, buck-passing or sidestepping situations. Consequently, an avoiding person fails to satisfy his/her own concerns as well as those of others. This style may be used when dealing with trivial issues or when a cooling-off period is needed before a complex problem can effectively be dealt with.

- the *compromising* style displays intermediate concern for self and others and involves a give-and-take process whereby both parties give up something to make mutually acceptable decisions. This style is useful when parties to the conflict are mutually exclusive or when parties are equally powerful and have reached an impasse in their negotiation and interaction.

The foregoing exposition illustrates clearly that conflict is inevitable and that its management is dependent on a variety of factors, hence the various models of managing it. It is also clear that most conflict management models depart from the management of interpersonal conflict. Although these can be applied to organisational conflict, they mostly address a phase of the conflict process, that is, conflict resolution, minimisation or reduction. Conflict management is by its nature, a process which requires a macro-level strategy that begins with organisational conflict identification and/or diagnosis. This is addressed by looking at the actual meaning or essence of conflict management.

2.5 THE ESSENCE OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Rahim (2002:206) argues that even though conflict is often said to be functional for organisations, most recommendations relating to organisational conflict still fall within the spectrum of conflict resolution, reduction or minimisation. It is precisely the understanding of this argument that underpins this study's approach to conflict management.

Conflict is, in this study, considered as a two-pronged phenomenon, that is, it can be functional and can also be dysfunctional, depending on the type it manifests. This view concurs with Rahim's assertion (2002:207) that conflict should be managed at interpersonal, intra-group and inter-group levels. To this end, a clear understanding of the essence of conflict management is thus essential.

2.5.1 Conflict management versus conflict resolution

Conflict management is usually confused with the notion of conflict resolution. The dictionary meaning of resolution derives from the verb "resolve" which, according to the Cambridge Learner's Dictionary (2002) means to solve or settle a problem. This implies an action of finding a solution at the height of a problem or settling a dispute at its utmost manifestation. Considering the episodes culminating into the end of a conflict, conflict resolution relates to a particular stage of the conflict.

Rahim (2002:207) sees conflict resolution as implying a reduction, elimination or termination of conflict. Accordingly such actions as negotiation, bargaining, mediation and arbitration fall into the conflict resolution category. This implies that conflict management is not avoidance, reduction or termination. Rahim (2002:208) defines conflict management as an effective macro-level strategy to minimise the dysfunction of conflict and to enhance the constructive functions of conflict in order to enhance learning and effectiveness in an organisation.

In terms of the definition above, an important aspect in conflict management is highlighted, namely, organisational learning. According to Luthans, Rubach and Marsnik (*in* Rahim, 2002:208),

> "the presence of tension and conflict seem to be essential characteristics of the learning organisation. ...The tension and conflict will be evidenced by questioning, enquiry, disequilibrium and a challenging of the status quo".

It can therefore be claimed that conflict management, as a strategy for minimising dysfunctional conflict, also seeks to enhance functional conflict through organisational learning. In this regard, Rahim (2002:208) cites Amason, Jehn, Northcraft and Neale, who suggest that conflict management strategies should involve recognition of the following:

- that certain types of conflict, which may have negative effects on individual and group performance may have to be reduced, including conflicts caused by negative reactions to organisational members such as personal attacks on group members, racial disharmony and sexual harassment.

- that other types of conflict which may have positive effects on the individual and group performance such as those that relate to disagreements relating to tasks, policies and other organisational issues require generating but maintaining at moderate levels.

- that organisational members, in dealing with each other will be required to deal with disagreements constructively, which calls for learning how to use different conflict-handling styles to deal with various situations effectively.

The exposition above indicates that conflict management is a process that takes cognisance of the stages of its unfolding, from potential conflict situations to

outbreaks that might require conflict resolution strategies. The best approach, however, is to manage the entire conflict process.

Learning to manage conflict requires insight into what is involved in so doing. This is more so with regard to the strategy that seeks to be at the macro-organisational level. To this end, certain criteria become important to note.

2.5.2 **Criteria for conflict management**

According to Rahim (2002:209), for conflict management strategies to succeed, the following criteria should be satisfied:

- *Organisational learning and effectiveness*, which dictates that conflict management strategies should be designed to enhance organisational learning, which will lead to long-term effectiveness. To achieve this, organisational learning should seek to enhance critical and innovative thinking to learn the process of diagnosis and intervention in the right problem.

  From the exposition above, it can be argued that the outcomes of organisational learning and effectiveness would be the knowledge of handling similar conflict situations in future and would create a situation where a recurrence of the same problems and conflict antecedents is eliminated. An acquisition of critical thinking will also serve to enhance organisational members' ability to interrogate problems and challenges and to engage in problem-solving, which would also enhance organisational effectiveness.

- *Needs of stakeholders*, which implies that conflict management strategies should satisfy the needs and expectations of strategic constituencies and to attain a balance among them. This includes involving the right stakeholders to solve the right problems.

At school, such conflict management situations can arise where parents and educators, educators and the school management or even educators and learners are involved. It can be said that their involvement in problem-solving can lead to organisational learning and effectiveness.

- *Ethics*, which entails leaders ethical behaviour by being, *inter alia*, open to new information and being willing to change one's mind. Subordinates should also have an ethical duty to speak out against the decisions of superiors when consequences of such decisions are likely to be serious.

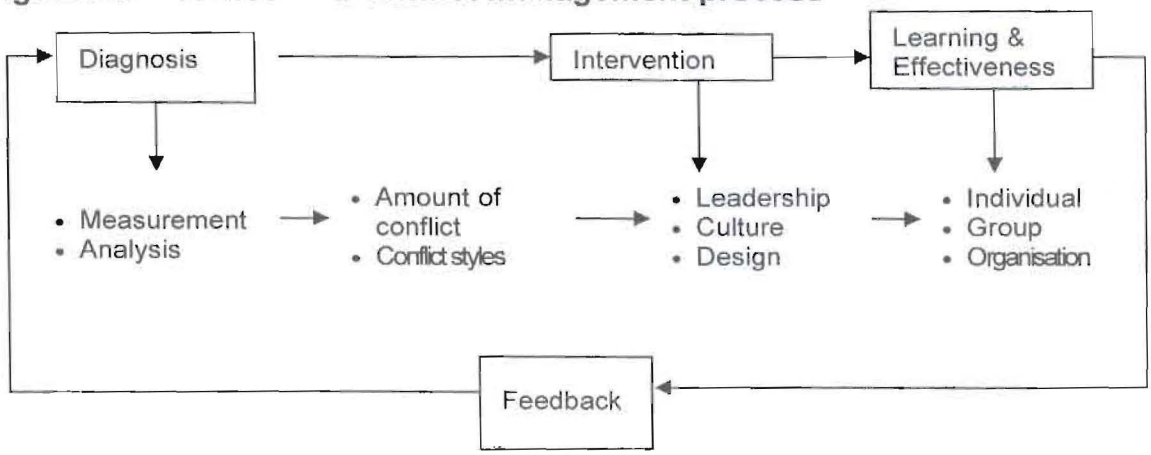
The exposition of criteria for conflict management indicate clearly that conflict management is not just an incidental or even reactionary process, but that it is a purposeful and planned process that requires the creation of conditions for the application of strategies geared towards organisational learning and effectiveness. The process of conflict management is thus of utmost importance in managing conflict at schools.

2.5.3 **Conflict at schools: the conflict management process**

As pointed out earlier in this text, conflict management is a process that takes cognisance of the stages of its unfolding, from potential conflict situations to outbreaks that might require conflict resolution strategies. For purposes of this study, conflict management is also defined as *an effective macro-level strategy to minimise the dysfunctional effects of conflict and enhance the constructive functions of conflict in order to enhance learning and effectiveness in an organisation* (cf. Rahim, 2002:208). Essentially, this implies that conflict management is seen as a process that begins with the identification of conflict and ends up with its resolution and this exercises an influence on the schools organisation. Thus, conflict management for the school implies putting into place measures to diagnose, identify and deal with potential conflict while handling outbreaks of conflict during the normal school operations.

To this end, Rahim (2002:222) presents the conflict management process as represented in figure 2.8.

Figure 2.8 A modified conflict management process



Adapted from Rahim, 2002:222.

The basic principle of the process as outlined in figure 2.8 above is that the management of school organisational conflict involves two major phases, namely, diagnosis and intervention.

- *Diagnosis*

  Diagnosis entails problem recognition, which involves problem sensing and problem formulation. Proper diagnosis of causes and effects of different types of conflict in schools is important in that the underlying causes and effects may not be what they appear to be on the surface. Accordingly, it is crucial to know:

  - whether or not the school has too little, moderate or too much affective and substantive conflict; and
  - whether or not the school members or parties in conflict are appropriately selecting and using the five styles of handling conflict to deal with different situations properly.

Rahim (2002:222) states that diagnosis provides the basis for intervention. Therefore, a comprehensive diagnosis should involve the measurement of conflict and the analysis of the relations amongst conflicting parties. According to Rahim (2002:223) *measurement* involves the measurement of the following:

- the amount of substantive and affective conflict at the interpersonal, intra-group and inter-group levels;
- the styles of handling interpersonal, intra-group and interpersonal conflicts of, and among school organisational members;
- the sources of substantive and affective conflicts among school organisational members; and
- individual, group and organisational learning and effectiveness.

Measurement largely occurs by way of data collection. Rahim (2002:224) states in this regard that questionnaires can be used for this purpose, for example, the questionnaire developed by Jehn to measure the affective and substantive conflict at group level as well as the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory – II for measuring the styles of handling interpersonal conflict.

Analysis of data collected involves analysing:

- the amount of substantive and affective conflict and the styles of handling conflict classified by departments, units and divisions and whether or not they are different from their corresponding national norms;
- the relationship of the amount of conflict and the conflict styles to their sources; and

- the relationship of the amount of conflict and conflict styles to learning and effectiveness.

From the foregoing exposition, it is clear that proper diagnosis will essentially reveal the nature of conflict and will determine whether or not it is functional or dysfunctional. What is more advantageous is that this process will indicate the level of conflict, its impact on school organisational learning and effectiveness. This should then lead to intervention in the conflict.

- *Intervention*

The intervention phase implies deciding on the best course of action to take in order to manage and resolve the conflict. According to Rahim (2002:225), an intervention may be necessary when there is too much affective or to little or too much substantive conflict, and it is clear that the school organisational members are not handling their conflict effectively.

There are two basic approaches to conflict intervention. Rahim (2002:225) describes these approaches namely, process and structural, thus:

- *Process approach*

A process refers to a sequence of actions or events intended to bring about some form of outcome or result. An intervention process in conflict management attempts to improve school organisational effectiveness by changing the intensity of affective and substantive conflicts and school members' styles of handling interpersonal conflict. Rahim (2002:225) asserts that an intervention process is mainly designed to manage conflict by helping school organisational members to learn how to match the use of conflict handling styles with different situations, thus enabling them to make effective use of for instance, avoiding, compromising,

integrating, obliging and dominating styles, as determined by the conflict situation (cf. 2.4.6.4).

Process intervention in conflict management will result in a change in the levels of affective and substantive conflicts and it requires changes in the school organisational processes such as culture, leaders and design, which will also support members' newly acquired skills of conflict management.

Process intervention uses various intervention strategies and techniques. It is important to reiterate at this stage, that conflict management aims at organisational learning and effectiveness. Thus organisational development strategies and techniques are useful to this end. Rahim (2002:225) cites French and Bell who define these strategies and techniques as:

> "long-term effort, led and supported by top management to improve an organisational visioning, empowerment, learning and problem-solving processes, through an ongoing, collaborative management of school organisational culture – with special emphasis on the culture of intact work teams and other team configurations – using the consultant-facilitator role and the theory and technology of applied behavioural science, including action research."

It seems therefore, that intervention strategies aim to help the organisational members to learn to use conflict handling styles, that are mainly integrative or collaborative through which the real causes of conflict are harnessed into functional solutions.

- *Structural approach*

  According to Rahim (2002:227), the structural intervention as an approach attempts to improve school organisational learning and effectiveness by changing the organisation's structural design characteristics, which include, *inter* alia, differentiation and integration mechanisms, hierarchy, procedures and reward systems. This is done by attempting to alter the perceptions of the intensity of conflict of the school's members at various levels.

  Therefore intervention strategies, depending on the nature and extent of conflict as well as the type of intervention required, may occur at school organisational leadership, cultural and at design levels.

  According to Rahim (2002:226), at *leadership level*, leadership should change to roles that emphasise leaders as educators, stewards and designers so that leadership becomes leadership that "articulates a clear and challenging vision ... that focuses on people around them, motivating them to want to learn and take responsibility ...". This clearly implies leadership that takes the lead in the conflict management process.

  At *school organisational culture and design levels*, conflict management requires, as stated by Rahim (2002:227), the support of school organisational learning and effectiveness in terms of cultures that support experimentation, risk-taking, openness, diverse viewpoints, continuous questioning and inquiry and sharing of information and knowledge, which factors would encourage substantive or task-related conflict and discourage affective or emotional conflict.

The strength of the conflict management process exposed above, seems to be located in its intensity of addressing as well as stimulating conflict. This is done

through the regulation of both substantive and affective conflicts with the main aim being to reduce affective conflict and to stimulate substantive conflict. The other strength of the process is located in the process's ability to allow for the diagnosis and solution of the correct problem (cf. Rahim, 2002:214; 223). Solving the correct problem ensures that proper intervention process is enacted. The conflict management process seems therefore appropriate in dealing with everyday conflict episodes, but also seems to address the most crucial aspect of conflict in schools namely, learning and effectiveness.

Managing conflict necessitates an insight into what conflict in school contexts entails. To this end, it is important to consider some aspects pertaining to conflict at schools as organisations.

2.6 CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN SCHOOL ORGANISATIONS

Conflict in schools portrays the same features as conflict in any other organisation. However, the nature of the service that the school delivers is such that, it necessitates elimination of dysfunctional conflict at all costs. Indeed, as a service-oriented organisation (Theron, 2002:80), and being a social system, the type of conflict at schools will display some unique features. Thus, it is important to scrutinise the main sources of conflict in schools.

2.6.1 The main sources of conflict in schools

According to Martinez (2004:30), in school settings, there are two common sources of conflict namely, *relational* and *resource* conflicts.

2.6.1.1 *Relational conflict*

Martinez (2004:30) defines relational conflict as occurring between individuals or groups and is caused by differences in personality, culture, values, beliefs and opinions. This conflict emanates from and involves emotional displays and heated verbal exchanges. Clearly, relational conflict can lead to the school being

dysfunctional as found by Medina *et al.* (2005:225), that relational conflict is positively related to the desire to leave the current job.

Relational conflict can be interpersonal, intrapersonal, inter-group or intra-group. In this regard, Bell (2002:67) in her research, found factors like racial, communication and cultural differences as being involved in relational conflict.

Examples of relational conflict can be experienced by educators in having to choose between certain school rites and the dictates of their consciences, relating to superiors who may be perceived to be too critical and less appreciative of educators' efforts, disagreements over the best course of action to be taken in pursuit of goals and objectives and perceptions of different cultures within departments in schools.

2.6.1.2 ***Resource conflict***

Resource conflict occurs because there is not enough of something for every person or group, so that the struggle to obtain it produces winners and losers (Martinez, 2004:31). Martinez (2004:33) emphasises that schools are particularly susceptible to resource conflict, especially with regard to constraints on time, money, equipment, learners, staff or facilities. Due to competition for resources, educators might find it difficult to separate personal feelings from the resource problems.

Examples of resource conflict are evident in, for instance, an educator being torn between spending more time on slower learners at the expense of brighter ones, deciding on which resources should receive priority in the face of poor financial resources, and competition among educators for the "best" learners in a subject.

Based on the main conflict sources at schools, it is clear that conflict management at schools requires an understanding of a number of factors. For that matter,

conflict handling strategies that are usually employed and are an important aspect of applying a conflict handling process at schools.

2.6.2 Strategies for handling conflict at schools

In dealing with day-to-day conflict, conflict handling strategies are particularly helpful in cases of inter-group and inter-organisational conflict (Kreitner & Kinicki, 1998:341). Negotiations and third party intervention are examples of conflict handling strategies.

2.6.2.1 *Negotiations*

Negotiation is a give-and-take decision-making process involving independent parties with different preferences (Kreitner & Kinicki, 1998:342). Anstey (2006:104) surmises from a number of definitions that negotiation is:

> a verbal interactive process, involving two or more parties, who are seeking an agreement over a problem or conflict of interest between them and in which they seek, as far as possible, to preserve their interests, but adjust their views and positions in the joint effort to achieve an agreement.

Negotiation at schools can be useful in resolving conflict. For instance, negotiation can be helpful in resolving resource conflict. It can also play a useful role in resolving conflict emanating from incompatible goal pursuits as well as situations where educator-parent conflict threatens to proceed to lawsuits. Obviously, the principal's mediating role would be quintessential in this case.

From the definition of negotiation above, it is clear that it should, as far as possible, aim for a "win-win" solution and because this can be challenging to attain, it can be deduced that negotiation would go well with third party intervention.

2.6.2.2 *Third party intervention*

Third party intervention includes such strategies as mediation, arbitration and conciliation.

- *Mediation*

  According to Anstey (2006:104), mediation relates to a neutral third party who facilitates a negotiated solution by using reasoning, persuasion and suggestions for alternatives. Havenga (2004:157) claims that mediation is more objective and parties are usually inclined to put trust in it.

- *Arbitration*

  Anstey (2006:104) states that arbitration relates to a third party in a negotiation, who has the authority to dictate an agreement. According to Alam (www.dundee.ac.uk/cepmlp/car/html/car7_article13.pdf), arbitration is an adjudicative process and focuses on an appraisal of each party's rights and the outcome is dictated rather than agreed, so that there is no win-win situation, but rather the winner takes all. Obviously, this would not be an advisable strategy at a school, especially because the aftermath of the process might result in resentment, which does not bode well for team spirit.

- *Conciliation*

  Conciliation uses a trusted third party who provides an informal communication link between the negotiator and the opponent (Anstey, 2006:104). The conciliator identifies the issues in dispute, develops options to resolve them and encourages parties to resolve the conflict according to his/her suggested options (Alam www.dundee.ac.uk/cepmlp/car/html/car7_article13.pdf).

2.6.3 Conflict management approaches

According to Van der Merwe (2003:32), because of personality differences, people in conflict situations usually approach conflict in various ways. The three most common approaches to handling conflict seem to be the win-lose, win-win and the lose-lose approaches.

2.6.3.1 *The win-win approach*

According to Van der Merwe (2003:32), the basic attitude of people with a win-win approach is that differences are natural and healthy and should not be seen as good or bad. Thus, differences and conflict require honest confrontation and objective solutions. Accordingly, this style can be perceived as the compromising style, and it involves give-and-take whereby both parties give up something to make mutually acceptable decisions. This style is useful when parties to the conflict are mutually exclusive or when parties are equally powerful and have reached an impasse in their negotiation and interaction (Rahim, 2002:219).

2.6.3.2 *The lose-lose approach*

With the lose-lose approach, Van der Merwe (2003:32) contends that neither of the conflicting parties is prepared to compromise and in fact, they may impose such massive demands on each other that both parties end up in far worse positions than before the conflict erupted. This situation is usually strongly motivated by self-interest for moving towards other outcomes such as compromise, for a win-win situation.

Fisher (2000:5) remarks that the lose-lose strategy is exemplified by smoothing over conflict or by reaching the simplest of compromises because disagreement is seen as inevitable. Therefore there is no agreement and no winner. In fact, both parties do everything to ensure that the other loses even if they lose themselves.

Letendre (2002) contends that as a result, conflicting parties are dissatisfied with the outcome, mainly because this approach is the result of avoiding to deal with the real problems and of making compromises on important issues.

2.6.3.3 *The win-lose approach*

With this approach, the parties' own specific interests are of primary concern and no compromise can be considered in the conflict situation, hence the basic attitude of a person is that it is natural to want to win in a conflict situation (Van der Merwe, 2003:32). Therefore people with this approach regard their own interest as vital, with the result that no compromise can be considered in the conflict situation.

According to Loock (2003:20-21), a person involved in a conflict situation and who has a win-lose orientation, sees the solution of the conflict as being embodied in the power struggle, the intervention of a third person with greater authority and the casting of lots.

Fisher (2000:4-5) emphasises that this approach is all too common as people learn the behaviours of destructive conflict early in life. In fact, competition, dominance, aggression and defense permeate many social relationships from the family to the school.

Berger (2007) explains that there are three win-lose strategies namely, competing, accommodating and dominating. Competing focuses on the person and not the issue of the conflict or problems. Accommodating is characterised by a low desire to satisfy one's own desires and a high desire to satisfy the desires of the other party. Dominating is characterised by a low level of cooperativeness and a high level of aggression.

2.6.4 The principal's role in conflict management in schools

It must be stated that conflict management in schools is basically the task of the principal as leader at the school. However, due to the nature of the school as an

organisation, an holistic approach to conflict management is advocated by the conflict management process (cf. 2.5.3). This is especially because the main aim is to limit dysfunctional conflict and to stimulate organisational learning and effectiveness. The process thus addresses everyday conflict occurrences while equipping school organisational members to learn to handle and resolve conflict. To that end, the conflict management process addresses both the management and resolution of conflict.

In essence, the conflict management process advocates elements of conflict prevention, management and resolution. Swanström and Weismann (2005:25) claim that conflict management requires an integration of conflict management, prevention and resolution. As alluded to earlier in this text (cf. 2.5.1), conflict management refers to an effective macro-level strategy to minimise the dysfunction of conflict and enhance the constructive functions of conflict in order to enhance learning and effectiveness in an organisation.

Conflict prevention, according to Swanström and Weismann (2005:19) relates to both direct and structural categories. Direct conflict prevention relates to measures aimed at preventing short-term, often imminent escalation of potential conflict. Structural prevention focuses more on long-term measures that address the underlying causes of potential conflict along with potentially escalating and triggering factors. These categories reflect, in a similar manner, Rahim's process and structural intervention in conflict (cf. 2.5.1). Therefore conflict resolution refers to the resolution of the underlying incompatibilities in a conflict and mutual acceptance of each party's existence (Swanström & Weismann, 2005:25).

In terms of conflict at schools, the role of the principals is therefore that of integrating conflict prevention and resolution into a conflict management process. This places conflict management at the very foundation of conflict resolution and prevention. To do so, the principal's role essentially revolves around diagnosis and intervention.

In terms of diagnosis, the principal's role involves firstly, problem recognition, which implies sensing and identifying potential problems and conflicts, and measurement and analysis of data collected with regard to the problem or conflict (cf. 2.5.3).

Secondly, the principal's role involves intervention in the conflict process. This implies deciding on the best course of action, either by improving the school organisational effectiveness by changing the intensity of affective and substantive conflicts and school members' styles of handling interpersonal conflict so that school organisational members can learn how to match the use of conflict handling styles with different situations. This will enable them to make effective use of for instance, avoiding, compromising, integrating, obliging and dominating styles as determined by the conflict situation (cf. 2.5.3).

Intervention also implies leadership changing to roles that articulate a clear and challenging vision, that focus on people around them, motivating them to want to learn and to take responsibility. It also implies support of school organisational learning and effectiveness in terms of cultures that support experimentation, risk-taking, openness, diverse viewpoints, continuous questioning and inquiry and sharing of information and knowledge, which factors would encourage substantive or task-related conflict and discourage affective or emotional conflict (cf. 2.5.3).

It is therefore clear that the principal's role in conflict management in schools revolves around proactively engaging in the conflict management process. This necessitates the principal to play numerous roles, *inter alia*, being an agent of communication, a problem solver, a negotiator, a leader, a mediator, a decision maker and a researcher (Kgomo, 2006:83). All these are attributes that are essential for both the diagnosis and intervention in the conflict management process.

2.7 SUMMARY

This chapter presented the nature of conflict management at schools. This was done through an examination of conflict management within the context of the school as an organisation and included among other aspects, the exploration of what conflict entails, conflict types, the conflict management process and the role of the school principal in managing conflict in schools.

The next chapter presents the empirical research method of the research study.

CHAPTER 3

EMPIRICAL RESEARCH METHOD

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter presented the literature review on the nature and management of conflict in schools. This chapter presents the emprical research method for this study.

3.2 EMPIRICAL RESEARCH DESIGN

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005:85), a research design provides the overall structure for procedures that a research study follows, and includes data collection and analysis, which essentially means planning, and is always done with the central goal of solving the research problem in mind. In this regard, Denzin and Lincoln (2005:32) point out that, due to the many factors that must be considered in planning the research, including time and costs, it is imperative that researchers consciously and purposely select and utilise those research methods that would permit better, convenient and successful attainment of specific research aims.

3.2.1 Aim of the empirical research

This study intended to investigate principals' conflict management styles at schools. The literature review highlighted the essence of conflict and its management and revealed conflict handling styles as well as the conflict management process as the main elements of conflict management in schools. This section of the study focuses on the empirical research. The aim thereof is to investigate the conflict handling styles that school principals currently use to manage conflict.

There are two broad approaches commonly used by researchers to collect data. These are the quantitative and qualitative approaches. The qualitative approach

focuses on phenomena that occur in natural settings and secondly, involves studying these phenomena in all their complexity and to this end, qualitative research relies on researchers' abilities to interpret and make sense of what they see. This is critical for understanding any social phenomenon (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:133).

In this research, the quantitative approach is used to investigate conflict management at schools and is outlined briefly below.

3.2.2 **The quantitative research approach**

Quantitative research is defined as a formal, objective and systematic process where data are used to obtain information about study phenomena (Stubbs, 2005). A quantitative research approach uses descriptive statistics as a method of organising data, facilitating the organisation and the interpretation of numbers obtained from measuring a characteristic or variable (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:30; McMillan & Schumacher, 1993:191). Leedy and Ormrod (2005:180) contend that the focus in quantitative research is typically one aspect of behaviour, which is quantified in some way to determine its frequency. According to Vockel and Asher (1995:192), quantitative research involves the use of questionnaires. To this end, this study makes use of a questionnaire as a quantitative research instrument.

3.2.3 **The questionnaire as a research instrument**

McMillan and Schumacher (2001:257) point out that for many reasons the questionnaire is the most widely used technique for obtaining information from subjects. Among other things, a questionnaire is relatively economical, has the same questions for all subjects and can ensure anonymity. In developing a questionnaire, McMillan and Schumacher (2001:259) allude to the fact that questionnaires can use statements or questions, but in all cases the subject is responding to something written for specific purposes.

Questionnaires are limited by certain disadvantages (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:185). According to Best and Kahn (1993:230) and Tuckman (1994:216), questionnaires are limited by, among others disadvantages:

- misleading responses as a result of not being able to check the motivation of respondents;
- socially desirable responses as a result of respondents being unwilling to respond to questions bordering on private or controversial issues;
- indiscriminate answering of the questionnaire due to little interest in a particular problem; and
- failure to get a true picture of opinions and feelings as a result of the questionnaire not being able to probe deeply enough as can be achieved in interviews.

Notwithstanding the disadvantages listed above, the questionnaire was chosen because of its advantages, *inter alia*, anonymity, low administration costs, coverage of a large geographic area and the ability to reach a large sample (Delport, 2002:172).

The questionnaire was therefore used as a data collecting instrument, mainly since it would be easy to distribute and administer (Charles & Mertler, 2002:159). The questionnaire was also used because it satisfies assumptions on which questionnaires are based namely that (Leedy and Ormrod, 2005:202):

- respondents can read and understand the questions;
- respondents are in a position to supply the information to answer the questions, especially in view of the prevailing conditions in the primary

schools, which are considered relevant in terms of the study in conflict management, and

- lastly, there was a strong possibility of interest and willingness to answer the questions.

The success of the questionnaire as a research instrument was assured through a thorough and meticulous process of developing questions.

3.2.4 *Reliability and validity*

The validity of a measuring instrument, according to Delport (2002:166), is determined by whether or not the instrument measures what it is supposed to measure and measures it accurately, and this can be achieved by ensuring that the instrument has content validity, face validity, criterion validity or construct validity. Reliability on the other hand, is determined by the accuracy or precision of an instrument and the extent to which an instrument yields the same or similar results under comparable conditions (Delport, 2002:168).

To establish the reliability and validity of the questionnaire, the empirical research questions and the literature review were used as the starting point to ensure that the questionnaire content and the constructs used in relation to conflict management were appropriate and would ensure dependability and reproducibility and that the questionnaire would measure what it was supposed to measure.

According to Anon. (http://www.musc.edu/bmt738/Semler/index.htm), content validity is the extent to which the content of the instrument appears logically to examine and comprehensively include the characteristic it is intended to measure. The constructs pertaining to conflict management were used as the basis for the determination of the questionnaire items and various questionnaires used in research relating to conflict management, were utilised for standardisation purposes. To this end, Rahim's measure of styles of handling interpersonal conflict

reliability. However, the average inter-item correlations yielded values indicating reliability.

Subsequent to the pilot study, the necessary adjustments were made and the

was used (cf. Rahim, 1983:368). The items were adapted to relate to educators' perceptions of their principals' conflict handling styles.

The study supervisor and his colleagues scrutinised the questionnaire to establish its reliability and validity. Only after their inputs, especially regarding the terminology appropriate for local school environmental conditions was the final draft of the questionnaire pre-tested. The questionnaire was then pre-tested to ascertain reliability.

A sample of primary school educators in the neighbouring Johannesburg South District (n=50) was used for this purpose. Educators were requested to respond honestly and to note any items that were either confusing or ambiguous and to make comments and suggestions so that the questionnaire could be readjusted before being distributed to the target population.

The overall validity of all questionnaire items scored a Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.853, which was considered highly valid. The individual categories of questions measuring the conflict handling styles yielded Cronbach Alpha values indicating reliability (see table 3.1).

Table 3.1 **Crobach Alpha values for conflict handling styles**

Dimension	Cronbach Alpha	Inter-item corr.
Integrating	0.860	0.479
Avoiding	0.709	0.264
Dominating	0.617	0.193
Obliging	0.730	0.285
Compromising	0.644	0.212

It is noted, however, that the dimensions, "dominating" and "compromising" yielded Cronbach Alpha values of 0.617 and 0.644 respectively, which indicated medium

- *Section A: General information* (items A1 – A7)

Items in this section relate to the biographical information of the respondents. The items relate to respondents' gender, age category, teaching experience, position held, number of staff members, the number of learners and the location of schools under investigation. This information is important to the study as these aspects can influences perceptions of the respondents in terms of their principals' conflict handling styles and because variables like gender, position held and number of learners can have an influence on educators' perceptions of their principals' conflict handling styles (cf. chapter 2).

- *Section B: Dimensions of principals' conflict handling styles* (Items B1 – B35)

This section was designed to investigate conflict handling styles and educators were required to respond to the items by choosing the most appropriate responses from the categories provided below:

- 1: Strongly agree; 2: Agree; 3: Disagree; 4: Strongly disagree

Items in this section comprised five dimensions. Each dimension had seven items namely, integrating, avoiding, dominating, obliging and compromising thus:

- ***Integrating:***

  Item numbers: 5, 10, 12, 16, 22, 23, 30

- ***Avoiding***

  Item numbers: 6,11, 15, 20, 24, 28, 31

- *Dominating*

Item numbers: 4, 7, 13, 14, 25, 32, 33

- *Obliging*

  Item numbers: 1, 3, 18, 19, 27, 29, 34

- *Compromising*

  Item numbers: 2, 8, 9, 17, 21, 26, 35

3.3 POPULATION

The population comprised primary school educators in the Gauteng Province. The study population was delimited to primary schools for reasons of convenience in terms of sampling as well as my being a primary school educator. My interest was therefore a determining factor in the purposive choice of the population.

The Gauteng Province consists of a large number of primary schools and it would be too time-consuming and not financially feasible to cover the entire province. It was therefore decided to limit the target population to public schools in the southern Gauteng's Sedibeng municipal areas consisting of Districts 7 and 8 of the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE).

A mini survey was conducted to obtain the number of primary schools in the two districts. The information was obtained from the district offices. It was found that there were 98 primary schools in the Sedibeng West district and 56 primary schools in the Sedibeng East district. A snap survey of 20 schools indicated an average of 25 educators per school. This would mean that there is a total of approximately 3850 educators in the two districts.

3.4 SAMPLING

Various authors on sampling in research advocate different sample sizes for populations in quantitative research. Among other sampling guidelines, sample sizes of between 10% and 20% are recommended as representative of population sizes larger than 1000 (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005; Strydom & Venter, 2002; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). In this research, it was decided to sample 400 educators in line with guidelines provided by Leedy and Ormrod (2005). Therefore a simple random sample of educators (n=400) was drawn from the population. Random sampling sought to ensure that schools, and thus educators in both Districts were represented.

3.5 RESPONSE RATE

Questionnaires were distributed to 400 primary school educators in the Sedibeng Districts 7 and 8. Of the questionnaires returned, 282 were usable. Table 3.2 illustrates the return rate of the questionnaires per population category.

Table 3.2 The return rate of questionnaires

Population category	Questionnaires distributed	Usable questionnaires returned	% return
Educators	400	282	70.5%

It can be seen from Table 3.2 that the return rate from the educators was 70.5% which, according to Delport (2002:172) is considered an acceptable return rate. This return rate can be attributed in part to the meticulous distribution and retrieval procedures used.

3.6 ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES

Administrative procedures include getting approval from education authorities to conduct research at schools and following up on outstanding questionnaires.

3.6.1 Approval from Gauteng Department of Education

Approval to conduct research in schools was requested from the Senior Managers of the two districts as per departmental protocol. The questionnaire was then distributed personally to educators at schools. School principals were requested to be contact persons for distribution and collection of questionnaires at their schools.

3.6.2 Respondents' anonymity

Respondents were assured through a covering letter that their participation was absolutely voluntary and that their responses would be handled with the utmost confidentiality and only for this research study's purposes. It was indicated also, through contact persons, that they could complete the questionnaires in their own convenient times outside contact time in school.

3.6.3 Follow-up on questionnaire

Personal follow-up visits were undertaken to collect outstanding questionnaires. These were mainly in schools where educators were engaged in school activities that required the researcher to allow for delays in collecting the questionnaires.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

The statistical consultancy service of the North-West University: Vaal Triangle Campus was approached for assistance in the analysis of data collected from questionnaires. Frequency statistics were computed to determine descriptive statistics and these were scheduled in tabular and graphic form. Inferential statistics were computed using the tests for variance, which included the ANOVA, MANOVA and Tukey HSD tests.

3.8 SUMMARY

The focus of this chapter was on the research methodology that was used. The entire research plan was outlined and included, *inter alia*, a discussion of the empirical research intrument, the population and sampling procedures and the administrative procedures. The next chapter presents the data analysis and interpretation.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

In this chapter the results of the empirical study are presented and interpreted. The study was conducted through a questionnaire (cf. Annexure B) to investigate school principals' conflict handling styles.

The summary of the data collected is discussed hereunder.

4.2 DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Demographic data relates to respondents' biographical information in terms of gender, age, experience as educators, post description, number of staff in the school, location of schools and number of learners in the school. This information helped the researcher to determine for instance, if results are in any way influenced by respondents' demographic circumstances. Figure 4.1 depicts data on the respondents' gender.

4.2.1 Respondents' gender

Data relating to the respondents' genders is depicted in figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1 Data on respondents gender

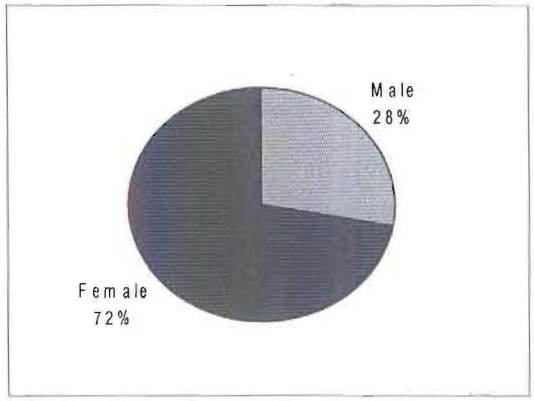


Figure 4.1 shows data relating to respondent educators' gender and indicates that there are more female educators (72%) than there are male educators (28%). This is typical of schools in general where there are usually more females than males. It will be interesting to see if the gender of respondents has any influence on perceptions regarding principals' conflict handling styles.

4.2.2 Data on respondents' ages

Figure 4.2 illustrates data relating to respondents' ages.

Figure 4.2 Data on respondents' ages

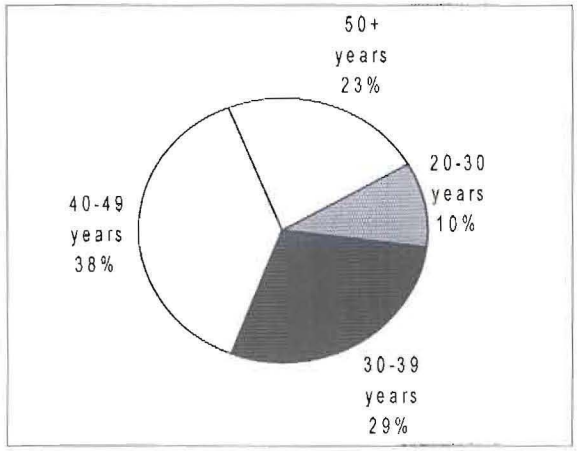
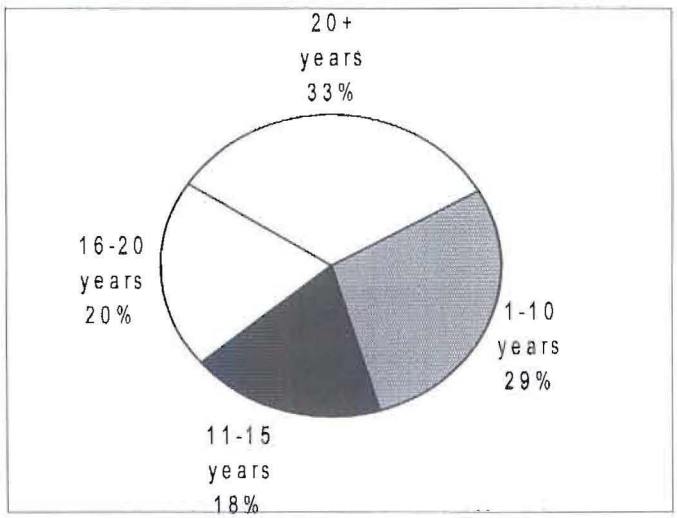


Figure 4.2 indicates that the majority of educators (61%) in the sample are above 40 years, while educators below 40 years account for 39% of the sample. It is also noteworthy that a sizeable number of educators (23%) are above 50 years. This finding is significant in terms of perceptions on conflict handling styles in that clearly, most educators sampled can be assumed to be mature people, whose responses can be considered valuable for this research.

4.2.3 Experience in position as educator

Figure 4.3 depicts data on respondents' positions at their schools.

Figure 4.3 Respondents' experience as educators

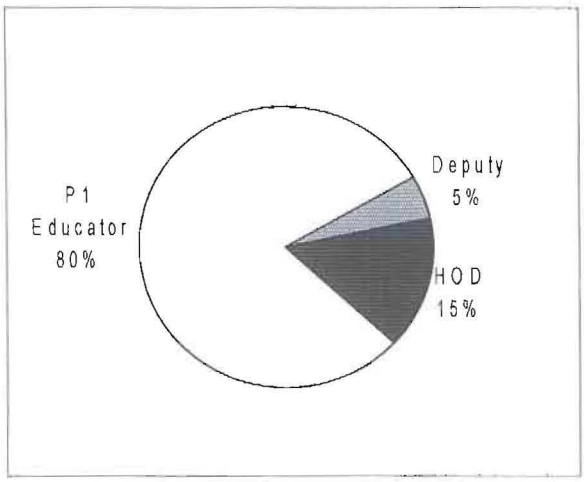


From figure 4.3, it can be seen that the majority of educators (33%) in the sample are quite experienced educators with more than 20 years experience as educators. This is followed by 29% whose experience is 10 years and less. This indicates a balance between experienced and less experienced educators. A significant number (20%) have teaching experience of between 16 and 20 years followed by 18% who are between 11 and 15 years.

4.2.4 Position held

Figure 4.4 depicts data on respondents' positions at their schools.

Figure 4.4 Data on respondents' positions at their schools

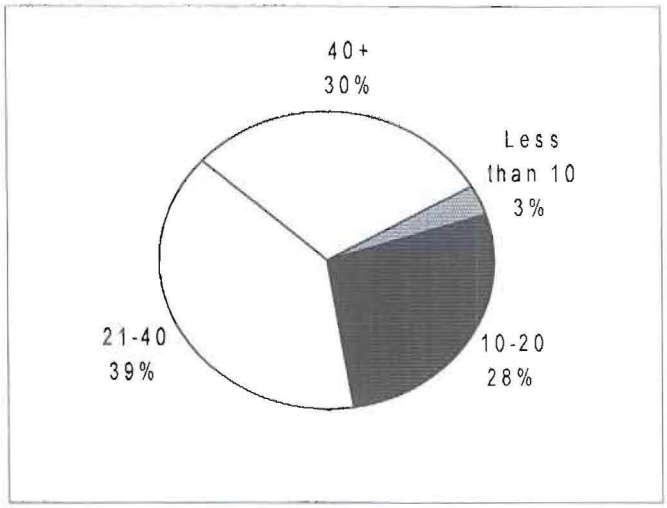


From figure 4.4, it can be seen that the majority of educators in the sample (80%) are on post level 1, while HODs account for 15% and deputy principals for 5%. The status of educators in these positions will assist in better understanding the conflict handling styles of principals as this will provide the research with perceptions from educators in different positions.

4.2.5 Number of staff members at school

Figure 4.5 illustrates data relating to the number of staff members/staff complements at schools.

Figure 4.5 Data on the staff complements at schools

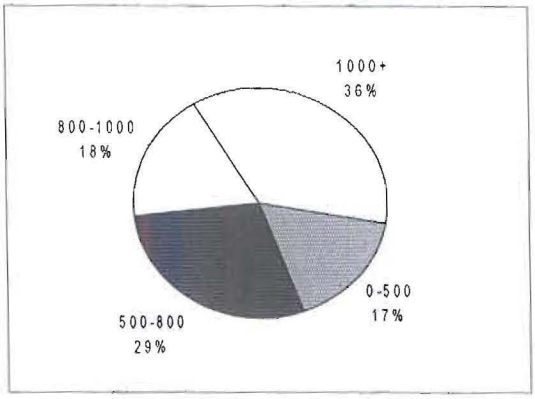


From figure 4.5, it can be seen that the majority of respondent educators (39%) are from schools with staff complements of between 21 and 40 followed by educators from schools with 40^{+} staff members (30%). In terms of post provisioning norms, clearly respondents are from relatively large schools and this can have implications regarding incidents of conflict and how it is managed at their schools. This finding is corroborated by findings regarding learner enrolments at schools.

4.2.6 Number of learners at schools

Figure 4.6 depicts data on the number of learners at respondents' schools.

Figure 4.6 Number of learners at respondents' schools



From figure 4.6, it can be seen that the majority of respondents' schools (36%) have enrolments above 1000 learners followed by schools with enrolments of between 800 and 1000 (18%). This finding confirms the findings above relating to the number of educators at schools (cf. 4.2.5). This finding is important in that such large schools are bound to have numerous incidents of conflict and as such, being a large school may have implications for handling and managing conflict.

4.2.7 Location of schools

Figure 4.7 depicts data on the location of respondents' schools

Figure 4.7 Data on location of respondents' schools

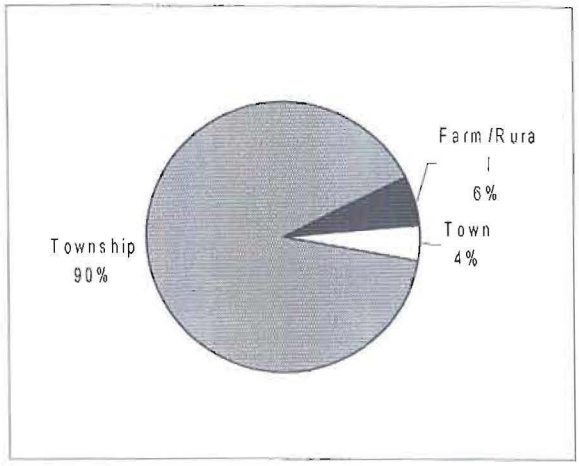


Figure 4.7 indicates that most respondent educators (90%) are from township schools, while 6% are from farm and rural schools and 4% are from town schools. This is true of the country's demographics where the majority of schools, and by implication, citizens, are located in townships. It will be interesting to determine if the location of respondents' schools had any effect on their perceptions of conflict handling styles of their principals. This could indirectly relate to sizes of schools and resources, which factors do have an effect on the types of conflict experienced at schools.

Having analysed the demographic data of the respondents, an analysis of responses to questionnaire items relating to conflict handling styles displayed by their principals will be undertaken. This will indicate generally how conflict is handled at schools.

4.3 CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AT SCHOOLS

The manner in which conflict is handled in schools, basically falls within the spectrum of five dimensions namely, integrating, avoiding, dominating, obliging and compromising (cf. 2.4.6.4). Data were thus dimensionally analysed and interpreted.

4.3.1 Data on the integrating style of handling conflict

The integrating style portrays a high concern for self and others and is associated with problem-solving, that is, the diagnosis of and intervention in the right problems and involves the use of openness, exchanging information, looking for alternatives and examining the differences to reach an effective solution (cf. 2.4.6.4). Table 4.1 illustrates data on the intergrating style of handling conflict.

Table 4.1 Data on the integrating style of handling conflict

Items	Items	Responses					
		Agree		Disagree		No Response	
	The school principal...	f	%	f	%	f	%
5	Tries to investigate an issue to find a solution acceptable to all	199	70.6	70	28.3	3	1.1
10	Tries to integrate educators' ideas to come up with a decision jointly	218	77.3	64	22.7	0	0
12	Tries to work with educators for proper understanding of a problem	229	81.1	52	18.5	1	0.4
16	Tries to bring all concerns out into the open so that an issue can be resolved in the best possible manner	218	77.3	63	22.3	1	0.4
22	Exhanges correct information with educators to solve problems together	224	79.3	57	20.3	1	0.4
23	Tries to work with educators to find solutions to a problem that might satisfy their expectations	159	82.3	49	17.3	1	0.4
30	Collaborates with educators to come up with acceptable solutions	227	80.5	53	18.8	2	0.7

Items in this dimension sought educators' perceptions regarding how the integrating style was used to handle conflict in their schools. The majority of respondents seems to agree with all items relating to this conflict handling style as indicated by frequency responses in excess of 70% for all the items. Emanating from the responses relating to this conflict handling style, is a suggestion that school principals do use the integrating style of conflict management.

4.3.2 Data on avoiding as a conflict handling style

The avoiding style, which exhibits a low concern for the self and for others is associated with withdrawal, buck-passing or sidestepping situations. Consequently, an avoiding person fails to satisfy his/her own concerns as well as those of others (2.4.6.3). Table 4.2 indicates data on the avoiding conflict handling style.

Table 4.2 Data on the avoiding style of handling conflict

Items	Items	Responses					
		Agree		Disagree		No response	
	The school principal ...	f	%	f	%	f	%
6	Keeps disagreements with educators to him/herself to avoid hard feelings	147	52.1	133	47.2	2	0.7
11	Tries to avoid being "put on the spot" and keeps her/his conflict with educators to himself/herself	126	44.7	155	54.9	1	0.4
15	Usually avoids open discussion of differences with educators	120	42.6	158	56.0	4	1.4
20	Avoids personal encounters with educators	154	54.5	127	45.1	1	0.4
24	Tries to stay away from disagreements	111	39.3	171	60.7	0	0
28	Tries to avoid unpleasant exchanges with educators	190	67.4	92	32.6	0	0
31	Generally avoids an argument with educators	168	59.6	114	40.4	0	0

From table 4.2, it appears that respondents' perceptions were mixed in responses to items relating to the avoiding style. On whether or not the school principal keeps disagreements with educators to him/herself to avoid hard feelings, just over half (52.1%) agreed and 47.2% disagreed. On whether or not the school principals try to avoid being "put on the spot" and keep their conflicts with educators to themselves, almost half (44.7%) agreed, and on whether the principal/leadership usually avoids open discussion of differences with educators, a notable 56.0% disagreed.

Most respondents (54.5%) agreed that there is avoidance of personal encounters with educators and a significant majority (60.7%) indicated that the principal tries to stay away from disagreements, while remarkably, almost two fifths (59.6%) indicated that there was generally, avoidance of arguments with educators.

The responses to items in this conflict handling style imply that avoidance is a prominent conflict handling style at schools. This can explain perhaps why some forms of conflict at schools also become explosive episodes when they occur, because avoidance tends to allow a build-up of emotions and resentment (cf. 2.4.3.4).

4.3.3 Data on dominating as a conflict handling style

The dominating style exhibits a high concern for the self and low concern for others and is identified as the win-lose orientation and consists of forcing behaviour to win one's position. A dominating person goes all out to win his/her objective and ignores as a result, the needs and expectations of others (cf. 2.4.6.4). Table 5.3 presents the results regarding the dominating conflict handling style.

Table 4.3 Data on the dominating style of handling conflict

Items	Items The school principal ...	Responses					
		Agree		Disagree		No Response	
		f	%	f	%	f	%
4	Uses her/his authority to make decisions in his/her favour	100	35.5	181	63.1	1	0.4
7	Uses her/his influence to get his ideas accepted	120	42.5	161	57.1	1	0.4
13	Argues her/his case with educators to show the merits of his/her position	129	45.8	151	53.5	2	0.7
14	Is generally firm in pursuing her/his side of an issue	158	56.0	122	43.3	2	0.7
25	Usually holds on to her/his solution to a problem	112	39.7	170	60.3	0	0
32	Sometimes uses her/his power to win a competitive situation	111	39.4	171	60.6	0	0
33	Uses his/her expertise to make decisions in his or her favour	145	51.3	136	48.3	1	0.4

The dominating conflict handling style, according to data in table 4.3 seems to enjoy mixed perceptions. For instance, on whether or not the principal uses authority to make decisions in his/her favour, uses his/her influence to get their ideas accepted, argues his/her case with educators to show the merits of his/her position, usually holds on to his/her solution to a problem and sometimes uses his/her power to win competitive situations, the majority of respondents (63.1%, 57.1%, 53.5%, 60.3% and 60% respectively) disagreed. In the same vein, the majority of respondents (56.0% and 51.3%) respectively agreed that the principal is generally firm in pursuing his/her side of an issue and uses his/her expertise to make decisions in his/her favour.

A remarkable factor in the responses above, is the small variance in frequency counts between the agree and disagree responses. This does make this conflict handling style a common feature of handling conflict at schools. This is especially clear when the percentage responses agreeing with the items are considered. While not the majority, these are sizeable enough to warrant notice.

4.3.4 Data on obliging as a conflict handling style

The obliging style exhibits a low concern for self and a high concern for others and is associated with attempting to play down the differences and to emphasise commonalities to satisfy the concerns of others (cf. 2.4.6.4). Table 4.4 illustrates results regarding the obliging conflict handling style.

Table 4.4 Data on obliging as a conflict handling style

Items	Items	Responses					
		Agree		Disagree		No response	
	The school principal ...	f	%	f	%	f	%
1	Generally tries to satisfy the needs of educators	236	83.6	43	15.3	3	1.1
3	Often goes along with suggestions of educators	208	73.8	74	26.2	0	0
18	Sometimes helps educators to make decisions in their favour	185	65.6	96	34.0	1	0.4
19	Tries to satisfy educators' expectations	200	70.9	81	28.7	1	0.4
27	Usually allows concessions to educators	198	70.2	84	29.8	0	0
29	Usually accommodates wishes of educators	213	75.5	66	23.4	3	1.1
34	Gives in to the wishes of educators	117	41.5	165	58.5	0	0

According to data from table 4.4, respondents' perceptions indicate that school principals use this style quite frequently. For example, on whether the principal generally tries to satisfy the needs of educators, an overwhelming majority (83.6%) agreed. Overwhelming majorities of respondents also agreed that the principal often goes along with suggestions of educators (indicated by 73.3%), tries to satisfy educators' expectations (indicated by 70.9%) and usually allows concessions to educators (indicated by 75.5%). A sizeable number (65.5%) also agreed that the principal sometimes helps educators to make decisions in their favour. However, almost two-fifths (58.5%) disagreed that the school principal gives in to the wishes of educators.

4.3.5 Data on the compromising style of handling conflict

The compromising style displays intermediate concern for self and others, involves give-and-take whereby both parties give up something to make mutually acceptable decisions and this style is useful when parties to the conflict are mutually exclusive or when parties are equally powerful and have reached an impasse in their negotiation and interaction (cf. 2.4.6.4). Table 4.5 depicts data with regard to the compromising style of handling conflict at schools.

Table 4.5 Data on compromising as a conflict handling style

Items	Items	Responses					
		Agree		Disagree		No Response	
	The school principal ...	f	%	f	%	f	%
2	Uses "give and take" so that compromises can be made	185	65.6	93	33.0	4	1.4
8	Gives some to get some	130	46.1	149	52.8	3	1.1
9	Negotiates with educators so that compromises can be reached	216	76.5	65	23.1	1	0.4
17	Tries to find a middle ground to resolve an impasse/deadlock	226	80.2	54	19.1	2	0.7
21	Tries to play down/ignore differences to reach compromises	105	37.3	175	62.0	2	0.7
26	Usually proposes a middle ground for breaking deadlocks	191	67.7	90	31.9	1	0.4
35	Wins some and loses some	192	68.1	90	32.9	0	0

Table 4.5 shows that respondents mostly agree that the compromising style is used at schools. On whether the principal uses "give and take" so that compromises can be made, the majority (65.6%) agreed. On whether negotiations with educators are undertaken to reach a compromise, an overwhelming majority (76.5%) agreed. The majority of respondents (80.2%) also indicated that the principal tries to find a middle ground to resolve impasses or deadlocks and the majority (67.7%) also indicated that the principal usually proposes a middle ground

for breaking deadlocks. Respondents (68.1%) also agreed that the principal wins some and loses some.

However, most respondents (52.8%) disagreed that the principal gives some to get some and the majority (62.0%) also disagreed with the statement that the principal tries to play down/ignore differences to reach compromises.

4.3.6 **Summation**

Data relating to responses of educators on the different conflict handling styles as tabulated in the foregoing section, indicate mixed perceptions on individual styles. Consequently, it is not possible to interpret the responses as indicating clear patterns as to whether or not a particular style is used more frequent than the other. A number of possible reason can be attributed to this, *inter alia*:

- the possibility that the use of conflict handling styles is determined by situational factors. Thus, the responses indicate marginal or small frequency variations between the agree and disagree categories; and
- the possibility of responses being well-thought out and being considered to be expected or even the attempt not to present negative responses. This is accepted commonly as a weakness in the questionnaire technique as a research instrument.

However, a scrutiny of variances in frequency counts necessitates a determination of which conflict handling styles are dominant at schools. For this purpose the means of conflict styles were computed and ranked.

4.4 THE RANK-ORDER OF CONFLICT HANDLING STYLES

The ranking of conflict handling styles provides the study with the ability to determine which conflict handling styles, according to educators' perceptions, enjoy dominance of use by school principals at schools. Table 4.6 depicts the

mean scores relating to each conflict handling style as well as the rank order thereof.

Table 4.6 The mean score of conflict handling styles

Conflict handling style	Mean	SD
Dominating	2.59	0.457
Avoiding	2.49	0.515
Compromising	2.27	0.408
Obliging	2.25	0.452
Integrating	2.01	0.574

The ranking of the conflict handling styles as illustrated in table 4.6, reveals that the dominating style of handling conflict ranks highest with a mean score of 2.59. This style is followed by the avoiding style with a mean score of 2.49. An interesting observation from the two scores is the mean difference of 10 points between the two styles. This can be considered as pointing to the dominating style being the most commonly used by principals in handling conflict. It is also apparent that the avoiding style, ranked second is also used frequently.

The compromising style ranked third with a mean score of 2.27 followed in fourth place by the obliging style with a mean score of 2.25. The two scores also interestingly, yield a mean difference of two points.

The integrating style ranked fifth with a mean score of 2.01. Interestingly, the mean difference is 24 below the fourth-ranked style and 58 points below the highest ranked style.

A noteworthy observation was made with regard to the rank order of the conflict handling styles. It does look as if the first four styles are paired (considering the mean differences). It can be surmised that school principals at the surveyed

educators' schools, while using the dominating style, also use the avoiding style and this could be attributed to situational conflict variables and episodes.

The dominating style could be used for purposes of asserting and enforcing departmental rules associated with changing circumstances. For example, from personal experience as an educator, it is not uncommon for educators to be "forced" to adhere to new curriculum approaches despite the less than adequate training provided to them.

The avoding style could be a result of the inability to explain the rationale behind some of the decisions taken, which educators dispute. It is also uncommon to hear of such remarks as "instruction from above" in ensuring that certain decisions are implemented without question, thus using avoidance.

Another reason for the frequent use of the two styles can be related to issues relating to, for example, declaring educators in excess for purposes of redeployment. Therefore considering the change environment prevailing at schools currently and the concomitantly inherent conflict associated with change, it is understandable that school principals would use a mix of the two styles.

The compromising and obliging styles also seem to be paired and a scrutiny of their implications indicates that these styles are not too different from each other in terms of their ranking. It can be surmised that these styles are used as a pacification means when conflict situations threaten to explode into the open and threaten to produce disruptive conflict episodes.

Somehow disconcerting is the fact that the integrating style, which for all intents and purposes seems to be the ideal style to be pursued by every leader, ranks lowest. Cognisance is taken of the fact that the frequency counts indicated marginal variances. It is also noted that the frequency counts gave a different impression from the rank order of the conflict handling style. For instance, the frequency analysis pertaining to the integrating style gave the impression that this

style was frequently used at schools. The possible reason for this discrepancy may relate to other school contextual factors independent of the respondents' demographic variables having an influence on educators' responses.

Because there seems to be marginal, yet notable discrepancies between the responses on the agree and disagree categories of items relating to the conflict handling styles, it was necessary to determine if these differences had any statistical significance and if so, which variables were responsible for that. An analysis of variance was thus undertaken.

4.5 ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE BETWEEN THE CONFLICT HANDLING STYLES DIMENSIONS AND THE DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

To determine if the differences had any statistical significance, an analysis of variance between conflict handling styles and demographic factors as independent variables was computed.

A multivariate test for significance (MANOVA) was thus conducted, using demographic independent variables with conflict handling styles as dependent variables. A MANOVA test for significance is conducted when there is more than one dependent variable and is thus a statistical procedure for analysing many variables at the same time (Salkind, 2000:269). In this research, the multivariate test was conducted to determine if responses were influenced by respondents' demographic backgrounds. Independent variables tested were the gender, age, experience as educator, position held, location of school, staff complement and school enrolment.

4.5.1 Analysis of variance between conflict handling styles and respondents' gender

The MANOVA test was computed to determine if the respondents' gender had any influence on their perceptions of how conflict is handled at their schools and to

determine if these differences had any statistical significance as well as determine if any statistical differences were of practical effect.

The test was computed at a significance level of 5% (p = 0.05), so that any p-value below this level would signify a statistically significant difference between the means of the variables being tested, while a score above this level would signify a non-statistically significant difference and that that difference could be because of statistical chance and thus would not necessitate any practical intervention. Table 4.7 illustrates data in this regard.

Table 4.7 The relationship between respondents' gender and conflict handling styles

Independent variable	Test	Value	F	p
Gender	Wilks	0.969	1.683	0.138#

Not significant * Significant at p < 0.05

Figure 4.7 illustrates that there were no significant statistical differences in responses relating to the conflict handling styles and the respondents' gender. This implies that their responses were not influenced by their either being male or female and can thus be considered authentic for the sample population.

4.5.2 Analysis of variance between conflict handling styles and respondents' post descriptions

The test in this instance, was done to determine if the positions held by respondents at schools had any influence in their perceptions of how conflict is handled at their schools. Post descriptions relate to deputy principal, head of department and post level 1 educator. Data in this regard is depicted in table 4.8.

Table 4.8 The relationship between respondents' post descriptions and conflict handling styles

Independent variable	Test	Value	F	p
Post description	Wilks	0.969	1.683	0.138[#]

[#] Not significant [*] Significant at $p < 0.05$

Figure 4.8 illustrates that there were no significant statistical differences in responses relating to the conflict handling styles and the respondents post descriptions. As concluded in the case of gender above, this implies that their responses were not influenced by their occupying different posts and can thus be considered authentic for the sample population.

4.5.3 Analysis of variance between conflict handling styles and respondents' ages

It was alluded to earlier that respondents' ages revealed educators who are assumed to be mature people, whose responses can be considered valuable for this research (cf.4.5.2). The frequency analysis showed variances in responses in terms of the agree and disagree categories. To this end, this analysis seeks to find out if the variances were a result of age differences and if so, if these were statistically significant. Table 4.9 illustrates the MANOVA test data in this regard.

Table 4.9 The relationship between respondents' post descriptions age differences

Independent variable	Test	Value	F	p
Age	Wilks	0.872	2.541	0.001#

Not significant * Significant at p < 0.05

Data in table 4.9 shows that age may have had an influence on respondents' perceptions of how conflict is handled at their schools (p = 0.001 = < 0.05). For that reason, a univariate test (ANOVA) was then conducted to determine which conflict handling style(s) (dependent variable) the statistical differences applied to. Data in this regard is portrayed in table 4.10.

Table 4.10 ANOVA test on conflict handling styles and respondents' ages

Independent variable	DF	Dependent Variable	SS	MS	F	p
Learner enrolment	3	Integrating style	1.5890	0.529	1.611	0.186#
		Avoiding style	3.113	1.038	4.011	0.008*
		Dominating style	3.224	1.075	5.367	0.001*
		Obliging	0.916	0.305	1.492	0.216#
		Compromising	0.608	0.203	1.213	0.305#

Not significant * Significant at p < 0.05

From table 4.10, it can be seen that the significant differences applied to the avoiding style (p = 0.008 = < 0.05) and the dominating style (p = 0.001 = < 0.05). In order to understand the source of these differences, it was necessary to determine which age groups' perceptions were statistically different and whether

these were significant or not. A Tukey HSD (Honestly Significant Difference) was conducted for this purpose. A Tukey HSD test is conducted in order to compare each pair of conditions to see if the difference is statistically significant (Hinton, 1995:131) and to determine if such a statistical difference is of any practical value. Data in this regard is portrayed in table 4.11.

Table 4.11 Tukey HSD test on the avoiding style

Age groups	Age groups		
	20-29	31-39	40-49
20-29			
31-39	0.868#		
40-49	0.034*	0.033*	
50+	0.159#	0.278#	0.919#

Not significant * Significant at $p < 0.05$

In terms of data in table 4.11, the statistically significant differences were found to be between the 20 – 29 and the 40 – 49 year age groups as well as between the 31 – 30 and the 40-49 year age groups. This can be explained, for both group differences as emanating in their outlook towards life in general and perceptions about what constitutes avoidance. Whereas, the younger 20 – 29 year age group could be seeking immediate attention and resolution of conflict situations, the more mature 40 – 49 year age group could be exercising patience in such conflict situations, as a result of perhaps, years of experience in such situations, However, a definite reason for this variance necessitates a much more detailed and comprehensive research undertaking that would be qualitative in nature.

Because statistical differences were found with regard to the dominating styles as well, the Tukey HSD test was also conducted for this dimension. Table 4.12 depicts data in this regard.

Table 4.12 Tukey HSD test on the dominating style

Age groups	Age groups		
	20-29	31-39	40-49
20-29			
31-39	0.282#		
40-49	0.005*	0.164#	
50+	0.003*	0.101#	0.960#

Not significant * Significant at $p < 0.05$

According to data in table 4.12, statistically significant differences were found between the 20 – 29 and the 40 – 49 year age groups as well as between the 20 – 29 and 50^+ year age groups. The same reasons as the ones proferred in the avoiding style above can be applicable for the differences in these age categories. In practice, this suggests the need for prudence in dealing with conflict situations. It is important to have knowledge of human nature and human development so as to apply conflict handling style as the situation demands. For instance, knowledge and skills in understanding human temperament combined with understanding the sources of conflict would be necessary in most conflict episodes.

4.5.4 Analysis of variance between conflict handling styles and respondents' experience as educators

This analysis sought to find out if the length of service as an educator had any influence on respondents' perceptions of how conflict is handled at their schools. Table 4.13 depicts data on the MANOVA test in this regard.

Table 4.13 The relationship between conflict handling styles and respondents' experience as educators

Independent variable	Test	Value	F	p
Age	Wilks	0.954	0.852	0.619#

Not significant * Significant at $p < 0.05$

Data from table 4.13 indicates that the statistical differences for this variable, while significant, are not of any practical effect. This implies that the differences in experience as educators did not influence their perceptions of conflict handling styles at their schools. The statistical differences can be ascribed to statistical chance.

4.5.5 Analysis of variance between conflict handling styles and schools' staff complements

The analysis regarding staff complements in schools is based on the fact that surveyed educators' schools were found mostly to be large schools. Table 4.14 depicts data on the MANOVA test in this regard.

Table 4.14 The relationship between conflict handling styles and their schools' staff complements

Independent variable	Test	Value	F	p
Age	Wilks	0.851	3.000	0.000*

Not significant * Significant at $p < 0.05$

From table 4.14, it can be seen that there were statistically significant differences between respondents' schools' staff complements and their perceptions of how conflict is handled at their schools. To determine the sources of these differences,

an ANOVA test was conducted for all the conflict handling styles. Table 4.15 illustrates data in this regard.

Table 4.15 ANOVA test on conflict handling styles and respondents' schools' staff complements

Independent variable	DF	Dependent Variable	SS	MS	F	p
Learner enrolment	3	Integrating style	0.918	0.306	0.922	0.430
		Avoiding style	4.861	1.620	6.400	0.000*
		Dominating style	0.911#	0.303#	1.452#	0.227#
		Obliging	1.341#	0.447#	2.194#	0.088#
		Compromising	1.826	0.608	3.733	0.011*

Not significant * Significant at $p < 0.05$

From the data in table 4.15, it can be seen that statistical difference were found in the avoiding ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$) and compromising ($p = 0.011 < 0.05$) styles. A Tukey HSD test was then done to determine the sources of these differences and to determine if they were of practical effect. In this regard, table 5.16 depicts data on the avoiding style.

Table 4.16 Tukey HSD test on the avoding style in relation to respondents staff complements

Staff complement	Staff complement		
	Less than 10	10 – 20	21-40
Less than 10			
10 – 20	0.409#		
21-40	0.880#	0.211#	
40+	0.072#	0.214#	0.000*

Not significant * Significant at $p < 0.05$

Data in table 4.16 indicates that statistical differences of practical effect existed between respondents whose schools had 21 – 40 staff complements and those with 40^+ staff complements. This difference can be attributed to the different school sizes and the consequent challenge that school principals would experience in handling conflict.

This finding is somewhat perplexing because both groups of schools have, in terms of post provisioning norms, enrolments figures in excess of 1000 learners. It can, however, be reasoned out that schools with staff complements of 21 – 40 have learner enrolments of up to 1000, while those with staff complements of over 40, have up to 1600 learners. In the context of size, it is understandable that educators' perceptions would be influenced by the large school size. Nevertheless, the practical effect of conflict handling styles on educators would necessitate further research, which currently is outside the scope of this research. Table 4.17 depicts data on the compromising styles with regard to respondents' schools' staff complements.

Table 4.17 Tukey HSD test on the avoding style in relation to the respondents' schools' staff complements

Staff complement	Staff complement		
	Less than 10	10 – 20	21-40
Less than 10			
10 – 20	0.928#		
21-40	0.936#	0.025*	*
40+	0.934#	0.999#	0.024*

Not significant * Significant at $p < 0.05$

Data in figure 4.17 indicate that the statistically significant differences applied to respondents whose schools had 10 – 20 staff complements and those with 21 – 40 staff members as well as to respondents whose schools had 21 – 40 and over 40 staff complements. In the former case, the differences allude to differences in school sizes. This implies that conflict handling styles would be seen differently by 20 staff members as compared to schools with 40 staff members. It could be that principals have more time in smaller schools to deal with staff conflict situations as compared to principals whose schools are large, given that school times do not vary.

In the latter case, the same argument given in the case of the avoiding style above can equally be applicable.

4.5.6 Analysis of variance between conflict handling styles and schools' enrolment figures

Since schools differ in size and the size of the school can have a significant impact on the prevalence of confict episodes, it was deemed necessary to see if the size of a school had an infuence of respondents' perceptions of how conflict was

handled at their schools. As related elsewhere in this text (cf. 4.2.6), most schools were found to be quite big and had high enrolment figures. Table 4.18 depicts data regarding the influence of learner enrolment and conflict handling styles.

Table 4.18 The relationship between respondents' school enrolment figures and conflict handling styles

Independent variable	Test	Value	F	p
Learner enrolments	Wilks	0.818708	3.764	0.000*

No significanct difference * Significant at $p < 0.05$

Data from table 4.18 indicates statistically significant differences between the conflict handling styles and the school enrolment figures ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$). A univariate test (ANOVA) was then conducted to determine on which conflict handling styles (dependent variables) the statistical differences applied. Data in this regard is portrayed in table 4.19.

Table 4.19 ANOVA test on conflict handling styles and school enrolment figures

Independent variable	DF	Dependent Variable	SS	MS	F	p
Learner enrolment	3	Integrating style	4.574	1.525	4.782	0.002*
		Avoiding style	3.240	1.080	4.169	0.006*
		Dominating style	3.004	1.001	4.964	0.002*
		Obliging	2.628	0.876	4.400	0.004*
		Compromising	3.962	1.287	8.266	0.000*

Not significant * Significant at $p < 0.05$

Data from table 4.19 indicates statistically significant differences between school enrolment figures and all the conflict handling styles as indicated by p-values that are all less than 0.05. In order to understand the source of these differences, it was necessary to determine which groups of respondents in terms of their school enrolment figures had these differences since the ANOVA test does not specify which groups differ among the four. This implies that the sizes of the schools in terms of learner enrolment had an influence on respondent educators' perceptions of how conflict was handled at their schools. For this purpose, a *post hoc* test was conducted. Data in this regard is portrayed in table 4.20.

Table 4.20 Tukey HSD test on the integrating style

School enrolment	School enrolment figures		
	0 - 500	0 - 800	0 - 1000
0 - 500			
0 - 800	0.006*		
0 - 1000	0.004*	0.996#	
1000+	0.172#	0.015*	0.0.024*

Not significant * Significant at $p < 0.05$

Data from table 5.20 indicates practically significant differences at schools with:

- 0 – 500, 0 – 800 and 0 – 1000 learner enrolment figures;
- 0 – 800 and 1000+ learner enrolments; and
- 0 – 800 – and 1000+ learner enrolments.

These differences are of practical effect and can be attributed to differences in school sizes. It is not inconceivable that in schools with less than 500 learners such as farm schools, incidents of conflict episodes would be much lower than in schools with higher enrolment figures. Therefore the conflict handling styles of

school principals would be a function of school sizes, especially considering the fact that school times, within which any form and amount of conflict has to be handled and resolved are equal for all schools.

Different schools in terms of sizes would also impact on the types of conflicts experienced. For instance, conflict over resource availability, distribution and utilisation will be different at a small farm primary school than at a big township primary school. The use of the integrating style of handling conflict would be much more challenging in a big school than in a small school. Therefore for practical purposes, this implies that handling conflict in an integrating manner, will require a great deal of skill and patience from school principals. This is actually where the conflict management process, which deals with handling conflict as well as, importantly, organisational learning and effectiveness, is necessary (cf. 2.5.3). The Tukey HSD data on the avoiding style is depicted in table 4.21.

Table 4.21 Tukey HSD on the avoiding style in relation to school enrolment figures

School enrolment	School enrolment figures		
	0 - 500	0 - 800	0 – 1000
0 - 500			
0 - 800	0.446#		
0 - 1000	0.409#	0.996#	
1000+	0.763#	0.015*	0.024*

Not significant * Significant at $p < 0.05$

From table 4.21, it can be seen that practically significant differences were found at schools with:

- 0 – 800 and 1000+ learner enrolment figures; and
- 0 - 1000+ learner enrolment figures.

The same reasons as those advanced above for the integrating styles can be advanced in these instances as well. The avoiding style of conflict handling would make even more sense in schools with high enrolments. Therefore it is undertandable that educators from these two different school enrolment types should have statistically different perceptions about how conflict is handled at their schools. Implications for practice would, in addition to suggestions above, involve a much more detailed research into the effects of school sizes on conflict handling styles at schools. Table 4.22 depicts data on the dominating style in relation to the school enrolment figures.

Table 4.22 **Tukey HSD on the dominating style in relation to respondents' schools' enrolment figures**

School enrolment	School enrolment figures		
	0 - 500	0 - 800	0 – 1000
0 - 500			
0 - 800	0.001*		
0 - 1000	0.465#	0.126#	
1000+	0.047*	0.413#	0.780#

Not significant * Significant at $p < 0.05$

Data in table 4.22 shows that there were statistically significant differences with practical effect between schools with:

- 0 – 500 and 0 - 800 learner enrolment figures; and
- 0 – 500 and 1000+learner enrolment figures.

This finding illustrates a vivid case of big school versus small school. It is clear that educators in schools with 500 learners and less would differ in perceptions about how conflict is handled by comparison with educators from schools with more than 1000 learners. As indicated in the section on staff complements, some of the big

schools have enrolment as high as 1600 learners (cf. 4.2.5 and 4.2.6). Although not specified by the statistical analysis, it can safely be assumed that where schools are small or very large, it would be easy for leadership to use a dominating conflict management style.

Table 4.23 portrays data on the obliging style in relation to school learner enrolments.

Table 4.23 Tukey HSD on the obliging style in relation to school learner enrolment figures

School enrolment	School enrolment figures		
	0 - 500	0 - 800	0 – 1000
0 - 500			
0 - 800	0.010*		
0 - 1000	0.027*	0.999#	
1000+	0.538#	0.117#	0.222#

Not significant * Significant at $p < 0.05$

Data in table 4.23 shows that there were statistically significant differences with practical effect between schools with:

- 0 – 500 and 0 - 800 learner enrolment figures; and
- 0 – 500 and 1000 learner enrolment figures.

Similar reasons as those indicated for the avoiding and dominating styles regarding school sizes can also be attributed to statistically significant differences with practical effect applicable to the obliging styles as well. For purposes of practice, it would be neccesary for in-depth research to determine why these differences exist in relation to the obliging style.

Table 4.24 presents data relating to the compromising style in relation to the school enrolment figures.

Table 4.24 Tukey HSD on the compromising style in relation to school enrolment figures

School enrolment	School enrolment figures		
	0 - 500	0 - 800	0 - 1000
0 - 500			
0 - 800	0.000*		
0 - 1000	0.000*	0.999#	
1000+	0.276#	0.010*	0.046*

Not significant * Significant at $p < 0.05$

Data in table 4.24 shows that there were statistically significant differences with practical effect between schools with:

- 0 – 500 and 0 - 800 learner enrolment figures;
- 0 – 500 and 1000 learner enrolment figures;
- 0 – 800 and 1000 learner enrolment figures; and
- 0 – 1000 and 1000+

This finding also indicates a clear case of big school versus small school. The same reasons as those proferred above can be applicable to this case as well. It is also understandable that the compromising style would be used frequently in schools with large school learner enrolments.

4.5.7 Analysis of variance between conflict handling styles and the location of respondents' schools

The location of schools can have an effect on conflict episodes and can also result in different types of conflict. This section explores if there is a relationship between conflict handling styles and the location of respondents' schools. The MANOVA test was first computed for this purpose. Table 4.25 depicts data computed through the MANOVA test in this regard.

Table 4.25 The relationship between the location of respondents' schools and conflict handling styles

Independent variable	Test	Value	F	p
Learner enrolments	Wilks	0.934	1.866	0.047*

No significanct difference * Significant at $p < 0.05$

According to data in table 4.25, there are statistically significant differences between the location of respondents' schools and the conflict handling styles. The ANOVA test was subsequently computed to determine the sources of these differences.

Table 4.26 ANOVA test on conflict handling styles and location of respondents' schools

Independent variable	DF	Dependent Variable	SS	MS	F	p
Learner enrolment	3	Integrating style	1.856	0.928	2.854	0.059
		Avoiding style	0.264	0.132	0.507	0.602
		Dominating style	0.421	0.210	1.038	0.355
		Obliging	0.601	0.300	1.460	0.234
		Compromising	1.489	0.744	4.542	0.011*

Statistically significant differences were noted with regard to the compromising style of handling conflict. Because the ANOVA test does not measure the groups in which the variances are significantly different, a *post hoc* test was conducted to determine from which groups of respondents' schools the differences applied. Table 4.27 depicts data in this regard.

Table 4.27 Tukey HSD on the compromising style in relation to the location of respondents' schools

	Location	
Location	Town	Township
Town		
Township	0.0083*	
Farm/rural	0.7902	0.290

Not significant * Significant at $p < 0.05$

Data from table 4.27 indicates that the statistically significant differences were between the town and township schools and that these were of practical effect.

This finding can be ascribed to various reasons. Among other reasons, the differences in availability of resources could mean that there are different sources of conflict at these schools and thus, the approach of principals to conflict handling may be different. In fact, one can safely venture that the compromising style of handling conflict could be more prevalent in township schools than in town schools. This reasoning is informed by the fact that from experience, I have seen that it is in townships schools where educators are "brave" enough to question issues and even to go on strike. This may lead principals to using, in most instances, the compromising style to maintain peace at schools.

However, it must be mentioned that this is another aspect for research into the relationshipship between school location and conflict handling styles in town and township schools.

4.6 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The analysis of the results of this research study indicated that school principals predominantly use the dominating style when handling conflict, followed by the avoiding style. It was also found that in terms of the statistical differences, differences of practical effect were found in cases of differing school sizes. This finding can explain the predominant use of the dominant and avoiding styles. It is also conceivable that the conflict handling styles could be used in terms of situational conditions at schools. It can thus be concluded that while the dominating style of handling conflict ranked highest, school principals also use other conflict handling styles.

4.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter presented the research data analysis and interpretation. This was done in terms of demographic data, frequency analysis, rank order and tests for statistical differences between demographic factors as independent variables and conflict handling styles as dependent variables.

The next chapter presents the summary, conclusions and recommendations of this study.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a summary of and a reflection on important findings as highlighted by both the literature survey and the empirical study. Research findings and the recommendations of this study are also presented.

The summary of aspects highlighted in this research, namely findings regarding the nature of conflict management in schools will be presented first.

5.2 SUMMARY

Chapter 1 presented the general orientation to this research study. The problem statement highlighted the importance of conflict management at schools. Chapter 1 then outlined the research design wherein the study of conflict management at schools was justified and the research method outlined.

Chapter 2 explored the nature of conflict management at schools. First, the theoretical orientation placed the study of conflict in the school as an organisation (cf. 2.3). Second, conflict was defined (cf. 2.4) and different views of conflict were presented (cf. 2.4.1), *inter alia*, the traditional view (cf. 2.4.1.1), the human relations view (cf. 2.4.1.2) and the interactionist view (cf. 2.4.1.3). Third, the sources of conflict (cf. 2.4.2) and types of conflict (cf. 2.4.3) were discussed. This was followed by an explanation of the conflict process (cf. 2.4.4), the consequences of conflict (cf. 2.4.5), conflict handling models (cf. 2.5.6), the essence of conflict management (cf. 2.5) and conflict management in school organisations (cf. 2.6).

Chapter 3 focused on the empirical research method. A discussion of the research design including the research method, the empirical research design (cf. 3.2), the quantitative approach of this study (cf. 3.2.2) as well as an explanation of the data

analysis was given (cf. 3.7). A discussion regarding the questionnaire as a research instrument and the questionnaire design (cf. 3.2.3 & 3.2.5), the questionnaire administration in terms of reliability and validity and the pilot survey (cf. 3.2.4), populations and sampling (cf. 3.3 & 3.4) response rate (cf. 3.5) and the administrative procedures were also presented (cf. 3.6).

Chapter 4 presented the data analysis and interpretation of the research results. This was done in terms of demographic data analysis (cf. 4.2), frequency analysis of the conflict management at schools (cf. 4.3), the rank order of the conflict handling styles (cf. 4.4), the analysis of variance on the conflict handling styles and demographic variable (cf. 4.5).

5.3 FINDINGS FROM THE RESEARCH

5.3.1 Findings with regard to research aim #1: the nature of conflict management in schools

The following findings were made with regard to the nature of conflict management in schools:

- As rationale for the study, it was highlighted that because school activities are carried out by many people and from various areas within the school, conflict is bound to be a feature of their relationships. It was also argued that while conflict could be detrimental to school effectiveness, it is not necessarily bad and is often functional and can have positive effects (cf. 2.2).

- The theoretical framework located conflict management within the view that a school is an organisation that is the result of the grouping of work and allocation of duties, responsibilities and authority to individuals in order to achieve specific educational aims (cf. 2.3). Consequently, schools are viewed as organisations where:

- conflict is intrinsic to human existence;
- conflict embraces a wide spectrum of social relationships;
- conflict occurs because of conflicting interests between people and groups in organisations; and
- there are disparate opinions, attitudes, outlooks and motives within any organisation.

- Conflict was viewed from three perspectives namely:
  - The traditional view considers conflict as bad, harmful, negative and destructive and is to be avoided at all costs, and accordingly, conflict is seen as a dysfunctional outcome resulting from poor communication, a lack of openness and trust between people and the failure of managers to be responsive to the needs and aspirations of employees (cf. 2.4.1.1);
  - The human relations view considers conflict as natural, positive, and an inevitable outcome in any group, which implies that conflict should be accepted because it cannot be eliminated and that conflict may even benefit a group's performance. Therefore conflict should be accepted as a natural phenomenon and that it is inevitable and should thus be managed (cf. 2.4.1.2); and
  - The interactionist view considers conflict as not only a positive force in an organisation, but as absolutely necessary for the organisation to perform effectively and as such, an organisation without conflict is probably dead or stale. Thus, conflict should be managed and not eliminated (cf. 2.4.1.3);

- Conflict being inevitable in organisations, and therefore schools, should be measured in terms of whether it is functional or dysfunctional.
    - Functional conflict is conflict that supports the goals of the organisation and improves performance and emanates from an honest difference of opinions resulting from the availability of two or more alternative courses of action and is a valuable part of life (cf. 2.4.1.3).
    - Dysfunctional conflict relates to conflict that hinders organisational performance and harms or interferes with organisational members and thus it refers to any confrontation or interaction between groups that harms the organisation or prevents the achievement of organisational aims (cf. 2.4.1.3).
- Conflict in organisations was found to emanate from various sources (cf. 2.4.2). Among others, the following sources were identified:
    - Individual differences;
    - Limited resources;
    - Departmentalisation and specialisation;
    - Inequitable treatment whereby a person's perception of unjust treatment can lead to tension and conflict;
    - Violation of territory;
    - Environmental changes;
    - Communication;
    - Communication differences;

- Structural differences;
- Personal differences; and
- Cultural factors.

- Types of conflict were identified as (cf. 2.4.3.1):
  - *Interpersonal conflict*, which happens for many reasons, like basic difference in views about what should be done, efforts to get more resources to do a job or differences in orientation to work and time in different parts of an organisation, effort to do more and differences in orientation to work and time in different parts in an organisation.

    Interpersonal personal conflict can also be seen from roles that people play in organisations, *inter alia*, role conflict, role ambiguity, role overload.
  - *Intrapersonal conflict*, which is conflict occurring within an individual and arises because of a threat to the person's basic values, a feeling of unfair treatment by the organisation, or from multiple treatment by the organisation and socialisation (cf. 2.4.3.2).
  - *Intrapersonal conflict* comprises three basic types, namely:
    - Approach-approach conflict, where an individual must choose between two alternatives which may both have a positive outcome and can be seen where a principal has for instance, to recommend one of two equally competent educators to a promotion post (cf. 2.4.3.2);
    - Avoidance-avoidance conflict, where an individual must choose between one or more alternatives, which may have a negative outcome, like where a person has to choose between being

redeployed to a school he/she dislikes or to resign (cf. 2.4.3.2); and

* Approach-avoidance, where an individual must choose if he/she must do something, which will have both positive and negative outcomes (cf. 2.4.3.2).

- Inter-group conflict occurs whenever individuals in one group interact, collectively or individually, with another group or its members in terms of their reference group identification (cf. 2.4.3.3). Inter-group conflict occurs from sources such as competition for resources, task interdependence, jurisdictional ambiguity and status struggle, including perceived goal incompatibility, perceived differentiation, task interdependency and perceived limited resources (cf. 2.4.3.3).

- Intra-group conflict occurs when members have interpersonal problems and are angry with one another or experience personality clashes, work less effectively and produce sub-standard products and this is likely to be highest during the early stages of group development when there are strong differences among members and can be about ways of doing tasks or reaching the group's goal (cf. 2.4.3.3).

  Two types of intra-group conflict are discernable namely, the task and the relationship conflict. Intra-group conflict at schools can be classified into four categories namely (cf. 2.4.3.3):

  * vertical conflict, which relates to problems within the hierarchical structure of authority in schools;

  * horizontal conflict, which occurs across the ranks of educators;

* line-staff conflict, which occurs between the principal and central office personnel; and

* role conflict, which occurs if there is inadequate or inconsistent information about the requirements of a position in a schools due to lack of clarification.

- The conflict process unfolds through three stages namely,

  - the first stage, which comprises the pre-episode factors, and indicates that all conflict involves an issue, and points to the existence of factors or circumstances in which conflict might occur (cf. 2.4.4);

  - the second stage, which is the actual conflict process and comprises both parties having a clear aim of emerging victorious and may use different tactics to achieve this (cf. 2.4.4); and

  - the final stage, which relates to the outcomes and consists of outputs from conflict and these are mostly substantive and procedural outputs (cf. 2.4.4).

  The conflict process consists of temporal dimensions which are, the latent conflict stage, perceived conflict, felt conflict, manifest conflict and conflict aftermath (cf. 2.4.4).

- It was found that among other consequences of conflict, it (cf. 2.4.5):

  - breathes life and energy into the organisational relationships and can cause individuals to be much more innovative and productive, because differences of opinions, individual interests, outside influences and even active discord, all have the capacity to inform

and advance collective efforts by providing a provocative stimulus, moving people to think deeply and to act prudently;

- enables learning to appreciate and make constructive use of people's different perspectives and experiences, thus helping to create a context where trust and respect are cultivated rather than depleted;
- in a cooperative context, allows for individuals to work together to achieve mutual goals and allows for open and honest communication of relevant information.
- promotes a sense of interdependence and goal congruence and thus facilitates constructive conflict itself;
- allows for group involvement in problem-solving, a high degree of uncertainty and therefore benefit from the diverse ideas of group members;
- has the potential to improve the effectiveness of group processes as well as the quality of decisions and their implementation and allows for open-mindedness and a discussion of opposing views; and
- can lead to improved thinking in that, for instance, debate among people of different developmental stages promotes the adoption of more adequate ways of reasoning for the people involved.

Within groups, conflict was found to lead to increased cohesiveness and loyalty, acceptance of autocratic direction, focused activity, taking extreme positions; while within groups, conflict results in (cf. 2.4.5):

* A clear distinction and comparison between "we" and "they".
* Decreased interaction and communication, where group members do not only reduce social and professional contacts

but they also reduce the number of attempted communications directed towards the other group.

* Distorted perceptions, whereby threatened group members feel superior and overestimate their strength as well as underestimate that of members of other groups.

* Decrease in member cohesion, implying that if the group loses a conflict, members experience tension among themselves and look for a scapegoat to blame their failure upon.

- Conflict handling models were discussed in terms of:

  - *The competence-based conflict management model*, which describes how people manage their disputes. The model presents conflict management as a function of the effectiveness and appropriateness of communication and focuses on three dimensions of communication namely, effectiveness, relational appropriateness and situational (cf. 2.4.6.1).

  - *The Thomas-Killman two-dimension model*, which propounds that conflict is the condition in which people's concerns appear to be incompatible and as such, when they find themselves in conflict, the behaviour which determines how the conflict will be handled, lies between two independent dimensions namely, assertiveness and cooperativeness. The model presents five main conflict-handling modes, which entail the competing mode, accommodating mode, compromising mode, avoiding mode and collaborating mode (cf. 2.4.6.2).

  - *The Behavioural style model*, which reflects a pervasive and enduring set of interpersonal behaviours and focuses on how a person acts,

that is, what he/she says and does and claims that the foundation for behavioural style rests on the clusters of behaviours people exhibit in interactive situations and two major dimensions of interactive behaviour are *assertiveness* and *responsiveness, each of which is* represented by four behavioural styles namely, *relater, analyser, director* and *socialiser* (cf. 2.4.6.3).

- *The Rahim's dual-concern model*, which addresses conflict handling on two basic dimensions, namely, the concern for self and the concern for others. On the basis of the two basic dimensions, the model proposes that in conflict situations, individuals behave in terms of the integrating style, the obliging style, the dominating style, the avoiding style and the compromising style (cf. 2.4.6.4).

- In exposing the essence of conflict management (cf. 2.5), the following aspects were revealed:

  - There is a difference between conflict resolution and conflict management.

    * Conflict resolution implies a reduction, elimination or termination of conflict, with such actions as negotiation, bargaining, mediation and arbitration (cf. 2.5.1).

    * Confliction management is an effective macro-level strategy to minimise the dysfunction of conflict and enhance the constructive functions of conflict in order to enhance learning and effectiveness in an organisation (cf. 2.5.1).

      Thus, conflict management as a strategy for minimising dysfunctional conflict also seeks to enhance functional conflict through organisational learning (cf. 2.5.1).

- Criteria for conflict management include:

  * Organisational learning and effectiveness, which dictates that conflict management strategies should be designed to enhance organisational learning, which will lead to long-term effectiveness (cf. 2.5.2);

  * Needs of stakeholders, which implies that conflict management strategies should satisfy the needs and expectation of strategic constituencies and to attain a balance among them (cf. 2.5.2); and

  * Ethics, which entails leaders' ethical behaviour by being, *inter alia*, open to new information and being willing to change their minds. Subordinates should also have an ethical duty to speak out against the decisions of supervisors when consequences of such decisions are likely to be serious (cf. 2.5.2).

- The conflict management process at schools, is a process that takes cognisance of the stages of its unfolding, from potential conflict situations to outbreaks that might require conflict resolution strategies. This was found to involve:

  * Diagnosis, which entails problem recognition, which involves problem sensing and problem formulation. It also involves determining whether the school has too little, moderate or too much affective and substantive conflict; and whether the organisational members or parties in conflict are appropriately selecting and using the five styles of handling conflict to deal with different situations properly (cf. 2.5.3).

Diagnosis involves a comprehensive process of conflict measurement and analysis

- Intervention, which implies deciding on the best course of action to manage and resolve the conflict and comprises two approaches namely (cf. 2.5.3):
  - *The process approach*, which attempts to improve organisational effectiveness by changing the intensity of affective and substantive conflicts and organisational members' styles of handling interpersonal conflict and does so by helping organisational members to learn how to match the use of conflict handling styles with different situations. This enables them to make effective use of for instance, avoidance, compromise, integration, obliging and dominating, as determined by the conflict situation (cf. 2.5.3); and
  - *The structural approach*, which attempts to improve organisational learning and effectiveness by changing the organisation's structural design characteristics, which include *inter* alia, differentiation and integration mechanisms, hierarchy, procedures and reward systems by attempting to alter the perceptions of the intensity of conflict of the school organisational members at various levels (cf. 2.5.3).

- The exposition of conflict management in schools (cf. 2.6.1) was found to include:
  - Main sources of conflict in schools namely, the relational conflict (cf. 2.6.1.1), which occurs between individuals or groups and is

caused by differences in personality, culture, values, beliefs and opinions and can be interpersonal, intrapersonal, inter-group or intra-group; and the resource conflict (cf. 2.6.1.2), which occurs because there is not enough of something for every person or group and thus, they struggle to obtain it, which produces winners and losers, especially with regard to constraints on time, money, equipment, learners, staff or facilities.

- Strategies for handling (cf. 2.6.2) conflict in schools included:
  - Negotiation, which is a give-and-take decision-making process involving independent parties with different preferences and can be useful in resolving resource conflict in schools (cf. 2.6.2.1).
  - Third party intervention, which includes strategies such as:
    - Mediation, which relates to a neutral third party who facilitates a negotiated solution by using reasoning, persuasion and suggestions for alternatives (cf. 2.6.2.2);
    - Arbitration, which refers to a third party to negotiation and is someone who has the authority to dictate an agreement, so that it is an adjudicative process and focuses on an appraisal of each party's rights and the outcome is dictated rather than agreed to so that there is no win-win situation, but rather the winner takes all (cf. 2.6.2.2).
    - Conciliation, which comprises a trusted third party who provides an informal communication link between the negotiator and the opponent (cf. 2.6.2.2).
- Conflict management approaches at schools were found to include:

* *The win-win approach*, which can be considered as the compromising style, and involves a give-and-take whereby both parties give up something to make mutually acceptable decisions. This style is useful when parties to the conflict are mutually exclusive or when parties are equally powerful and have reached an impasse in their negotiation and interaction (cf. 2.6.3.1);

* *The lose-lose approach*, which relates to where neither of the conflicting parties is prepared to compromise and in fact, impose such massive demands on each other that both parties end up in far worse positions than before the conflict erupted. This situation is usually strongly motivated by self-interest (cf. 2.6.3.2); and

* *Win-lose approach,* where the parties' own specific interests are of primary concern and no compromise can be considered in the conflict situation, hence the basic attitude of a person is that it is natural to want to win in a conflict situation. Therefore people with this approach regard their own interest as vital, with the result that no compromise can be considered in the conflict situation (cf. 2.6.3.3).

- The principal's role in conflict management revealed the following important aspects:

  * Conflict management in schools is basically the task of the principal as leader at the school and due to the nature of the school as an organisation, an holistic approach to conflict management is advocated through a conflict management process (cf. 2.6.4).

* The main aim of conflict management in schools is to limit dysfunctional conflict and to stimulate organisational learning and effectiveness (cf. 2.6.4).

* In terms of conflict in schools, the role of the principals is therefore, that of integrating conflict prevention and resolution into a conflict management process (cf. 2.6.4).

    - The principal's role, in terms of diagnosis involves firstly, problem recognition, which implies sensing and identifying potential problems and conflicts, and measurement and analysis of data collected with regard to the problem or conflict (cf. 2.6.4).

    - Secondly, the principal's role involves intervention in the conflict process. This implies deciding on the best course of action, by improving the school organisational effectiveness by changing the intensity of affective and substantive conflicts and school members' styles of handling interpersonal conflict. This is so that school organisational members learn how to match the use of conflict handling styles with different situations, thus enabling them to make effective use of, for instance, avoidance, compromise, integration, obliging and dominating, as determined by the conflict situation (cf. 2.6.4).

* Intervention implies that the principal changes his/her leadership approach to ensure the articulation of a clear and challenging vision, that focuses on people and that, motivates them to want to learn and to take responsibility (cf. 2.6.4).

It also implies support for school organisational learning and effectiveness in terms of cultures that support experimentation, risk-taking, openness, diverse viewpoints, continuous questioning and inquiry and sharing of information and knowledge, which factors would encourage substantive or task-related conflict and discourage affective or emotional conflict (cf. 2.6.4).

* The principal is thus required to play numerous roles, *inter alia*, being an agent of communication, a problem solver, a negotiator, a leader, a mediator, a decision maker and a researcher, all of which attributes are essential for both the diagnosis and intervention in the conflict management process.

5.3.2 Findings with regard to aim #2: to investigate conflict handling styles school principals currently used to manage conflict

The following results were found:

- Principal's conflict handling styles – frequency analysis:
  - Integrating as a conflict handling style was found to be in regular use in terms of the frequency counts on all items relating to it (cf. 4.3.1).
  - Avoiding as a conflict handling style was found to be a regular feature of conflict management at schools (cf. 4.3.2).
  - Dominating as a conflict handling style, was found not to be used extensively by school principals. It was found that only in terms of firmness and the usage of expertise in making decisions were the principals found to use the dominating style (cf. 4.3.3).

- Obliging as a conflict handling style was found to be in significant use by school principals as indicated by the frequency counts that indicated that respondents agree with all the items for this dimension. It also was found, however, that principals generally do not give in to the wishes of educators (cf. 4.3.4).

- Compromising as a conflict handling style was also found to be used in schools (cf. 4.3.5).

- The frequency analysis indicated that all the styles were used, though not, it was assumed, to the same degree of frequency or intensity. It was therefore concluded that the possibility was that the styles used to handle conflict at schools were situational, rather than dominant (cf. 4.3.6).

• The rank-order of conflict handling styles:

  - The dominating style of handling conflict ranked the highest, followed by the avoiding style, the compromising style, the obliging style and the integrating style (cf. 4.4).

  - It was concluded, noting the results of the frequency analysis, that the dominating style could be used for purposes of asserting and enforcing departmental rules associated with changing circumstances cf. 4.4).

• Having taken cognisance of the fact that the frequency counts indicated marginal variances and that the frequency counts gave a different impression from the rank order of the conflict handling style, an analysis of variance was done and the following results were found (cf. 4.5):

  - *The variance between conflict handling styles and respondents' gender*

* There were no statistically significant differences found between the conflict handling styles and respondents' gender, which implies that their genders did not influence the way they responded to questionnaire items (cf. 4.5.1).

- *The variance between conflict handling styles and respondents' post descriptions*

  * There were no statistically significant differences found between respondents' post descriptions and conflict handling styles, which implies that the positions they hold in schools did not influence their responses to questionnaire items (cf. 4.5.2).

- *The variance between conflict handling styles and respondents' ages*

  * Differences were found with regard to the avoiding and dominating styles (cf. 4.5.3). The sources of these statistically significant differences were found to be between the age groups 20 – 29 and 40 – 49; and the 31 – 30 and the 40- 49 age groups with regard to the avoiding style. These differences were perceived, for both group differences, as emanating from the outlook towards life in general and perceptions about what constitutes avoidance. Whereas, the younger 20 – 29 year age group could be seeking immediate attention and resolutions of conflict situations, the more mature 40 – 49 year age group could be exercising patience in such conflict situations, as a result of perhaps, years of experience in such situations.

    It was, however, recognised that a definite reason for this significant variance necessitates a much more detailed and comprehensive research undertaking that would possibly be qualitative in nature.

In terms of the dominating style (cf. 4.5.3), the source of the statistically significant differences was found to be between the 20 – 29 and 40 – 49 years age groups. The same reasons as the ones proferred in the avoiding style above were perceived as applicable for the differences in this age category. In practice, this was attributed to the need for prudence in dealing with conflict situations, in terms of having knowledge of human nature and human development so as to apply conflict handling style as the situation demands as well as considering people involved. For instance, knowlegde and skills in understanding human temperament combined with understnding the sources of conflict would be necessary in most conflict episodes.

- *The variance between conflict handling styles and respondents' experience as educators*

  * There were no statistically significant differences for this variable, which implies that the differences in experience as educators did not influence of perceptions of their principals' conflict handling styles in their schools (cf. 4.5.4).

- *The variance between conflict handling styles and staff complements*

  * The were no statistically significant differences between respondents' staff complements and the conflict handling styles, which implies that the differences in experience as educators did not influence their perceptions of conflict handling styles in their schools (cf. 4.5.5).

- *The variance between conflict handling styles and school enrolment figures*

  * There were statistically significant differences found between respondents' schools enrolment figures with regard to all the conflict handling styles (cf. 4.5.6).

    It was found, in terms of the integrating style, that there were practically significant differences at schools with 0 – 500, 0 – 800 and 0 – 1000 learner enrolment figures; 0 – 800 and 1000^{+} learner enrolments; and 0 – 800 – and 1000^{+} learner enrolments.

    These differences were perceived as attributable to differences in school sizes. It is not inconceivable that in schools with less than 500 learners such as farm schools, incidents of conflict episodes would be much lower than in schools with higher enrolment figures. Therefore the conflict handling styles of school principals would be a function of school sizes, especially in consideration of the fact that school times, within which any form and amount of conflict has to be handled and resolved, are the same.

  * It was also found, in terms of the avoiding style, that statistically significant and practical differences emanated from school with 0 – 800 and 1000^{+} learner enrolment figures; and 0 - 1000^{+} learner enrolment figures (cf. 4.5.6).

    The same reasons as those advanced above for the integrating styles were advanced in these instances as well. The avoiding style of conflict handling would make even more sense in schools with high enrolments. Therefore it is understandable that educators from these two different school enrolment types should have different perceptions about how conflict is handled in their

schools. Implications for practice would, in addition to the suggestion above, involve a much more detailed research into the effects of school sizes on conflict handling styles at schools.

In terms of the dominating style, it was found that differences emanated from schools with 0 – 500 and 0 - 800 learner enrolment figures; and 0 – 500 and 1000^{+}learner enrolment figures.

This finding illustrated the vivid difference between big schools versus small schools. It is clear that educators in schools with 500 learners and less would differ in perceptions about how conflict is handled in comparison to educators from schools with more than 1000 learners. Although not specified by the statistical analysis, it can safely be assumed that where schools are small or very large, it would be easy for task-oriented leadership and the dominating conflict handling styles to be exercised.

In terms of the obliging styles, it was found that there were statistically significant differences with practical effect between schools with 0 – 500 and 0 - 800 learner enrolment figures; and 0 – 500 and 1000 learner enrolment figures.

Similar reasons as those indicated for the avoiding and dominating styles regarding school sizes were also attributed to statistically significant differences with practical effect applicable to the obliging styles as well. For purposes of practice, it would be neccesary for in-depth research to determine why these differences exist in relation to the obliging style.

In terms of the compromising styles, there were statistically significant differences with practical effect between schools with 0

– 500 and 0 - 800 learner enrolment figures; 0 – 500 and 1000 learner enrolment figures; 0 – 800 and 1000 learner enrolment figures; and 0 – 1000 and 1000^{+}.

This finding also indicates a clear case of big school versus small school. As such the same reasons as those proferred above were perceived to be applicable to this case as well. It is also understandable that the compromising style would be used frequently in schools with large school learner enrolments.

- *The variance between conflict handling styles and the location of respondents' schools*

  * There were statistically significant differences found between the location of respondents' schools and the compromising style. Statistically significant differences were found between town and township schools and that these were of practical effect (cf. 4.5.7).

    This finding was ascribed to various reasons among others, the availability of resources could mean that there are different sources of conflict at these schools and thus, the approach of principals to conflict handling may be different. In fact, it could be safely concluded that the compromising style of handling conflict could be more prevalent at township schools. This reasoning is informed by the fact that at townships schools, educators are "brave" enough to question issues and even to go on strike. This may lead the principals to use, in most instances, the compromising style to maintain peace at schools.

    However, it must be mentioned that this is another area for comparative research into the relationshipship between school location and conflict handling styles in town and township schools.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are thus made in the light of both the literature review and the empirical research:

Recommendation 1

School principals should move towards using the integrating conflict handling style.

Motivation

The dominating style was found to rank the highest followed by the avoiding and compromising styles, and its frequency variance with the integrating style was significantly large. The integrating style allows for openness, exchange of information, looking for alternatives and examining differences to reach effective solutions and is usefull in dealing with school strategic issues regarding objectives and long-range planning.

Recommendation 2

Conflict management training should receive the greatest priority in schools.

Motivation

The fact that there were significant statistical differences found with regard to school sizes as projected by staff complements and school enrolment figures is quite significant. It actually points to difficulties in dealing with conflict at schools that are big. Capacity building in this regard should not only concern school principals, but other staff members as well. The mere knowledge of conflict handling styles and training in them, would facilitate educators' own attempts at resolving conflict, rather than to expect the principal to deal with all conflict incidents at school.

Recommendation 3

There is a need to identify the types of conflict mostly experienced at schools for capacity building purposes.

Motivation

The statistical differences found with regard to the influence of school sizes on educator perceptions of principals' conflict handling styles implies that there could be serial conflict types occuring in certain schools. An identification of conflict types will assist capacity building and support interventions in target areas of greatest need. This might even prompt a re-evaluation of, for instance, policies that inform, *inter alia*, resource allocation to schools, staffing norms and school size norms.

Recommendation 4

Peer group capacity building programmes for school principals should be initiated.

Motivation

Very often, people learn better in relaxed and informal environments and from their equals. Institutional development officials at district levels of the department could encourage principals to learn from their peers' through examples of good practice. This can be done by initiating "peer-learning" programmes in the form of meetings or mini-summits where principals can share experiences.

5.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The research could have been limited by the population being confined to primary schools only. While valuable to conlfict maanagement and resolution at schools, data gathered can only be generalised to primary schools since it excludes secondary schools.

The questionnaire, while relatively easy to administer, could not elicit information regarding causes of the use of certain styles and could not account for almost equal responses to items. A more in-depth approach using interviews could better serve this puprose.

5.6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

An in-depth research on the conflict handling styles should be conducted using the qualitative approach in order to fill in the gaps emanating from the quantitative survey.

Research could also be undertaken to investigate specific types of conflict incidents at schools and the conflict management processes employed.

It would be interesting to investigate how educators themselves deal with conflict and how this contributes to whole school conflict management processes.

5.7 CONCLUSION

This study set out to investigate school principals' conflict handling styles. To this end, it was found that principals predominanty use the dominating and avoiding styles. This was attributed to such factors as the sizes of schools, that is, most schools were found to be big with enrolment of over 1000 learners. Consequently, staff complements were also found to be quite big and it was concluded that these conflict handling style would understandably, be used frequently.

The study has opened the scope for further research into areas of conflict management that require an holistic approach that enables conflict resolution and prevention in terms of day-to-day conflict situations, while empowering staff in schools to learn and to be effective in dealing with conflict, especially in terms of reducing dysfunctional conflict and facilitating functional conflict.

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ANNEXURE A

Dear Sir/Madam

I am interested in how leadership manages conflict at schools. Kindly assist me in this regard by completing the questionnaire hereto attached.

Please note: There are no right or wrong answers – only honest ones. Therefore do not spend too long on an item. This questionnaire should take you at the most, about five minutes to complete. Your responses will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and the results will be used purely and strictly for study purposes. Therefore be assured of the complete and strictest anonymity with which this questionnaire will be handled.

Thank you in anticipation of your cooperation.

Ms. Motsiri T.E.

ANNEXURE B

Section A (1- 7): General information

***Please indicate your response to this section by means of a* X.**

1. Your gender			Male	Female
2. Your age	20-30	30-39	40-49	50+
3. Years in position as educator	1-10	11-15	15-20	20+
4. Your post description	Deputy	HOD	P1 Educator	
5. Number of staff in the school	Less than 10	10-20	21-40	40+:
6. Location of your school			Township	Farm/Rural
7. Number of learners in your school	0-500	0-800	0-1000	+1000

Section B (1 – 35): Dimensions of principals' conflict handling styles

Directions: The following are statements about how conflict is managed at your school. Please indicate the extent to which each statement characterises your school by circling/crossing the response that most corresponds to your situation.

1 = Strongly agree	2 = Agree	3 =Disagree	4. = Strongly disagree

The school leadership/principal

1. Generally tries to satisfy the needs of educators	1	2	3	4
2. Uses "give and take" so that compromises can be made	1	2	3	4
3. Often goes along with suggestions of educators	1	2	3	4
4. Uses her/his authority to make decision in her/his favour	1	2	3	4
5. Tries to investigate an issue to find an acceptable solution to all	1	2	3	4
6. Keeps disagreements with educators to him/herself to avoid hard feelings	1	2	3	4
7. Uses her/his influence to get her/his ideas accepted	1	2	3	4
8. Gives some to get some	1	2	3	4
9. Negotiate with educators so that a compromise can be reached	1	2	3	4
10. Tries to integrate educators' ideas to come up with a decision jointly	1	2	3	4
11. Tries to avoid being "put on the spot" and keeps her/his conflict with educators to himself/herself	1	2	3	4
12. Tries to work with educators for proper understanding of a problem	1	2	3	4
13. Argues her/his case with educators to show the merits of his/her position	1	2	3	4
14. Is generally firm in pursuing her/his side of the issue	1	2	3	4
15. Usually avoids open discussion of differences with educators	1	2	3	4
16. Tries to bring all concerns out in the open so that the issue can be resolved in the best possible solution	1	2	3	4
17. Tries to find a middle ground to resolve an impasse/deadlock	1	2	3	4
18. Sometimes helps educators to make decisions in their favour	1	2	3	4
19. Tries to satisfy educators' expectations	1	2	3	4
20. Avoids personal encounters/confrontations with educators	1	2	3	4
21. Tries to play down/ignore differences to reach compromise	1	2	3	4
22. Exchanges correct information with educators to solve problem together	1	2	3	4
23. Tries to work with educators to find solutions to a problem that might satisfy our expectations	1	2	3	4
24. Tries to stay away from disagreement	1	2	3	4
25. Usually holds on to her/his solution to a problem	1	2	3	4
26. Usually proposes a middle ground for breaking deadlocks	1	2	3	4
27. Usually allows concessions to educators	1	2	3	4
28. Tries to avoid unpleasant exchanges with educators	1	2	3	4
29. Usually accommodates wishes of educators	1	2	3	4
30. Collaborates with educators to come up with acceptable solutions to them	1	2	3	4
31. Generally avoids an argument with educators	1	2	3	4
32. Sometimes uses her/his power to win a competitive situation	1	2	3	4
33. Uses her/his expertise to make decisions in her/his favour	1	2	3	4
34. Gives in to the wishes of educators	1	2	3	4
35. Wins some and loses some	1	2	3	4