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## A Review Article on Conflict Management and its Impact on Teachers' Performance

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### Abstract

Conflict is an essential and unavoidable human phenomenon because where there is human interaction; there is a likelihood of personal likes and dislikes. These agreements and disagreements among individuals and groups lead them to conflicts. Conflicts are neither constructive nor disruptive but the ways these are handled make them either positive or negative. Schools, like other human organizations, are prone to one or other type of conflict. Various conflict management strategies are adopted for handling conflict; the most important among these are, mediation, negotiation, avoidance, collaborating etc. The purpose of this review article is to give a clear understanding of the nature of the problem being investigated, which is conflict management by principals in secondary schools. This review forms a fundamental and integral part of planning and undertaking of the research project. According to De Vos (2000:65), a literature review may disclose that somebody else has already performed essentially the same research. This has provided a substantially better insight into the dimensions and complexity of the problem and aspects such as conflict management skills. It also equips the researchers with a complete and thorough justification of the subsequent steps as well as with a realization of the importance of the undertaking of the research; consequently, this review will focus on: the concept, conflict, the concept of management, the process of conflict management, the roles of principals in conflict management and a conclusion concerning the review.

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### Keywords

Conflict; Management; Impact and teachers' performance.

### Introduction

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complexity of the problem and aspects such as conflict management skills. It also equips the researchers with a complete and thorough justification of the subsequent steps as well as with a realization of the importance of the undertaking of the research; consequently, this review will focus on:

- the concept, conflict
- the concept of management
- the process of conflict management
- the roles of principals in conflict management
- a conclusion concerning the review.

## Concept of conflict

This section of the review will focus on the concept of conflict as described by other researchers. It was important for us to see how other scholars have conceptualized this concept prior to reviewing the relevant body of knowledge.

Conflict is a situation in which groups or countries have a serious disagreement. It is a situation that perverts individual or groups consciously or unconsciously which may work negatively or positively for achievement of the school policy and set goals. It is obvious that conflict is inevitable, because it develops as a result of dealing with people's lives, jobs, children or students, pride, self-concept, ego and sense of mission or purpose (Akinnubi, et., al., 2012).

Conflict refers to perceived or experienced incompatible differences within the individual or between two or more individuals, which may lead to some or other form of opposition (Kroon, 1991:436). Gilman (2002:5) on the other hand states that conflict is the natural tension that arises from differences. Furthermore a conflict exists whenever people are in disagreement and opposition (Lussier, 2000:308). Similarly, Griffin (1990:531) views conflict as a disagreement between two or more individuals or groups.

According to Hellriegel and Slocum (1996:552), conflict is opposition arising from disagreements about goals, thoughts or emotions within or among individuals, teams, departments or organizations. Achoka (1990:43) defines conflict as any situation in which two or more person's or groups perceive that their goals are incompatible, whilst Slabbert (1987:67) describes conflict as a dynamic process of interaction between two or more people or groups competing for rare resources, whose conflict objectives or needs have irreconcilable standards.

Conflict is natural. Conflict, to differing degrees, occurs daily in everyone's life. Conflict is not necessarily good or bad. It's the way that it is handled that makes the outcome positive or negative. If handled effectively, it can create a good learning experience. If handled ineffectively, conflict can quickly escalate to physical and emotional violence (Jones, 1994:2).

Difference is an inevitable part of any organization, including schools. Principals, management teams and educators may beat variance when the actions of one

person are interfering with or obstructing their work. For this purpose conflict management strategies may be found in terms of this analysis, where questions are asked like:

- Who is in conflict? The conflict may be between individuals, between individuals and teams, or between departments.
- What is the source of conflict? The conflict may rise from competition, personal differences or organizational roles. Answering this question requires trying to view each situation through the eyes of the parties involved.
- What is the level of conflict? The situation may be at a moderate level of intensity.

If the goals of the work group are threatened or sabotage is occurring, the principal must take action immediately. If individuals or groups are in simple disagreement, a less immediate response is required (Plunkett and Attner, 1997:485).

On the contrary divergence can be compared as traditional and interactionist. Table 1 compares these views.

According to Swart (1998:347), most principals have traditionally viewed conflict as a problem to be avoided, whereas Stoner and Freeman (1989:32) argue that the traditional view of conflict was that conflict was unnecessary and harmful. They believed that conflict would develop only when principals failed to apply conflict management principles. This traditional way of viewing conflict is not functional. On the other hand, Stoner *et al.*, (1989:392) view the current or interactionist view of conflict in organizations like schools as inevitable and even necessary no matter how the school is designed and operated. Murphy (1994:367) stipulates that principals have begun to realise that conflict has positive and negative aspects. The above discussions were illustrated in Table 1.

The conclusion demonstrated by Table 1 (traditional and interactionist view) is that conflict may be dangerous and/or be of value to organizations like schools. According to Everard and Morris (1990:88), conflict becomes dangerous and disruptive when principals try to avoid it rather than manage it. The more conflict develops, the more bitter the conflict becomes, and the less easy it is to achieve a solution and or manage it. In addition, Van der Westhuizen (1991:309) suggests that when conflict drags on for too long, the diverging parties may regard it from different perspectives with

detrimental consequences. Often this is unavoidably a no-win situation, as both parties tend to do things which are neither in their own best interest or that of a school as an educational institution. An immense amount of valuable time is wasted when a dispute drags on; while the institution itself is damaged in every way imaginable. This is referred to as dysfunctional conflict.

Additionally, Everard *et al.*, (1990:46) indicate that conflict in the sense of an honest opinion is not only unavoidable but can also be a valuable aspect of life. It helps to ensure that different possibilities are properly considered, and further possible courses of action may be generated from the discussion of the already recognized alternatives. Divergence often means that the chosen course of action is tested at an early stage, thereby reducing the risk of missing an important flaw, which may emerge later. Consequently, according to Achoka (1990:6), conflict can be constructive, thus improving work performance and overcoming staleness. She further argues that discord is of value in that it makes the school as an organization dynamic.

### Types of conflict

In this part of the study different types of conflict will be discussed to give a clear understanding of how the divergent types of conflict influence an organization such as a school.

#### Intrapersonal conflict

According to Kroon (1991:437), conflict within the individual (intrapersonal), can indicate the presence of simultaneous, opposing, divergent and conflicting ideas, feelings and activities. Characteristics of such tension are uncertainty, hesitation, stress, anxiety, depression and insomnia. For example, a principal might be task orientated at the expense of human relations. This can cause stress within the principal if he/she has to decide whether to admonish an educator whose work is not up to standard.

#### Interpersonal conflict

Interpersonal conflict is broadly defined as disagreements, incompatible interest concerning goals, policies, rules and discordant behavior that creates anger, distrust, fear and rejection or resentment. This is the most common and visible type of divergence in schools and other organizations where people are involved. Interpersonal conflicts in an organization like a school

are often not so visible. The origins of such discord can also lie outside the school organization, for example, two colleagues may be competing for the chairmanship of a tennis club and this can be transferred to school activities (Van der Westhuizen, 1991:305).

#### Intra group conflict

Saddler (1998:18) describes intra group conflict as largely interpersonal conflict between persons in a group. Interpersonal conflict is always present in groups because individuals differ in terms of values, beliefs, attitudes and behavior. As a result some people are more attracted to some than to others. The better underlying relationships, the easier it is for people to work together. Conflicts in small groups can, however, play a constructive role since it can stimulate creativity and renewal in that they start to communicate and work together as a unit. Working together, promotes the spirit of *compassion – having good human relations including respect, caring, love etc.* among them.

#### Intergroup conflict

Intergroup conflict occurs between different groups in the school, such as different departments, especially if they are competing for scarce resources like number of educators, time allocation for extramural activities, textbooks and other learning material, teaching aids and so on (Van der Bank, 1995:168).

#### Intra-organizational conflict

Intra-organizational conflict occurs when management and staff disagree about working conditions, goals, authority and decisions (Swart, 2001:368). While Van der Westhuizen (1991:306) states that this type of conflict can also originate between certain groups in a school or school system it can occur between members of a certain subject interest group, for example between history teachers, concerning a certain approach to the work. When more than one person is involved, coalitions are created within the interest groups.

#### Individual institutional conflict

According to Prinsloo (2001:5), school management is a social process. The concept brings along the realisation of how radical conflict can be, between an individual's expectations and the demands of the school as a dynamic organization. No two individuals are alike. Each brings his specific needs and personal preference into the social

system. The institution itself also has its own role to fulfill. This role is determined by its broader aims and motives. When the ideal and aim of the two parties concerned differ greatly, an ideal climate for possible discord is created.

### **Conflict between school and community**

Particular interest groups in the community often attempt to involve the school in order to facilitate the achievement of their aims. Sometimes these aims embody religious, social and political ideals (Saddler, 1998:18). Such school/ community aims may be in conflict of school rules and regulations and may upset the whole system and because school activities cannot function normally, there is an unavoidable drop in standards which affects the culture of learning and teaching (COLT) as well as learner discipline.

### **Effect of conflict**

Conflict is inevitable in an organization such as a school, and is inherently neither functional nor dysfunctional; it simply has the potential for improving or impairing organizational performance, depending on how it is managed (Stoner, et al,1989:391). In this section on the effect of conflict, I look at how functional and/or how dysfunctional it could be.

Ivancevich and Matterson (1996:325) describe functional conflict as when the result of a conflict or confrontation between groups enhances and benefits the organization's performance. For example, two departments in a school are in conflict over the most efficient and adaptive method of learner discipline. The two departments agree on the goal not on the means to achieve it. Whatever the outcome, there would be little commitment to change, and most groups likely would become stagnant. To this end, functional conflict can lead to increased awareness of problems, which need to be addressed, result in broader and more productive searches for solutions, and generally facilitate positive change, adaptation, and innovation. If you ignore the alarm, you will all get burnt. Similarly, in terms of the conflict, if you ignore the alarm you will get burnt; if you act on the warning signs, you will prevent yourself and others from getting hurt.

Furthermore, when a disagreement prevents the organizational objectives from being achieved then it is dysfunctional. Dysfunctional conflict is destructive in nature and leads to gradually worsening interpersonal

relationships, productivity decreases and negative organizational results (Swart, 2001:368). Prinsloo (2001:3) agrees by saying that dysfunctional conflict is destructive because it prevents goal achievement. On the other hand, Van der Bank (1995:171) says that if educators in a school are willing to disagree but fight too much without resolutions, objectives may not be met and the school's performance will diminish thus contributing to the collapse of the school.

### **Potential causes of conflict**

In this section of the study I outline potential causes of conflict. According to Robbins (2000:536), conflict does not appear out of thin air. It has causes. These causes can be managed consciously and unconsciously that is, positively or negatively.

### **Objective interference**

In many situations, the achievement of one person's objectives blocks the achievement of another's objectives. Both people may have the same objective, but only one may attain it. Suppose for instance, a new office becomes available. Two heads of department want the office, but it can only be allocated to one. Another example of objective interference might be the principal who wants to produce the maximum number of learners passing without worrying about the quality of the education they obtain (Mondy and Premeaux, 1993:406).

### **Competition**

According to Plunkett *et al.*, (1997:485), competition can take the form of two individuals trying to outperform each other. Competition can also erupt over a struggle for limited resources. This can lead not only to a lack of co-operation but to open conflict as well. Conflict can also arise from competition for awards associated with performance. Should principals manage this competition correctly, it can generate positive results enabling interpersonal relationships and commitment among educators to improve; learners to perform to the best of their ability within limited resources.

### **Personality differences**

People have different personalities which, results in them doing things differently. These diverse personalities can create the potential for conflict. Because people differ in respect of their socio-economic backgrounds, values, attitudes, and expectations and because there is usually

little respect between people for each other's differences, conflict potential is increased (Mondy, Sharplin and Premeaux, 1991:407). In addition, Toby (1999:8) stipulates that by personality difference we mean the characteristics of a person and the way in which he/she expresses him/herself which clashes with that of other people. These people tend to blame others for their miseries. Some of the divergent personality types are stubborn, argumentative, complaining, non-assertive, highly emotional and so on.

### **Difference in perception**

Perception is the specific way in which each person experiences the world around him. Although two educators are faced with the same situation, each educator would experience the situation differently because they experience the reality subjectively. Values, attitudes, expectations and needs influence the teacher's perception of his/her situation in the school. Groups can come into conflict because of different objectives and incorrect perceptions (Van der Bank, 1995:172).

### **Communication**

According to Achoka (1990:43), communication problems may also cause conflict. The difficulties involved include noise, semantic differences and insufficient exchange of information. Any distortion of information for either the sender or the recipient may cause unnecessary conflict. Plunkett *et al.*, (1997:485) share these sentiments by saying that communication is seldom perfect, and imperfect communication may result in misperception and misunderstanding. Because the receiver is not listening actively, he may simply misunderstand the sender. The results can be a disagreement about goals, roles, or intentions. Sometimes information is withheld intentionally, for personal gain or to embarrass a colleague.

### **Personal differences**

Robbins (2000:534) says conflicts can evolve out of the individual who idolizes personal value systems. The chemistry between some people makes it hard for them to work together. Factors such as background, education, experience, and training mould each individual into a unique personality with a particular set of values. The result is people who may be perceived by others as abrasive, untrustworthy, strange, or difficult to work with. These personal differences can create conflict.

### **Structural and human factors**

According to Achoka (1990:44), structural factors related to the school cause conflict. For instance, the size of the school correlates with the amount of disputes. That is the larger the school, the greater the number of differences and the higher the degree of conflict intensity. School bureaucratic characteristics like the degree of specialization correlates with conflict. While people like educators are dissatisfied or cannot realize their status aspirations, they can compensate for it by fostering discord within the school. Principals who are authoritarian but have low self-esteem tend to misinterpret the behavior of others and initiate conflict. Interest groups with different goals will run into differences at times. A situation is at times also provoked by a divergent perspective (Achoka, 1990:44).

### **Management**

In this section of the study, I outline a brief layout of what management entails. The school is an organization consisting of teachers and pupils. In order to realize the goals of educative teaching it is essential that the school is organized properly, which means that management of the school is essential. Management is a particular kind of activity and to manage effectively specialized knowledge is necessary.

### **General management**

Management is about coping with complexity. Good management consists of drawing up formal plans, designing rigid organization structures and monitoring results against the plans and so brings about order and consistency (Van der Bank, 1994:2).

In addition, Ivancevich, Lorenzi, Skinner and Crosby (1994:10) define management as the process undertaken by one or more persons to co-ordinate the work activities of other persons to achieve high quality results not attainable by only one person acting alone.

Hodgetts and Kuratko (1991:4) define management as a process of setting objectives and coordinating the efforts of personnel in order to attain them. While on the other hand Huse (1982:6) states that management refers to an individual's engagement in planning, organizing, controlling and directing the efforts of members of an organization and using organizational resources in order to achieve stated goals.

## **Education management**

Van der Westhuizen (1991:55) describes education management as “a specific type of work in education which comprises those regulative tasks or actions executed by a person or body in a position of authority in a specific field or area of regulation, so as to allow formative education to take place.” The above description implies that everything the stakeholders (principal, staff, parents, governing body, and others) in education do with regard to specific management areas should be aimed at enhancing the teaching and learning activities in a school. Education management is the process of working with and through people to accomplish school (educational) goals efficiently (Van der Bank, 1994:3).

## **Management skills**

According to Van der Bank (1995:8), a skill can be defined as the ability to do something well as a result of practice. For the purpose of this study, management skills that are needed by principals are divided into four main categories:

- technical skills, refer to the use of procedures and techniques in a specialized field
- human relations skills, which involve the ability to work with individuals and groups so as to understand motivate and co-operate with people
- conceptual skills refer to the intellectual ability to coordinate and integrate all the interests and activities of the school
- institutional skills involve the ability to represent the school in the community and in other organizations.

## **The management process by principals in schools**

The management process consists of four fundamental management tasks (Preedy, Glatter and Wise, 2004:12) which are:

- Planning: firstly, plan it, that is, what must be done?
- Organizing: secondly, organize it, that is, how and by whom will it be done?
- Leading/guiding: thirdly, give guidance, that is, when and how will it be executed?
- Controlling: lastly, implement controls to assess whether the aims have been achieved, that is, have the outcomes be achieved?

Planning is the process by which human technology directs administrative and financial activities to achieving organizational objectives (Hannaway and Hunt, 1992:59). While organizing means the creations of an organizational structure for the institution to indicate how people and resources should be utilized to achieve the vision, mission and objectives (Le Roux, 2003:24). However, Bov’ee, Thrill, Wood and Dovel, 1993:12) define leading as the process of influencing and motivating others to work together to achieve organizational goals. In addition, Ivancevich *et al.*, (1994:49) state that controlling ensures that actual activities are consistent with planned activities.

Table 2 illustrates the management tasks and the sub-tasks of management.

Planning in a school, according to Kerzner (1998:114) is vital because it links curriculum to teaching and learning. The role of the principal and the School Management Team (SMT) is to transform general curriculum and to put it into action through teaching and learning. This is done through planning of the school curricula, making decisions, solving problems, staffing and provision of materials and equipment, and the drawing up of policies. In organizing the resources and executing the school plan, the school management team needs to delegate responsibilities and co-ordinate duties to other members of staff. Planning and organizing are regarded as the thinking tasks of management, where principals of schools have to strive to see that objectives of the school are achieved. This can only be done by drawing up policies and delegating duties within the school. With regard to leadership, the principal should formulate the policies and management plans. All these aspects should be communicated to the relevant people. In so doing, proper monitoring of the situation by the principal will contribute to efficient evaluating and the following of corrective steps (Kgoale, 2003:116). Consequently, leading and controlling are regarded as the doing tasks of management where the real action takes place within the school as an organization. All stakeholders work towards the attainment of the objectives/outcomes.

## **Conflict management**

In this section of the study, I will discuss conflict management as practiced by principals in schools. Generally, the term conflict management refers to programs that teach individuals concepts and skills for preventing, managing and peacefully resolving conflicts (Jones, 1994:11). According to Johannsen and Page

(1996:325), conflict management refers to the identifying of divergences of interest between groups or individuals and the constructive reconciling or balancing of these divergences so that they are acknowledged and expressed.

Robbins (2000:535) stipulated that conflict management entails maintaining the optimum level of conflict in a group. Too little conflict creates stagnation. Too much conflict creates disruption and indigestion. Both are dysfunctional because they undermine group performance. Davidoff and Lazarus (2002: 160) describe the aim of conflict management strategies as facilitating a process of conflict self-reflection and commutation, where participants can take part. Taking responsibility before blaming others is an important part of the management process.

Conflict management has become an integral part of a principal's task. Principals are not required to suppress or resolve conflict, but to manage it. Since conflict in Ethiopian schools has long history, headmasters have had to manage serious and dangerous situations. Unfortunately, there has been little research in conflict management in "unrest situations" and in "normal" conflict situations (Bondesio, 2000:1). Individuals can learn new skills regarding disagreements. Although conflict is a natural part of human existence, many educators and learners lack the skills necessary to effectively resolve them. Conflict management programs have demonstrated that educators and learners in schools can quickly learn to use effective conflict management skills when they are given an opportunity to practice such skills. They are also encouraged to use their new skills in real life situations and to observe peers and people in authority modeling effective conflict management skills. The acquisition of conflict management skills empowers individuals to take responsibility for their own conflicts and for the resolution of those conflicts (Warters, 2004:1).

Conflict can be either destructive or constructive. Whether or not organizational conflict is destructive or constructive depends to a large extent on how it is managed. Healthy, effective schools, which are characterized by well-developed problem solving mechanisms and collaborative decision-making, are able to identify it and deal with it in a co-operative manner. Unfortunately, there is no best way of managing conflict in schools although there are different ways to manage conflict in schools depending on the particular situation. The basic principle in choosing the way of managing

conflict is to use the approach most likely to minimize the destructive aspects and to maximize the opportunities for growth and development of the school organization (Van der Bank, 1994:179). According to Everard and Morris (1995:89), principals need to develop certain conflict management skills and attitudes if they are to be effective. The way to develop these skills is by self-control and practice.

Principals firstly, require the ability to confront, to be able to say 'No' when a difference of opinion emerges. They should show by their attitude that they are open to reason, logical discussion and problem solving. Secondly, they must be able to present ideas and feelings clearly, concisely, calmly and honestly.

Thirdly, principals need to develop listening skills, which include the ability to show someone that they understand what has been said by "playing it back". The head teacher also needs to develop the habit of asking questions rather than making statements, remembering that successful people are those who ask the questions.

Fourthly, the skill to evaluate all aspects of the problem is necessary; and finally, the principal needs to be able to articulate the common goals, so as to help both parties to rise above their differences about methods and to look to future achievement rather than past frictions (Everard et al, 1995:89).

### **Conflict management styles**

In this section of the study, I will describe conflict management styles. This is because conflict management has become an integral part of an effective management style. The principal can no longer ignore it and should make provision for handling and solving conflict within the context of the school. Unresolved conflict can be viewed as a significant barrier to learning. An environment, in which conflict is resolved effectively, facilitates the learning process, thus enabling the school to more effectively meet its primary goal (Sayed, 2005:102).

### **Avoidance or withdrawal**

One method of dealing with conflict is to simply withdraw. Avoidance is a decision to do nothing. It is assumed that if the situation is ignored, the conflict may resolve itself without requiring any personal involvement. This attempt to maintain neutrality often annoys both parties, but it can be a useful technique for

“cooling off” parties or preventing disputes about unimportant matters. Avoidance is not a successful method for achieving a long-term solution since the original cause of the conflict remains (Truter, 2003:42)

When can the principal use this style?

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

### **The dominating response I win/you lose**

This is an undesirable outcome for many situations, especially when the stakes are high for both parties as they often are in a school. The effects are often destructive because the conflict is not resolved and might even be escalated. However, the undesirable effects of a dominating style may be offset by gains in organizational efficiency in some low-stakes scenarios. The dominating style involves the use of power and aggressive behavior in attaining self-concerns. Such behavior shows a lack of respect for the rights and feelings of others. It often displays hostility and sarcasm and forces personal feelings, beliefs, ideas, and decisions on others as well as often shifting responsibility from one’s own actions to blaming others. Intense and tenacious enemies emerge as an aftermath to this response. Tactics and strategies include attacking others ideas and beliefs, offering derogatory remarks, and demanding concessions from others. Nonverbal behavior includes glaring or condescending eye contact, an attacking or threatening body posture, and hostile facial expressions (Wheeler, 2005:18).

When can the principal use this style?

- in an emergency situation when quick decisive action is necessary
- when the school principal has to implement unpopular changes
- when all other methods have failed.

### **Integrative/collaborating, powerful-powerful, win-win**

This style is characterized by mutual differences, but conflict is, at times, regarded as natural and healthy. It

requires open confrontation coupled with an objective search for a common solution to the problem. People hope and expect that various conflicting viewpoints can be integrated in a new, improved, viewpoint or aim. This style may be labeled as one of co-operation and win-win because the conflict is not colored by personal opinion, and a sincere and true attempt is being made to find a correct and real solution.

The educational leader plays a dynamic management role in creating the correct climate for co-operation, and training people in communication skills and group dynamics (Saddler, 1998:25).

When can the principal use this style?

- when he/she wants to merge the feeling and experience of people from different backgrounds, perspectives and perceptions
- when he/she wants to resolve a long-standing conflict, which may have a negative effect on the working relationship
- when he/she expects the staff to be forthcoming with creative solutions for specific problems.

### **The obliging response is “I lose/you win”**

A person responding in this way tries to absorb conflict by ignoring, covering up, or playing down differences with the other person. Self interest is ignored to satisfy the other’s concerns. The obliging person has difficulty expressing ideas, beliefs, and feelings, is often unable to say “no” to unreasonable requests, feels guilty when saying “no” and will not make her own needs known. The long-term effect is for the obliging person to become a pushover for anyone initiating a conflict.

If the person is in a leadership position, the conflicts will eventually spread to other groups and persons, which will lead to a dysfunctional organization. Tactics and strategies employed are to apologize and make excuses, be silent, use a soft, hesitant voice, and conform to ideas of the opposing party. The obliger tends to avoid eye contact, display nervous body movement, and maintains a closed body posture (Johnson, 2005:22)

When can the principal use this style?

- when the relationship with the staff is more important
- when the issue is not as important to you as it is to the other person



- when you want to encourage the other party to express his/her point of view.

**Compromise win-lose-win-lose**

Aims to solve conflict issues by having each party give up some desired outcomes in order to get mutually desired outcomes. Compromise often involves bargaining by the conflicting parties and generally requires a situation that offers both parties the chance to be in a better position or at least in no worse position after the conflict is resolved. With compromise each person wins some major issues and loses others (Bartol and Martin, 1991:580). The way in which people respond to conflict tends to be a reflection of both their assertiveness and their tendency to collaborate. A person who tends to be non collaborative and non-assertive will probably try to avoid conflict. Also, a person who is collaborative and non-assertive will tend to oblige, and a person who is collaborative and assertive, will tend to negotiate and problem-solve (Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana, 1997:130).

When can the principal use this style?

- when two parties involved have equal power
- when he/she wants to achieve a temporary settlement in complex matters

**The outcoms of conflict management**

**Lose-lose conflict**

Conflict management by avoidance or accommodation often creates a lose-lose situation. Here, no one achieves

his or her true desires, and the underlying reasons for conflict often remain unaffected. Although a lose-lose conflict may appear settled or even disappear for a while, it tends to recur in the future. Avoidance is an extreme form of non-attention (Lussier, 1997:390).

**Win-lose conflict**

Competition, or authoritative command, and compromise tend to create win-lose conflict. Here, each party strives to gain at the other’s expense. In extreme cases, one party achieves its desires to the exclusion of the other party’s wants. Because the win-lose method fails to address the root causes of conflict, future conflict of the same or similar nature are likely.

For instance, one party wins as superior skills and outright domination allows her desires to be forced on the other.

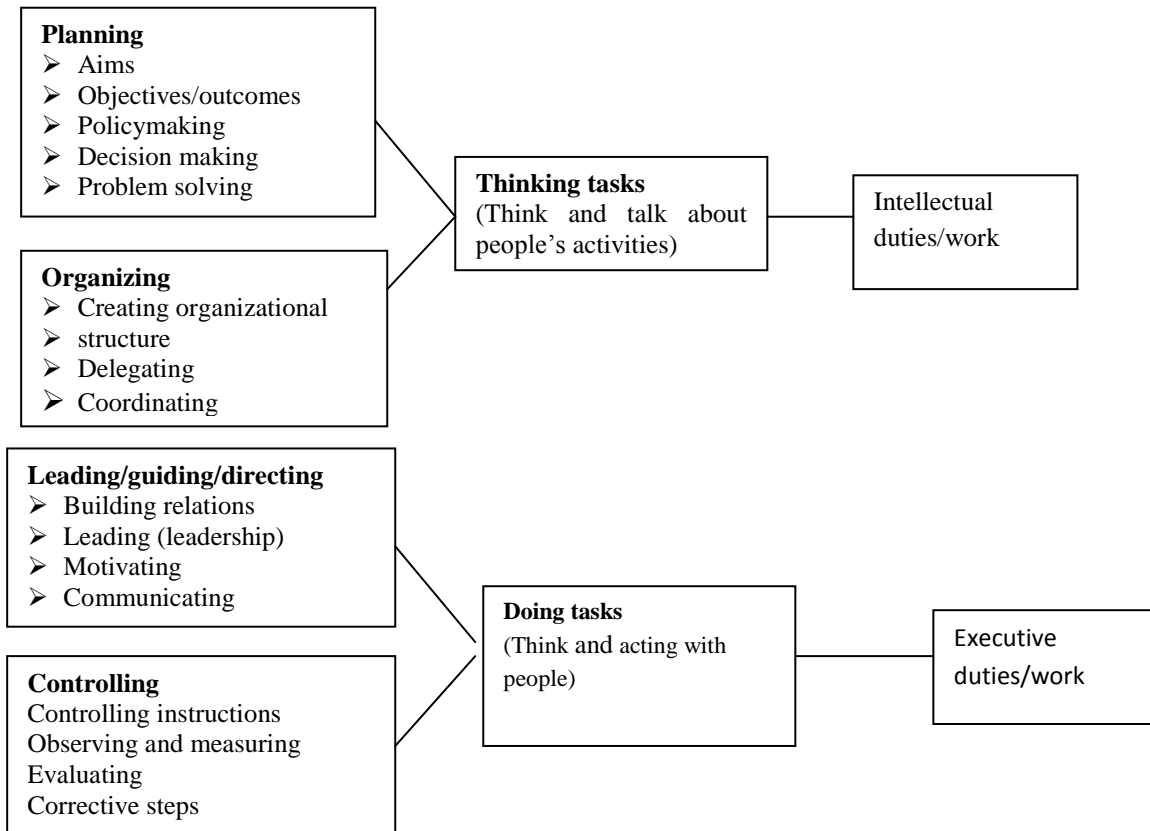
**Win-win conflict**

Collaboration, or problem solving, which tries to reconcile underlying differences, is often the most effective conflict management style. It is a form of win-win where things are resolved to the mutual benefit of all conflicting parties. This is typically achieved by confutation of the issues and the willingness of those involved recognizing that something is wrong and needs attention (Lussier, 1997:390).

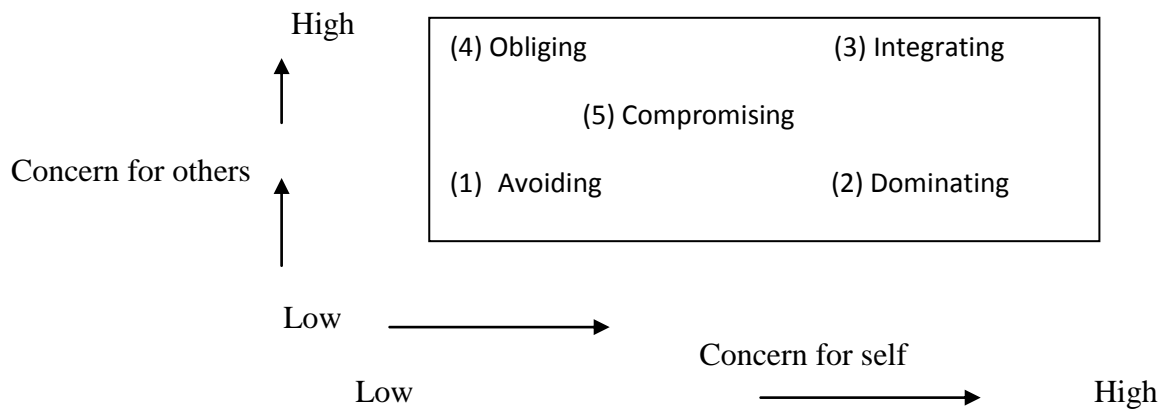
**Table.1** Old and current conflict (Stoner and Freeman, 1989:392)

<b>Traditional view (Negative)</b>	<b>Inter actionist view (Positive)</b>
Conflict is avoidable.	Conflict is inevitable.
Conflict is caused by management errors in designing and managing organizations by troublemakers.	Conflict arises from many causes, including organizational structure, unavoidable differences in goals, differences in perceptions and values of specialized personnel, and so on.
Conflict disrupts the organization and prevents optimal performance.	Conflict contributes to and detracts from organizational performance in varying degrees.
The task of management is to eliminate conflict.	The task of management is to manage the level of conflict and its resolution for optimal organizational performance.
Optimal organizational performance requires the removal of conflict.	Optimal organizational performance requires a moderate level of conflict.

**Table.2** Management tasks (Le Roux, 2003:14)



**Fig.2.1** Conflict management styles (Kroon, 1991:404)



**The role of the principal in conflict management**

The purpose for this section of the study is to look at the different roles that principals play in managing conflict.

The principal plays a cardinal role in the management of any school. The principal is the most important and influential individual in the school. This decisive position encompasses a wide spectrum of complex functions pertaining to management and conflict

management (Lemmer and Squelch, 1997:343). The management of conflict in schools can be either destructive or productive depending on the skills of those managing the context (Tomlinson, 2004:81). Preedy *et al.*, (2004:83) agree by saying that this is evidenced by the nature of principalship, and the position, role, and power of the principal which differ between schools and between systems. This influences the way in which the principal handles conflict in the school.

A head-teacher faces myriad external pressures and expectations, deals with conflict and stress, and tries to keep up with the ever-increasing technological and social changes. The technological and social revolutions that have overtaken all communities to varying degrees have affected our curriculum, school organization, discipline, student behaviour, community relations and the very nature of the teaching-learning processes. Furthermore, the community, the school councils, the central government, and teachers look upon the principal as the person responsible for exercising leadership in his school (Mampuru, 1992:14).

Achoka (1990:46) states that the school principal must accept the fact that conflict is part and parcel of all social organizations. The school depends on the principal's ability to resolve conflict. Failure to do so could be the result of misunderstanding the cause of the discord or ignorance about which course to take. The principal must also be aware of the type of divergence. Each type of conflict brings lessons to be learned, but they must each be resolved. The principal has to use literal knowledge and experience to generate better ways to resolve conflict.

The school is a place where different people with unique values and attitudes meet. All staff, therefore, may not appreciate all conflict resolution mechanisms used by the principal. Nonetheless, the possibilities for resolving conflict must be continually sought. A noteworthy point is that each conflict might warrant a different resolution technique. But this is not to discredit principals who have institutionalized conflict resolution mechanisms that become accepted by staff, and as such, form part of the school regulations. An unmanaged or mismanaged conflict has the tendency to escalate and become independent of its initial cause after all has been forgotten. There is no luck in conflict resolution. Successful conflict management involves artistic sensitivity. This grows out of both theoretical knowledge and the experience of the administrator. No action taken in the resolution of discord will ever satisfy all

concerned. However, this is not an excuse. The school principal must, above all, have virtuosity, technical skill and artistic insight into conflict resolution (Achoka, 1990:46).

School principals devote a significant portion of their time of dealing with conflict. Principals who look for the sources of these tensions may find that many of them reside in the principal's own interpersonal behavior, which may be products of their leadership skills. Four important leadership variables related to the amount and degree of conflict are conflict response styles, problem solving, communicator styles, and bases of social power. Each of these dimensions can be partitioned into two domains -concern for self and concern for others. The degree and consistency that concern for others is operational determines the depth of expertise of the principal's conflict management. Expert school leaders have developed a healthy other centered perspective of running their schools. Conversely, novice school leaders employ knowledge and skill gained to support only self-survival in the principal ship, which will lead to personal and professional disappointment (Johnson, 1997: 116).

## **Conclusion**

The school just like any other organizational institution is a system of social interaction. Conflict is inevitable in any work environment. Conflict is not merely destructive but can also be a useful tool in stimulating creative solutions to problems.

Although principals have a duty to accomplish management tasks such as planning, organizing, leading and controlling, one of their important tasks is to know how to manage and deal with conflict in the school. Although there is no best way to manage conflict in the schools the principal must be able to choose the most appropriate conflict management style for a particular situation. Principals who manage conflict best are able to draw out all parties, understand the differing perspectives, and then find a common ideal that everyone can endorse. They surface the conflict, acknowledge the feelings and views of all sides, and then redirect the energy towards a shared ideal.

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