

**AN INVESTIGATION OF THE FACTORS INFLUENCING INTERPERSONAL  
CONFLICT IN THE WORKPLACE: A CASE OF SELECTED PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
IN NAIROBI PROVINCE**

BY  
**MUCHEMI JOYCE KARUNGARI**

UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI  
EAST AFRICANA COLLECTION

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## DECLARATION

This project report is my original work and has not been submitted for any award in any other institution of learning

Muchemi Joyce Karungari

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Sign: 

Date: 15/9/10

This project report has been submitted for examination with my approval as University supervisor.

Sign: 

Date: 15/9/10

Dr Anne Aseey

Lecturer

Department of Educational Studies

University of Nairobi

## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my loving mum Monica Mumbi whose priceless love, encouragement and endurance has made me who I am today.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

<b>BATNA</b>	Best alternative to a negotiated agreement
<b>BOG</b>	Board of Governors
<b>FPI</b>	Free Primary Education
<b>IPAR</b>	Institute of Policy Analysis and Research
<b>KESSP</b>	Kenya Education Sector Support Programme
<b>KIE</b>	Kenya Institute of Education
<b>KNUT</b>	Kenya National Union of Teachers
<b>MoE</b>	Ministry of Education
<b>PTA</b>	Parents Teachers' Association
<b>SIMBA</b>	School instructional Material Bank Account
<b>TI</b>	Transparency International
<b>TSC</b>	Teachers Service Commission

## ABSTRACT

We spend at least one-third of our adult lives in the workplace and in very close proximity with all sorts of people. The effects of conflict in the workplace are therefore widespread and costly to the institution and to the individuals in it. This study therefore aims at investigating the factors influencing interpersonal conflict in the workplace. The study identified three objectives namely: investigating the influence of communication on interpersonal conflict, establishing how competition for limited resources contributes to interpersonal conflict in the workplace and establishing the effect of task interdependence on interpersonal conflict. Extensive literature review was carried out to provide background information to the study. It included review on sources of conflict in the workplace, conflict management styles and effects of conflict in the workplace. Methods of data collection have also been discussed; the study was carried out through the survey method targeting secondary school teachers in Nairobi Province, the schools were stratified into 9 districts and thereafter a school was randomly selected from each district. Data was collected using structured questionnaires with both open-ended and closed-ended questions which were administered to the respondents through the drop and pick method. Data analysis was then carried out through the use of the Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS); this included descriptive analysis, frequency presentation and interpretation of data. Data was analysed in the form of descriptive statistics and presented in descriptive statistics and presented in simple tables and percentages. The findings of the study indicated that creating proper channels of communication was very important as poor communication was a major source of conflict. Limited resources were also noted to escalate conflict while independence of tasks was unavoidable but necessary for achievement of organizational goals. In conclusion it was noted that conflict is sometimes useful as it can bring about desired positive changes to an institution. It was recommended that the stakeholders in secondary schools should set up structures to improve communication, encourage equitable sharing of resources and train teachers on conflict resolution mechanisms.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.0 Background of the Study

Tjosvold (1991) suggests that today's organizations face greater potential for conflict than ever before. The work place, with its increasing competition and globalization magnifies differences among people in terms of personality, values, attitudes, perceptions, languages, cultures and national backgrounds. Furthermore, with the increasing diversity of the workforce, comes the potential for incompatibility and conflict.

An organization comes into being when there are people who interact with each other and are prepared to put force and a unified effort in pursuit of a common goal. When people interact with one another, it is natural for conflicts to occur. Conflict in the workplace has been a common phenomenon for a long period of time and has received different degrees of emphasis from social scientists. Thus, the phenomena related to conflict have been deeply studied by philosophers, sociologists, economists, political scientists, anthropologists, and psychologists (Rahim, 1986).

As the level of interpersonal, inter-group, inter-organizational and inter-cultural tensions have risen in recent years; there has been an intensified interest in the area of conflict resolution. University programmes have been developed in conflict management. There has also been a phenomenal growth in the academic literature in such subspecialties as inter-group conflict, interpersonal conflict, organizational conflict and role conflict (Thomas, 1992)

Needless to say, conflict has been with us for some time, and it would be safe to argue that we expect it when people of different cultures, personalities, expectation sets, etc., interact together. Conflict is inevitable and our best expectation is to be able to resolve it or reduce it through the use of a variety of strategies, for example consensual approaches, third-party intervention and the famous getting to yes approach of Fisher and Ury (1981).

No one even suggests that there could be a conflict-free state in human experience. This assumption, in fact, creates a context for conflict, and all attempts to deal with it rise

from this basic assumption. People discuss strategies for resolving conflict, hopefully in a “win-win” manner, but no one dares to suggest that conflict could be transcended.

Nelson and Quick (2008) note that organizations employ different ethnic and cultural groups where widely differing cultures represent vast differences among individuals, and therefore the potential for conflict increases. The United States for example, is considered a masculine society whereas Sweden is considered feminine; hence adjustment to the assertive interpersonal style of the U.S. workers may be difficult for the Swedish. In the same manner workers from the United States would tolerate high levels of uncertainty unlike employees in Israel who tend to prefer certainty in their work settings; this might lead to conflicts among the employees because of differences in value system.

The principle regulatory framework for the education sector is the Education Act - The Education Act, Cap 211 of the laws of Kenya. The Act was enacted in 1970, ostensibly in line with the recommendations contained in the Ominde report of 1964. It provides for the overall governance framework of the education sector including the institutional framework, registration and inspection of schools and examination as well as the examination processes. The Act also provides for two categories of schools, that is public and private. Public schools are referred to as aided or maintained schools and as such, are entitled to receive financial assistance from the ministry and personnel from the Teachers Service Commission (TSC)

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Conflict is a pervasive phenomenon that permeates a multitude of organizational processes and outcomes. Its omnipresence and the importance of conflict management has been acknowledged in diverse fields including psychology, communication, organizational behaviour, information systems (IS), and marketing ( Deutsch 1990; Thomas 1992). The ability to manage interpersonal conflict is therefore probably one of the most important social skills in the workplace.

According to Lippitt (1982) estimates show that managers spend about 21 percent of their time dealing with interpersonal conflict which is equivalent to one day every week. To manage conflict effectively, managers need to understand its root causes.

A report by the Kenya National Union of Teachers (KNUT) and Education International (EI) notes that there has been a gradual increase in students' enrolment in Public Secondary Schools which has led to a strain on the available limited resources in secondary

schools. The report notes that in some cases this has led to increased cases of interpersonal conflict among teachers. This study therefore seeks to establish the factors influencing interpersonal conflict among teachers in public secondary schools.

Workplace conflict is unavoidable and can have far reaching consequences on the productivity of an organization and in extreme cases can escalate to violence. Although workplace conflict and related dispute resolution issues have been studied in organizational behaviour, management, sociology, law and industrial relations, factors influencing interpersonal conflict among teachers in public secondary schools and dispute resolution remain unexamined. The study will concentrate on teachers in public secondary schools Nairobi province where very little study on interpersonal conflict has been done.

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

The major purpose of this study is to investigate the factors influencing interpersonal conflict among teachers in public secondary schools in Nairobi province.

### **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

- 1) To investigate the influence of communication on interpersonal conflict in the workplace.
- 2) To establish how competition for resources contribute to interpersonal conflict in the workplace.
- 3) To establish the effect of task interdependence on interpersonal conflict in the workplace

### **1.5 Research Questions**

1. What is the effect of communication on interpersonal conflict in the workplace?
2. What is the effect of limited resources on interpersonal conflict in the workplace?
3. What is the effect of task interdependence on interpersonal conflict at the workplace?

### **1.6 Significance of the Study**

The study will hopefully useful to employees and in particular teachers, school administrators/employers who have the duty of leading, guiding, promoting unity and a spirit of teamwork among staff for enhanced performance.

The Ministry of Education (MoE) – being the regulator of education, which can push for inclusion of new policies on conflict management and resolution in the teacher education curriculum.

It is also useful to the community since teachers can pass down these skills to community members and even the learners themselves.

### **1.7 Scope of the study**

The study focussed on public secondary school teachers in Nairobi province and at the same time taking in consideration of the environment in which they operate in.

### **1.8 Limitation of the Study**

Due to financial constraints the study was carried out in selected schools in Nairobi province. Time was also a limitation particularly because Nairobi province is expanse and each district had to be represented in the study the research

### **1.9 Delimitation of the Study**

The study was delimited to selected public secondary schools in Nairobi province which is a represent the population. The study was delimited to interpersonal conflict in the workplace.

### **1.10 Assumptions**

The study assumed that all workplaces experience workplace interpersonal conflict in varying degrees and that staff members are aware of various conflict resolution mechanisms. The study also assumed that respondents will cooperate and provide reliable responses.

## 1.11 Definition of Significant Terms

Accommodation:	resolving conflict by giving in to the other needs and abandoning your own.
Avoidant:	resolving conflict by demonstrating indifference to both parties' needs and concerns, and neglects the interests of either person.
Conflict:	Any situation in which incompatible goals, attitudes, emotions or behaviour lead to disagreement.
Compromise:	An approach where both parties involved in conflict give up something and get something.
Collaboration:	resolving conflict by integrating parties' opinions to arrive at outcomes that promotes sharing.
Competition:	This conflict resolution approach combines high assertiveness with low concern for others.
Conflict Management:	the process of planning to avoid conflict where possible and resolving it where it does happen as rapidly and smoothly as possible.
Dysfunctional conflict:	An unhealthy, destructive disagreement between two or more people.
Functional conflict:	A healthy, constructive disagreement between two or more people.
Win-win approach:	A strategy that seeks to achieves the goals of both parties through sharing.
Win-loose approach:	A strategy that achieves one's own goals at the expense of another's.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter covers literature review under the following subheadings: Nature of conflict, factors influencing interpersonal conflict in the workplace, interpersonal conflict management styles, effects of conflict in the workplace and relationship between conflict and employee performance.

#### 2.2 Nature of conflict

Conflict is a process that begins when one party or individual perceives that one or more others have frustrated or are about to frustrate a major concern of theirs (Thomas, 1992). Conflict is inevitable in any organization due to the inherent differences in the perception of each individual. Even in organizations with established rules and work procedures and the hierarchical structure of authority and the rights and duties of position incumbents is documented, conflict is bound to occur.

‘Conflict involves people in their day-day interactions; it’s an outgrowth of the diversity that characterizes our thoughts, our attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, our social systems and structures. Conflict occurs because of differences in values, beliefs and interests, ambiguity over responsibility and authority, poor communication, and unwillingness to respond to social, political, cultural, technological, economic and social change (Burton 1987).

In a conflict situation therefore, each party attempts to destroy, injure, thwart, influence or control the behaviour of another party (Sidaway 1996). The way in which people handle conflict depends on how they view it. Some people consider conflict as problematic, uncivilized or destructive. Others view it as a natural and inevitable result of differences within the organization. The Traditional view as the early approach to conflict assumed that conflict was bad, harmful and must be avoided. In fact the term conflict was used synonymously with the term violence and destruction (Robbins, 1989).

The Contemporary View on organizational conflict views conflict as neither good nor bad, but as inevitable. Thus, whether we like it or not, conflict will exist or will occur even if organizations have paid great sacrifice to prevent it. Other writers such as Terry and Franklin (1991) argue that interpersonal conflict exists in all organizations despite the finest formal organizations and the most cohesive informal organization. According to them, it is reasonable to expect differences of opinions, beliefs and ideas among managers and workers,



between departments and between other groups in the organization. Therefore, since conflict is the inevitable accompaniment of change, the challenge is not to prevent the conflict arising, but to identify the outcome of conflict and find the best ways to manage it (Brown et al. 1995).

The modern view of conflict does not encourage the elimination of conflict but rather managing conflict so that it can help groups and individuals perform better (Mowday, 1985). Likewise, recent researchers have discovered that organizational conflict is considered as legitimate, inevitable, and even a positive indicator of effective management. Today, a synthesis of the classical and modern viewpoints has brought us to determine that the productive as well as destructive potentials of conflict exist in the workplace.

Pinto (1996) notes that conflict is a dynamic and evolving process and it is perceptual in nature. It may seem that they are trying to maximize their gains, but the underlying feeling may be different. Negotiators are often reluctant to disclose their real interests for the fear of extortion (Ertel, 1991). Even in professional areas like project management, conflicts of interest, if prolonged, grow into retributive ones, in which each party determines its gains in part by incurring costs on their opponent.

Conflict can manifest itself in the decisions and overt behaviours of one party towards the other. These conflict episodes may range from subtle nonverbal behaviours to warlike aggression. Particularly when people experience of high levels of conflict emotions, they have difficulty finding words and expressions that communicate effectively without further irritating the relationship. Conflict is also manifested by the style of each side uses to resolve the conflict. Some people tend to avoid the conflict, whereas others tend to defeat those in with opposing views. A sense of being treated fairly in a resolution process is important for the satisfaction of the parties involved as it ensures a stable outcome (Nelson & Quick 2008).

Both parties need to be convinced that what they gain or loss is equivalent to what the other party losses or gains. In other words, whether the demands made by one side are a match to demands made by the other side is a factor which determines the stability of the outcome. According to McShane et al. (2008) interpersonal conflict is often caused by different values and beliefs due to unique backgrounds, experiences and training. Most people have their own set of values and ethics. The extent to which they apply these ethics in the workplace varies and can hence result to disagreements. Along with conflict generated from cultural diversity, Zemka (1999) observes that many institutions are experiencing a

rising incidence of cross-generational conflict. Younger and older employees have different needs, different expectations and somewhat different values which sometimes produce conflicting preferences and actions. Generation gaps have always existed but the source of conflict is more common today because employees across age groups work together more than ever before.

Neison et al. (2008) notes that:

'Most people have their own set of values and ethics. The extent to which they apply these ethics in the workplace varies, some people have strong desires for approval from others and will work to meet others' ethical standards. Some people are relatively unconcerned about approval from others and strongly apply their own ethical standards. Still others operate seemingly without regard to ethics and values'.

Therefore when conflicts about values or ethics occur, heated disagreement is common because of the personal nature of the differences.

### **2.3 Influence of Communication on interpersonal conflict.**

We engage in communication and decision making several times a day, in both our personal and work lives. Given how common these activities are, it is not surprising that differences in how people communicate or make decisions lead to interpersonal conflict.

Communication in an organization has been identified as an important component for achieving and increasing performance within the organizational employees. It involves the transfer of information regarding the organizational goals and objectives to members of the enterprise. Chester Bernard (1938) views communication as the means by which people are linked together in an organization to achieve a common purpose. All in all communication allows for coordination.

Conflict often occurs due to the lack of opportunity, ability or motivation to communicate effectively McShane et al. (2008). When two parties lack the opportunity to communicate, they tend to use stereotypes to explain past behaviours and anticipate future actions. Stereotypes unfortunately are insufficiently subjective that emotions can negatively distort the meaning of an opponent's actions, thereby escalating perceptions of conflict. In addition, some people lack the necessary skills to communicate in a diplomatic, non-confrontational manner. When one party communicates its disagreement in an arrogant way, opponents are more likely to heighten their perception of the conflict. Arrogant behaviour also sends a message that one side intends to be competitive rather than cooperative. This

may lead to the other party to reciprocate with a similar conflict management style Jehn et al. (2003).

Ineffective communication can result in less motivation to communicate in the future thus employees avoiding interaction with each other. The lack of motivation to communicate also explains why conflict is more common in cross-cultural relationships. With limited communication, people rely more on stereotypes to fill in the missing information. They also tend to misunderstand each other's verbal and non-verbal signals, further escalating the conflict (Robbins 2005).

A common source of conflict is goal incompatibility. Goal incompatibility occurs when personal work goals seem to interfere with another person's or department's goals. When work groups have different goals, these goals may be incompatible leading to conflict.

In The Education Act there are too many institutions involved in the education sector. This creates and overlaps and confusion of mandates leading to suboptimal deployment of limited resources and jurisdictional conflicts. For instance the KIE is mandated to undertake training and education of teachers whereas the TSC is supposed to review standards of education and training of teachers. Ideally, the two roles are extremely similar and thus one institution should be better placed to manage the same (IPAR, 2008)

Ambiguous rules or the complete lack of rules breed conflict. Robbins (2005), in particular, mentions the role of rules and regulations in reducing conflict by minimizing ambiguity. He maintains that where there is high formalization, there are fewer opportunities for disputes about who does what and when. On the other hand, where there is low formalization, the degree of ambiguity is such that the potential for jurisdictional disputes increases. According to McShane et al. (2008), Conflict is more likely to be less subversive in highly formalised situations. In situations where the rules are vague, the opportunity to fight for resources and other power bases increases.

However, Tosi et al. (1994) warns that rules and procedures do not necessarily guarantee an absence of conflict. In situations of over-regulation, people can become frustrated by their lack of autonomy and a perceived lack of trust of them by their superiors.

## 2.4 Competition for limited resources and interpersonal conflict.

Anytime multiple parties must share resources, there is potential for conflict. This potential is enhanced when the shared resources become scarce. Senior & Flemings (2006) observes that in good times when resources are plentiful, the potential for conflict through competition for resources is reduced. In conditions of reducing profits or revenues and when redundancies are occurring, the potential for conflict over reduced resources rises. Resource scarcity therefore generates conflict because each person or unit that requires the same resource undermines the others who also need that resource to fulfil their goals. Research (Schopler, 1986) has shown that when organizational teams share resources (high task interdependence), competitive strategies may be used to acquire maximum resources and power.

The ministry of education has over the years seen a steady increase in its budgetary allocations. However, the ministry has consistently under-spent its allocations for development spending as Figure 2 shows.

Table 2.1: Ministry of Education (MoE) Budgetary allocations

<i>Financial year</i>	<i>Under-expenditure</i>	<i>As % of total budget</i>
2002/03	617,707,037.80	41%
2003/04	2,984,288,857.75	35%
2004/05	2,141,369,096.40	36%
2005/06	3,295,000,000.00	33.8%

Source: Kenya Education Sector Integrity Report 2010

This has led to a scenario whereby ministry officials forward expenditure from the current to the next financial year. This budgetary practice distorts financial accounting by reducing or wiping out surpluses (under-expenditure), therefore concealing delays and poor performance by contractors – a common practice in development projects in the education sector.

## 2.5 The effect of Task Interdependence on interpersonal conflict.

Task interdependence perceptions refer to a team member's impressions of the dependency upon one another, to some degree, within his or her team to accomplish the work and/or carry out the tasks of the team. According to Van de Vliert, & Oosterhof, 2003, Task

interdependence refers to the extent to which an individual team member needs information, materials, and support from other team members to be able to do his or her job.

Task interdependence is an objective job characteristic directly related to performance in teams and may serve to increase the motivation of team members to work together as a team (Hunt, 1992). High interdependence within teams has strengthened the importance of team-efficacy (i.e., belief in the capabilities of the team on a specific task) and cohesion (i.e., degree to which a team is united in its work through goals and objectives) on performance (Rahim, 1986).

Several studies have documented that task interdependence alters the course and consequences of conflict (Wilmot & Hocker, 2001). Some have asserted that because high task interdependence implies the need for intensive interactions among members, it creates more opportunities for conflict.

Conflict tends to increase with the level of task interdependence, task interdependence exists when team members must share common inputs to their individual tasks, need to interact in the process of executing their work, or receive outcomes that are partly determined by the performance of others. The higher the level of task interdependence, the greater the risk of conflict because there is a greater chance that each side will disrupt or interfere with the other side's goals.

Likewise, Nelson & Quick (2008) notes that work that is interdependent requires groups or individuals to spend time on one another to accomplish goals. Depending on other people to get work done is fine when the process works smoothly. When there is a problem, however, it becomes very easy to blame the other party, and thus escalating conflict.

Other than complete independence, employees tend to have the lowest risk of conflict when working with others in a pooled interdependence relationship. Pooled interdependence occurs where individuals operate independently except for reliance on a common resource or authority. McShane et al. (2008) continues to argue that the highest risk of conflict tends to occur in reciprocal interdependence situations where employees are highly dependent on each other and consequently have a higher probability of interfering with each other's work and personal goals.

Senior and Fleming, 2006 studies of interdependence are also important to review. The authors have also examined task interdependence as a job characteristic, but they used

employees' perceptions to measure the variable. They found employee task interdependence perceptions were positively related to employee satisfaction employee and manager judgments of effectiveness and productivity suggesting a direct relationship between perceptions and team outcomes.

Tesluk et al. (1997) proposed four patterns of workflow with increasing levels of interdependence: pooled interdependence, sequential interdependence, reciprocal interdependence, and intensive (Thompson, 1967). In the pooled/additive pattern, there is a separation between each member's activities and work completed with each individual's performance determined by-and-large by their own efforts. In the sequential pattern, workflow is unidirectional with team performance determined largely by one-on-one interactions between teammates. Workflow involves back-and-forth interaction in the reciprocal pattern, with back-and-forth communication influencing team performance. Finally, the intensive pattern is characterized by close working relationships, in which individual team members working together as a team determine team performance.

For the purpose of the study the author highlighted two theoretical literatures that can be used to explain perceptions of individuals towards task interdependence. The two bodies of literature emphasize the emphasis of the study on the phenomenon of teamwork in public secondary schools.

Deutsch's (1949b) Social Interdependence Theory (SIT) provides a basis for understanding how group members perceive interdependence and how these perceptions are related to beliefs regarding one's goals. Specifically, interdependence exists in groups where each member's outcomes are influenced by others' actions (Johnson & Johnson, 2005). Positive interdependence in SIT is a function of group members' perceptions that goal attainment depends upon whether the other group members attain their goals (Johnson & Johnson, 2002). In contrast, negative interdependence is the perception that goal attainment is independent of whether others accomplish their goals (Johnson & Johnson, 2002).

Thus, members develop perceptions concerning the nature of their dependence upon others to attain their goals. SIT offers behavioral outcomes representative of each form of interdependence. Groups with positive interdependence exercise coordination and promotive

interaction, while groups with negative interdependence do not engage in interaction (Johnson & Johnson, 2002)

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB; Ajzen, 1991) provides a link from members' perceptions to behavior. This theory focuses heavily on the behavioral intentions of individuals, introducing the notion of perceived behavioral control and recognizing that behavior may not always be under complete volitional control. Intentions are a function of an individual's motivation, effort, and willingness to carry out a particular behavior. Moreover, Ajzen (1991) asserts that intentions are determined by attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control.

## 2.6 Interpersonal Conflict Management Styles

For any organisation to be effective and efficient in achieving its goals, the people in the organisation need to have a shared vision of what they are striving to achieve, as well as clear objectives for each team / department and individual. You also need ways of recognising and resolving conflict amongst people, so that conflict does not become so serious that co-operation is impossible. All members of any organisation need to have ways of keeping conflict to a minimum and of solving problems caused by conflict, before conflict becomes a major obstacle to your work.

The severity and recurrence of conflict is determined, in part, by the extent to which each event is resolved to the satisfaction of all parties. Even with severe conflicts, healthy and open resolution of the conflict will breed trust and ease contentiousness as new sources of conflict arise (Lovelace et al., 2001).

Most of us have a preferred conflict management style, but the best style varies with the situation. A number of researchers have used Thomas' (1992) two-dimensional taxonomy of conflict-handling intentions to understand how conflict is resolved in teams. Thomas argues that when both parties are attempting to maximize their own interests (assertiveness) as well as the other party's interests (cooperativeness), they have a "collaborative" intent. In the absence of a *collaborative intent*, one of four alternative approaches are used: avoidance, competition, compromise, or accommodation. Each of these approaches, Thomas argues, leads to one or both parties ultimately frustrated with the outcome. We posit that distant team members will have no more or less collaborative intent than collocated team members.

Establishing collaborative norms, however, may be significantly more difficult in distributed teams. Collaborative norms of conflict handling improve performance, whereas avoidance and compromise detract from it (Montoya-Weiss et al. 2001, Xie et al. 1998). To be effective, parties must work to resolve the underlying interests of each party. Doing so requires sharing information about each party's interests and engaging in discussion and brainstorming to discover innovative ways to create a win-win solution (Lovelace et al. 2001, Tinsley 1998).

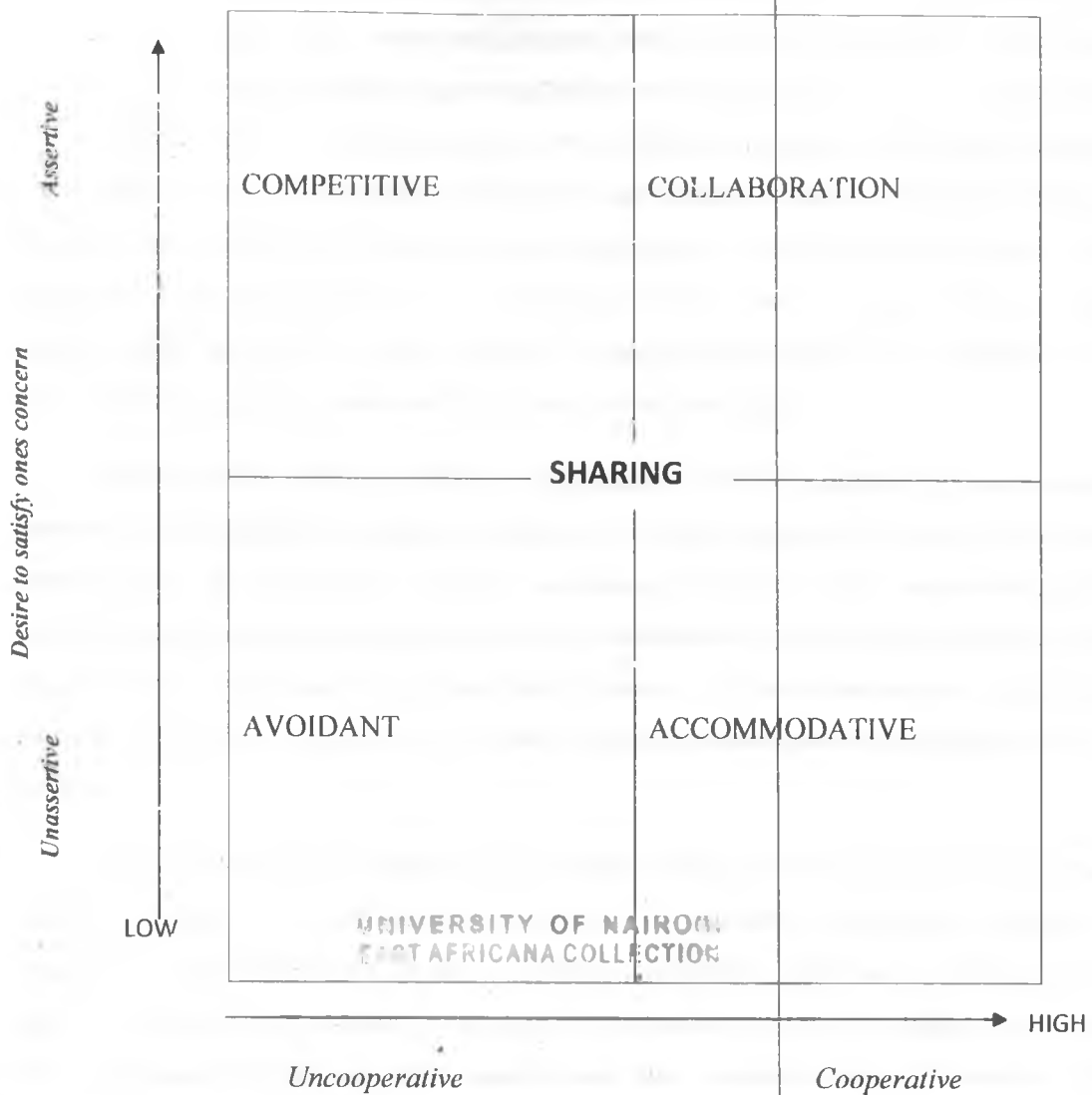
Thomas (1992) held that trust, positive mutual regard, mutual attraction, cohesiveness, and adequate opportunities to interact (among others) are crucial for fostering collaboration. Some of these factors, however, are directly affected by distance and technology mediation. Distance diminishes the development of friendships among team members (which is akin to attraction and cohesiveness), often undermines trust, and reduces opportunities to interact, especially on an informal basis.

Hunt (1992) notes that when teams deal with conflict collaboratively, they are likely to establish stronger bonds and have more integrated goals. In sum, healthy conflict-handling norms will lessen the impact that conflict has on performance and reduce the potential for future conflict.

Having said that conflict is inevitable, the way we handle or manage these conflicts will determine the quality of our relationships and long term emotional costs. There are many ways in which conflict can be managed. Thomas (1976) suggests five general approaches (or styles): Competing, avoiding, sharing, accommodating and collaborating.

As shown in Figure 1, these five styles are distributed on a two-by-two grid formed from low and high values of two mutually exclusive dimensions (cooperative/uncooperative and assertiveness/unassertiveness). In any conflict situation, according to Thomas, individuals vary in their commitment to satisfying other's concerns, and the manner in which they assertively stand up for their own concerns.





Source: Adapted from Thomas (1976)

Figure 1: Five conflict management styles.

The first of these styles (competitive) reflects a strategy that achieves one's own goals at the expense of another's. It is a style that is very assertive and uncooperative. The conflicting parties just want to satisfy their own interests and are willing to do so at the expense of the other party. However, in an emergency situation or a situation where one knows that they are right, it may be appropriate to use this style Nelson & Quick (2008). This domination tactic is often referred to as a win/lose approach to resolving conflict.

The second style (avoidant) reflects an approach to resolving conflict that demonstrates indifference to both parties' needs and concerns, and neglects the interests of either person. De Dreu (2001) argues that avoiding is a style low on both assertiveness and cooperativeness. It is a deliberate decision to take no action on a conflict or to stay out of a conflict situation. Some relationship conflicts such as those involving political norms and personal tastes may distract team members from their tasks and avoiding may be an appropriate strategy. When parties are angry and need time to cool down, it is best to use avoidance. However, Baron (1990) warns that there is potential danger of using avoidance too often as overuse of this style results in negative evaluations from others in the workplace.

The third style (sharing) reflects an approach to resolving conflict by compromising between a dominating and appeasing approach. In this approach both parties involved in conflict give up something and get something. Thomas (1977) acknowledges that compromise is an effective backup style when collaborative efforts are not successful. Often when people compromise, they inflate their demands. The solutions reached may only be temporary and often compromises do nothing to improve relationships between the parties in conflict.

The fourth style (collaboration) is a problem solving style that tries to find a mutually beneficial solution for both parties McShane et al, (2008). Information sharing is an important feature of this style as parties collaborate to identify common ground and potential solutions that satisfy all of them. According to Jjosvold & Law (2000) collaboration is a win-win style that is high on both assertiveness and cooperativeness. Situations where collaboration may be effective include times when both parties need to be committed to a final solution or when a combination of different perspectives can be formed into a solution. Collaboration requires open, trusting behaviour and sharing information for the benefit of both parties. Long term, it leads to improved relationships and effective performance.

The fifth style (accommodation) involves yielding and giving in completely to the other side's wishes, or at least cooperating with little or no attention to your own interests. This style involves making unilateral concessions and unconditional promises as well as offering help with no expectation of reciprocal help. Appropriate of situations for accommodating include times when you find you are wrong, when you want to let the other party have their way so that they will owe you similar treatment later. However, Nelson & Quick (2008)

warns that over reliance on accommodation have its dangers when accommodating parties' needs are not met as they may have thought resulting to another cycle of conflict.

Conflict management styles are therefore situational and relational. One's cultural, organizational and interpersonal values can influence the way one style is determined to be most appropriate depending on the situation and relationship involved. In organizational situations we strive for approaches that maximise our ability to reach outcomes that are win/win. Rather than generalizing a best approach for every situation, Thomas (1977) suggests that it is best to consider the relative advantages and disadvantages of each approach, and the circumstances for which each approach may prove most appropriate.

Conflict may be viewed in two ways. For some people conflict in the work environment is something to be feared and is thus to be avoided. According to this view conflict is undesirable and destructive. In contrast to such a negative view, there exists another pragmatic view which regards conflict not only as inevitable but also as desirable. In fact, those who maintain this second view consider conflict as a stimulus for change, growth and innovation (Campbell, et al 1983).

## **2.7 Effects of Conflict in the workplace**

Ivancevich and Matteson (1990) describe the contemporary viewpoint of conflict in the following manner, 'Too much conflict can have negative consequences because it requires time and other resources to deal with and diverts energy that could more constructively be applied elsewhere. Too little conflict, on the other hand can also be negative in that such a state can lead to apathy and lethargy and provide little or no impetus for change and innovation'.

Conflict can have either a positive or negative impact on the work performance, depending on how it is handled or the degree to which an individual or the group is satisfied with the outcome (Verma, 1995). Most conflicts are easier to resolve if they are recognized and resolved early. If they are delayed, the parties often become frustrated and conflict becomes destructive in a work or project environment.

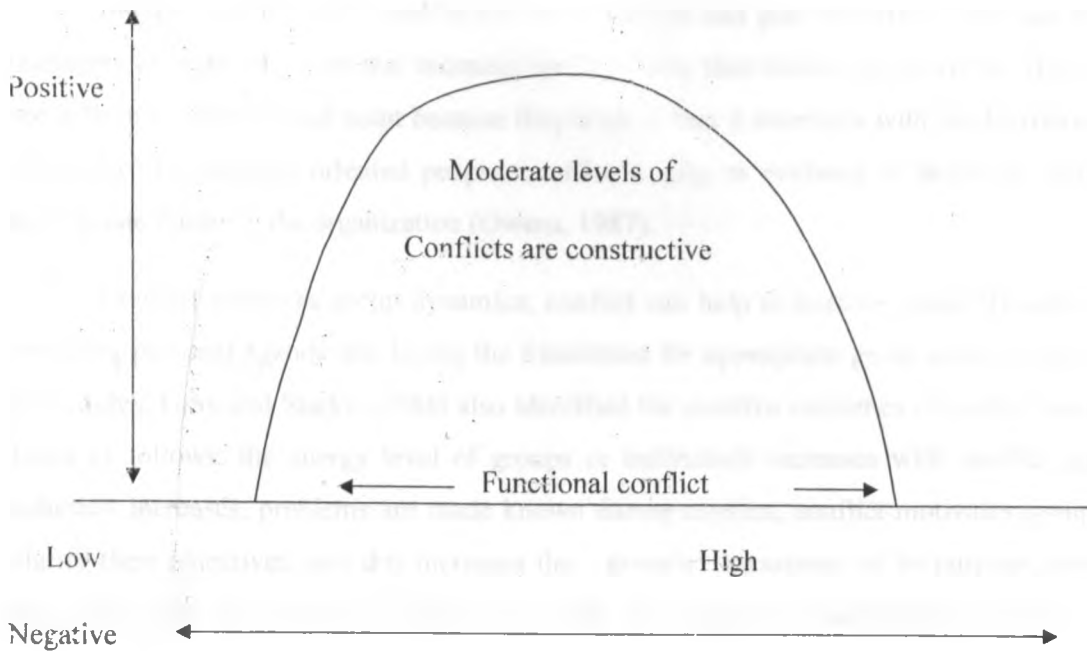
According to Forster (1995), not all conflict is bad; rather, it may result in productive outcomes. Conflict may stimulate people to search for improved approaches that lead to better results. It energises them to be more creative and experiment with new ideas leading to

higher performance. In addition, the once hidden problems are brought to the surface where they may be confronted and solved. Once the conflict is resolved, the individuals may be more committed to the outcome through their involvement in solving it.

Robbins (2005) uses the term functional or dysfunctional conflict respectively. With respect to functional conflict, Robbins refers to the interactionist approach to conflict which views it as not only positive, but also one that is absolutely necessary for a group to perform effectively. Functional conflict enhances and benefits the organization's performance. Without functional conflict in organizations, there is a possibility to have little commitment to change, and most likely groups would become stagnant.

Positive or functional conflicts result in an urge for excellence and creativity. Such conflicts take the form of healthy competition. With such type of competition, Pareek (1982) says; better ideas are produced, people are forced to search for new approaches, long standing problems are dealt with and people are forced to clarify their ideas, and the tension stimulates interest and creativity.

Organisational conflict is considered as legitimate, inevitable and even a positive indicator of effective organisational management. It is now recognised that conflict within certain limits is essential in essential in productive. Organizational conflict in educational systems is by no means the antithesis of the makings of quality of educational institutions. When dealt with in a constructive manner, conflict encourages creative solutions, leads to unity and supports people through change and stressful periods. It is thus important to note that whether or not conflict benefits institutions depends on two factors: the intensity of the conflict and the way conflict is managed.



Source: Adopted from (Schermerhoun, 2001: 339)

Figure 2: The relationship between conflict and performance.

Nelson et al (2008), on the other hand argues that dysfunctional conflict is unhealthy and destructive as it takes the focus away from work to be accomplished and places the focus on the conflict itself and the parties involved. Excessive conflict drains energy that could be used more productively. Likewise, Amason et al, (1995) suggests that disagreements that involve personalized anger and resentment directed at specific individuals rather than specific ideas are dysfunctional. In the same manner, Saaty (1990) notes that destructive conflict increases the grievance of the parties involved because they insist on unreasonable terms and each party has a hidden desire to inflict pain on the opponent.

Levine (1998) observes that conflict will never be eliminated, and it is often constructive, but it can also be very destructive if issues of fairness and justice are not dealt with effectively. Regardless of the outcome of conflict, there are emotional costs. Win or lose, these emotional effects remain and can linger long after conflict has been officially resolved. If conflict lasts for a long time or if it becomes intense, it will have a negative effect. At the interpersonal level, co-operation and team work may deteriorate and distrust may grow among people who need to cooperate in their efforts. For individuals, some may feel defeated, while the self-image of others will decline.

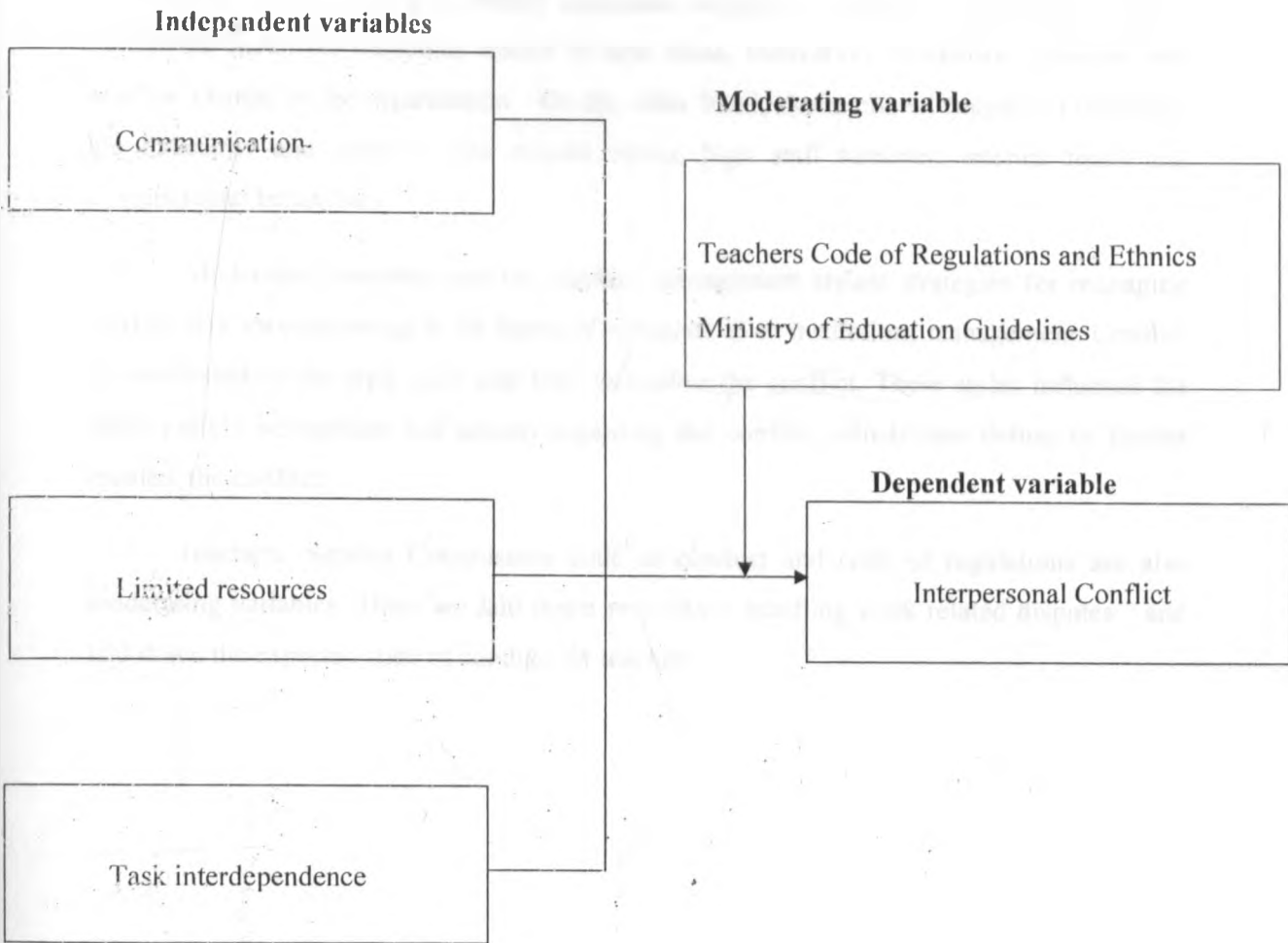
Intense conflict often leads to biased perception and goal distortion. This can cause managers to make decisions that increase conflict rather than reduce or resolve it. They also see it from a control stand point because they believe that it interferes with productivity and efficiency. To negative oriented people, conflict is seen as evidence of failure to develop appropriate norms in the organization (Owens, 1987).

Conflict improves group dynamics; conflict can help to improve group dynamics by revealing personal agenda and laying the foundation for appropriate group goals, norms and procedures. Gray and Starke (1984) also identified the positive outcomes of conflict and are listed as follows: the energy level of groups or individuals increases with conflict, group cohesion increases, problems are made known during conflict, conflict motivates groups to clarify their objectives, and this increases the group's awareness of its purpose, conflict encourages group to protect values they think are important, individuals or groups are motivated to mobilize information that is relevant to the conflict, additional information is usually developed that can be helpful in resolving the problem, conflict can increase an organization's overall effectiveness because it forces groups or individuals to adapt to the changing external environment that the organization faces.

In conclusion, constructive conflict can lead to improved relationship between individuals and groups and to new and better understanding of organizational problems. It also tends to be integrative, or at the least will stop disputes between the conflicting parties. In contrast, destructive conflict leads to the polarization of views and the reduction of effective cooperation between the parties involved. When the distrust between the parties continues, the conflict is more likely to be destructive (Billisbery, 1999).

Conflicts are therefore a fundamental component of organizational life and, as such, they require careful attention from managers so that disputes are handled in the most beneficial way possible for the organization (Kolb and Putnam, 1992; Van de Vliert (1997). From this perspective, one of the basic tenets of conflict management stipulates that that the way an organization settles its conflicts has a direct impact on its workplace climate, and in particular on the conflict aspect of this climate. In other words, conflict management has an impact on the workplace climate as some approaches have the effect of maintaining harmony while others perpetuate conflicts (Friedman et al. 2000).

## Conceptual framework



**Figure 3: Conceptual framework**

The Independent variables include the factors that influence interpersonal conflict and these include various indicators such as communication, limited resources and task interdependence among the teachers. At some point the sources of conflict lead one or both parties to perceive that conflict exists. These perceptions usually interact with felt emotions about conflict. If the conflict remains focused on perceptions, both parties can often resolve the conflict through logical analysis.

The Dependent variable on the other hand include interpersonal conflict that are experienced among the teachers, this is presumed to be the effect of the independent variables as identified by the study. Conflict outcomes depend on conflict management styles. Functional (positive) outcomes results in new ideas, innovation, teamwork, cohesion and positive change in the organisation. On the other hand, dysfunctional (negative) outcomes are unhealthy and result in low morale, stress, high staff turnover, internal feuds and dysfunctional behaviours.

Moderating variables are the conflict management styles; strategies for managing conflict will vary according to the frame of reference of an institutions management. Conflict is manifested by the style each side uses to resolve the conflict. These styles influence the other party's perceptions and actions regarding the conflict, which then defuse or further escalate the conflict.

Teachers' Service Commission code of conduct and code of regulations are also moderating variables. There are laid down procedures handling work related disputes and laid down the expected code of conduct for teachers.



## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methodology which was used to meet the objectives of the study. The chapter highlights the design of the study, the population of interest, the sample and the various sampling techniques employed, research instruments and data analysis method.

#### 3.2 Research Design

The survey method was used in the study. This allowed an in-depth description, assessment and analysis of the causes of conflict among teachers in the public secondary schools. It also included the effects of conflict on performance and conflict resolution mechanisms. In this case it was possible for the researcher to administer the data collection tools to the respondents in their workstations which was relatively easy and hence increased the respondents' response rate.

#### 3.3 Target Population.

The target population for this study was public secondary school teachers in Nairobi province. Nairobi province has nine districts namely: Makadara, Westlands, Langata, Njiru, Kasarani, Starehe, Kamukunji, Embakasi and Dagoretti. Out of the 9 districts the researcher carried out a pilot study in Langata district. Nairobi province has 9 districts and a total of 69 public secondary schools. The sampling frame which is an exhaustive list of all the schools involved in the study will be highlighted in Annex III of the study.

#### 3.4 Sample and Sampling Techniques

Sampling techniques are of two main approaches i.e. probability and non probability sampling techniques. In the former, the researcher knows the exact possibility of selecting each member of the population; in the latter, the chance of being included in the sample is not known. Stratified sampling involves dividing the population into homogeneous non-overlapping groups (i.e., *strata*), selecting a sample from each group, and conducting a simple random sample in each stratum. (Cochran, 1963) (Trochim) On the basis of information available from a frame, units are allocated to strata by placing within the same stratum, those units which are more-or-less similar with respect to the characteristics being measured.

The stratum was defined in terms of the 9 districts which make up Nairobi province, whereby the study targeted one school in each stratum and in this case simple random sampling was then used to select one school in each district; this ensured that any of the schools had an independent and equal chance of being selected. Out of this the following schools were identified as the sample for the study from which the sample size was calculated.

Table 3.1 Sampling Frame

<i>District</i>	<i>Name of school</i>	<i>(Population) No. of teachers</i>	<i>Sample size</i>
Makadara	Highway Secondary	30	10
Nairobi West	Kangemi Secondary	29	8
Langata	Langata High	38	8
Njiru	Ruai Girls	27	8
Kasarani	Ruaraka Secondary	33	8
Starehe	Muranga Road Sec	32	10
Kamukunji	Uhuru Secondary	30	10
Embakasi	Dandora Secondary	28	8
Dagoretti	Ruthimitu Mixed	30	8
<b>Total</b>		<b>277</b>	<b>78</b>

However since the sample size was too large the study resulted to take a percentile of 30 % from each population group. Fraenkel (2001) recommends that samples be as large as a researcher can obtain with reasonable expenditure of time and energy while at best (1993), asserts that there is no fixed number of percentage of subjects that determine the size of an adequate sample. This is suggested for social science research that a minimum of 30% proportion of the population is sufficient for a sample size. Also due to the use of Langata High School as a pilot study the final sample included in the data collection process was 70.

### 3.5 Research Instruments

The study used primary data collected using a structured questionnaire with both open-ended and closed-ended questions. The closed-ended questionnaires are easy to administer and are also economical to use in terms of time and money while the open-ended allows the respondent to give personal responses and deeper insights. Use of questionnaires enabled the

researcher to reach many respondents at a relatively short time and also increase honesty due to the confidentiality that is almost guaranteed by using this form of instrument (Fraenkel, 2008). The questionnaire will be structured according to the objectives of the research.

The questionnaires were self administered to the respondents by drop and pick later method. This method is considered appropriate in view of time constraints and also to ensure a high response rate. The questionnaire was structured and pre-tested on Langata district which acted as a pilot study; this helped improve validity of the data collected. Secondary data had also been collected through an extensive literature review.

### **3.6 Validity of the Instrument**

The researcher ensured that questions given are relevant to the purpose of the study and arranged in a logical order to enhance content validity. To ensure content validity, the instrument was evaluated by experts in the field of conflict studies.

### **3.7 Reliability of the instrument**

Before the data was collected, the questionnaire was piloted in Langata district which was not included in the final data collection process. According to Aluko-Orodha (PHD) (2004) piloting helps to establish whether the questions measure what they are supposed to measure, whether the respondents interpret all questions in the same way, whether the wording is clear and whether there is researcher bias. To establish reliability, the researcher used the feedback from the pilot study to revise the questionnaires for final data collection to increase reliability. Respondents in the pilot phase were excluded during the final administration of the instrument. The researcher also sought expert opinion on the field of conflict.

### **3.8 Data Collection Procedures**

The study used both primary and secondary sources of data. A questionnaire was administered by the researcher or her assistant who was trained on data collection. The questionnaires had both open and close ended questions with clear and specific guidelines on how to answer the questions. Both published and unpublished sources of literature were used to get more information. Review of secondary data was used to supplement primary data. They included journals, periodicals, books and other unpublished and non-published material

### **3.9 Data Analysis**

Analysis was done in the form of descriptive statistics and presented in frequencies and percentages, tables were used to summarize the data in an effective and meaningful way. Before processing the data, the completed questionnaires were coded for ease of analysis. They were then be edited for completeness and standardized. The data was then entered and analysed by use of the windows Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) so as to easily carry out the analysis. Data interpretation was also complemented by information from content analysis.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION

#### 4.1 Social Demographic Data

The questionnaires were administered to teachers in the final sample of 8 schools and they accounted for 70 respondents. Among the total respondents female respondents were the majority with a frequency of 41 (58.6 %) whereas their male counterparts accounted for 29 (41.4%). Among the respondents 25 (35.7%) were in the age bracket of 0-29, 30 (42.9%) were between the ages of 30-39, between the age bracket of 40-49 respondents amounted to 9 (12.9%). Respondents between the age of 50 and above on the other hand constituted of 5 (7.1 %). Graduates were the majority of the respondents with frequency of 35 (50%) with diploma holders with 26 (37.1%). Certificate and Postgraduate holders combined accounted for 8 (11.4%).

Due to the categorization of secondary schools in terms of their status as either district, provincial or national schools, the responses were as for teachers in district schools accounted for 23 (32.9%), provincial schools were represented by 37( 52.9%) whereas national schools were at 10 (14.3). It was also important for the study to seek to identify the duration of the career of its respondents. From these it was identified that most of the respondents 27 (38.6%) were in the profession for 6-10 years, 23 (32.9%) 2-5 years- this was accounted for due to the teacher recruitment since the adoption of the free secondary school initiative. Respondents that had worked for less than one year represented 6 (8.6%) while those that had been in the profession for more than 11 years accounted for 14 (20.0%)

#### 4.2 Influence of communication on interpersonal conflict

An objective of the study was to investigate the influence of communication on interpersonal conflict. In the literature it was evident that communication within an organization and between its members provides an opportunity for interpersonal conflict to occur in the workplace. As such various questions were formulated so as to identify communication factors that may lead to interpersonal conflict. As such communication flow was identified as a crucial aspect of information transfer thereby improving on performance. The question was thus posed to the respondents on how they regard. Majority of the respondents the communication approach of the organization. Majority of the respondents acknowledged that top-down approach of communication highly characterized information

transfer and this accounted for 44 (62.9%) while those whom characterized it as down-top accounted for 26 (37.1%).

The top-down approach is characterized by the top leadership whereby there is no consultation rather procedures are only enforced on employees. According to a research conducted by Psychometrics, Canada acknowledges that since individuals' communication and leadership styles are rooted in their values and what they see as important, this could be one of the more difficult areas in which to resolve conflict. When people disagree on what is important, conflict can become intractable and require a high level of skill to resolve. Respondents touched on the need for better communication and a willingness to deal with difficult individuals and situations before they get out of hand.

**Table 4.1: Communication approaches**

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
top-down	44	62.9
down-top	26	37.1
Total	70	100.00

Conflict resolution strategies rely more and more on the ability of the parties to communicate therefore it was imperative for the study to identify what conflict resolutions that respondents were more likely to employ within the organization. The five conflict strategies include avoiding, accommodating, competing, collaborating and compromising. The responses from the respondents from these questions were represented as highlighted below.

**Table 4.2: Conflict strategies**

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Competing	15	21.4
Accommodating	19	27.1
Compromising	10	14.3
Collaborating	15	21.4
Total	70	100.0

Accommodation was the most popular strategy through which employees dealt with conflict and they accounted for 19 (27.1%), competing was also represented at 15 (21.4%), respondents whom identified with these approach were quick to point out that competition was necessary especially among teachers whom share the same subjects and class levels. One respondent asked why they chose accommodation strategies was quoted as saying, “I would really despise if I ever got on the ‘wrong footing’ of colleagues with whom I have to work with everyday”

Opportunities for staff to communicate can have a bearing on what course conflict and tensions may take. Whether an organization or its leadership facilitates gatherings whether formal or informal to provide avenues for airing grievances may aid in management of conflict occurrences. 20 (28.6%) acknowledged that there were opportunities for airing grievances in formal meetings however informal gatherings were not facilitated within the organizational context but rather among various independent groups. These responses are highlighted in table 4.3

**Table 4.3: Opportunities for staff members to communicate**

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
strongly disagree	6	8.6
Disagree	17	24.3
Neutral	17	24.3
Agree	20	28.6
strongly agree	10	14.3
Total	70	100.0

#### **4.3 Competition for resources**

Conflicts are prone to arise especially in situations where there is a poor access to fundamental resources to enable a staff member to perform their duties. As Fleming (2006) notes that in good times when resources are plentiful, the potential for conflict through competition for resources is reduced. Resource scarcity therefore generates conflict because each person or unit that requires the same resource undermines others who also need that resource to fulfill their goals.

The study therefore sought to identify which resources are most likely to result to conflict and were still not accessible as it would be. Teaching materials were identified as the most likely source of conflict, teachers especially of more practical subjects such as the sciences were the majority of whom comprised of 27 (38.6%). Physical facilities accounted for 22 (31.4%) these included lockers, classrooms and laboratories. Human resources accounted for 17 (24.3%). Poor financing was blamed for this inefficiency within the schools especially so district secondary schools. Table 4.6 highlights the respondent's representation.

Although the Ministry of Education (MoE) has seen a steady increase in budgetary allocations the ministry has been accused of under-spending their allocations as per their development spending (The Kenya Education Sector Integrity Report 2010-Transparency International)

Financial resources are the most critical but their allocation to various bodies for disbursement also seems to be at the detriment of secondary schools and their teachers. For example the purchase of learning materials through the SIMBA account has attracted controversy. A total of Ksh 45 billion has since 2003 been disbursed to schools. However, a report by DFID indicates that 5.8 million books have been lost since the FPE began the losses cover a period of six years (2003-2008) estimated at an average cost of Kes 226 per book. This book attrition is unusually high in both quantity and cost.

The report also highlights the secrecy in which development projects in both primary and secondary schools are embedded in, for example the computer-for-schools project, and the installation of fire and laboratory equipment projects have flouted procurement procedures. This leads to suspicion among staff members especially those in leadership positions and their colleagues.

**Table 4.4: Limited resources**

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
teaching materials	27	38.6
human resources	17	24.3
physical facilities	22	31.4
Other	4	5.7
Total	70	100.0



It was relevant to identify the sentiments of staff members in secondary school on the governance structures that regulate their organizations as such the question was thus posed as; there is a culture of accountability, transparency regarding distribution of resources at your workplace? Whereby they would give their opinions the responses emanating from this item are represented in table 4.5

**Table 4.5 Accountability in resource allocation**

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
strongly disagree	10	14.3
Disagree	15	21.4
Neutral	18	25.7
Agree	18	25.7
strongly agree	9	12.9
Total	70	100.0

25 (35.7%) agreed that disagreed with the notion that there existed a clear and transparent culture regarding the distribution of resources. Various reasons were given such as favoritism to teachers whom had better performing classes or streams. Personal relationships were also identified as factors that would affect distribution of resources within the organization. 27(50.4%) agreed with the notion highlighting various factors, which included requirements by development partners to release records on the various resources and their allocation. This could be attributed by the various initiatives undertaken by the government and development partners in the civil society in improving the quality of education.

This was through the Kenya Education Sector Support Program (KESSP) as a collaborative effort between the government and development partners using the Sector Wide Approach (SWAP) as a sequel to the Sessional Paper No.1, KESSP provides a comprehensive framework for programme implementation. It also constitutes the first stage of the implementation of the new policy framework as laid out in Sessional Paper No.1 of 2005.it proposes the need for a lean education and training management structure at the ministry headquarters to provide policy direction, resource mobilization and allocation, quality assurance and maintaining standards

#### 4.4 Task interdependence

Respondents agreed that task interdependence was an occurring phenomenon in the school if they were to be able to survive and provide quality services. Most described task interdependence as reliance on other individuals or departments to be able to effectively perform their own duties and obligations. Task interdependence however also presented an opportunity for interpersonal conflict to occur and as such should be treated with caution. As noted by several studies have documented that task interdependence alters the course and consequences of conflict (Wilmot & Hocker, 2001). However they also represent an opportunity for higher performance with relevance to meeting organizational objectives as noted by Lam & Chin, 2004 that although high task interdependence increases the amount of interaction among members, it provides an incentive for collaboration.

The study therefore sought to identify how often task interdependence occurs at the schools and the responses were represented as follows. 26 (37.1%) concurred that task interdependence occurred always in the delivery of their duties. This they highlighted was due to the nature of related subjects whereby certain topics would need to be covered for a particular subject. This in most cases would result to a conflict whereby one teacher may not feel they are fully responsible to cover certain topics under their syllabus. 23 (32.9%) of the respondents acknowledged that it happened often and this was especially during the opening and closing periods of the school, this would also coincide with end of term/ year exams. These responses are highlighted in table 4.6

**Table 4.6: Frequency of task interdependence**

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Often	23	32.9
Always	26	37.1
Occasionally	19	27.1
Never	2	2.9
Total	70	100.0

The study also sought to find out the perceptions of individual teachers on the phenomenon of task interdependence. Research has suggested that perceptions of task interdependence have an effect or influence on resolving interpersonal conflict at the

workplace. In their review of research on team effectiveness, Wilmot & Hocker, (2001) drew attention to the antecedent role of task interdependence in conflict and other team processes. As such the question was thus posed to the respondents on what were the perceived benefits of task interdependence.

Nelson & Quick (2008) studies of interdependence are also important to highlight. The authors have also examined task interdependence as a job characteristic, but they used employees' perceptions to measure the variable. They found employee task interdependence perceptions were positively related to employee satisfaction employee and manager judgments of effectiveness and productivity suggesting a direct relationship between perceptions and team outcomes.

**Table 4.7: Perceived benefits of task interdependence**

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
employee satisfaction	24	34.3
employee effectiveness	18	25.7
employee productivity	24	34.3
Other	4	5.7
Total	70	100.0

From the total number of respondents 18 (25.7%) acknowledged that employee effectiveness would be better achieved through task allocation within teams. Effectiveness in his context would refer to the ability of individual to improve performance by use of the available resources at the workplace. Respondents who identified employee satisfaction and employee productivity were evenly distributed and accounted for 48 (68.6%). Interpretation of this would imply that employee's satisfaction is a factor for increase in employee productivity. Table 4.7 highlights these responses.

The study also sought to identify the belief of respondents on the ability to which task interdependence and hence working in teams had been identified as beneficial to an organization as noted by Ilgen (2006) In modern organizations, teams have become the method of choice for responding quickly to technological and market changes and thus improving the organization's chances of survival. Table 4.8 represents the responses.

**Table 4.8: Positive outcome of task interdependence**

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
strongly disagree	2	2.9
Disagree	10	14.3
Neutral	12	17.1
Agree	28	40.0
strongly agree	18	25.7
Total	70	100.0

28 (40%) of respondents acknowledged that allocation of tasks among staff members to form teams have had a positive outcome towards the performance and achievements of the organizations' objectives, along with 18 (25.7%). 12 (17.2%) disagreed with this notion. Task allocation among various members were blamed for severe workloads especially when the relationship was characterized by superior member of the staff. Feigning was identified as a major obstacle to team performance.

The secretive nature in the operation and management of the education sector can lead or foster conflict tendencies at the workplace, from the ministry down to the head teachers.

The study also sought response on the beliefs and attitude of teachers on the issue of interpersonal conflict at the workplace. These included the negative outcomes with which they associated this occurrence with. Table 4.9 indicates these responses.

**Table 4.9: Causes of interpersonal conflict**

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Personality clashes	16	23.5
Stress	17	25.0
Poor leadership	25	36.8
lack of openness/honesty	10	14.7
Total	70	100.0

25 (36.8%) identified poor leadership as the cause of interpersonal conflict at the workplace; the leader's role was according to them to facilitate communication between members of staff. Leadership or the lack thereof was identified to be the major cause of

conflict. Second on the list was stress accounting for 17 (25%). Personality of clashes represented 16 (23.5%) and as also identified as a root cause to all the others. Since individuals' communication and leadership styles are rooted in their values and what they see as important, this could be one of the more difficult areas in which to resolve conflict. Issues related to communication- lack of honesty and openness accounted for 10 (14.7%).

**Table 4.10: Responsibility to manage conflict**

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
BOG	11	15.7
education officers	20	28.6
Head teacher / deputy	32	45.7
Mine	7	10.0
Total	70	100.0

Through the research process it has been evident that everyone is susceptible and will most likely be involved in conflict. But to whom does the responsibility lie with for dealing with it at the workplace? As indicated in table 4.10 when asked the respondents identified the head teachers and their deputies as responsible for handling conflict scenarios and these accounted for 32 (45.7%) whereas education officers were represented for by 20 (28.6%) this was explained as due to the autonomous nature within the workplace setting but rather with only an interest in the smooth running of schools..Only 7 (10%) believed that they were arbitraries in conflict situations.

**Table 4.11: Negative outcomes of interpersonal conflict**

		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Valid	Employee turnover	20	29.4
	personal insults	14	20.6
	sickness/absenteeism	22	32.4
	Other	12	17.6
	Total	68	100.0

An organization experiencing interpersonal conflict is due to suffer in the long run, its effect (conflict) may be either short-term or long-term and in some cases both. The highest number of respondents acknowledged that employ turnover was the highest casualty of interpersonal conflict, these accounted for 20 (29.4%) Sickness / absenteeism was second with a representation of 22 (32.4%) whereas personal attacks comprised of 14 (20.6%) of the responses as reflected in table 4.11

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter represents a discussion and summary of the main findings. It also presents the conclusions and recommendations drawn from the findings of the study. It also highlights areas of further research.

#### 5.2 Summary of Findings

Through the data collection process the researcher was able to gain contact with all the intended respondents and successfully administered all the questionnaires. Respondents were also aware of the phenomenon of interpersonal conflict at their workplace and were ready to give information.

Analysis from the first question on the influence of communication revealed that it was a major factor that would influence the course and intensity of interpersonal conflict. Communication plays a key role in how information is passed from one party to another in performance of their duties. Other factors related to communication included lack of openness and honesty which implied that communication was a major underlying factor which may exacerbate conflict tendencies. Ambiguous rules and lack of clear role distinction is also an aspect related to communication particularly in the relationship between the leadership and the individual staff. Communication and leadership styles are rooted in their values and what they see as important; this could be one of the more difficult areas in which to resolve conflict. When people disagree on what is important, conflict can become intractable and require a high level of skill to resolve.

Resource mobilization in organization remains a critical issue as leaders and managers are in an every day effort to establish a clear balance between effectiveness and efficiency in job performance. In the education sector in Kenya this remains an uphill task and as such tensions in the workplace are given an impetus to develop. Head teachers and their personnel are in a constant flux when it came to the allocation of resources such as facilitation for procurement of learning materials. Previous studies have consistently shown that job resources, such as social support from supervisors and colleagues, are positively associated with work engagement (Bakker, 2007)

### 5.3. Discussion

Task interdependence was identified as a variable that has an effect on interpersonal conflict. While task interdependence refers to the objective degree to which group members are dependent upon one another to accomplish their work and is often referred to as a job characteristic, task interdependence perceptions refer to subjective impressions of task interdependence. As such ideas of interdependence were sought from the respondents which also included the various levels of interdependence. As Jehn (1995) notes whether task conflict is productive or not varies with the type of task, norms about conflict, and the degree of task interdependence (Jehn, 1995). Respondents identified certain periods of the year as the most likely to lead to conflict due to the high level of interdependence in job performance.

However it was realised that though task interdependence may give an impetus to conflict development but it also provides a ripe opportunity for individuals to work together thereby fostering greater teamwork. There is evidence that task conflict can lead to dissatisfaction and anxiety (Baron, 1990), but also evidence that it can also be productive (A and that it need not have a negative impact on satisfaction (Jehn, 1991), depending on the circumstances

The study also sought response which would address the various negative outcomes which emanate from interpersonal conflicts. Various options were identified from previous researches as the most likely effect of these conflict on the individual, both physically and psychologically - Stress and absenteeism were identified as negative outcomes. According to a study by Jehn 1995, interpersonal conflicts are very prevalent in occupational settings and have often been identified as a leading source of workplace stress. Such interpersonal conflicts could be caused by injustice, inequity, unfairness, or incompetence of the employees. Persistent conflict at work has been shown to be detrimental to the work climate and to negatively affect the physical and psychological well-being of employees.

### 5.4 Conclusion

The study identified three study objectives from which the research questions were formulated investigating the three independent variables- communication, resources and task interdependence. Respondents identified communication forms and channels as a major factor that would give room for tensions to escalate. This was particularly on the issue of ambiguity associated with various policy guidelines within the institutions.



Resource allocation was also blamed for intensification of conflicts especial liner group conflict, this was more so between different subject teachers, for instance more attention was diverted towards scientific subjects which require practical exercises. Lack of transparency within the education sector was blamed for limiting various stakeholders to identify procurement processes.

Task interdependence was also mentioned as an aspect of job performance what would lead to conflict in the workplace. 26 (37.1%) whom were the majority of respondents identified their job performance was involved in most of their task interdependence and as such would most likely lead to interpersonal conflict. However it is prudent to mention that respondent's also gave their account of task allocation among groups which leads to some interdependence on the input of the other would lead to positive outcomes. 28 (40%) of respondents agreed that positive outcomes-greater job performance- could be realised through task interdependence.

## **5.5 Recommendations**

Public secondary schools heads need to facilitate conflict resolution approaches that afford the best possible outcomes for teachers who experience conflict situations. As the world becomes more flat, we need to learn to survive in less hierarchical environments and rely more heavily on semi-autonomous work groups, self-managed teams, and matrix organizations.

Teachers should embrace the spirit of team work and appreciate the fact that the synergy of teamwork can be an extraordinary thing, and delivers results with incremental power while accomplishing more with less.

School managers and in particular the head teacher with the help of the BOG and PTA should pay careful attention to ensure that the available resources are distributed fairly and equally among the various departments so as to deliver a workforce that is able to meet the institution's goals.

In relation to communication head teachers should involve staff members in consultative meetings more often and also encourage open communication so as to foster cooperation among teachers.

School managers should develop clear roles and responsibilities for teachers to avoid task overlaps and also put in place clear channels of communication. Flow of information from the sector would go a long way in establishing trust thereby eroding suspicion among stakeholders in the sector. Secrecy that surrounds the education sector requires reform whereby there would be transparency and accountability in the sector.

Conflict resolution mechanisms should be included in the teacher training curriculum.

### **5.6 Areas of Further Research**

Following the findings of this research, the researcher suggests that further research be done on inter group conflict in the workplace.

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## APPENDIX

### Appendix I: Introduction letter

Joyce K. Muchemi

University of Nairobi

P.O. Box 12761 00100

Nairobi

08-06-2010

Dear Sir/ Madam

I am carrying out a study on the causes of conflict between teachers and head teachers in this area. You are hence requested to fill in this questionnaire to give your views on the major causes of conflict and how you feel it should be resolved. Your responses will be kept completely confidential and used for academic purposes only.

Looking forward to your positive response and cooperation.

Yours faithfully

Joyce Muchemi

L50/71408/2007

University of Nairobi – M.A student

## Appendix II: Research Questionnaire for Teachers.

This questionnaire will try to find out the role the causes of conflict between teachers and Head teachers. Kindly provide answers to these questions as honestly and precisely as possible. Responses to these questions will be treated as confidential. Please tick ( ) where appropriate or fill in the required information on the spaces provided.

### Part 1: Background information

1. What is your gender?

Male ( )

Female ( )

2. What age category do you belong to?

20 - 29 ( )                      30 -39 ( )

40 - 49 ( )                      over 50 ( )

3. What is your level of education?

Certificate ( )

Diploma ( )

Graduate ( )

Postgraduate ( )

4. How long have you worked as a teacher in secondary school

Less than 1 year ( )

2 -5 years ( )

6 - 10 years ( )

11 and above years ( )

5. What type of school are you teaching?

District school ( )

Provincial school ( )

National school ( )



**Part 2: Influence of communication on interpersonal conflict**

6. The following statements relate to the influence of communication on interpersonal conflict at the workplace. Rate them as per the given Likert scale

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>
staff members meet both formally or informally					
roles and responsibilities of staff members are clearly understood					
the organization demand use of (ICT) information technology and communication					
Policy guidelines on various issues and matters are clear					
There are laid down mechanisms and channels of handling interpersonal conflict					

7. What Conflict-handling strategies do you employ in the workplace?

Avoiding ( )

Competing ( )

Accommodating ( )

Compromising ( )

Collaborating ( )

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8. Which approach would you agree clearly represents communication flow within your organization?

Top-down ( )

Down-top ( )

**Part 3: Limited resources influence on interpersonal conflict in the workplace**

9. The following statements relate to the influence of limited resources on interpersonal conflict in the workplace. Rate them as per the given Likert scale

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>
Resources are evenly distributed among the various departments in the school					
Resources are readily available when required					
there are clear and transparent guidelines in procurement of resources					
There is a culture of accountability and transparency in resource distribution					

10. What resources do you think are mostly required and are likely to generate conflict at your workplace?

Financial ( )

Human ( )

Physical facilities ( )

Other .....

11. What do you think should be done to reinforce the availability of resource or maximise on the existing capacity of the organization?

.....

.....

**Part 4: Task interdependence and interpersonal conflict at the workplace**

a. The following statements relate to the influence of task interdependence on interpersonal conflict at the workplace

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>
Task interdependence improves job performance					
Performance of tasks are evaluated against objectives					
Allocation of different tasks to members have a significant outcome to the organization					

12. To what extent does your work depend on those of others at your workplace?

High ( )

Medium ( )

Low ( )

13. How often does this interdependence at your workplace occur?

Often ( )

Always ( )

Occasionally ( )

Never ( )

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14. What are your perceptions of the positive outcomes of task interdependence?

Employee satisfaction ( )

Employee effectiveness ( )

Employee productivity ( )

Other .....

## Part 5: Interpersonal conflict

15. How often do you experience interpersonal conflict?

Always ( )

Frequently ( )

Occasionally ( )

Never ( )

16. What do you presume to be the major causes of conflict in the workplace?

Personality clashes / warring egos ( )

Stress ( )

Poor leadership from the top of the organization ( )

Lack of honesty and openness ( )

17. What do you think are the negative outcomes of workplace conflict have you witnessed?

People left the organization ( )

Personal insults /attacks ( )

Sickness / absence ( )

People were fired ( )

18. Whose ultimate responsibility is it to ensure conflict is managed more effectively?

Board of Governors (BOG) ( )

Education officers ( )

Headmaster/Deputy ( )

None ( )