

## Conflict Management and School Leadership

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**ABSTRACT** Schools are prone to conflicts and breakdown in communication especially in an age where all role-players are aware of their rights. School-based conflict can be ignited by a number of aspects. Yet school principals as managers, are expected to be able to creatively address conflicts in their schools. This was a qualitative study that included eight school principals from four primary and four secondary schools in two historically black African areas (townships) in the Gauteng Province, South Africa. The participants were interviewed and their schools were observed as well. The study found out that few principals are prepared adequately for conflict management. They tend to misunderstand the role of conflict and maintain that it should be immediately avoided or halted. The discussion closes with recommendations, and among these is the need to empower school principals with conflict management training before they assume their leadership positions.

### BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

The South African Schools' Act (SASA) of 1996 stipulates that the school principals have delegated powers to organise and control effective and learning at their school (Potgieter et al. 1997). However, many school managers have found themselves occupying challenging positions and assuming a number of roles. Not only are they expected to lead curricular changes but they are also required to be decisive change managers. As curriculum leaders, school principals have to provide guidance to teachers as they deal with constant educational changes. As leaders in change, the school principals need to guide their followers as they mini-mise the fear and resistance to change. Kotter (1999) points out that among others, leaders need to alleviate the fear to change. There are a number of authors who have written about the unpredictable world that school principals generally find themselves in. Patterson (1986) wrote of a nonrational world that school managers operate in, while Peters (1994) opined of "crazy organisations" that engulf the 21<sup>st</sup> century managers. Many school principals may be daunted by the rapidly changing or fluid nature of the school as an organisation. School principals need to learn from their mistakes, because that can strengthen the teaching profession by providing an honest and accurate stance of their position (Grady 2004). All meticulous school principals strive for effectiveness and effective school managers also have strong commitment to fellow teachers in their schools as they build relationships with the learners (O'Hanlon and Clifton 2004).

In his study of effectiveness in schools Msila (2011) states that the challenge of school principals is to identify the problems endemic in their schools. Furthermore, Msila cites Botha who contends that the workload of school principals is becoming unmanageable and as a result many school principals, especially in secondary schools, lack the time for and an understanding of their leadership roles. Currently, in a period where rapid changes are occurring at a phenomenal rate, much is needed to empower and enhance the practice of school principals. Growing research has been conducted to acquire a better understanding of the politics of "failing" historically disadvantaged schools in South Africa. However, there is a huge gap in school management research in South Africa in that the aspect of conflict management has been neglected. Yet, many schools are plagued with debilitating challenges and these schools' performance is usually hampered by conflicts as well as protracted breakdown in communication.

Conflicts are caused by a number of aspects that create tensions between people. Corvette (2007) contends that conflict exists wherever, and whenever there is an incompatibility of cognitions or emotions within individuals or between individuals. Moreover, this author avers that conflict arises in personal relationships, in business and professional relationships in organisations, between groups and organisations, and between nations. Many schools have broken down relationships because of the existence of this incompatibility. School managers in "conflict schools" will face mammoth task as they

try to be effective. It is also important to note that the leader's philosophy will influence how they react to conflict; some perceive it as something to be avoided at all costs while others see it as an aspect that is necessary to propel change and foster organisational regeneration. Corvette (2007: 34) posits:

It is the perception or belief that opposing needs, wishes, ideas, interests, and goals exist that create what we commonly call conflict. Conflict is everywhere, and it is inevitable. It arises from many sources. In addition to being the antecedent for negotiation, conflict may also arise during negotiation.

The subject of conflict is large and complex. Conflict if misdiagnosed, can lead to a spiral of antagonistic interaction and aggravated, destructive behaviour.

This paper explores the anatomy of conflict. The author first looks at the theory behind conflict and conflict management before the exploration of the case studies. More research in understanding the evolution of dysfunctionality needs to be conducted as this will shed light on conflict management skills. This study seeks to understand some of the complexities linked to conflict and school leadership. Sometimes school principals may not be able to identify conflict when it happens. The study was necessitated by a huge gap in research. Few studies have investigated conflict management in schools. Understanding the dynamics of conflict will minimize the negative effects of conflict among educators. It is in light of this that this study explores the question: What are the conflict management needs of school principals in selected Gauteng schools?

### Objectives of the Study

In light of the above question the study seeks to explore the following objectives:

- To investigate pertinent skills that school principals need to be able to deal with conflict in their schools.
- Exploring how school principals build positive strategies to deal with conflict.
- To investigate how school principals can introduce and sustain an effective school culture and school climate that enhances school growth despite conflicts.
- To see whether the idea of building teams in schools is ideal for dealing with conflicts effectively.

### Literature Review

School managers and leaders need to understand what is entailed in conflict management and need high conflict competence to be able to be effective in their schools. When conflict managers have determined and defined the nature of the conflict in a conflict situation, they try and find ways of resolving it. Various conflict writers have highlighted various ways of resolving these conflict situations. Many of these are relevant in school situation. Effective school principals will have the qualities highlighted in conflict literature. Blake and Mouton (1964) identified five conflict solving strategies; smoothing, compromising, forcing, withdrawal and problem solving. Furthermore, Dana (2001) avers that leaders need to comprehend structure to be able analyse conflicts well. There are six parts of conflict structure that people can pay attention to:

- interdependency – How much do parties need one another?
- number of interested parties- How many distinct parties, individuals or groups have an interest in how the conflict is resolved?
- constituent representation-Do the parties represent the interests of other people who are not personally or directly involved in the process of resolving the conflict?
- negotiator authority- If the parties consist of more than one individual, say a department within an organisation, is the person or team of people who represent the interests of that department within an organisation, is the person or team of people who represent the interests of that department able to make concessions or reach creative solutions without going back to their constituents for approval?
- critical urgency-Is it absolutely necessary that a solution be found in the very near future to prevent disaster?
- communication channels-Are parties able to talk to each other face to face in the same room.

Dana perceives these six dimensions as elements that are necessary to be able to analyse conflict well. There are many similar theories that analyse conflict resolution and management. Anderson et al. (1996) contend that negotiation is one of the most common techniques for creating agreements during conflict situa-

tions. Furthermore, these authors cite Putnam who defines negotiation as a type of conflict management characterised by an exchange of proposals and counterproposals as a means of reaching a satisfactory settlement. The Harvard Business Essentials publication (2003: xi) concur with the above definitions when they aver:

*Negotiation is the means by which people deal with their differences. Whether those differences involve the purchase of a new automobile, a labour contract dispute, the terms of a sale, a complex alliance between two companies, or a peace accord between warring nations, resolutions are typically sought through negotiations. To negotiate is to seek mutual agreement through dialogue. Negotiation is an ever-present feature of our lives both at home and at work.*

Negotiations also present a form of conflict management that is more consciously controlled. Yes although negotiation involves more controlled communication than other conflict situations, the overall process is marked by greater ambiguity because of the stakeholders' lack of control over the outcome (Anderson et al. 2003). Negotiations are sometimes plagued by pitfalls that might hinder any success in resolving the conflict situation. Deutsch (1991) highlights aspects such as cultural factors and how they have a potential of hindering negotiations. Deutsch argues that negotiators need to have an implicit understanding of cultural assumptions which are likely to determine how negotiators from different places perceive the world. "Lacking such knowledge, negotiators from different cultural backgrounds are likely to misunderstand one another and apt to engage in behaviour that is unwittingly, offensive to the other: circumstances not conducive to constructive conflict resolution" (Deutsch 1991: 36).

### **Significance of the Study**

As highlighted above, this study is significant to those who want to understand teacher commitment, school dysfunctionality and teacher morale. Many schools are broken down by conflicts that alienate teachers from their professional work. Runde and Flanagan (2010) examine the need for leaders and managers to develop conflict competence if their organisations are to prosper. School principals who can

differentiate between functional and dysfunctional conflicts will know how to act in times of conflict. When leaders have self-awareness, they are more likely to have this quality. Ross (1993) also contends that successful conflict management should address the underlying sources of conflict constructively and these are the development of shared interests among the disputants as well as the transformation of the disputants' interpretations of each other's needs and motives.

Snodgrass and Blunt (2009) assert that unmanaged conflict can create dysfunctional schools which deprive learners of their rights to citizenship through free and equal education. These authors also point out that constitutional values embedded in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa such as human dignity and equality cannot be attained in an atmosphere and contexts where conflict is endemic. This study will be significant in that it wants to comprehend the role of school principals as they work in challenging situations where there are conflict situations.

### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

This study was conducted through qualitative research methodology. Qualitative research methodology was appropriate for this study because the researcher wanted to hear anecdotal accounts from the participants. The researcher also wanted to focus on the school environments under study because human behaviour does not occur in an empty space. Struwig and Stead (2004) point out that contextualism stresses the various macro and micro contexts of the individual and how these contexts dynamically interact with one another. Furthermore, these authors state that contextualism is closely aligned to holism which examines social environments in their totality. The participants were selected through purposive sampling. Sometimes referred to as judgemental sampling or theoretical sampling, this is a type of non-probability sampling based on the judgement of the researcher regarding participants (Brink 2000). For this study, the researcher selected four schools that were beset with conflicts and four that had no known conflicts and appeared to be run well or effectively.

All the selected schools are situated in historically black African areas (townships) and are

primary and secondary schools. Four of the participants were female and four were male. Of these participants, three females were leading primary schools. The researcher interviewed each of the participants twice during the course of the study. The interviews were an hour long; the first one was conducted in the first week and the second one in the eight (final) week of the study. In-between the researcher observed how the teachers operated in the schools. The researcher made use of an observation instrument and among the aspects that were observed were teacher communication, teacher collaboration and school climate. The researcher was not able to observe staff meetings in all the schools for in two of these schools no meetings were scheduled during the course of the study. In these two schools the researcher was only able to observe subject committee meetings. During the observations the researcher was a non-participant observer.

Rich information in the form of words was gathered by the end of the study. Qualitative researchers usually begin their data analysis during the data collection process. They use steps for coding themes and categories “and making memos about the context and variations in the phenomenon under study, verifying the selected themes through reflection on the data and discussion with other researchers or experts in the field” (Brink 2000: 192). In this study the researcher also initiated coding at the beginning as he organised data collected in the interviews and observations. These were all manually developed as the researcher searched for categories. During the interviews the researcher made a thorough review of what was recorded. For example, some statements about conflict were classified according to perceptions about conflict, feelings portrayed, understanding about conflict resolution, theories about conflict, role of management and so on. For the characteristics of the participants see Table 1.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The participants in the study reflected a number of aspects in conflict management strategies. All maintained that conflict was not an aspect that was needed in schools for it tends to “stall progress”. They also felt that schools that experienced conflict will never prosper “because the energies are usually directed at ending these conflicts. Only one participant curtly pointed out

**Table 1. The participants' characteristics**

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>School</i>	<i>Experience as principal</i>	<i>Highest qualification</i>
Female	56	Primary	8 years	BEd Honours
Female	51	Primary	6 years	BA and Higher Diploma in Education
Female	47	Secondary	5 years	Secondary Education Diploma
Female	39	Primary	2 years	BA and Primary Teachers Diploma
Male	38	Secondary	1 year	BAEd
Male	44	Secondary	3 years	BSc and Higher Diploma in Education
Male	58	Secondary	9 years	Secondary Teachers Diploma
Male	61	Primary	19 years	Advanced Certificate in Education (Environmental Education)

that conflict was sometimes necessary because it could help in changing “the internalised cultures in the school”. However, all the participants highlighted that conflicts created cliques in the staffroom, suspicion, breakdown in communication as well as low teacher morale. Furthermore, the participants agreed that conflict impacted badly on teaching and learning in their schools. All of them also stated that their teacher training never prepared them for conflict management in the schools. Yet they have learnt that conflict becomes a daily occurrence in their schools from two learners fighting for a pen, to a staff member shouting the school principal in her/his office.

All the participants stressed the need for the holistic preparation of school principals in school management and leadership. One of the participants had been a school principal for close to two decades but he stated that he could have done better as a school principal had he been mentored before assuming the position. He pointed out:

*Unfortunately, I was never mentored when I became principal. The school inspector just accompanied me to this school. He left me literally at the door of my office and said good luck. That first week I experienced much conflict because the teachers at the school expected the*

*deputy to assume the position of principal. I was devastated, and had to strive under difficult conditions.*

He is supported by another participant who stated:

*When I assumed this position I expected male teachers to be opposed to my leadership. I was surprised though, for it was the female who were very confrontational towards me. It is difficult building a school when people are against you. Teachers can make it impossible for you to operate. To make matters worse as principals we were not really trained to overcome some of these obstacles. We learn on the job.*

All the participants contended that they had seen different kinds of conflict when they were ordinary (post level 1) teachers in their schools. However, they stated that it happens when one is at the helm of the school it becomes different. As one participant asserted, “soon you realise you are the man to diffuse, the fire. It is daunting!” it was interesting to hear the participants talking about mentoring as one of the possible solutions that can enable school managers to be generally effective managers and specifically efficient conflict managers. The participants also concurred that conflict appears to be ongoing in many schools and that “successful principals will be able to avoid it.”

The idea of avoiding conflict was an interesting aspect. Only one participant out of the eight stated that conflict sometimes needs to be encouraged because “it may steer the school towards necessary change”. Two participants, one from a secondary school and the other from a primary school related how their schools are relatively more successful than other township schools because of the way in which they are able to “ward off conflict” when it starts. A participant from one of these two schools used the expression; “nipping conflict in the bud” if one wants to run a successful school. Both participants use similar tactics to quell conflict and confrontation in their schools; they make use of their School Governing Bodies (SGBs) as well as School Management Teams (SMTs). Furthermore, one of these two participants stated that a leader needs to “stamp his foot down or else the pandemonium linked with conflicts will turn the school upside down”. According to him, an effective leader “can smell impending conflict and will be able to extinguish it”.

The participants illustrated a number of examples where they felt that conflict could be

totally avoided. There were three kinds of conflict that seemed to come out from the interviews;

- (i) Conflicts that were on a personal level—these affected and usually strained personal relations. Frequently these were between teachers and teachers or teachers and learners.
- (ii) The second kind of conflict are union conflicts. All the participants highlighted how union conflicts could affect the operations in the schools. The participants gave various examples of how one union would strike while another is not supporting the strike. They said that this can create much conflict among staff members from various unions.
- (iii) Some conflicts are by staff members against the school management. The participants state that this can also due to various reasons, some reasonable and some not. They showed how for example, enforcing school rules can be interpreted negatively by teachers and lead to bitter conflicts.

The participants gave various examples to exemplify these in their schools. In one school the participant found herself in an unenviable position because she refused to support the suspension of a teacher who was impeached of misusing school funds. The participant stated clearly that the complainants needed to prove that before any action could be taken. In another school, teachers were hostile towards their SMT because they maintained that they were only supporting grade 12 teachers and did not care about lower classes. The latter created tensions in the school. Common to many of these conflict experiences was the lack of conflict competence among the school principals. Unmanaged conflict can be a health hazard the participants related how conflict situations can lead to psychological trauma and prolonged stress.

The participants though mentioned an important aspect that conflict usually hits them hard because school managers are usually alone in times of conflict. They were using the terms “sharing leadership” and “team work” interchangeably; to signify that it was necessary to use these if any school was to be able to keep conflict at bay. The participants maintained that conflicts where the school principal is not working closely with the staff members, conflicts are likely to be protracted and be very hurtful to the

role-players. One participant summed this well when she stated:

*In many of these we easily find ourselves as principals isolated. Sometimes nobody plans it, it happens on its own. You find yourself on the one side with your School Management Team and teachers on the other. This can be hurtful and creates deep scars. Many of our schools need to instil responsibility where every teacher will see himself as a leader. I think we are to blame too as principals; we want to be perceived differently by teachers, as bosses. Teachers do not want this, they want leaders.*

However, in the schools under study, the school culture did not support team work. In four of the six meetings attended, the researcher could easily pick up how past conflicts were surfacing in the present agenda. In two of these schools there were agenda items that were ongoing because of deep divisions among staff members. In another, there were three clear divisions among staff members who were opposing each other openly and in a hostile fashion. In the other two schools the participants were trying at all costs to “stop” conflict whenever they saw it starting. As one explained, “the meeting is where you need to show the teachers your control. If you lose it in meetings, your school will be ruled by these conflicts”. Generally, it was clear that the participants lacked conflict competence. In one school the researcher observed how the school principal could not “discipline” one teacher who was in the staffroom whilst his class made noise with no one to teach. The school principal just opined:

*No one tells Mr X anything. He is about to retire and he likes no one in here. I have fought with him so many times; he just stays in there or under that tree smoking his pipe.*

In some schools though the climate was appeared appealing although it hid deep seated hatred when one heard what the school principal said or observed the communication among staff members.

This study reflects varied responses to conflict management in schools. The data was coded into themes as to assign meaning to the information elicited. A code though is never perceived as separate. Struwig and Stead (2004) point out that a code could be linked to a word, a phrase, a sentence, a paragraph or larger sections of data. In this study too, codes were not perceived as isolated units of meaning. Some codes were

linked to the development of conflict management. In turn this had a connection with other codes such as perceptions, beliefs and school climate. The data in this study is analysed under three themes:

- Conflict competence and school management;
- Conflict management and the ‘right’ school culture;
- School teams and conflict management.

### **Conflict Competence and School Management**

Conflict resolution is an important area that calls for professional development among the participants. The participants showed that they lacked negotiation and mediation skills when conflict situations arose. Many school principals lack the capacity to manage conflicts and this can be detrimental to organisational growth. Foley (2001) states that in a time where many schools support collaboration, conflicts are bound to happen. Foley (2001:20) argues:

Principals and teachers may experience conflict due to unclear parameters of their roles in a collaborative-based system, presence of competing responsibilities (for example, instruction of class vs. making time for team planning), and overload of tasks due to inadequate time, energy or resources (Cliff et al. 1992). Thus conflict resolution skills may be a prerequisite skill for administrators supervising collaborative-based programming.

Emerging and established research shows that for leadership excellence to be attained, leaders need to manage conflict effectively. The *Dynamic Leadership Essential Four* (online) lists skills that effective leaders will have and these include;

- Management of own emotions;
- Addressing own conflicts;
- Addressing others’ conflicts;
- Assertiveness;
- Negotiation; and
- Mediation.

Johnson (online 2003) also lists guidelines for becoming an expert conflict manager:

- Beginning each conflict episode with an “I win you win” intent to resolve conflict;
- Use communicator styles that show a focus on others, rather than on self;
- Assess the power relationships involved in the episode;

- Employ strategies used by expert problem solvers;
- Spend time reflecting on the relationships of conflict responses, problem-solving, communication, and power to each conflict scenario;
- Analyse the behaviour of expert school leaders who have become expert conflict managers;
- Evaluate and reflect the aftermath of one's conflict episode for signs of emerging expertise in conflict management and continue to work toward expert leadership.

This section looks at Runde and Flanagan's (2010, 2008) theory as to what strategies can ensure that school leaders become effective conflict managers. The participants reiterated how they lacked conflict management skills. They were never trained or prepared for conflicts linked with their positions.

The participants showed that it was crucial for them to develop conflict competence to be able to deal with conflict situations in their schools. All concurred that schools experience conflicts from time to time and when school principals are competent in handling conflicts, this would help in ensuring that teaching and learning never stops in their schools. Runde and Flanagan (2010) define conflict competence as the ability to develop and use cognitive, emotional, and behavioural skills that enhance productive outcomes of conflict while reducing the likelihood of escalation or harm. Furthermore, these writers point out that the results of conflict competence include improved quality of relationships, creative solutions, and lasting agreements for addressing challenges and opportunities in the future.

Runde and Flanagan (2008) assert that conflict is at the root of many leaders' best ideas as well as the core of their worst failures. In this study the participants highlighted how conflict has worsened relations, collegiality and teamwork in their schools. All pointed out that they were not competent enough to deal with conflict. They attribute the lack of competency to the lack of training or induction when they were appointed school principals. Their schools are usually in dire straits during times of conflict because they utilise instincts than expertise to deal with conflict. Conflict is also compounded by the fact that few people understand it as shown in the study. Runde and Flanagan (2008)

contend that most leaders define conflict in negative terms such as anger, frustration and stress. Few describe conflict with words such as opportunity, energizing or resolution. The latter was also evident in this study when many participants maintained conflict needs to be avoided and discouraged.

Self-knowledge is important if one is to be an effective conflict manager. Understanding one's own values in relation to others as well as different conflict management styles are key. Managers who will manage conflict well need to use a phased approach which emphasises *cooling down*, *slowing down* and *engaging constructively* (Runde and Flanagan 2008). Below the focus is on these processes explicating how these two authors envisage these.

Cooling down – this is a phase that starts with increasing one's self-awareness about what gets one angry. This self-awareness is a crucial first step in learning to cool down. In a school a school principal will be irritated by various colleagues but has to know how to deal with each.

Slowing down – the challenge that leaders encounter is to stay cool in a conflict situation. Yet it is important for a person to wait until they cool down before moving ahead in a conflict situation. It is also crucial at this stage to step back and try to get a clear picture of what is happening. A person needs to be momentarily distracted from the conflict so as to begin to relax and be able to reflect well. In the ensuing paragraph the focus is on how a competent school principal can create and sustain the "right" school culture after working on his or her conflict competence.

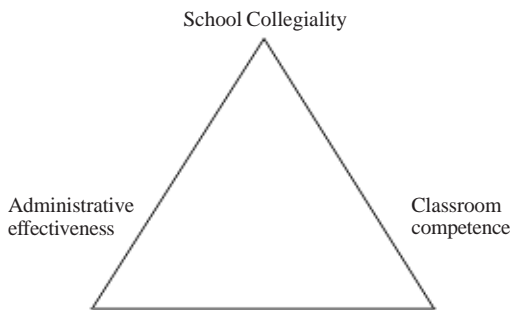
### **Conflict Management and the 'Right' School Culture**

The "right" school culture is crucial in any school if it was to deal with conflict effectively. Effective school principals would set an atmosphere of collegiality where conflict is managed to the benefit of all in the organisation. School principals and their management teams should foster a culture that would be receptive to change. Usually it is change initiatives that are a source of many conflicts in schools. Many school principals who are attempting to change the culture in their schools do so by instilling a culture of collegiality and collaboration. Sergio-vanni (1991) defines collegiality as the respon-

sibility given to teachers to become an integral part of the management and leadership processes of the school. There are a number of ways to achieve this collegiality. Leithwood et al. (2004) highlight three crucial leadership practices:

- Developing people-enabling teachers to do their jobs effectively, offering intellectual support and stimulation to improve the work and providing models of practice and support;
- Setting directions for the organisation-developing shared goals, monitoring organisational performance and promoting effective communication;
- Redesigning the organisation-creating a productive school culture, modifying organisational structures that undermine the work, and building collaborative processes.

Linked to the above is Martinez's (2004: 32) assertion that successful schools can be represented in a triangle (Fig. 1):



**Fig. 1. Martinez's triangle of collegiality**

Martinez stresses that for collegiality to be ingrained in a school's culture each of the three aspects in the triangle needs to be addressed well. These also relate well to Leithwood et al. (2004) cited above. Both shed light on an effective organisational culture. The thesis in this study is that conflict is unavoidable and is necessary. Therefore, it is crucial to ensure that the school culture has correct practices. In the study participants underscored how their schools lacked a culture of collaboration and collegiality. In many instances this resulted to conflict leading to strained relationships and these strained relationships made running the schools very challenging.

Martinez (2004) contends that in a collegial school environment teachers are able to:

- Work well with other teachers;
- Work well with administrators;
- Manage conflict with others, including teachers, administrators, parents and students; and
- Match their educational strengths and preferences with an appropriate school.

A number of schools in the study lacked the above qualities. Yet, collegiality contributes to ensuring that change does not lead to dysfunctional conflict. It is very difficult to handle conflict in the absence of collegial environment. Collegiality is about relationships forged by professionals. It hinders aspects that can stunt organisational growth. The participants portrayed that their schools lacked collegiality. DeLima (2001:97-98) postulates:

*School may benefit from teacher collegiality by taking profit from a co-ordination of teaching work across classrooms, from a better organisation for tackling pedagogical and organisational innovations, and from better preparation to buffer the negative effects of staff turnover, by providing assistance to newcomers and socialising them into the values and traditions of the school (Little 1987). Collaborative schools may also be better prepared than others to promote instructional effectiveness (Smith 1987) and to provide teachers with increased and enriched opportunities for professional growth and accomplishment*

De Lima also highlights the need to build professional communities. In communities people feel more interdependent than when they act in isolation. In communities people would want to deal with conflict in positive ways that would build the organisation.

### Teams and Conflict Management

One of the effective ways utilised by many managers today is to develop teams as many of them believe that it is much easier to attain the school's vision and goals when teachers work as teams. In the study, six of the participants stated that they try to work in teams. In the study the participants highlighted the importance of teams in their schools. However, many did not know how to use these teams effectively in times of conflict. Yet, Somach (2008:360) writes:

In applying teamwork in education one must recognise that in schools tasks are often structured for the individual, and teachers are iso-



lated within their classrooms. The teachers' main socialisation into the teaching profession has been characterised by an individualist approach: professional training, development, and promotion focus on specialisation, and teachers are trained to develop their careers independently of their staff colleagues (Somech and Drach-Zahavy 2007).

Despite, these challenges in the nature of teaching and schools, principals need to develop teams that would be beneficial to their schools especially in times of conflict. The school principals who have teams in their schools should be able to identify the various dynamics at play when it comes to schools and teamwork. When trying to see cooperation happening conflict may happen and school principals need to be able to deal with this. In the above discussions we have seen that conflict is not necessarily negative. Many organisations that use teams cannot and will never avoid conflicts. Without these conflicts teams could never grow and perform optimally. Conflict is about power and participants in the study have spoken about the way in which groups from unions clash in their schools. An empowered school principal would prepare team members for a number of roles that they need to play in the organisation, including conflict resolution. Convey (1994) states that if a team is to be successful, it is crucial that members know the basics of conflict resolution, delegation and consensus building. As highlighted above, the school principals in this study lacked the capacity to deal with conflict in their teams. Conflict literature points out that managers need to develop strategy of training members to deal with conflict. Gahr (1995) lists training phases that may be useful for school principals working with teams:

- Conflict resolution awareness
- Conflict resolution training
- Mediation training
- Reinforcement training
- Reinforcement workshops
- Institutionalisation of the programme.

However, what is apparent above is that if school principals are not equipped with skills of dealing with conflict, they cannot train their teams. Therefore, group performance in many schools will be far from best. Behfar et al. (2008) point out that a number of scholars have contended that conflict management and conflict resolution are important predictors of group

performance. Teachers who lack skills of managing conflict will hardly be satisfied in their jobs. When teachers learn to solve conflict in teams, they learn fairness, justice and moral uprightness.

## CONCLUSION

This study has shown that conflict affects schools and other organisations almost all the time. Moreover, the participants underscored their need to be empowered in conflict management to be able to steer their schools to success. The participants also identified crucial skills that would enable them to be effective conflict managers. These included the ability to work in teams, and learning more about the theories of conflict. Conflict competent school principals are able to deal with conflict situations well. Moreover, effective conflict managers understand themselves well and this is crucial in conflict. Understanding oneself is as important as understanding the other party and this is the basis for creating effective school managers. Effective school managers will also eschew seeing conflict in negative light. The school's vision can be attained after the conflict has been handled well. In fact, schools that grow are those that have experienced some kind of conflict. Successful schools will be those that have effective conflict managers at the helm. Below, the paper closes with the study's recommendations.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

After the completion of the study the following recommendations were drawn:

- The induction of school principals should be mandatory and conflict management should be among the important aspects in this induction;
- Practicing school principals need an ongoing formal professional development because education practices constantly change all the time;
- School principals should not only refine their own professional development but should build more teacher leaders in their schools. This would equip the school with a team of "expert educators" who will know what to do during the times of conflict;
- More research needs to be conducted in schools regarding the instilling of conflict management among school principals.

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