AUTHOR:
Dr Johan Kruger[1] iD
Prof Johan Beckmann[2] iD
Dr Andre Du Plessis[1] iD

AFFILIATION:
[1]University of Pretoria, South Africa

[2]University of Pretoria and University of the Free State, South Africa

The management and governance conundrum in South African public schools: principals' perspectives

ABSTRACT

The introduction of school governing bodies (hereinafter SGBs) changed the roles and functions of principals dramatically when this new approach to school governance and professional management (referred to as a participatory decision-making approach) was activated when the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (hereinafter SASA) was implemented in January 1997. Consequently, the principal is no longer the only decision-maker in the school. The principal as the protagonist in school management and governance (implementing SGB policy) is the role-player most affected by the introduction of the participatory decision-making approach. In this article, we discuss principals' perspectives regarding the shared participatory decision-making approach and the effects thereof on the relationship between the principal and the SGB. In this regard, it is important to note that the perceptions the two parties have of each other are established by the SGB's encroachment on the professional management functions of the principal and vice versa. The research findings concluded that the relationship between the principal and the SGB is often a relationship characterised by tension, no trust and irrational actions by the SGB. The relationship is further influenced by the functionality or lack of functionality of SGBs as well as prevailing socio-economic conditions and SGB members' levels of literacy. On the other hand, principals who do not adapt to participatory decision-making, and who still implement an assertive autocratic management approach, also contribute to a turbulent relationship.

Keywords: *public schools; school governance; school professional management; South African Schools Act*

1. Introduction

The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (hereinafter SASA) (Republic of South Africa (RSA),1996a) made it possible to give effect to a participatory form of democracy by redistributing power to local school communities while at the same time, centralised control over certain aspects of educational decision-making was abolished (Squelch, 1998:101; Smit & Oosthuizen, 2011:59). In principle, these stipulations in the SASA were intended to create democratic power-sharing and co-operative partnership between the State, parents, and educators (Karlsson, 2002). Principals

are now expected to implement democratic management models and leadership styles in schools (Mhone & Edighej, 2003). This is the reason why in the present-day governance of the school system a complex and broad set of inter-relationships between inter-dependent groups and individuals exists. This broad range of interests and involvement complicates school governance and the pattern of rule (Balarin *et al*., 2008:5).

In terms of section 20 (1)(a) of the SASA (RSA, 1996a) members of SGBs are democratically elected by parents, educators, learners and non-teaching staff members of a school to promote the best interests of a school (RSA, 1996a). In terms of section 20 (1) (b) the principal is a member of the SGB in his official capacity, and in terms of section 20(1) (c) a SGB also has the option to co-opt members to the SGB (RSA, 1996a). SGBs also have the democratic and statutory authority to adopt a constitution (section 20), recommend the appointment of teaching and non-teaching staff (section 20), determine the language policy of a school (section 6), adopt a code of conduct for learners (sections 8 and 9) and control the school property and financial resources (sections 20 and 21) (RSA, 1996a). In essence, it is a structure that has a great deal of influence in the school environment.

In addition, the directive principle in sub-section 4(m) of the National Education Policy Act 27 of 1996 (hereinafter NEPA) (RSA,1996b) stipulates that the national Minister of Basic Education must ensure broad public participation in the development of education by including stakeholders in policy-making and governance in the education system (RSA, 1996b). The National Development Plan 2030 (RSA, 2012) is clear that education requires political consensus. Participants in education include political parties, government, unions, the private sector, professional bodies, subject-specific associations, associations of governing bodies and the communities. New legislation after 1994 allowed SGBs to govern schools (Squelch, 1998; Smit & Oosthuizen, 2011:59) and provided public school principals with greater autonomy in respect of the professional management of their schools (Squelch, 1998; Oosthuizen, Roux & Van der Walt, 2003).

The article begins with a discussion regarding the peripheral school landscape in which the principal must operate, by referring to the proverbial 'three hats' public-school principals must wear in relation to the management and the governance conundrum, ultra vires actions of SGBs, and grassroots governance challenges.

2.   The three hats of a public–school principal

Section 16(3) of the SASA (RSA, 1996a) stipulates that the professional management of a public school must be undertaken by the principal (Hat 1) under the authority of the Head of Department of a province (Hat 2), his or her superior authority. Section 16(1) vests the governance of every public school in its SGB which may perform only such functions and obligations and exercise only such rights as prescribed by the Act.

The Education Laws Amendment Act 31 of 2007 added Section 16A to the SASA (RSA, 2007). Section 16A contains more detailed stipulations regarding the professional management duties of public-school principals. In terms of section 16A (1)(a) a principal of a public school represents the provincial Head of Department on the SGB when acting in an official capacity as contemplated in sections 23 (1) (b) and 24 (1) (j). The principal is therefore an ex officio (by virtue of his office) member of the SGB in accordance with section 23 (1) (f) of SASA (Hat 3).

Consequently, principals wear three proverbial hats namely: representing the school management team, the DBE, and the school community. As a result, public school principals find themselves in a precarious position because they must look after the interests of multiple stakeholders. This is one of the reasons why Sefeane (2013) argues that schools are complex institutions to manage, lead and govern.

This is explained by Beckmann (2002: 11) as follows:

> *In practice, the principal should implement the policies of the provincial education department when operating as a departmental employee, and, when dealing with the department in his/her capacity as governing body member, watch over the interests of the governing body, the school and the parent community. What makes the position of principals even more complex is that they often live among the parents and learners of their school where they must be cognisant of both the government and parents' expectations and must strive to work to the benefit of both the government and the community, while simultaneously ensuring that effective teaching and learning takes place within their schools. This balancing act is crucial to establish and maintain a relationship of trust with both the parents and learners*.

Furthermore, public school principals are obliged not to divert from the directives of the DBE (cf. sections 16A (2-3) of SASA) because the department pays his/her salary (Heystek, 2004). Simultaneously, the community can expect the principal to respect the expectations of the community (Heystek, 2004:308). The challenge is that if the principal acts against the department's instructions, such behaviour will be regarded as insubordination and the principal could be subjected to disciplinary action. On the other hand, if the principal does not support the SGB, the principal could be exposed to various forms of sanctions implemented by the SGB (the school-based authority).

2.1 Ultra vires actions of SGBs

In recent years the phenomenon of SGBs meddling in the professional management of schools has become more and more prevalent. Several scholars indicate that the most obvious demonstration of authority abuse can be found in the relationship between the principal and the SGB (Van Wyk, 2004; Mncube & Harber, 2013). This often leads to unhealthy relationships between school principals and SGBs that escalate to such levels of tension that court intervention becomes the only way to remedy the situation. In that regard, Serfontein and De Waal (2018:2) indicate that although authority is a necessary part of managing and governing a school, the desire for power can become a major challenge, as it is often abused for own gain. Authority used fraudulently, dishonestly or in bad faith, is prohibited by law (Hoexter, 2008). Power abuse, as set out by Makumbe and Chairman (1999) and expressed in section 33 (1) of the Constitution of 1996 includes the malevolent, unaccountable, devious, unlawful, unreasonable and procedurally unfair exercise of power. Some recent examples are presented below.

2.1.1   The Grey College case

The Grey College case is the most recent documented case of tension between a principal and the SGB. In that case, the court determined that the SGB did not have the power to make the pronouncements it made about the principal's management responsibilities because the SASA (RSA,1996a) does not sanction it. Therefore, it is imperative to be cognisant of the judgement in the Schoonbee case in which Judge Moseneke indicated that in the SGB and the principal relationship the principal is tasked to guide and assist the SGB in the execution

of its statutory functions. The SGB can delegate specific parts of their duties to the principal. However, a public-school principal is also answerable to the SGB, and it is the SGB that must hold the principal accountable for monetary and property affairs that are not specifically delegated to the principal by law as the principal is not the accounting officer of a public school (Prinsloo, 2016).

2.1.2   The Potchefstroom Boys High case

In this case, angry parents of the Potchefstroom High School for Boys and members of the SGB got together to protest against the principal. The meeting was arranged by the SGB urging parents not to take their children to school. According to the SGB, "parents of learners at Potchefstroom High School for Boys are resolute that the principal must be shown the door. This is based on poor results from Grade 8 to 12" (Van der Westhuizen, 2021). The South African Teachers' Union (SAOU) pointed out that the SGB was dysfunctional and was manipulating the parents of the school thus acting outside their jurisdiction (Van der Westhuizen, 2021).

2.1.3   The Theresapark case

In this incident, the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU) expressed objections to unlawful behaviour by the principal of the Theresapark Primary School. Multimedia footage was circulated where the principal was forcefully carried out of her office. It was alleged that the principal was being thrown out by a group of parents and the SGB. The parents and SGB allegedly released her from her duties (Mahlokwane, 2021).

2.2 School principals abusing power

Earley (cited in Van Wyk, 2004: 53) states that "in previous years, principals regulated South African schools affording parents, educators and learners very little to no opportunity to make inputs in reference to policy and decision-making". Educators and parents were functioning merely as secondary governors, reliant on the principal for information. Principals became used to exercising sole control and authority in public schools (Heystek, 2004). Having to deal with many stakeholders who might want to be active participants in the exercise of authority presented a challenge to many public-school principals (Heystek, 2011). This often led to unhealthy relationships between school principals and SGBs that escalated to such levels of tension that intervention by the DBE or courts became the only way to remedy the situation.

The Hoërskool Eldoraigne case is the most recent documented case where draconian management approaches by the principal led to tension with the SGB, parents, educators and learners. Parents, learners, and educators at Eldoraigne High School were shocked when the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) instructed the principal to report back for duty at school after being suspended pending an investigation into the way he managed the school. The educators and the school community reported the principal to the GDE because of his continuous bullying behaviour at school (Van der Merwe, 2021).

The charges against the principal included victimisation of staff members, the humiliation of staff members in the presence of others and threats that some staff members' contracts would not be renewed. A law firm appointed by the SGB recommended that the principal be investigated for misconduct (Willemse, 2021).

2.3 Additional grassroots governance challenges

At grassroots level, there are also various issues that contribute to tensions between principals and SGBs. Research by Mohapi and Netshitangani (2018) indicated that parent governors found it especially difficult to implement the functions of the SGB as articulated in the SASA (RSA, 1996a). Their research points out that some functions of SGBs are dependent on, and influenced by the socio-economic settings of schools and capacity differences of SGBs (Mohapi & Netshitangani, 2018). In that regard, Mohapi and Netshitangani's (2018) research revealed that low levels of education and literacy of some parent governors are linked to low-income regions while parent governors from wealthier regions have higher levels of education. Participants in the study indicated that they had challenges comprehending some of the discussions in the SGB meetings due to the English language barrier (Mohapi & Netshitangani, 2018).

Mohapi and Netshitangani's (2018) research suggested that what Mokoena (2005) emphasised in 2005, still held true: There are widely varying capacities among SGBs in affluent suburban schools and those in rural areas. SGBs in urban schools are dominated by well-off and highly qualified professionals and managers, predominately whites, but also include a small and growing complement of blacks who have accumulated some experience in running schools under the old model C system. SGBs in rural areas are often dominated by parents who are illiterate and without administrative and financial experience to oversee the affairs of the schools.

Mathonsi (2001) remarked that when SGBs are well-educated and capacitated in understanding their roles and responsibilities, they are able to govern schools well and improve the quality of education in South Africa. On the other hand, parent governors who are illiterate, present challenges when it comes to parent involvement in school activities (Mohapi & Netshitangani, 2018). In that regard, section 19(l) of SASA empowers the provincial Head of Department to establish a programme to provide introductory training for newly elected governing bodies to enable them to perform their functions and to also provide continuing training to governing bodies to promote the effective performance of their functions or to enable them to assume additional functions (RSA, 1996a). In essence, it is the duty of the provincial departments of education to assist SGBs that are not functional.

Another important marker of the functionality of the SGB is the respect that the SGB and the principal have for each other's functions and duties (Mohapi & Netshitangani, 2018). In that regard, Mohapi and Netshitangani (2018) mention that the perspectives the two parties have of each other are negatively affected by the SGB's encroachment on the professional management functions of the principal and vice versa.

Another major grassroots governance challenge is the SASA's expectations of the SGB. Some scholars such as Soudien (2003) and Duku (2006) criticise the SASA (RSA, 1996a) for being too much aligned with middle-class standards. They maintain that SASA has been drafted to reflect middle-class conditions and values, without any consideration given to disadvantaged societies. Soudien (2003) and Duku (2006) refer to the absolute assumptions made about parents in the SASA, wealthier regions for example: that they have sufficient time to take part in school activities without receiving any compensation for their time, and that they have the means to make decisions about their children's education (Soudien, 2003; Sayed & Soudien, 2005 in Duku, 2006). As a result, in some communities (particularly in less affluent

schools) parents seem to rely more on educators in matters of school governance (Duku, 2006; Mncube, 2009).

3.   Research methodology

This qualitative research project made use of a multiple case study design. Creswell and Poth (2017: 96) refer to a case study as *"a qualitative approach in which the researcher explores a phenomenon in an everyday realistic, bounded system (a case) over a period of time, through comprehensive, in-depth collection techniques like interviews, documents and reports"*. This design enabled the researchers to collect data in bounded systems namely twenty-four public schools in four school districts in Gauteng. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the principals in these bounded systems (schools) to determine their perspectives of participatory decision-making and the effects it has on the relationship between the principal and the SGB.

Data coding was used to analyse the transcriptions of the semi-structured interviews. The data coding began with the identification of significant segments (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014) to formulate meaningful words or phrases that were grouped into categories. The categories were the main ideas that were used to describe the meaning of similarly coded data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The categories were then arranged into themes and the themes into clusters of themes. Finally, the themes and clusters of themes in patterns were grouped together. A pattern formed the connections between categories (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014).

4.   Presentation and discussion of the data

From the analysis of the data the following sub-themes appeared:

- • Negative perspectives about school governing bodies;

- • Positive perspectives about school governing bodies;

- • Keys to functional principal and SGB relationships; and

- • The importance of establishing boundaries between professional management and governance.

Each sub-theme is discussed below.

4.1 Negative perspectives about school governing bodies

Several participants from predominantly poorer schools had negative perceptions regarding their relationship with their SGBs. For example, Participant 10 said that he "*must deal with very nasty people"* in his school governing body *and Participant* 12 indicated that the SGB was a structure that he *disliked* and that *"it is a structure that is more of a hindrance than a help."* These opinions were supported by Participants 14, 18 and 19 who emphasised that some SGB members had hidden agendas that were not in the best interest of the schools. This also led to conflict and the SGBs then sometimes reacted by withdrawing duties that they had allocated to the principal as it could provide the parent members with more freedom to promote their own vested interests.

Participant 9 said that the chairperson of his SGB interfered with the professional management of the school. He explained as follows:

> *My school governing body chairman tends to be too involved sometimes and actually makes a nuisance of himself. The SGB must know it should be 'hands off' regarding professional school matters.*

Some participants pointed out that many parent members of SGBs were not highly educated and that they lacked the capacity to make well-informed and rational governance decisions. They also mentioned that such parents were generally employed in the lower levels of the private and public sectors. Consequently, most of them were not familiar with the principles of good governance and they struggled to make positive contributions in the SGB. This led to a great deal of tension when the principal disagreed with proposals made by the SGB that were not viable or in the best interest of the learners. Although an uneducated parent serving on an SGB can be a good governor, research findings indicate that it is not the norm (Mohapi & Netshitangani, 2018; Mathonsi, 2001; Soudien, 2003; Duku, 2006; Mncube, 2009).

Some of the participants indicated that they had multi-cultural and multi-racial SGBs and, if the principal was from a different racial group than the rest of the members of the SGB, conflict often occurred and that some SGB members would go out of their way to make the principal's interactions with the SGB unpleasant.

According to Participant 12, his SGB chairman told him that *"the school must be led by a person of colour and that transformation is too slow at the school"*.

Participant 21 mentioned that in an SGB meeting it was said that it was unacceptable that the school still had the name of a previous Afrikaner leader and that the school was still managed and co-governed by a white person.

Participant 18 indicated that the SGB had informed her that the leadership had to be transformed to form better associations with learners and parents.

> *"Leaders from the same culture as the learners and parents have a better understanding of the cultures and customs and that leads to more trust"*.

There is thus a discernible racist undertone that impedes the principal-SGB relationship at some of the participating schools.

Participants 4, 9, 12, 19 and 22 were cautioned by their SGBs that, if they did not implement the SGBs' policies, the SGB would limit their statutory powers and would proceed without the principal.

Participant 9 indicated that *"the chairperson of the SGB informed me that you either comply with the demands of the SGB or else your duties will be allocated to other staff members"*.

Participant 22 pointed out that *"the SGB on several occasions forced me to implement policy and [said] that if I did not support them, they would implement it on my behalf"*.

Participants 3, 10, 12, 14, 18 and 19 alluded to the fact that SGBs terms of office were short and SGBs only had short-term visions while the principals had long-term visions for the school. This often led to a great deal of tension.

Participant 3 expressed the above notion in the following way, *"the SGB plans for now while I must make long-term plans. This leads to a lot of tension"*.

Participant 18 indicated that *"the SGB wants to make a statement by focusing on short-term projects because they only have a three-year term. I, on the other hand, must focus on the long-term. This leads to conflict"*.

4.2 Positive perspectives

A relatively small number of the participants perceived their SGBs in a positive light. These participants managed schools in more affluent communities. They indicated that they were "*spoilt*" with professional parents serving on their SGBs. For example, Participant 22 stated that:

> Our governing body chairman is an accredited accountant. Our finance committee consists of three chartered accountants. In addition, we have a structural engineer who looks after the school's infrastructure, and we also have two lawyers who serve on the governing body.

In a similar vein, Participant 7 remarked that:

> I have a positive relationship with my SGB. They support me in the vision I have for the school. All of them are professionals and they bring a lot of knowledge to the table.

Participant 23 indicated that he had a good working relationship with his SGB:

> We have a united front. We also co-opted a person to manage conflicts that might arise between members on the SGB. This makes my work easier.

According to Participants 2, 13, 17, 23 and 24, their SGBs entrusted them with many functions. They received a great deal of support from their SGBs and they had the freedom to approach the SGBs with any problem they had at school.

4.3 Keys to a functional principal–SGB relationship

Participants shared their perspectives on aspects that contribute to a functional principal and SGB relationship. Participants indicated that the relationship between the principal and the SGB must be built around the best interests of the learners and staff. There must be transparency in management and governance. The school principal and the SGB must work in harmony, and they must have a shared vision for the school. The principal must establish cooperation between the SGB and the school management. It is important for the principal to establish a cordial and professional relationship with the SGB. The participants stressed the importance of mutual respect and trust that the principal and the SGB must have for each other. In this regard Participant, 4 explained that *"it is important to establish a relationship of trust. You earn trust by keeping the SGB well-informed"*. A similar view was expressed by Participant 7 who indicated that he had an open relationship with his SGB and underlined the importance of always keeping the relationship professional.

Participant 14 emphasised that:

> There must be a mutual understanding and a mutual agreement between the principal and the SGB. In other words, an amicable relationship, because the principal needs to work with the SGB and the SGB with the principal. A diplomatic relationship must exist.

Participant 1 stated that *"you need to tie people and you need a collective focus on where the school is heading"*.

4.4 The importance of establishing boundaries between professional management and governance

Earlier, we referred to principals' proverbial three hats in relation to the management and governance challenges. The duality of being involved in management and governance featured prominently in the responses. The fact that professional school management and governance stand adjacent to each other is the main reason why a strong emphasis on the need to establish clearly defined boundaries between management and governance came to the fore.

Participants were adamant about the importance of establishing clear boundaries between management and governance. They highlighted the importance of proper communication in setting clear boundaries between management and governance functions. Participant 10 explained as follows: *"Right at the beginning of the SGB's term, I set the boundaries of professional management and governance"*.

Participant 24 emphasised that *"[if] the SGB knows what its duties are and if there is continuous interactive communication, a productive relationship will develop. It is important to communicate the boundaries"*.

Participant 4 mentioned that when she was appointed as a principal, she communicated to the SGB that they must trust her:

> *This means you do not interfere in my professional management of the school, and you stick to your functions which are the governance of the school. It is important to set firm peripheries regarding the management and governance [of the school].*

Although it is important to have respect for each other's boundaries, principals must guard against not being transparent when it comes to professional management issues. If the principal manages the school in a silo the principal and SGB relationship will become unhealthy.

5.   Discussion

The participants had mixed perspectives regarding their relationships with their SGBs. On one hand, there were participants who had strongly antagonistic feelings about their SGBs. These participants expressed their displeasure with the SGB by using words like: *"nasty people"* (Participant 10); *"a structure I dislike"* (Participant 12); *"lacked capacity"* (Participants 3, 10, 12, 14, 18 and 19); "*racism*" (Participants 12, 18 and 21); *"intimidation"* (Participants 4, 9, 12, 19 and 22); "*hidden agendas*" (Participants 12, 14, 18 and 19) and *"threats to curtail duties"* (Participants 4, 9, 12, 19 and 22).

The deduction can be made that a principal who had negative experiences with a previous SGB could enter a relationship with a newly elected SGB with preconceived beliefs that all SGBs are bad and should not be trusted. There is then a danger that a principal could be the source of the problem should the relationship with his or her SGB turn sour. Furthermore, principals must guard against temptations to act too assertively or defensively towards SGBs if they do not agree with the SGBs. Such conduct could contribute to a toxic relationship (Van Wyk, 2004).

It seems that some principals find it difficult to adapt to the participatory decision-making approach. This deduction is especially pertinent to principals who belong to the so-called 'baby boomer' generation. These are the educators that were in management positions at schools

before 1994 when the system was still highly centralised and parents had a limited voice in the education of their children. The Department of Basic Education failed these educators in the sense that there were no programmes implemented to assist these educators to adapt to a democratic education system.

The data indicate that, if principals did not agree with the SGB on governance issues, some SGBs reacted irrationally by curtailing the principal's duties through actions that were not always legal. The deduction is supported by recent incidences where SGBs attempted to remove principals from schools as mentioned earlier. The fact that some SGB members are not highly educated can directly be associated with the reasons why they may act irrationally towards the principal. Because these parents work in lower levels of the private and public sectors, they may not be familiar with or exposed to the principles of good governance and therefore struggle to make positive contributions in the SGB. This can lead to tension when the principal disagrees with proposals made by the SGB that are not viable or in the best interest of the learners (Mohapi & Netshitangani, 2018; Participants 3, 10, 12, 14, 18 and 19). An important deduction to make from this is that the SASA assumes that all SGB members will positively contribute to SGBs in which they serve. South Africa is one of the most diverse and unequal countries in the world and the DBE should consider a more contextually intelligent approach when it comes to SGBs (Soudien, 2003; Duku, 2006). Consequently, the SASA must be amended in such a way that it takes cognisance of the contextual differences in communities. Furthermore, the training of SGBs becomes a vital imperative to ensure effective governance at school as it seems that the current training programmes for newly elected SGBs are not up to standard. The DBE must include other role-players such as governing body federations, teacher unions and universities to assist in the development of training programmes.

The data further revealed that some SGB members have vested interests and such members often compromise the principal and SGB relationship. In such cases, there is a lack of trust between the principal and the SGB because of a lack of transparency and open lines of communication (Participants 12, 14, 18 and 19). The deduction can be made that SGB elections must be solely based on a parent's abilities and the positive contributions a member can make towards the school. Pre-SGB election meetings with parents that indicate their availability to serve on SGBs can be introduced as one of the steps in the SGB process. This is in line with arguments made by Serfontein and De Waal (2018) and Hoexter (2008).

The data also revealed that principal SGB relationships are influenced by race. Although South Africa is in its 27th year of being a non-racial democracy, the issues and sensitivities around race are still a determining factor in many sectors of society, especially in the education sector. Some of the participants indicated that they had multi-cultural and multi-racial SGBs and when because the principal is from a different racial group than the rest of the members of the SGB, conflict often occurs and some SGB members do their utmost to undermine the principal's authority (Participants 12, 18 and 21). This suggests that both principals and SGBs must receive in-depth training on politically sensitive issues such as race. The researchers could not find any literature that specifically addressed this matter from a South African perspective. This seems to be an area that needs the urgent attention of the education authorities.

On the other hand, there were participants who had positive interactions with their SGBs. Those participants used words like: *"professionals"* (Participant 22); *"support"* (Participant 7)

and *"united front"* (Participant 23) to describe their relationships with SGBs. The research identified two foundations of a healthy relationship between principals and SGBs. Firstly, the participants referred to the establishment of well-defined boundaries between the professional management functions of the principal and the governance duties of SGBs. The importance of proper communication in setting clear boundaries between management and governance is a prerequisite for establishing and maintaining a healthy principal-SGB relationship (Participants 4, 6, 10, 12, 18, 19 and 24). Consequently, if there are no clearly defined and agreed-upon boundaries between the principal's leadership and management functions and the SGB's governance domains, the potential for interference in each other's domains increases exponentially and could lead to mistrust and tension. By clearly distinguishing between the professional management and governance of schools, the principal can protect his/her management domain. However, when establishing these boundaries, principals must guard against managing the school in a silo as it is against the democratic vision of the SASA.

Secondly, the participants mentioned that effective and successful principal-SGB relationships flourish where: the best interests of the learners and staff are placed at the forefront; there is transparency in management and governance; the principal and the SGB purposefully work in harmony; the principal and the SGB have a shared vision for the school; the principal and SGB promotes sound cooperation between the SGB and the school management; and, where there is mutual respect and trust between the principal and the SGB (Participants 1, 2, 4, 7, 11, 13, 14, 23 and 24).

The Grey College, Potchefstroom Boys High and Theresapark incidents are examples of how quickly relationships can become toxic when role players do not understand and respect or the role that each are supposed to perform. The cases also underscore how vested interests can undermine the best interest of a school in general and the learners in particular. Furthermore, the Hoërskool Eldorainge case should serve as a warning to despotic principals who believe that 'their way is the highway'. Such a mentality will ignite the wrath of the school governing body who represents the school community. As the protagonist in this complex relationship, the principal should be open to suggestions from school governing body and the school management team. In so doing, the partnership-principle as envisaged in the Preamble of SASA will be promoted.

6. Conclusion

Against the background of the provisions of the SASA, both the school principal and the SGB have an obligation to establish an ethical culture to ensure that their relationships are conducive to effective communication and decision-making. In an effective relationship, no one should be powerless and mistrusted. Trust is earned if one acts in good faith towards another and the school. In a trusting environment, decision-making can be carried out by one person after consultation with other stakeholders. To build trust among stakeholders (SGB/parents/ teachers and non-teaching staff/learners/the community/DBE/NGOs) in a school there is a need for cooperation rather than a desire to compete or dominate. A trusting relationship is an interactive process, involving the sharing of information, ideas, and feelings.

Principals and SGBs must, therefore, be open and transparent about the school's objectives and demonstrate expertise without being oppressive or trying to signal superiority. In this way, mutual trust between stakeholders will be fostered.

The operative word in trust is reciprocity and it is important to share rather than conceal feelings. Thoughts should be expressed in ways that respect parents' and learners' rights so that they can understand and appreciate what the school management and SGB are trying to achieve.

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