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THE ROLE OF THE PRINCIPALS IN MANAGING CONFLICT IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN DZINDI CIRCUIT IN VHEMBE REGION IN THE LIMPOPO PROVINCE

BY

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DECLARATION

I, *Rathanya Tuwani Agnes*, declare that this study is my own work and that all sources I used have been cited with acknowledgements.

Signed: Rathanya.....

Date: 14.09.2009

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DEDICATION

The study is dedicated to my children, Fungisani, Pollen, Ricky and Ruddick.

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ABSTRACT

This study is centred on the role of the principals in managing conflict in primary schools in the Dzindi circuit. Qualitative methods which involved the use of in-depth individual and focus group interviews were used in this study. The study revealed that the main causes of conflict in primary schools are overcrowding in classroom, management style, misunderstanding, and fear of unknown, monitoring system, lack of school policy and lack of proper channels of communication. The study also revealed that principals have crucial role in managing conflict. They become the mediators and the negotiator in managing conflict and reconcile the parties in the conflict. The principals also emphasised that they prevent conflict by forming syndicates in their schools, encouraging teamwork, avoiding gossip and by being a good listener.

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CHAPTER ONE

ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

(http://www.union.arizona.edu) indicated that conflict is inevitable in any interpersonal relationship or among members of any group. While we encounter various types of conflict in many of our life situations, we often feel a lack of confidence and vision of what is really appropriate to do. Most educational managers find the conflict in their personal relationships already quite stressful, thus any conflict within educational leaders becomes overwhelmingly unbearable. Those educational managers who have lower tolerance level for anxiety often choose to leave the school as an organization. Therefore, ability to manage conflict is probably one of the most important social skills an individual can possess.

It is during this stage of conflict whereby school managers experience his or her most uncomfortable moments when he/she has to deal with differences among people. Because of these differences, he/she must often face disagreements, arguments, and even open conflict. To add to his/her discomfort, he/she frequently finds himself/ herself torn by two opposing desires. The school manager's lot is further troubled by the fact that when differences do occur, strong feelings are frequently aroused, objectivity flies out the window, egos are threatened, personal relationship are placed in jeopardy (Schmidt & Tannenbaum, 2000:1). The background reveals that conflict has negative or positive consequences.

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Therefore, school managers have a principal role to deal with conflict in their respective organization. Conflict provides a rich tool for the principals to analyze much of human behaviour. It is a concept which, when applied intelligently, can bridge the gap between very personal conflict situations and those remote conflicts occurring within a group. Within the school context, principals should be aware that they would continue to face conflict because no two individuals are likely to view the same circumstances in the same way.

Differences in people's experiences affect their observations and values. Such differences set conflicts in motion, thus conflicts have been and will continue to be a certainty in almost all situations involving people. It is the responsibility of principals to manage conflict that occurs between and amongst various constituencies of public education, for instance, learners, parents and educators. Since the need for conflict management skills has become increasingly important in schools, principals should be conversant with the tactics of successfully dealing with conflict in order to realise mutual educational goals (Johnson 1994: 710).

1.1 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The basic premise is that the sense of self collective victimhood emerges as a major theme in the ethos of conflict of societies involved in intractable to conflict and is fundamental part of the collective memory of the conflict. The ethos of conflict and collective memory of conflict are part of the socio-psychological infrastructure and provide the contents for culture of conflict that evolved to meet the challenges of the conflict. The societal shared

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beliefs of ethos and collective memory portray own group as the victim of the opponent. The focus of these beliefs is on the unjust harm, evil deeds and atrocities perpetrated by the adversary.

This view is formed over a long period of violence as a result of the society's sufferings and losses. The formation of the sense of self collective victimhood is based on beliefs about the justness of the goals of one's group and one's positive self-image while, while emphasizing the wickedness of the opponent's goals and characteristics. In other words, focusing on the injustice, harm, evil and atrocities associated with the adversary, while emphasizing one's own society members to present themselves as victims.

Beliefs about victimhood imply that the conflict was imposed by an adversary, who not only fights unjust goals, but also uses immortal means to achieve them. Members provide the moral incentive to seek justice and oppose the opponent, as well as to mobilize moral, political and material support from the international community. The presentation will elaborate on the nature of self collective victimhood, its antecedents, functions and consequences. Managers should seek for management solutions to deal with conflict in their institutions. In addition, all academic specializes in online solutions for meetings, conferences, conventions and other types of events to deal with conflict.

1.3 AWARENESS OF THE PROBLEM

The researcher has learnt that during the apartheid era, principals in South Africa were executing their leadership roles alone without involving other

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stakeholders such as, teachers and parents (Nxumalo 1996:5). Teachers' participation in decision-making was restricted to listening and implementing. There were major conflicts between principals and other stakeholders pertaining to poor conflict resolution strategies employed by the principals.

The researcher, as a primary school educator who has 10 years teaching experience, has witnessed that most primary school principals do not have skills of managing conflict. Most of the conflicts are poorly managed and as a result the issues often go underground, and then reappear often in subtle or disguised form. This contributes to the demeaning of the status of the teaching profession and lowering the standard and culture of teaching and learning. It is evidenced by poor functioning of a large number of disadvantaged primary schools in the Dzindi Circuit.

The above discussions indicate that the researcher's awareness of the problem was based on the experience in primary schools, whereby the researcher was also involved in conflict with other educators and on was part of the team attempting to find a solution to a conflict. Furthermore, the researcher also became aware of the problem through reading books, articles, journals and research conducted by others. It is, therefore, important to study the role of principals in order to identify other strategies that can be useful in preventing conflict. It is very important to conduct this study since it will benefit several parties with regard to the following:

- This study will serve as a guideline on how the primary school principals can manage conflict in Dzindi Circuit.

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- The department of Education will be able to find out the strategies of empowering principals in conflict management.

1.4 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The researcher's observation is that most training conducted by the Department of Education are aimed at helping the principals to understand, promote and implement the mandate, vision, mission and values of the Department of Education, to implement curriculum, to identify the various resources at school and how to manage them efficiently and effectively to maximizes the performance of their schools and to make provisions of the statutes supplied to them as part of the induction program in the management of schools. Moreover, nothing related to conflict management was addressed. It becomes a common complaint within educational institutions that conflict management skills are unsatisfactory amongst most principals. Most principals seem to be lacking the skills to observe the conflict and to utilize conflict constructively and proactively in order to achieve the school's and individual's goals more efficiently.

In most schools, conflicts increase as teachers, heads of department and principals assert their demands for an increased share in organizational rewards, such as position, acknowledgment, appreciation, monetary benefits and independence. Even management faces conflicts with many forces from outside the organization, such as government, unions and other coercive groups which may impose restrictions on managerial activities. Conflicts emanate from more than one source, and so their true origin may be hard to identify (http://www.csudomona.edu).

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In addition, many conflicts in schools arise because educators want the same resources such as promotions, desirable work or working conditions or management attention or approval and because of the scarcity of desired resources to meet everyone's objectives. However, the researcher is concerned that conflicts in schools seem to be contributing to demean the status of teaching profession and lowering the standard and culture of teaching and learning which resulted in poor functioning of large number of schools in the previously disadvantaged communities. It is against the above background discussion that the researcher has developed an interest in investigate the role of the primary schools principals in managing conflict in Dzindi Circuit.

1.5 AIMS OF THE STUDY

The aims of this study were:

- To find out the role of the principals in managing conflict in primary schools.
- To find out the causes of conflict in primary schools.
- To find out the strategies used by Dzindi Circuit primary school principals in managing conflict.

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study was guided by the following similar questions:

- What is the role of primary school principals in managing conflict?

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- What are the causes of conflicts in primary schools?
- What are the strategies used by the primary school principals in managing conflict?

1.7 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

In this section, the following key concepts are clarified:

1.7.1 Conflict

Conflict is the holding of divergent of views which leads to incompatible activities, pursuing of incompatible goals which when realised will gain one party at the expense of others (Matlawe, 1989:12). Freeman (1998:27) emphasises that conflict is a state of discord, dilemma or disagreement between seemingly incompatible objectives by either individuals or groups. Conflict refers to a perception that values, goals or needs are incompatible.

In this study, conflict arises when the differences between two or more groups or individuals become apparent.

1.7.2 Conflict Management

Conflict management is the purposeful intervention of leaders to stimulate and encourage beneficial or helpful conflict and to resolve, suppress or prevent harmful conflict (Johnson 1994:716). According to Bentley (1996:3) conflict management refers to the use of various strategies to arrive at a peaceful settlement of a conflict situation.

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In this study, conflict refers to perceived or experienced incompatible differences within the individual or between two or more individuals which may lead to some form of opposition. Conflict management, thus refers to a manager's effort to find a harmonious balance between conflict and co-operation. It refers to directing the use of an organisation's resources in a way that efficiently accomplishes the organisation's goals.

1.8 LITERATURE REVIEW

The researcher consulted literature sources relevant to the topic such as thesis, journals and other primary and secondary sources in order to acquire knowledge and information pertaining to the role of the primary school a principal in managing conflict and to provide a critical synthesis of what has already been written on the topic.

1.9 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This section presents a summary of the details on the research design and methodology. The complete and detailed research design is presented in Chapter Three.

1.9.1 Research Design

The study utilises a case study design which includes the use of qualitative methods.

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1.9.1.1 Qualitative Research

The researcher was interested in the nature of the sentiments expressed by the respondents. Respondents' descriptions and interpretations of issues formed the central point of this study.

1.9.1.2 Case Study

A case study method of research was adopted because it is a form of qualitative descriptive research, which is used for an in-depth study of a small group of participants (Creswell 1998:36). Furthermore, a case study was followed because it is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or a social unit within a limited time scale (Merriam 1998:21).

1.9.2 Data Collection

In this study, in-depth individual interviews and semi-structured focus group interviews were used to enable the researcher to gather data on the role of the primary school principals in managing conflicts in the Dzindi Circuit Area.

1.9.2.1 Structured Individual Interviews

According to Bless and Smith (2000:1), an in-depth individual interview is referred to as a method of authority because it regards the knowledge producers as authorities due to their ability to transmit the truth or

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knowledge about what they know or have experienced in their local environment. The researcher limited her contribution to the articulation of the research questions.

1.9.2.2 Semi-structured Focus Group Interview

According to Morgan and Spanish (1984:253), focus group interview is characterised by the bringing together of several participants to discuss a topic of mutual interest to themselves and the researcher. The interviewer introduced the topic and then guided the discussion by means of questions. The researcher recorded verbal and non-verbal communication from the participants.

1.9.3 Qualitative Data Analysis

Data was analysed for content, using techniques such as open coding and selective coding. Open coding refers to labels that are attached to segments of text, and selective coding refers to categories that were constructed into data themes.

1.10 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Since not much has been written about conflict management in primary schools, the study provided literature about the extent to which principals can manage conflict in primary schools. The study was useful to the principals as it determined the strategies that can be used to deal with conflict situations in schools.

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1.11 DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

There are many primary schools in Dzindi circuit but for the purpose of this study only five primary schools in the Dzindi Circuit Area in the Vhembe District were considered. The researcher decided to conduct a study in this Circuit because of its accessibility. The main target of the study was principals, deputy principals, and heads of department and senior educators. Based on the fact that the study was conducted in the Dzindi Circuit, it may not be possible to generalise the findings of this study to other areas or circuits.

1.12 THE RESEARCH PROGRAMME

The outline of the study adheres to the following structure:

Chapter One contains the introduction, awareness of the problem, statement of the problem, objectives of the study, research questions, methodology, definition of concept, significance of the study, delimitation and outline of the study.

Chapter Two presents the role of the primary school principals in managing conflict, types of conflict that need to be managed in schools, causes of conflict in schools, strategies used by principals to manage conflict and success and failure of principals in managing conflict.

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Chapter Three contains a detailed research design and methodology.

Chapter Four presents an analysis and interpretation of data collected.

In **Chapter Five** summary, recommendations and conclusions of the study are presented.

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CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Schools have traditionally been expected to teach children academic skills. Schools are also places where learners interact with one another, their teachers and the principals (Marsano, 2003:56). The researcher believes that conflict affects academic achievement therefore; negative behaviour has always been concern to any government (Johnson 1994:710). In the last decade, the concern about conflict in schools has escalated to alarming proportions. Managing conflict at schools has been an age-old challenge for the principals who spend huge amount of time in managing conflicts that occur in schools (Johnson 1994:710). Principals often find it necessary to manage conflict that occurs between and amongst the various constituencies of public education: students, parents, teachers, administrators and the community in the general. The greatest problem that conflict presents is interference with the establishment and maintenance of other priorities within the school.

Recently, attention has been drawn to the level of societal problems that affect the nation's education and cause conflict within the schools and society (Mampuru 2001:167). It is therefore important to note that conflict is a natural part of life and as such, learning to deal with conflict is a life-skill that principal's need. When the principals learn to resolve conflicts, the atmosphere at school will become more pleasant for everyone. Educators

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can spend more time teaching, while learners will spend more time learning. It is therefore important to initiate a conflict management or peer mediation program as a proactive way to address concerns about societal problems (Pendharkar 1995:1). According to Johnson (1994:678), it is necessary to acknowledge the fact that although conflict is usually experienced as something negative it can also have a positive effect. The fact is that, conflict will always be with us. Therefore we cannot eradicate it, but if conflict surfaces, the principal must know how to manage it.

2.2 CONFLICT

Conflict is a natural disagreement resulting from individuals or groups that differ in attitudes, beliefs, values or needs (http://www.cti.purdue). It can also originate from past rivalries and personality differences. Other causes of conflict include trying to negotiate before the timing is right or before needed information is available.

In addition, conflict is a 'clash of interests, values, actions, views or directions.' and point out that disagreement among people is the underlying basis of conflict. People disagree because they see things differently, want different things, have thinking styles which encourage them to disagree, or are predisposed to disagree (http://www.cti.purdue)..

Conflict situations arise because of fear, force, fair or funds. Fear is an imaginary concern for future. Force of any kind initiates and concludes conflicts. Tangible as well as intangible costs may provoke conflict, and also help towards its resolution. Interpersonal conflicts arise because of differences in personality, perceptions, status and ideological and

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philosophical outlooks. Other causes of conflict can be communication gaps; personality differences; substandard performance; disputes over approaches, responsibility and authority; lack of cooperation; or competition for limited resources (http://www.fao.org).

Managing conflict is a major responsibility of the school managers. To create a dynamic and healthy environment in the organization, conducive to effective working, the school manager should deal skilfully with conflict situations. This can only be done if she or he understands the scientists fully, i.e., their problems, interests, limitations and the factors motivating them (http://www.fao.org).

Conflict is a clash of interests, values, actions, views or directions. Conflict refers to the existence of that clash. Generally, there are diverse interests and contrary views behind a conflict, which are revealed when people look at a problem from their viewpoint alone. Conflict is an outcome of organizational intricacies, interactions and disagreements. It can be settled by identifying and neutralizing the etiological factors. Once conflict is concluded it can provoke a positive change in the organization (http://www.fao.org).

When we recognize the potential for conflict, we implicitly indicate that there is already a conflict of direction, even though it may not have yet manifested itself as a clash. Confliction is the process of setting up, promoting, encouraging or designing conflict. It is a wilful process and refers to the real effort put into generating and instituting conflict. Deconfliction is the annihilation of conflict. It does not refer to negotiation

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or bargaining, or even to resolution of conflict: it is the effort required to eliminate the conflict.

Currently the situation has changed for the worse and the school managers are often called upon to deal with serious and conflict situations. However, because there is conflict, it does not necessarily mean that the relationship is doomed. It is a mistake to think that all conflict is bad and should be avoided. Constructively handled conflict is positive, unresolved conflict is negative. Thus, what makes conflict positive or negative is the way in which it is handled (Mampuru, 2001: 167).

In any organisation, especially a school which is a task and human orientated, conflict will occur. This means that conflict is usually experienced as something negative but it can also have a positive effect.

According to Mampuru (2001:168), negative conflict has the following characteristics:

- it leads to increased negative regard for one's opponent,
- it depletes energy which could have been better spent in other areas,
- it leads to individuals closing themselves off from each other, preventing meaningful communication and
- sometimes drags others into the disputes as either supporters or opposers.

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- Conflict causes a breakdown in communication. Although conflict can cause an initial communication breakdown, it can also create opportunities to clarify certain issues. Conflict sometimes rather enhances communication in the school.
- If one avoids conflict, it will eventually disappear. Although minor issues may sometimes resolve themselves, conflict situations must be addressed, otherwise they can escalate out of control
- All conflict can be resolved. If this were true, the task of a principal would be much easy. As long as there are people with different backgrounds and values, there will always be issues on which people can simply not agree. If one cannot resolve it, one must know how to manage it.
- Conflict always results in a winner and a loser. This is not always the case because other outcomes of conflict are also possible.

2.3.2. Truths

According to Rue & Byars (1992:403), the following about conflict are true:

- Nobody can escape conflict. It is natural that when one interacts with others, conflict will occur. The question is what one does with conflict when it occurs.
- Most conflict can be managed. An educational leader cannot fix everything, but he/she can manage most differences by using different methods.

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- Conflict can contribute to building relationships. In trying to solve conflict, one can strengthen relationships. Negative first impressions may be interpreted differently after further discussion and perception of each other may change on both sides.
- Conflict can be a motivator for change. When trying to manage one's differences, one can become introspective, which can be a motivation for change.

2.4 DIFFERENT PHASES IN CONFLICT

It is imperative for a reader to be aware of the dynamic nature of conflict. Conflict does not occur suddenly, it passes through a series of progressive stages as tension builds up. The stages of development are (Rue & Byars 1992:403):

- **Latent conflict**: At this stage the basic conditions for conflict exist but have not yet been recognised. This is the beginning stage of conflict where a pattern starts to develop, where the different parties start to act different roles and interests become hardened.
- **Manifest conflict**: The struggle is under way and the behaviour of the parties makes the existence of the conflict apparent to others who are directly involved. The response during this phase is panic and accusations.
- **Conflict aftermath**: Sometimes conflict takes place for weeks; sometimes it ends quickly or is put under control by intervention. Irrespective of what happens, the fact is that it will have either

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negative or positive consequences on the parties depending on the strategy that was used to resolve it.

These phases indicate that conflict can be progressive as well as destructive in nature but out of the consequences of conflict, a period of recovery and positive reform must arise (Johnson 1994:710). The task of a principal is to limit the amount of conflict, but once they have occurred, the lessons that were learned from the outcomes must be implemented to make the school a better place than it was before the conflict. It is therefore necessary to identify the sources of conflict in order to avoid repetition of the same situation.

2.5 SOURCES OF CONFLICT

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There are various sources of conflict in schools. Gray and Starke (1988:543), identify the following sources of conflict in schools:

2.5.1 Role Conflict

A role is a set of expectations associated with a given position in a group or organisation. Role conflict occurs when different people, including the person filling the role, disagree on how that role should be performed. For example, a principal may see it as his or her role to evaluate educators in the classroom, while experienced educators feel that the principal should make no attempt to do so (Gorton 1987:101).

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2.5.2 Communication Blocks

At the broadest level, communication problems develop because not all groups have the same information. Each group therefore takes a position based on its view of the world and information at its disposal. People or groups who do not communicate are more likely to find themselves in conflict. When people do not communicate, there is a greater chance of misunderstanding and mistrust, which are the main causes of emotional conflict. Sometimes communication problems are also caused by the technical jargon that is frequently used in schools (Umstot 1984:243).

2.5.3 Personal Skills, Abilities and Characteristics

These aspects can have a tremendous influence on the quality and nature of interpersonal relations in an organisation. Aggression, tolerance and domination can affect the way in which a person deals with potential conflict (Johnson 1994:710). These qualities will also determine whether conflict arises or not. If principals tend to perceive people in a certain way, for example, if they are quick to infer laziness or incompetence from only limited evidence, their responses to certain situations can be the source of conflict (Gorton 1987:101). In addition, some people enjoy being argumentative and combative (Vecchio 1991:415). Studies also show that conflict-prone people are likely to possess certain traits (Vecchio 1991:415). For example, highly authoritarian people are likely to antagonise their colleagues by escalating otherwise trivial differences. On the other hand, people with low esteem more readily feel threatened by others and therefore tend to overact.

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2.5.4 Structural Factors

The size of the organisation has a significant influence upon the occurrence of conflict. It was found that conflict is greater in large organisations including a school (Vecchio 1991:412). The increase in size is associated with less goal clarity, greater formality, increased speculation, more supervisory levels and increased opportunities for information to be distorted. In addition, it also appears that differences among staff members in terms of authority and values may be sources of conflict (Vecchio 1991:413). Differences among staff members, however, can have beneficial effects on performance in the organisation. The diversity that exists in heterogeneous groups can be a source of fresh ideas and challenge members to improve their performance. Furthermore, the participation of staff might be another source of conflict. When subordinate participation is greater, levels of conflict tend to be higher. Increased participation in decision-making does not ensure that a person's point of view will prevail, since a subordinate can be involved in decision-making but lack the authority to have his or her preferences put in action (Gray & Starke 1988:543).

2.5.5 The Environment of the Organisation

This factor may cause conflict in schools. Changes in the school's environment can cause major conflict within the schools. The changes in the education system in South Africa have led, amongst other things, to major changes in the educator-learner ratios at some schools. Educators were laid off at many schools. The pressure to reorganise at schools has caused real

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problems and conflict in allocating staff to classes and subjects (Johnson 1994:678).

2.5.6 Disagreements over the Distribution of Limited Resources

Included in this category are shortages in many materials and equipments, time, space, status, influence and knowledge. This type of conflict occurs when there are limited resources in a school (Bentley 1996:5). For instance, most of the times conflicts occur when educators are sharing a classroom or the same reference books.

2.5.7 Cognitive Conflict

Bentley (1996:5) indicates that cognitive conflict occurs when two interacting social entities become aware that their thought processes or perceptions are incongruent. In its extreme form, two parties' inferences from the same data are logical contradictions of one another. This category includes disagreements over how to organise a group of people for a collective enterprise; disagreement over the particular methods that various individuals will use to perform specific tasks and disagreements over moral and ethical standards of behaviour (Bentley 1996:5).

2.5.8 Conflict of Values and Beliefs

Conflict of values and beliefs occurs when two social entities differ in their values or ideologies on certain issues. Differences in values and goals, disagreements over what to do can also create conflict. When personal

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values or perceptions differ, for instance, the principal regards written preparation as important whereas some educators may regard it as bureaucratic 'red tape' (Bentley 1996:5).

Knowing the sources of conflict is not sufficient for principals who have the task of managing schools which have people who are coming from different backgrounds and who have different values, attitudes and political affiliation. It is therefore important for the principal to know the types of conflicts that occur in schools in order to manage them successfully.

2.5.9 Organisational Structure

Autocratic principals with dictatorial styles are more likely to create resentment and hostility (Bentley 1996:5). Principals inevitably seek means to deal with this and collective action may be the result. The structure of a school can also encourage conflict if there are unclear boundaries between work and decision-making responsibilities. For example, if it is not clear that the sales department must agree any urgent delivery orders with the production department before they are confirmed, then a basis for departmental conflict exists.

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2.6 DIFFERENT TYPES OF CONFLICT

Bondesio and De Witt (1991:304-308) distinguish between the following five different types of conflict:

2.6.1 Intrapersonal Conflict

Intrapersonal conflict is conflict that occurs within an individual (Rue & Byars 1992:403). There may be an internal conflict because a person does not feel that contradictory demands, doing a certain job in a certain way will help the person at the expense of colleagues (Gray & Starke 1988:536), or the person has to choose between goals with positive and negative results (Rue & Byars 1992:404). According to Mampuru (2001:147), this type of conflict is caused by:

- **Conflict between two basic needs:** A school principal might be task orientated but he/she also has a strong desire to be accepted by his/her staff. These conflicting human needs can cause stress within the principal if he/she has to decide whether to admonish a teacher whose work is not up to standard.
- **Conflict between certain values:** A school principal must sometimes make a choice between different options all of which contain sufficient merits. This choice that he/she has to make, sometimes leads to stress and inner conflict. An example is when he/she has to make a choice between two evenly-capable teachers for promotion.

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2.6.2 Interpersonal Conflict

This is the most widespread and visible kind of conflict in schools and other organisations in which people are involved in carrying out an organisational mission (Whetten & Cameron, 2002:87). This type of conflict occurs between two individuals of a school if there are fundamental differences regarding the priorities, activities and policy matters of a school. The origins of conflicts in a school can also lie outside the school. Although most of these interpersonal conflicts between two staff members may be of a low intensity, the principal should not ignore them because they can snowball out of portion (Mampuru 2001:147).

In addition, interpersonal conflict is the results of many factors. Rue and Byars (1992:404) state that people with opposing personalities often find themselves in conflict because they rub each other up the wrong way, for example, the extrovert and the introvert, the pessimist and the optimistic, and the impulsive and the level-headed. Certain prejudices based on personal background or ethnic origin can also lead to interpersonal conflict, including racial and religious conflicts (Mayor, 2008:32). There are also more subtle forms of prejudices, such as those held by a graduate in relation to someone who has a diploma rather than a degree.

Another cause of interpersonal conflict is a person's dissatisfaction with his or her role in relation to the roles of others. A teacher may be comfortable with both the principal and colleagues, but if one colleague is promoted to deputy principal, that teacher may no longer be able to accept his or her role in relation to the new appointment (Mampuru 2001:172).

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2.6.3 Individual-Institutional Conflict

This type of conflict occurs when there is conflict between an individual's expectations and the demands of a school as a dynamic organisation (Gorton 1987:101). If the career expectations of a teacher and the bureaucratic approach of the school system are not reconcilable, conflict can be expected. The teacher regards himself/herself as professional and because of that he/she wants professional autonomy. On the other hand, the bureaucratic system does not always allow enough space for it. That is why teachers sometimes feel aggrieved when there are too many rules and regulations to standardise and especially regulate their work. One can compare the situation with a father who wants to rule his child by using rules and regulations. In this case, the father represents the department of education and the child represents the educator.

2.6.4 Intra-Organisational Conflict

Intra-organisational conflict originates between specific groups in a school or school system (Gorton 1987:101). It can also arise between two or more separate groups in the organisation. There could be conflict between members of a particular department, for instance, natural science department and humanities department. It differs from interpersonal conflict because this type of conflict is not primarily a clash of personalities but rather a difference in opinion between members of a certain subject interest group regarding a specific approach to the work/subject (Greenberg & Baron, 2003:45). For instance, the three Biology educators might not feel the same regarding the implementation of more group work instead of individual

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assignments. Another form of intra-organisational conflict occurs between two or more separate departments within the same school. The origin of this conflict is mostly the results of the efforts of these departments to do their best for the school.

2.6.5 The School Community Conflict

According to Mampuru (2001:148), the school does not exist in isolation. It forms part of a community and should therefore also serve the community. But it often happens that there may be certain factions within the community who use the schools to help to achieve their specific aims and objectives which might be religious, social or politically motivated (Bondesio & De Witt 1991:307). Most times these aims and objectives eventually results in school boycotts, unrest and violence. The desires of parents to enrol their children at the so called "traditionally" Afrikaans schools to be instructed through the medium of English as well as the unrest between Black and White learners at certain high schools are all examples of school community conflict that affect the school-community (Mampuru 2001:148).

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The organisational leader, the governing body of the school as well as the community leaders must try to solve this conflict as soon as possible because it disrupts the teaching and learning activities at school (Gorton 1987:101). These will inevitable lead to a drop in standards of teaching and learning. In this way it is not just learners and community that suffer, but eventually the country as a whole.

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2.7 PROCEDURES FOR HANDLING CONFLICT

There are many different forms of procedural mechanisms that can be utilised to either prevent conflict from arising or to minimise its potential for disruption and negative effects. The following are some procedures, if established, can handle conflict (Gorton 1987:101): operating policy and procedures, communication and consultation procedures, decision making practices, negotiation, discipline and grievance procedures.

2.7.1 Operating Policy and Procedures

Every organisation including a school requires policy and procedural frameworks to guide its functioning. The purpose of this being to provide clarity of operational responsibility, prevent duplication of effort and to establish ground rules for activity (Martin 2001: 867). In many large, complex organisations and schools, such policies and procedures would be committed to writing in the form of procedures manuals. However, schools may be more informal and this may be reflected in the organisation structure, job descriptions and the normal ways of carrying out the work required.

2.7.2 Communication and Consultation Procedures

Conflict arises through a lack of knowledge or a misunderstanding of the actions and intentions of others. Communication and consultation between the various groups that exist within an organisation should facilitate an

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improved level of understanding and acknowledgement which in turn should reduce the prospect of conflict (Martin, 2001: 867).

2.7.3 Decision-making Practices

The process adopted with regard to decision-making can also be used to reduce the opportunity for conflict and assist with its resolution. For example, a department that is involved in a decision will have little scope for subsequently engaging in conflictual behaviour with regard to the outcome. Of course, this point of view assumes that the decision-making process is both rational and fair. In most organisations' decision-making situations, there is a degree of power and political behaviour present and if not kept in check these in themselves can create scope for parties feeling aggrieved and conflict arising (Martin 2001: 867).

2.7.4 Negotiation

Negotiation provides a process by which individuals and groups can directly resolve their differences. It is a process of reaching an accommodation that is acceptable to all parties to the process (Mampuru 2001:148). However, it assumes that all parties are prepared to negotiate and reach a compromise which, although less than ideal, would be acceptable.

2.7.5 Discipline and Grievance Procedures

According to (Martin 2001: 867), the employment contract determines the duties and responsibilities to which both employer and employee commit

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themselves during the employment relationship. The discipline and grievances procedures are the vehicles through which both parties have the opportunity to ensure satisfaction with the execution of a contract. For example, if an educator arrives late for work, a principal is not receiving the input of time required by the contract. One way to redress this conflict is through the application of the disciplinary procedure by principal and the school management team. Equally, if employees feel that they are being discriminated against by a principal they have the grievance procedure through which to seek redress for this conflict.

2.8 CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLES

The principal and his/her staff are regarded as important members of the school family. It is important that conflicts should be solved as soon as possible to limit the destructive power it can have on relationships and productivity in a school (Mampuru 2001:154). According to Johnson (1994:716), conflict management is influenced by situational differences combined with the personality traits of those persons experiencing the conflict. Johnson (1994:716) identifies five styles of managing conflict: dominating, integrating, obliging, avoiding and compromising. Researchers have investigated the five conflict-handling styles to determine which most effectively resolved conflict in an organisation.

Operating from the assumption that individuals possessed a characteristic trait or personality for style selection, it was discovered that integrating and dominating were more effective than other styles. The most constructive leaders were those who used integrating and obliging styles, whereas the

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least constructive managers used dominating and avoiding styles. Subordinate assume that high quality results can be obtained with integrating managers. It was found that obliging interfered with goal achievement and productivity, whereas avoiding behaviours produced the lowest ratings for satisfaction with conflict management. According to Mampuru (2001:154), the following tactics can also be followed by principals in effectively managing conflict in schools:

2.8.1 Force

This approach is based on power. Using force, authority or power to resolve conflict leads to a forced or imposed solution. Force can include the use of institutional authority and power, reward and punishment, bribery and even physical force. One side demands apologies from the other and a redress of the perceived wrongs. Authority is used to defeat the other side. This style is adopted by people with high concern for their own needs and a low concern for others' needs. As one party wins at the expense of the other, a confrontational style can cause a great deal of anger. Force can serve a purpose in emergencies or in the following circumstances (Umstot 1994:246):

- when rapid, decisive action is crucial, such as in the case of fire,
- for important matters requiring the institution to take unpopular measures, such as reducing the consumption of photostat paper and
- for matters that are crucial to the well-being of the organisation.

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According to Mampuru (1999:154), conflict can only be resolved by power and authority if this power is enforced, the chance of having a permanent solution is very slim. However, if the power of persuasion is applied, the effect may be long lasting.

2.8.2 Competitive Approach

This type of approach to conflict is an attempt by one party to dominate the other party completely (Mampuru 1999:148). This style reflects the win-at-all-costs approach to conflict resolution. It contains no consideration of the other parties' interests in the situation. In negotiation terms it represents the view that anything conceded is something lost. The purpose of this approach is winning the dispute at all cost. This approach is based on power. You use whatever power you think is necessary to win people over to your position. This type of conflict management may also be compared with an arm wrestling match where there is bound to be a winner and a loser.

2.8.3 Accommodation

The accommodating style in its simplest form involves giving in to another's wishes (Vecchio 1991:422). This approach is recommended when two groups have compatible goals but do not need to interact in order to reach goals (Van Fleet, 1991:203). Two groups will have friendly meetings to decide how they will work towards their goals and accomplish their interdependent tasks while expending the least time and energy. The accommodation approach to conflict management is high in co-operative behaviour and low in assertive behaviour (Mampuru 2001:152).

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This approach may also be known as lose-win approach. The person who follows this approach feels that good relationships cannot be ignored. The principal who adopt this approach sacrifices their personal convictions and goals in order to accommodate those of others. Sometimes those principals ignore differences in order to preserve harmony. In the end, you lose and the other party wins. Although the frequency of conflicts may well be reduced if a principal adopts this approach, he/she might be seen as weak because some may interpret his/her behaviour as shying away from his/her responsibility to make unpopular decisions.

According to Martin (2001: 869), accommodation strategy entails apologising and giving in to the other person, regardless of who is right or wrong. It reflects a low concern for one's own needs and a high concern for the needs of others. This approach reflects a style that would allow the other party to achieve what they desire from the situation. It is an attempt to maintain unity and harmony though subjugating one's own wishes. This could be consequences of difference towards any needs other than those of the other party. It could also reflect a degree of fear of the consequences of failing if one does not allow the other party to have its way (Martin 2001: 869).

2.8.4 Avoidance

Any strategy aimed at avoiding major confrontation or conflict is known as avoidance. It can be used as a delaying tactic, but this causes problems (Gorton 1987:101). This approach refuses to acknowledge that a problem exists, while reducing the amount of interaction with the other persons as

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much as possible. It results from a low concern for both one's own and others' needs. Avoidance technique does not actually resolve the situation, but attempts to evade it because people may tend to justify the situations in which the other party has the authority, power and influence to impose his or her will, or when a more active or aggressive approach is likely to have negative consequences (Gorton 1987:109).

Furthermore, this style reflects a minimalist approach to the situation. It constitutes a desire to ignore the problem and hope that it will go away (Gorton 1987:109). Common responses include ignoring the problem, evading specific attempts to deal with it and elongating any procedural devices invoked to deal with it. This is the active avoidance of any open confrontation or hostility.

Principals who adopt this approach see no virtue in conflict and do not face up to it personally (Mampuru 2001:152). If rules or regulations cannot settle the dispute, the educational leader simply withdraws from the situation to side-step or postpones confrontation. Therefore this is an unco-operative, unassertive conflict management style which can result in communication problems. Both parties are eventually losers in the process because the conflict is not resolved. According to Umstot (1984:246), the principal can use avoidance as strategy to handle the conflict when:

- both parties involved regard the issue as a minor one.
- the possible damage and cost that the conflict can cause outweigh the benefits of a solution.
- additional time is required by both parties to cool off.

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- the conflict is about a trivial matter or matters that are more important warrant immediate attention.
- people see that there is no possibility of their needs being met or their goals attained.
- the potential disruption anticipated in solving the problem seems greater than the potential benefits of doing so.
- people first have to be allowed to cool down and gain perspective.
- gathering information supersedes immediate decision.

2.8.5 Compromise

A compromise solution entails give and take (Maurer 1991:25). It is employed when there is a balance of power between the parties, or when resources have to be shared, for example, when there is a limited stock of school stationery. This strategy is often used to achieve temporary solutions to difficult problems. A major problem with a compromise is that the participants may feel that it is weak and ineffective and that it restricts their chances of attaining their goals. For this reasons principals often meet resistance when trying to convince both sides of the necessity for an agreement. The principal's approach should be to prove to participants that the conflict is unlikely to be resolved without such an agreement.

If parties do see that compromise is essential, they must also understand that it is necessary for both parties to compromise. Typically, individuals or groups who are in conflict do not think about the need to modify their own position but assume that the other party is the one who should or must

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change (Gorton 1987:114). Because parties are frequently convinced that they are right and the other side is wrong, it is difficult to persuade them that there has to give and take on both sides before progress can be made.

A principal who adopts this approach feels that the parties in the conflict should set aside their own view in the interest of the majority. People should thus be allowed to express their views but this should not hamper progress. Compromising principals strive to maintain enough consensuses to keep moving because they believe that motion is more important than destination.

This approach to conflict resolution is the result of a balance between assertion and co-operation and involves negotiation, tradeoffs, swapping, wheeling and dealing. It is regarded as a win-lose situation because in resolving the conflict both parties experience partial satisfaction. In order to gain something you must thus also be prepared to give up something else in the process.

Moreover, this strategy entails each side making concessions, bargaining with each other until a compromise is reached. It represents a satisfying approach to conflict resolution. It is the search for the acceptable middle ground between two points of view so that no one completely wins or loses. This often seems a reasonable approach, but there is the danger that the agreed-upon compromise will be the worst of all worlds; leading to long-term dissatisfaction.

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2.8.6 Collaboration

According to Martin (2001: 870), this is an approach which treats the conflict as a problem which the two parties need to solve together. Both parties can emerge as winners if the conflict is handled carefully by both:

- parties sitting on one side of the table, solving the problem together,
- sides focusing on the problem rather than on proving who is right or wrong and
- parties striving towards a common goal.

The collaborative process creates an atmosphere of trust between the parties. This augurs well for future relationships within the organisation (Martin 2001: 867).

This type of conflict management approach is usually regarded as a best because this style represents the highest levels of both assertive and co-operative behaviours. Another factor is that both parties are committed to come up with a win-win situation in which both parties get most of what they want. Collaborative principals turn conflict into problem-solving exercises where all the parties to the dispute are involved. This type of problem-solving requires the following (Mampuru 2001:154):

- an atmosphere which is based on trust,
- the exposing of hidden agendas and

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- the willingness to be creative and to look for alternative courses of action.

According to Vecchio (1991:422), successful collaboration is based on the following conditions:

- **Willingness to resolve**: This implies that both parties must be willing and committed to resolve conflict. Therefore there should be no hidden agendas or failure to trust each other. Parties should be honest; otherwise a win-win solution will not be achieved.
- **Willingness to uncover the root problem**: Both parties must be committed to discover the origin of the conflict in order to identify the real sources and deal with it.
- **Willingness to empathise**: Both parties must be willing to accept and understand the other party's feelings and point of view, even if they might not agree with each other. Both parties must thus be willing to put themselves in the shoes of the other party.

According to Mampuru (2001:154), the principal can use the collaboration approach when he/she wants:

- to merge the feelings and experiences of people from different backgrounds, perspectives and perceptions,
- to resolve a long-standing conflict which may have a negative effect on the working relationship and

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- the staff to be creative, to come up with solutions for a specific problems.

In addition, collaboration involves an attempt to satisfy the concerns of both sides through honest discussion (Vecchio 1991:422). The focus of this style is on negotiating, looking for the middle ground, trade-off, and searching for solutions that are satisfactory or acceptable to both parties (Hoy & Miskel 1991:101). Collaboration is sometimes difficult to achieve but often yields innovative results (Van Fleet, 1991:204). This management style is sometimes equated with problem-solving approach (Everard & Morris 1991:109). Collaboration is useful because it involves both parties (Sweeney & Lindsay 1991:37). Sweeney & Lindsay (Ibid) emphasise that principals who use collaboration to manage conflict, should follow the steps below:

- define the problem,
- look for solutions (alternatives),
- choose a suitable solution,
- implement the decision and
- evaluate the implementation.

This approach reflects a win-win approach to negotiation and problem solving (Martin 2001: 870). This style gives equal recognition to the need to resolve conflict through meeting the objectives and desires of both parties if a lasting settlement is to be achieved. Leaving one party disadvantaged is a recipe for future conflict. That is not to say that every party can expert to achieve everything desired as a result of conflict resolution.

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2.8.7 Mediation

Buchanan and Huczyynski (2004: 809) indicate that mediation is a process in which a neutral third party to the conflict assists in the achievement of a negotiated solution by using reason, persuasion and the presentation of alternatives. Mediation involves bringing in a third party in order to resolve the dispute. In negotiation situation, the behaviour and feelings of the parties can become sharply polarised and each becomes isolated from the other. When this happens, a mediator can maintain contact and communication between the parties in dispute. In hostage-taking situations and local wars, independent third parties are often brought in to act as mediators. They do not control the agreement but influence the conflict resolution process. They guide the two parties to discover the solution to their problem. With increasing litigation and an increasing number of cases log-jammed in the courts, the importance and frequency of alternative dispute resolution is increasing (Buchanan & Huczynski 2004: 809).

2.8.8 Signals

The signals that principals and other individuals within an organisation give also contribute to the likelihood of conflict breaking out. For example, if principals only speak to employees when there is a real threat of industrial action taking place, then they are sending out a clear signal of what they think about the workers. It becomes apparent that the only way to attract the attention of management is to threaten to take industrial action. Appropriate signals can be used to encourage different behaviour patterns. For example, it would be possible to encourage openness and discussion by involving

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employees on regular basis. This would also signal that it was not necessary to threaten conflict in order to gain attention (Martin 2001: 867).

2.8.9 Training and Socialisation

The development of training courses can help to reinforce a management perspective. For example, a training course on customer care is a signal that principals are interested in customers as well as providing an opportunity to explain why principals adopt those views and thereby providing staff with an opportunity to internalise those same views. This provides an opportunity for the principal to be socialised into particular behaviour patterns and beliefs as defined by management, thereby reducing the potential for conflict (Martin 2001: 867). Principals who display inappropriate behaviours are less likely to be allowed to develop their careers or gain access to training. Consequently, career development and promotion depends upon delivering appropriate behaviours and generally meeting management expectations. Part of this involves not engaging in behaviours that would be classed as undesirable, including conflictual or questioning orientations (Martin 2001: 867).

2.8.10 Clarity and Openness

This is based on the notion that conflict can arise where there is a lack of clarity about the intentions of management or other people. For example, when managers suddenly spend considerable amounts of time away on business and groups of visitors are shown around the facilities, it is only natural that doubts about the future of the company will emerge. A

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commitment to ensure clarity and openness within an organisation can go some considerable way to provide a climate of trust, which in turn minimises the possibility for misunderstandings and conflict (Martin 2001: 867).

2.8.11 Resolution of Conflict on a One-to-One Basis

If an educational leader or any other colleague is in conflict with someone, it is by far the best to talk it over as soon as possible before the dispute escalates out of proportion. For both parties, to confront each other face-to-face works well to solve minor conflicts (Mampuru 2001:154).

2.8.12 Resolution of Conflict through Objective Arbitration

Sometimes it becomes important to resolve a conflict on a one-to-one basis; in that situation one can make use of objective arbitration (Martin 2001: 867). The arbitrator, mediator or referee can be a principal, senior staff member or even a member of the governing body of the school. His/her task is to bring the different parties to the point where each has the desire to solve the problem. His/her role as mediator is to stay neutral at all times, keep the discussions to the point and not to allow the parties involved to attack each other personally.

According to Bondesio and De Witt (1991:315), the following principles should regulate such discussions:

- Both parities should get an opportunity to state their view of the problem clearly and openly.

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- Both parties should listen alternatively to each other's viewpoints and make sure that they understand each other correctly. To avoid any misunderstanding, the listening party must repeat the other party's viewpoint to ensure that perceptions and or interpretations are accurate.
- Both parties must restrain themselves from being continually on the defensive and offensive behaviour is not tolerated. Both parties should rather accept each other's sincerity and act in good faith.
- Both parties should be encouraged to build on each other's good ideas.
- A set of strategies with a clear indications of who is going to do what and when, should be developed to try and resolve the problem.
- Both parties should attend a follow-up discussion at a predetermined date to evaluate the progress that has been made.

2.9 ASPECTS TO BEAR IN MIND WHEN PREVENTING SCHOOL CONFLICT

In a school where so many different personalities are involved, it is impossible to avoid conflict entirely. A principal should thus try to prevent conflict or if it occurs, find a solution for the smooth running of the school.

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The following are a few aspects that a principal should bear in mind in an attempt to prevent school conflict (Mampuru 1999:154):

- Do not speak about anyone behind their backs. Speak or confront the person personally. This also implies dealing with problems immediately and not avoiding them.
- Adopt an open door policy towards subordinates so that the principal is accessible to other members of staff as well as to pupils and parents.
- Create communication channels to deal with grievances such as a suggestion box.
- Monitor individuals or groups whose viewpoint radically differs from yours so that you can be prepared if something happens.
- Know your staff with regard to their aspirations, needs and disappointments.
- Discourage the staff from adopting a win-lose approach to conflict management because it normally brings out the worst in people.
- Follow a participative management style which makes provision for communal decision-making. Everybody thus has the opportunity to air his/her views before decisions are made.

2.10 CONCLUSION

A school is expected to be a place where children learn academic skills and morals, cultural activities and interact with one another. This interaction is also expected to be available amongst the principal and educators but due to the fact that the school is a family of people who have diverse needs and

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cultural background it is important to acknowledge that conflict will always exist in school. So what is needed is to know the strategies that can be used to manage conflict. In this, Chapter the researcher has provided a theoretical framework regarding the myths and truths about conflict, phases in conflict, sources of conflict, types of conflict, and procedures in handling conflict, the strategies that can be used to manage conflict, conflict management style and what should be born in mind when managing conflict. In the course of the presentation of the theoretical framework, the researcher has also provided the role of the school principal in managing conflict. In the next chapter, the researcher will detail the research design and methodology that will be used in the study.

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CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INRODUCTION

The aim of this study is to investigate the role of primary school principals in managing conflict. In Chapter Two, the researcher presented a literature review on conflict management in schools. This chapter presents the research design that was followed in data collection, data analysis and interpretation.

The design was based on the specific research problem statement which directed this empirical research. This was:

- What is the role of primary school principals in managing conflict?

The chapter will start with a brief discussion of the research design, followed by a sampling procedure, population, sample, data collection instruments, data analysis, reliability and validity of research instruments, pilot study, some ethical considerations and conclusion.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

McMillan and Schumacher (1993:157) define a research design as a plan for selecting subjects, research sites and data collection procedures to answer a research question. This study on the role of the primary school principals in

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managing conflict followed a qualitative design. This means that a research design is the plan and structure of an investigation used to obtain evidence to answer research questions. A research design describes the procedures for conducting a study, including when, from whom and under what conditions the data will be obtained (Creswell 1994:154). Furthermore, Creswell (1994:154) indicates that educational research is either qualitative or quantitative. The research followed qualitative research for various reasons:

Firstly, data was obtained in a natural setting. The researcher developed an instrument that enabled her to interact with the selected individuals in their natural settings.

Secondly, the researcher viewed qualitative methods as appropriate because they encourage social inquiry that focuses on the way people interpret and experience events and the world in which they live. According to McMillan and Schumacher (1993:373), a number of different approaches exist within the wider framework of qualitative research, but most of these have the same aim: to understand the social reality of individuals, groups and cultures. So, the researchers used qualitative approaches to explore the behaviour, perspective and experiences of the primary school principals in managing conflict (Holloway 1997: 1).

Finally, the researcher chose to use qualitative research because it concentrates on small, distinct groups such as the participants in this study. This will ensure that data analysis will focus on one phenomenon which a researcher seeks to understand in depth, regardless of the number of sites, participants or documents of a study (Leedy & Ormrod 2001:148).

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3.3 POPULATION

A population is the entire group of items or individuals from which the samples under consideration are presumed to come (Gay 1996:172). Melville and Goddard (1996:29) further emphasise that a population is any group that is the subject of a research interest. A population is sometimes referred to as the universe and it is defined as the entire group whose characteristics are to be investigated (Ndagi 1984:75).

The above paragraph means that a researcher chose a group or a number of individuals in whom he or she has interest. These may be the members of a culture or a setting or phenomena under study. Hence, for the purpose of this study, primary school principals in the Dzindi circuit formed part of the population of this study. The participants were regarded as the information–rich key informants for the study. In other words, the principals and school management teams were the ones who were likely to have knowledge and information about the issue under investigation.

3.4 SAMPLING PROCEDURES

According to McMillan and Schumacher (1993:158), *sampling* is defined as strategies used to select a sample of participants chosen from the whole population to get the information about the larger group. For the purpose of this study, the researcher used purposeful sampling to select in only information-rich participants who have reliable information and experience of managing school conflict (Holloway 1997:142). This helped the

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researcher to collect rich data and understand the ideas of participants chosen as the sample.

3.5 SAMPLE

Huysamen (1994:39) maintains that in a study, a *sample* is a number of individuals selected from a population preferably in such a way that they represent the larger group from which they were selected. McMillan and Schumacher (1993:598) define *sample* as a number of individuals selected for a population for a study. In terms of what constitutes an appropriate sample, Tuckman (1978:205) is of the view that there are no specific rules on how to obtain an adequate sample, although a sample of 10 to 20 percent of the population is often used. For the purpose of this study, a sample of five primary school principals and a total of 25 members of school management consisting of principals, deputy principals, heads of department and senior teachers that is, five members from each school, in the Dzindi circuit formed the sample for this study. The selection of the schools was based on researcher's knowledge of the geographical position of the school and the principals of those schools.

3.6 DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

According to White (2002:82) qualitative researchers operate under the assumption that reality is not easily divided into discrete, measurable variables. Qualitative researchers are often described as being the research instruments because the bulk of their data collection depends on their personal involvement (interviews, observation) in the setting. Holloway

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(1997:45) further stresses that data collection in qualitative research involves the gathering of information through a variety of data sources such as interviews and observation schedule. Qualitative researchers sometimes reject the term 'collection' of data. They use instead 'generating' data; term which was considered also appropriate in this study as the researcher did not merely collect and describe data in a natural and detached manner, but was involved in a more creative way (Holloway 1997:45).

In this study, structured individual interviews and semi-structured focus group interviews were used to enable the researcher to gather valuable data on the role of the primary school principals in managing conflicts in the Dzindi Circuit Area.

3.6.1 Structured individual interviews

Structured individual interview is the process of data gathering where the interviewer and interviewee engage in a 'talk' (Bless & Smith 2000:1). The researcher preferred to use structured interview because of the following reasons:

- It gives the participant to be open with the issues under the discussion
- It gives opportunity to the researcher to probe and follow-up issues not clear.

This method is known as the method of authority because it regards the knowledge producers as authorities due to their ability to transmit the truth or knowledge about what they know or have experienced in their local

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environment. According to Schulze (2002:61), a researcher using structured individual interviews develops further questions spontaneously in the course of the interaction with the interviewee.

In this study, the researcher limited her contribution to the previously articulated research question. The researcher conducted five structured individual interviews with five primary school principals to determine their role in managing conflict (See Appendix A).

3.6.2 Semi-structured Focus group

According to Morgan and Spanish (1984:253) focus group interview is characterised by the bringing together of several participants to discuss a topic of mutual interest to themselves and the researcher. Focus groups involve organised discussion with a selected group of individuals to gain information about their views and experiences of a topic. This type of interviewing is particularly suitable for obtaining several perspectives about the same topic.

According to White (2005: 147) the focus group interview is seen to be limited to those situations where the assembled group is small enough to permit genuine discussion amongst all its members because some people need company to be motivated to talk and some topics are better discussed by a small group of people who know each other. The researcher introduced the topic and then guided the discussion by means of questions. During the process, the researcher used verbal and non-verbal communication from the participants.

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The researcher must encourage the participants to speak one at a time to avoid garbling the tape. It is of much help during the sessions if participants identify themselves each time they speak (White, 2005:148).

In this study, participants were informed about the value of the study and about the instrument that was to be used in this study. During the interview the researcher took notes and even captured the exact phrases and statements made by the participants.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

In order to collect data, the researcher negotiated with the respondents of the selected schools in Dzindi Circuit. In qualitative data analysis, the researcher aims to gain new understandings of the situations and processes being investigated (Creswell 1994:153). Qualitative research requires logical reasoning and it makes considerable use of inductive reasoning, organising the data into categories and identifying patterns (relationships) among the categories (White 2002:82).

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In this study, data was analysed for content, using open coding to attach labels to segments of text and selective coding to determine recurring categories in data themes (Morgan & Spanish, 1984:253). The procedure began with naming and categorising of phenomena through close examination of data. Data was analysed for content, using a techniques such as open coding and selective coding. Open coding refers to labels that are

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attached to segments of text, and selective coding refers to categories that are constructed into data themes.

McMillan and Schumacher (1997:500-3) confirm that qualitative data analysis uses written language. In this study, the results were presented in a descriptive or narrative form supported by direct quotations from the raw data, percentage and tables (McMillan & Schumacher 1993:420). This means that in this study, verbatim accounts, transcripts and direct quotations were highly valued as data as they indicated the understanding of the participants.

3.8 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY OF RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

Validity tells us whether an item measures or describes what it is supposed to measure or describe. If an item is unreliable, then it must lack validity but a reliable item is not necessarily valid. It could produce the same or similar responses on all occasions but not be measuring what it is supposed to measure (Hitchcock & Hughes 1995:105).

3.8.1 Validity

Hitchcock and Hughes (1995:105) refer to validity as the extent to which the description of events accurately captures events. Validity pertains to whether the researchers is observing, identifying and measuring what he/she says is being observed, identified and measured (Mason 1996:21). Validity is a goal towards which the researcher constantly moves. Hence, the movement is

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facilitated by constant reflective questioning about credibility. Internal and external validity was adopted in this study.

Internal validity deals with the question such as *'how do we know that the results of this piece of research represent the real thing, the genuine product?'* The researcher achieved this through checking the transcripts against the objectives of the study.

External validity answers to the question, '*how do we know that the results of this piece of research are applicable to other situations?* In this regard, the results were only generalised to schools in the same circuit.

3.8.1.1 Content validity

This is concerned with the representativeness or sampling adequacy of the content of an instrument. To determine content validity, people normally ask themselves questions like (White 2002: 23): *'Is the instrument really measuring the concept we assume it is?' 'Does the instrument provide an adequate sample of items that represent that concept?* For example, '*Do the items describing conflict really describe conflict?' 'Are the items contained by scale claiming to measure the role of the primary school principals in managing conflict an adequate sample of indicators measuring conflict?*' This means that questions with content validity, should sample the range of the behaviour that is represented by the theoretical concept being measured.

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3.8.1.2 Face validity

Face validity refers to what an instrument appears to measure (White 2002: 23). Questions appeared relevant to those who completed or administered them. This means that face validity is a desirable characteristic of a measuring instrument. Without face validity a researcher may encounter resistance on the part of the respondents, which may in turn adversely affect the results obtained. Therefore, in this study the items in the interviews appear to be a relevant measure of the role of the principals in managing conflict. The researcher was therefore convinced that all her instruments measured all that she intended to measure.

3.8.2 Reliability

Reliability is the extent to which a test or procedure produces similar results under constant conditions on all occasions. According to Mason (1996:24), objectivity is to be sure that if a later investigator follows exactly the same procedures as described by an earlier investigator, the researcher should arrive at the same findings and conclusions. This means that reliability in social research refers to whether a piece of research can be replicated, in other words, whether a different investigator can achieve the same results using the same research methods. The reliability of this study can be proven if the same interviews could be conducted to the same participants.

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3.9 PILOT STUDY

A pilot study is a preliminary study which is done to test the feasibility of the research instruments. It helps the researcher to determine whether instrument will measure what is expected to measure.

The term pilot study refer to mini version of a full-scale study as well as specific pre-testing of a particular research instrument such a questionnaire or interview schedule (Baker, 1994:182-3). Furthermore, pilot study refers to the so-called feasibility studies which are small scale versions done in preparation for the major study (Polit, Beck & Hungler, 2001:90). In addition, a pilot study also called a 'pilot experiment' is a small scale preliminary study conducted before the main research in order to check the feasibility or to improve the design of the research (Haralambos & Holborn, 2000:998). However, a pilot study can also be the pre-testing or trying out of a particular research instrument (Baker, 1994:182-3).

Pilot study may also try to identify potential practical problems in following the research procedure. It also improves the internal validity of a questionnaire or interview schedule. In this study the researcher asks the participants for feedback to identify ambiguities and difficult questions. After that the researcher discarded all unnecessary, difficult or ambiguous questions (Peat, Mellis, Williams & Xuan, 2002:189).

In this study, a pilot study with two primary school principals and two members of the school management team was conducted in the Dzindi

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circuit. After conducting pilot study, the researcher was compelled to discard all unnecessary, difficult and ambiguous questions.

Dzindi circuit is one of the circuits in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province. The researcher used primary schools that had similar features and conditions as the schools selected for the study. The results of the pilot study revealed that principals are the mediators when there is a conflict. Principals sit with the parties in conflict and discus the problem with the aim of reaching a peaceful settlement.

3.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Ethical measures are principles which a researcher should bind himself / herself with (Schulze 2002:17). In this study, the researcher was bound by the following research ethics:

3.10.1 Permission to conduct research

For a research to be conducted at an institution, such as a university or school, approval for conducting the research should be obtained before any data is collected (McMillan & Schumacher 1997:195). In this study, the researcher sought permission from the Head of Department of Education in the Limpopo Province before visiting the targeted schools (See Appendix C).

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3.10.2 Informed consent

According to Schulze (2002:17), participants should be given enough information pertaining to the study before data collection. In this study, the participants were given adequate information on the aims of the research, the procedures that were to be followed, possible advantages and disadvantages for the participants, the credibility of the researcher and how the results would be used so that participants could made informed decision on whether they want to participate in the study. No form of deception was used to ensure the participation of the participants.

3.10.3 The Right of privacy

Schulze (2002:18) defines privacy as "that which normally is not intended for others to observe or analyse". In this study, subjects' confidentialities were not at any time compromised, as their names were not used in the final report. No private or sensitive information was divulged as the right to confidentiality of the subjects was respected (Schulze, 2002:17). In addition, the following were adhered to:

- The privacy of participants was protected at all costs.
- The use of concealed media such as video cameras, one-way mirrors or microphones without the permission (preferably written) of the participants was not condoned.

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CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The primary aim of this study was to investigate the role of principals in managing conflict in primary schools. This was undertaken by means of a literature study and an empirical investigation. This chapter is set out to report on the investigation by providing answers as to how the primary school principals in the Dzindi circuit manage conflict. The information was collected by using qualitative methods involving structured individual and semi-structured focus group interviews.

4.2 METHODOLOGY

Five structured individual and five semi-structured focus group interviews were conducted in the Dzindi circuit. The five structured individual interviews were conducted with the principals of five primary schools in the Dzindi circuit. Five semi-structured focus group interviews were conducted with the members of school management teams from five primary schools. The focus group interviews composed of five deputy principals, seventeen heads of department and three senior teachers. The first semi-structured focus group interview consisted of one deputy principal, three heads of department and one senior educator. The second semi-structured focus group interview consisted of one deputy principal and three heads of department and one senior educator. The third semi-structured focus group interview

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consisted of one deputy principal, three heads of department and one senior teacher. The fourth semi-structured interview consisted of one deputy principal and four heads of department. The fifth semi-structured interview consisted of one deputy principal and four heads of department. The total number of the participants was 25. This means that there were five members in each focus group.

4.3 METHODS OF PRESENTATION

In analysing the data the researcher started by reading the transcripts in their entirety several times in order to get some sense of the interviews as a whole before unpacking it into parts and determining the emerging categories and themes. Similar topics were clustered together in all interviews in order to establish themes, trends and patterns. Emerging themes, patterns and trends were identified, written down and cross referenced with the research question to ensure that the investigation stayed on track. The themes were categorised into topics. Related topics were categorised and data materials belonging to each category were grouped together. The presentation was mainly in the form of descriptive data supported by tables and percentages (%).

4.4 ANALYSIS BASED ON THE INTERVIEWS WITH THE PRINCIPALS

In discussing the data, the researcher focused the analysis on all the individuals' responses to each question as is often done in research where open-ended questions are used during interviews. The results, based on the

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main categories that emerged from data collected from the principals using structured individual interviews, were organised and discussed under the following headings:

- Biographical data of respondents
- Conflict management

The findings discussed under each main heading were presented in sub-sections that were aligned to the sub-categories that emerged from the interviews.

4.4.1 Biographical data of respondents

The respondents were asked to provide their biographical information. They were expected to indicate their gender, age, academic qualification, post held and their work experience.

4.4.1.1 Gender

Principals were asked to indicate their gender.

Table 1: Gender of the respondents

Responses	Number	%
Male	3	6o
Female	2	40
Total	5	100

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The results in Table 1 reveal that the majority of the respondents sixty percent were males while only forty percent were females. This indicates that more males are in the top management posts. Data revealed that males are more involved in the management of conflict than females in their institutions. Furthermore, if training on conflict management could be offered it would favour males than females.

4.4.1.2 Age

Principals were asked to indicate their age.

Table 2: Age of the principals

Responses	Number	%
38 years	1	20
39 years	2	40
46 years	1	20
51 years	1	20
Total	5	100

Table 2 reveals that the majority of the respondents forty percent were 39 years old. Twenty percent of the respondents were 38 years old while the other twenty percent of the participants were 46 years old while twenty percent of the respondents were 51 years old. The results reveal that respondents were in the middle age. The researcher's assumption is that the old the participants the more the experience in handling or solving conflict in their institutions. This implies that the respondents could apply various strategies of handling conflict in their schools.

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4.4.1.3 Educational qualifications

The respondents were asked to indicate their highest educational qualifications.

Table 3: Educational qualification

Responses	Number	%
Bachelor Degree	1	20
Honours Degree	1	20
Masters Degree	3	60
Total	5	100

Table 3 illustrates that the majority of the respondents sixty percent have Masters Degree while twenty percent of the participants have a Bachelor Degree while twenty percent of the respondents has Honours Degree. This reveals that respondents have different educational background. It should not be surprising if those who hold senior degrees could manage conflict effectively depending on their educational qualification and experience.

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4.4.1.4 Previous post held

Respondents were asked to indicate their previous post.

Table 4: Previous post held by the principals

Responses	Number	%
Head of Department (HoD)	1	20
Deputy Principal	4	80
Total	5	100

Table 4 indicates that the majority of the respondents eighty percent were promoted first as deputy principals and twenty percent of the respondents were once a head of department. Based on the participants' experience from the previous posts in management positions, they have skills of managing conflict. The experience of the participants in different managerial positions before could assist them to have exposure on how best they could solve conflict in their institutions. Their experience could also assist colleagues to handle complicated cases in their institutions.

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4.4.1.5 Extent of experience in the previous post

The respondents were asked to indicate the extent of their experience in their previous posts.

Table 5: Previous post experience

Post	Responses	Number	%
Head of Department	5 years	1	20
Deputy principal	10 years	2	40
Deputy principal	13 years	1	20
Deputy Principal	16 years	1	20
Total		5	100

Table 5 illustrates that the majority of the respondents forty percent have 10 years working experience as the deputy principals while twenty of the respondents have 5 years working experience as head of department. Twenty percent of the respondents have 13 years working experience as deputy principal while the remaining twenty have 16 years working experience as deputy principal. Taking their experiences into account, the researcher concluded that the respondents were knowledgeable in managing an institution.

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4.4.1.6 Experience in the current post

The respondents were asked to indicate their experience in their current posts.

Table 6: Experience in the current post

Responses	Number	%
5 years	1	20
10 years	4	80
Total	5	100

Table 6 shows that the majority of the respondents eighty have 10 years working experience as principals while only twenty has 5 years working experience as principals. Based on their previous and the present experience the researcher can conclude that the respondents are knowledgeable in terms of conflict resolution and management. Their long service in the management position could assist in solving conflict in their institutions.

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4.4.1.7 Number of educators in their respective schools

The respondents were asked to indicate the number of educators in their respective schools.

Table 7: Number of educators in school

Responses	Number	%
11	1	20
16	1	20
24	1	20
36	1	20
55	1	20
Total	5	100

Table 7 reveals that twenty percent of the schools have 11 educators; twenty has 16 educators, twenty has 24 educators, twenty has 36 educators and the remaining twenty of the schools has 55 educators. The conclusion is that the respondents are working with huge number of educators. This implies that these participants are not working in a conflict-free environment as the higher the number of the educators the more the differences in perception.

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4.4.2 Conflict Management

4.4.2.1 Development of relationship within the school

The respondents were asked to indicate how they promote positive relationship among the educators.

Table 8: Relationship among the educators

Responses	Number	%
Encourage educators to do a farewell party if a staff member is leaving the school.	2	40
Encourage educators to attend the funeral if an immediate family member of the colleague has passed away.	3	60
Total	5	100

Table 8 illustrates that forty percent of the principals encourage the staff members to throw parties. It was evidenced by the following comment, *"staff members are encouraged to do a farewell party if the member of staff is leaving"*. Sixty percent of the principals indicated that they encourage educators to work as a family. This was evidenced by the following comment, *"educators are encouraged to attend the funeral if one of the immediate family members of the colleague has passed away"*. This means that all principals are working hard to encourage good relationship among the educators. They are using different strategies to enforce good relationship among the staff members.

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4.4.2.2 Definition of conflict

The respondents were asked to indicate their understanding of conflict.

Table 9: Definition of conflict

Responses	Number	%
Conflict is when two or more people perceive things differently. When they disagree in their opinion.	5	100
Total	5	100

Table 9 indicates that all participants hundred percent had consensus on the fact that conflict is a disagreement between two or more individuals. Individuals are engaged in conflict because they differ in opinion since they perceive things in different ways. This was supported by the following comment from one school principal participant, "*Conflict occurs when two or more groups or individuals perceive things differently. It may occur in a school amongst the educators or between the educators and the principals*". This implies that differences in individuals' perception, if they are not handled in professional way, may result in conflict.

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4.4.2.3 Conflict management

The respondents were asked to indicate their understanding of conflict management.

Table 10: Conflict management

Responses	Number	%
It is a way of finding peaceful settlement between or amongst the people who are fighting.	5	100
Total	5	100

Table 10 reveals that all respondents hundred percent share the same understanding of conflict management. According to the respondents, conflict management has to do with solving problems between or amongst conflicting parties. This is supported by the following comment from a school principal, "*It refers to how people can handle conflict situation between two or more people in order to find peaceful settlement between or amongst the individuals*" This means that conflict management may be any strategies that could be employed to resolve conflict in a peaceful manner. From the interviews, it was evident that conflict management is the process whereby the parties workout their disagreement in order to end a conflict peacefully. This implies that conflict management is a key factor in successful management of any institution.

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4.4.2.4 Signs of conflict

The respondents were asked to indicate how they notice conflict in their schools.

Table 11: Awareness of conflict

Responses	Number	%
When the staff members do not speak with each other.	1	20
When there is a resistance.	3	60
When members are fighting with each other.	1	20
Total	5	100

Table 11 illustrates that twenty percent of the respondents notice conflict when there is communication breakdown between or amongst the staff members. This is confirmed by the following comment from the school principal, *"There is a communication breakdown between the two parties in conflict". Communication ceases to exist between the two parties and scolding of each follows"* Based on the comment it is evident that one of the steps in conflict manifestation is when parties are not talking to each other.

Twenty percent of the respondents notice conflict when members are fighting with each other. This was confirmed by the following comment from the school principal, *"I only notice conflict when there is fighting between or amongst the members. It is seen by everybody because the two parties decide to go out to fight as a way of solving their problems.* Based on the comment one can say that fighting is another manifestation of conflict.

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Twenty percent of the respondents notice conflict when there is resistance. This is supported by the following comment, *"The conflict becomes visible when there is resistance and facial expression between or amongst the staff members to show that they disapprove each other. Resistance usually takes the form of silence"*. It is clear from Table 11 that all respondents notice conflict when it is already visible to everyone.

4.4.2.5 Prevention of conflict

The respondents were asked to indicate the strategies they use to prevent conflict in their schools.

Table 12: Strategies to prevent conflict

Responses	Number	%
Encourage teamwork.	4	80
Avoid gossip.	1	20
Total	5	100

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Table 12 points out that the majority of the respondents eighty percent had consensus on the fact that teamwork is important when preventing conflict. This is supported by the following comment, *"I encourage teamwork because it encourages unity amongst the stakeholders"*. This means that respondents valued teamwork as an important aspect in preventing the outbreak of conflict.

The interviews with the respondents revealed that refraining from talking about others behind their backs is an important aspect in preventing conflict.

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This was confirmed by the following comment from twenty percent of the respondents, *"I encourage all the staff members not to talk behind the backs of others. I encourage them to be open and respect other staff members"*. This means that respect of other staff members can prevent the outbreak of conflict in schools. Based on the comment, the researcher claims that transparency is a major aspect in conflict management.

4.4.2.6 Causes of conflict

The respondents were asked to identify some causes of conflict in their schools.

Table 13: Causes of conflict

Responses	Number	%
Shortage of resources. It occurs when members are competing for resources with each other, such as one classroom.	1	20
The management style of the principals.	3	60
Learners. It occurs when some are favoured by the staff members while others are not favoured.	1	20
Total	5	100

Table 13 reveals that twenty percent of the respondents believe that conflict is caused by shortage of resources in school. This was confirmed by the following comment, "Conflict occurs when e*ducators compete to use one classroom to achieve different aims and objectives. They are also forced to compete to use one resource in an overcrowded classroom. They compete to*

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use limited technological resources in an overcrowded classroom". This implies that unequal distribution of resources in school does not only affect the education of the children, it also influences the behaviour of the educators.

Sixty percent of the respondents identified the management style of school leaders as also contributing to conflict in schools. This is supported by the following comment, "*Autocratic management style of the principal who does not involve other staff members in decision-making always cause conflict in schools because some staff members will question the decision of the principals. Principals who do not involve others in decision making always cause conflict in school. Such principals do not respect their subordinates. They do not involve them in decision making".* It is evident that conflict occurs because of lack of inappropriate management style of the person who is heading the school.

Twenty percent of the respondents had consensus on the fact that learners are also the root cause of most conflict between the staff members. This is supported by the following comment from a school principal, *"Learners are the cause of most conflicts in schools. One educator may prefer the learner and likes to be close to the particular learner while the other one does not prefer a particular learner. This contradiction may result in conflict".*

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4.4.2. 7 Conflict management strategies

The respondents were asked to indicate the strategies which they used to manage conflict in their schools.

Table 14: Conflict management strategies

Responses	Number	%
Discussing the problem with the staff members who are in conflict.	3	60
Asking the educators who are in conflict to perform the tasks together, for example, to invigilate.	2	40
Total	5	100

From table 14, it is clear that the majority of the respondents sixty percent describe the role of the principal in conflict management as one of a mediator. This is confirmed by the following comment from a school principal, *"I act as a mediator when managing conflict. I achieve this by showing them love, respect and being patient and responsible. I discuss the problem with staff members who are in conflict"*. This means that principals are the mediators in a conflict situation. They do not take sides when managing conflict. They regard each party as equal. This means that the principal is doing his/her best to avoid a 'win-lose' situation.

Forty percent of the respondents had consensus on the fact that they reconcile the parties in conflict. They evaluate all aspects of the problem bearing in mind the pressures on each party. This is supported by the following comment from a school principal, "*I call the two parties in*

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conflict to listen to their problems. I allow them to reconcile each other. I strive to unite them. I make sure that there is no winner or loser between the two parties. I also ask them to perform the same task as a way of reconciling them". This means that the principals allow the fighting parties to be part of the solution.

4.5 ANALYSIS BASED ON THE SEMI-STRUCTURED FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS WITH THE MEMBERS OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAMS

The results, based on the main categories that emerged from data collected from the members of school management teams (deputy principals, heads of department and senior educators) using semi-structured focus group interviews, were organised and discussed under the following two sections:

- Biographical data
- Conflict management

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4.5.1 Biographical information

4.5.1.1 Gender

The respondents were asked to indicate their gender.

Table 15: Gender of the respondents

Responses	Number	%
Male	17	68
Female	8	32
Total	25	100

Table 15 reveals that sixty eight percent of the respondents were males while thirty two percent were females. This means that the majority of the members in the school management teams, which participated in the study, were males. Based on the fact that even the majority of the principals were males, the researcher can claim that most management posts in schools are occupied by males. This indicates that the male dominant environment can also influence the strategies used in solving conflict.

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4.5.1.2 Age

The respondents were asked to indicate their age.

Table 16: Age of the SMT members

Responses	Number	%
30	2	8
35	5	20
38	7	28
41	8	32
46	3	12
Total	25	100

Table 16 reveals that thirty two percent of the respondents were aged 41 years, twenty eight percent were aged 38 years, twenty percent were aged 35 years, twelve percent were 46 years while eight percent of the respondents were aged 30 years. Based on these results, all respondents were in their middle age. This means that they are in a good position and experienced enough to employ different strategies of managing conflict in schools.

The researcher's assumption is that the old the participants the more the experience in handling or solving conflict in their institutions. This implies that the respondents could apply various strategies of handling conflict in their schools.

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4.5.1.3 Educational qualifications

The respondents were asked to indicate their highest educational qualification.

Table 17: Educational qualification

Responses	Number	%
Bachelor Degree	3	12
Honours Degree	8	32
Masters Degree	14	56
Total	25	100

From Table 17, fifty six percent of the respondents had Masters Degrees while thirty two percent had Honours Degrees and twelve percent of the respondents had Bachelor Degrees. It is evident therefore that the respondents had different educational backgrounds. This means that respondents can employ different strategies of managing conflict, based on their educational qualifications.

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4.5.1.4 Previous post held

Respondents were asked to indicate their previous posts.

Table 18: Previous posts held by the respondents

Responses	Number	%
Head of Department	7	28
Senior educator	5	20
Educator: post level 1	13	52
Total	25	100

Table 18 reveals that fifty two percent of the members of the school management teams were promoted from educator post level 1, while twenty eight percent were promoted from the position of head of department. It was only twenty percent who were promoted from the post of a senior educator. Based on the results, it is clear that the majority of the participants have been working in management posts. Based on their previous experience, the researcher concluded that participants should be in the best position to manage and resolve conflict. Looking at the experiences of the members of the school management teams in their current posts, the researcher can assume that their experience would enhance their conflict management style.

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4.5.1.5 Experience in the previous post

The respondents were asked to indicate their experience in their previous posts.

Table 19: Previous posts experience

Previous Post	Responses	Number	%
Head of Department	5 years	2	8
Head of Department	8 years	5	20
Educator: Post level 1	8 years	9	36
Educator: Post Level 1	10 years	6	24
Educator: Post level 1	12 years	3	12
Total		25	100

Table 19 reveals the previous experience of the members of the school management team. Eight percent of the respondents have 5 years experience As Head of Department while twenty percent have 8 years working experience as Heads of Department. Thirty six percent of respondents have 8 years working experience as Educator Post Level while twenty four percent of the respondents have 10 years working experience as Educator Post Level 1. Twelve percent of respondents have 12 years working experience as Educator Post Level 1.This means that participants were experienced. This also means that they were able to manage and resolve conflict based on the previous working experience. Based on the results, it is clear that the majority of the participants have been working in management posts from five years and above. Based on their previous experience, the

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researcher concluded that participants should be in the best position to manage and resolve conflict.

Looking at the experiences of the members of the school management teams in their current posts, the researcher can assume that their experience would enhance their conflict management style.

4.5.1.6 Experience in the current post

The respondents were asked to indicate their experience in their current posts.

Table 20: Experience in the current post

Current Post	Responses	Number	%
Senior Educator	15	3	12
Head of Department	17	2	8
Head of Department	2	2	8
Head of Department	3	4	16
Head of Department	5	7	28
Head of Department	6	2	8
Head of Department	4	3	10
Deputy Principal	8	2	10
Deputy Principal		25	100
Total			

Table 20 reveals that twelve percent of the respondents who were working as Educator Post Level 1 have 15 years working experience as senior educator, eight percent has 17 years working experience as senior educator,

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eight percent of the respondents have 2 years working experience as Heads of Department while sixteen percent have 3 years working experience as Heads of Department. Twenty percent of the respondents have 5 years experience as Heads of Department; eight percent have 6 years working experience as Heads of Department. Fifteen percent have 4 years working experience as deputy principals while ten percent have 8 years working experience as deputy principals. Looking at the experiences of the members of the school management teams in their current posts, the researcher can assume that their past experience would enhance their management style.

Data revealed that the majority of the participants have vast experience in working in schools and therefore they had an exposure on how to handle conflict. In addition, their experience could assist in employing different strategies to handle conflict.

4.5.2 Conflict Management

4.5.2.1 Development of relationship among educators

The respondents were asked to indicate how they promote interpersonal relations.

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Table 21: Development of positive relationships

Responses	Number	%
Our principal encourages teamwork.	5	20
Our principal organises a party in each quarter.	12	48
Our principal encourages us to share responsibility.	8	32
Total	25	100

Table 21 illustrates that forty eight percent of the respondents indicated that their principals develop interpersonal relation by organising a party in each quarter. This was supported by the following comment, *"Our principal organises a party. In that party we are given different tasks to perform. We are also encouraged to contribute financially for the success of the party"*. 32% of the respondents indicated that their principal encourages them to share responsibilities. This was supported by the following comment, *"Our principal encourages us to share the responsibility and to delegate our fellow staff member. We are encouraged to ask our fellow staff member to help us in invigilation"*. Twenty percent of the respondents indicated that their principal develops interpersonal relation by encouraging teamwork. This was emphasised by the following comment, *"Our principal encourages teamwork. She encourages us to work as team and in unity"*.

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4.5.2.2 Definition of conflict

The respondents were asked to indicate their understanding of 'conflict'.

Table 22: Meaning of conflict

Responses	Number	%
It is a disagreement between two or three parties which results in total disorder.	25	100
Total	25	100

Table 22 reveals that respondents had similar view with regard to the definition of the word 'conflict'. Respondents regard conflict as misunderstanding between two or more individuals. This is supported by the following comment from the senior educator, *"Conflict is a different in understanding or perception. It may occur between two or more people over goals. It occurs when there is a disagreement between or amongst the two parties"*. Based on the comment, it is evident that respondents understand conflict as a disagreement resulting from incompatible demands between or amongst two or more parties. It is also important to note that conflict is generated when an individual becomes aware that another individual is frustrated with or concerned about a circumstances, situation or issue. This means that conflict is undesirable as it may paralyse decision-taking.

4.5.2.3 Conflict management

The respondents were asked to indicate their understanding with regard to conflict management.

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Table 23: Conflict management

Responses	Number	%
It is a way of finding a peaceful settlement between or among fighting parties.	25	100
Total	25	100

From Table 23, it is evident that all respondents had a similar understanding of the word 'conflict management'. According to the respondents' point of views, conflict management means to handle conflict. In supporting this statement one respondent who is a Head of Department emphasised that conflict management deals with how one can handle a conflict situation. This is supported by the following comment, "*Conflict management is the way in which a person handle conflict situation to reduce conflict*".

4.5.2.4 Awareness of conflict

The respondents were asked to indicate how they notice conflict in their schools.

Table 24: Signs of conflict

Responses	Number	%
When the staff members do not speak with each other.	17	68
When members are fighting with each other.	8	32
Total	25	100

From Table 24, it is evident that sixty eight percent of the respondents had similar understanding with regard to awareness of conflict. Respondents

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indicated that they notice conflict when there is no communication between two parties in conflict. This is confirmed by the following comment, *"If conflict is not noticed at the first stage then the second stage will be no communication stage. This stage is characterised by communication breakdown between the two parties in conflict". Communication ceases to exist between the two parties and scolding of each other follows".*

Thirty two percent of the respondents noticed conflict when there is a resistance between the parties in conflict. Respondents had consensus on the fact that the initial stage of conflict is characterised by resistance. Resistance occurs between two parties who are in conflict. This is supported by the following comment from a deputy principal, *"The initial conflict is characterised by resistance and facial expression to show that they disapprove of each other. Resistance usually takes the form of silence".* From the comment, it is evident that facial expressions show resistance between two parties and also indicates that there is a conflict.

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4.5.2.5 Strategies to prevent conflict

The respondents were asked to indicate the strategies they use to prevent conflict in their schools.

Table 25: Prevention of conflict

Responses	Number	%
Good listening skills.	6	24
Our principal forms a common syndicate.	19	76
Total	25	100

From Table 25, it is clear that the majority of the respondents seventy six percent had indicated that forming of a syndicate helps to prevent conflict in schools. This is confirmed by the following comment, "*We must form eating syndicate during break time to create harmony in the school. This will help to unite the staff members*". This shows that participants value syndicates as a major strategy in managing conflict.

Twenty four percent of the respondents emphasise that a good conflict manager should have good listening skills. This was confirmed by the following comment from a school principal, "*As the conflict arise, school managers should have a good listening skills so that they should not fall into a trap of taking side because this will lead to a total conflict in a school. Where possible they should be able to sacrifice themselves in order to reach peaceful conflict resolution*". This means that listening skill is an important aspect in managing conflict.

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4.5.2.6 Major causes of conflict

The respondents were asked to indicate causes of conflict in their schools

Table 26: Causes of conflict

Responses	Number	%
Fear of unknown.	6	24
Love affairs between the staff members cause conflict in school.	9	36
Monitoring style employed by principals.	10	40
Total	25	100

Table 26 indicates that twenty four of the respondents agree that conflict is caused by fear. This is supported by the following comment from a senior educator, *"Fear of unknown amongst the educators causes conflict between the educators and the school management"*. It is evident that fear of the unknown is responsible for most conflict in primary schools in the Dzindi circuit.

Furthermore, thirty six percent of the participants indicated that conflict is caused by the monitoring style employed by the principals. This is supported by the following comment from a senior educator, *"I find that the main cause of conflict is monitoring educators' classroom attendance. There are educators who do not like to be monitored while they ar e in their classes. They complained that they are monitored frequently than others. This causes conflict between the educators and the principals"*. It is evident that

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Monitoring causes a lot of conflict in schools because educators felt that monitoring is done consistently.

Lastly, forty percent of the respondents agree that conflict is caused by love affairs between learners and educators. This was confirmed by the following comment, "*Most conflict in our school is caused by love affairs between learners (female) and educators (male). The male educators compete to win a learner and they end up not speaking to each other*".

4.5.2.7 Conflict management strategies

The respondents were asked to indicate the strategies which they use to manage conflict in their schools.

Table 27: Management of conflict

Responses	Number	%
Discussing the problem with staff members who are in conflict with each other.	25	33
Total	25	100

Table 27 reveals that all respondents had consensus on the fact that principals become the mediator in managing conflict. This was emphasised by the comment from the school principal, *"In most of the times the principal becomes the mediator between the two parties in conflict. The principal visited each camp in order to find peaceful conflict settlement. He /she treats and values the information from each party equally. He/she also calls the two parties after scrutinizing the information from each party"*.

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This means that the principal plays a major role in order to reach a peaceful settlement. One could also say that lack of one of these skills could mean that the principal using this strategy might fall in a trap of being bias.

4.6 CONCLUSION

The role of principals in managing schools is disturbed by conflicts that take place almost everyday between or amongst the staff members over certain issues. The findings of the study reveal that conflict in most schools, in the Dzindi Circuit, is caused by lack of resources, misunderstanding over certain issues, fear, monitoring system, management style of the principal and monitoring of educators. In managing conflict the principals in the Dzindi Circuit, play the following roles: mediator, negotiator and they also reconcile the parties in conflict. It was identified that the following aspects are important when managing conflict: teamwork, forming of syndicate, avoiding gossip and being a good listener. These aspects help a principal to solve the existing and avoid future conflict in a school environment.

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CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter One, introduction, awareness of the problem, problem statement, aims of the study, research questions, definition of the key concepts, research methodology and significance of the study and the delimitation of the study were all presented.

In Chapter Two definition of conflict, myths and truths about conflict, different phases in conflict, sources of conflict, different types of conflict, procedures for handling conflict, conflict management styles and aspects to bear in mind when preventing school conflict were reviewed.

In Chapter Three, research design, population, sampling procedures, sample, data collection instruments, data analysis, reliability and validity of research instruments, pilot study and ethical consideration were presented.

In Chapter Four, an analysis and interpretation of the data collected on conflict management were presented. The analysis of data was descriptive and was supported by tables and percentages.

In Chapter Five a summary of the study was presented. Conclusions will be drawn on the factors pertaining to the management of conflict. This will be

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followed by recommendations on enhancing the role of the primary school principals in managing conflict.

5.2 GENERAL SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of primary school principals in managing conflict in the Dzindi circuit in the Vhembe District. The findings of the study revealed that conflict occurs when there is a different understanding about certain issues. Literature revealed that conflict refers to incompatible differences within the individual or between two or more individuals which may lead to some form of opposition (Mampuru 2007:167). Principals have different strategies of managing conflict. They sometimes act as mediators in conflict situation.

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5.2.1 Findings pertaining to principals

The following is a summary of the findings pertaining to principals:

- Principals do not have the necessary skills of noticing conflict at its earliest stages. They notice conflict when there is fighting and when people do not communicate with each other.
- Schools do not have adequate facilities. Educators are sharing limited resources as they have to wait for each other when using resources. This causes conflict. Literature revealed that one of the causes of conflict is disagreement over the distribution of limited resources. This type of conflict occurs when there are limited resources in a school (Bentley 1996:5).

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- Principals do not have the necessary skills of encouraging interpersonal relationship amongst the staff members. Lack of interpersonal relationship is the most widespread and visible kind of conflict in schools and other organisations in which people are involved in carrying out an organisational mission. In addition, this type of conflict occurs between two individuals of a school if there are differences regarding the priorities, activities and policy matters of the school (Rue and Byars (1992:404).
- The management styles used by the principals also contribute in causing conflict.
- Most conflicts are caused by poor listening skills amongst the principals.

5.2.2 Findings pertaining to the members of the School Management Team (SMT)

- Members of the school management teams do not have relevant strategies of preventing conflict.
- Conflict occurs because of fear of the unknown. This means that SMT members are afraid of things they do not know.
- Members of the SMT blame the principals' management strategies.

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- Principals do not have the necessary skills of encouraging interpersonal relationship amongst the staff members. Lack of interpersonal relationship is the most widespread and visible kind of conflict in schools and other organisations in which people are involved in carrying out an organisational mission. In addition, this type of conflict occurs between two individuals of a school if there are differences regarding the priorities, activities and policy matters of the school (Rue and Byars (1992:404).
- The management styles used by the principals also contribute in causing conflict.
- Most conflicts are caused by poor listening skills amongst the principals.

5.2.2 Findings pertaining to the members of the School Management Team (SMT)

- Members of the school management teams do not have relevant strategies of preventing conflict.
- Conflict occurs because of fear of the unknown. This means that SMT members are afraid of things they do not know.
- Members of the SMT blame the principals' management strategies.

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5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to improve the role of the principals in managing conflict the following are recommended:

5.3.1 Recommendation pertaining to the principals

- The principal should articulate the common goals which should help both parties to rise above their differences.
- Principals should be trained on how to notice conflict at its earliest stage before it leads to fighting.
- Principals should be able to discuss monitoring system with educators to avoid conflict. There should be a policy in place which stipulates the procedures that must be followed in monitoring educators' classroom performance.
- Listening skills should be developed amongst the SMT members.
- The schools should be provided with adequate resources so that educators should not compete with each other over limited resources

5.3.2 Recommendations pertaining to the school management teams

- The members of the school management team should be part of conflict management.
- Members of the SMT should be trained to notice conflict at its earliest stage before it leads to no communication stage, resistance and fighting.

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- SMT members should share problems with other staff members in order to find early solution before it causes conflict.

5.3.3 Recommendation pertaining to the Department of Education

- The Department of Education should introduce conflict management course in schools to empower the principals with conflict management skills.
- The Department should provide schools with adequate resources and facilities.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has achieved its aim, that is, "*to investigate the role of the principals in managing conflict in primary school.*" It has therefore opened up the following avenues for further investigation:

- The researcher recommends that future study should investigate the roles of different stakeholders, for example, the role of the school management team in managing conflict.
- Future study should also investigate the problems encountered by the principals when managing conflict in primary schools.

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5.5 CONCLUSION

In most schools conflict takes place every day due to misunderstanding between the staff members. This needs principals who are well conversant with the strategies of preventing and managing conflict. This study revealed that principals and the members of the school management teams are aware that during conflicts their role is to discuss problem with the parties in conflict and find a peaceful settlement as a way of managing conflict. Apart from that principals also share a responsibility with educators in organising common syndicate and encourage teamwork amongst in school as strategies in conflict management.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: STRUCTURED INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS WITH THE PRINCIPALS

1. Indicate your gender and age.
2. What is your previous post and experience?
3. What is your current work experience?
4. How many educators do you have in your school?
5. How do you develop interpersonal relations?
6. What is conflict?
7. What is your understanding regard to conflict management?
8. What are the causes of conflicts in primary schools?
9. How do you prevent conflict in your school?
10. How do you manage conflict in your school?

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APPENDIX B: SEMI-STRUCTURED FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS WITH THE SMT MEMBERS

1. Indicate your gender and age.
2. What is your previous post and experience?
3. What is your current post and experience?
4. How many educators do you have in your school?
5. How does your principal develop interpersonal relations?
6. What is conflict?
7. What is your understanding with regard to conflict management strategies?
8. What are the main causes of conflict in your schools?
9. How does your principal prevent conflict?
10. What are the strategies that can be employed by the principal in managing conflict?

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APPENDIX C: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

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To: Makumbane Schol
Mapate School
Mashila School
Muthundinne School
Tshisahulu School

PERRMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEACH

1. The above matter bears reference.
2. Rathanya Tuwani Agnes was granted a permission to conduct a research at the schools mentioned above.

3. Thanking you in anticipation.

Tsakwana

DZINDI CIRCUIT MANAGER

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