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The Relationship of Principal Conflict Management Style and School Climate

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THE RELATIONSHIP OF PRINCIPAL CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLE AND SCHOOL CLIMATE

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my family, learners all, whose energy, curiosity, and joy in learning have inspired my own; and especially to my husband, Ken. His wisdom, patience, and encouragement have made all the difference.

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ABSTRACT

Using a mixed-methods design, this study examined conflict management styles of elementary school principals in South Carolina and the relationship of conflict management style and school climate. The Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory-II, Form B, which identifies five styles of managing conflict, was used to determine principal conflict management style preferences. Eight indicators on the South Carolina school report cards were used to measure school climate. Seven principals were interviewed to obtain additional information on conflict management style preferences. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and the Spearman's rho statistic. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed to provide qualitative data. Principals in the study strongly preferred the Integrating conflict management style. No significant correlation was found to exist between principal conflict management style and school climate indicators. The interviews extended the understanding of principal conflict management practices. Principals linked trust, listening, addressing conflict issues promptly and directly, and self-knowledge to effective conflict management practices.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The history of education in the United States provides a history of education

reform. Major reforms since mid-twentieth century have focused primarily on improving

student achievement, and the effects of these reforms have carried over into twenty-first

century education practices. Of particular note are reforms brought about by the

Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965; the Equality of Educational

Opportunity Study of 1966, widely known as the Coleman Report; A Nation at Risk: The

Imperative for Educational Reform of 1983; and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001

(NCLB), which became law in 2002. In 2009, the American Recovery and Reinvestment

Act of 2009 (ARRA) was signed into law. This legislation focused on stimulation of the

economy; support for job creation; and investment in critical sectors, including education.

To this end, $4.35 billion was initially allocated for the Race to the Top program, which

provided, through competitive grants to states, funding for school and district

improvement. The full appropriation for ARRA had been awarded by the end of 2010.

These reform measures have been accompanied by increased accountability. During the

latter part of the twentieth century and first decade of the twenty-first century, states

developed state-wide curriculum standards and assessments, which often varied widely

from state to state. A number of state assessments were developed before NCLB, and the

disparity in the rigor of assessments allowed for inequity in reported student

achievement and rankings from state to state. The differences in reported achievement affected federal funding awarded to states and districts, particularly under the guidelines of NCLB.

The most recent reform effort is the Common Core Standards Initiative, which arose in part to rectify the problem of the disparity in standards from state to state, and also to address student mobility, global competition, and skills needed for today's jobs. The Common Core Standards Initiative has produced core standards in two areas, mathematics and English language arts and literacy, which have been developed under the leadership of the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers. This initiative is state-led, and state adoption of the Common Core State Standards (Core Standards) is voluntary. As of early 2013, 45 states, the District of Columbia, four United States territories, and the Department of Defense Education Activity have adopted the Core Standards. South Carolina is one of these. Currently, states are collaborating to develop common assessments aligned to the Core Standards. These are to be available for use by 2014-2015. Once common assessments of the Core Standards are in use, assessment of student achievement can be compared among all participating states. This holds the potential for ensuring high standards on a national level. This also implies pressure on schools and states to produce student achievement that is competitively high.

State reform efforts have paralleled the national push for education reform. In South Carolina, this is evident in the state's adoption of the Core Standards as well as in recent state legislation related to education. The Education Accountability Act of 1998

(EAA), has been a key influence on education practices in South Carolina. The law states:

> The General Assembly finds that South Carolinians have a commitment to public education and a conviction that high expectations for all students are vital components for improving academic achievement. It is the purpose of the General Assembly . . . to establish a performance based accountability system for public education which focuses on improving teaching and learning so that students are equipped with a strong academic foundation. Accountability . . . means acceptance of the responsibility for improving student performance and taking actions to improve classroom practice and school performance by the Governor, the General Assembly, the State Department of Education, colleges and universities, local school boards, administrators, teachers, parents, students, and the community. Section 59-18-100

The EAA mandates academic standards in core academic areas; an assessment program that measures student performance; accountability on specific measures of student, school, and district performance; and sanctions for schools and districts that fail to meet the prescribed standards. The mandates of the EAA and NCLB highlight the importance of school success.

Although the search for ways to improve schools is not new, current reform efforts highlight its importance. A look at factors considered to have affected school performance offers a window into new ways of improving schools. School climate is one of those factors, and has been studied from a number of perspectives for more than four decades, with varying emphases. A number of researchers (Edmonds, 1982; Edmonds &

Frederiksen, 1979; Goddard, Sweetland, & Hoy, 2000; Heck, 2000; Lezotte & Jacoby, 1990) have linked school climate to school effectiveness. Principal leadership has also been an area of interest. Some studies focus on leadership styles and behaviors (Bass, 1985; Bennis, 1989; Bennis & Nanus, 1987; Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002; Kouzes & Posner, 1987). Others investigate specific leadership traits (Kenny & Zaccaro, 1983; Lord, De Vader, & Alliger, 1986; Stogdill, 1948, 1964; and Zaccaro, 2007). Leader conflict management style is one of the leadership characteristics of interest to students of organizational effectiveness within general leadership and management studies and within education.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between principal conflict management style and school climate, with the intent of furthering the knowledge related to factors that contribute to school improvement. The study builds on the conflict management work of Blake and Mouton (1964), Thomas (1976, 1992), and Rahim (2001) and on the school climate work of a number of researchers, including Anderson (1982), Gettys (2003), Stevenson (2006), Sweeney (1992), and White (2005). In addition to contributing to operational knowledge for educational practitioners, the investigation stands to extend the understanding of the work of these researchers.

Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What conflict management styles do South Carolina's elementary school principals prefer?

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2. What relationship exists between principal conflict management style and the following resource indicators of school climate: percent of teachers returning from the previous year, percent of teachers with advanced degrees, average teacher salary, and teacher attendance rate?

3. What relationship exists between principal conflict management style and the following process indicators of school climate: percent of teachers satisfied with the learning environment, percent of teachers satisfied with the social and physical environment, percent of teachers satisfied with home-school relations, and engagement in professional development?

4. In what ways do principal conflict management style preferences relate to principals' work with teachers?

Significance

This study examines the relationship between principal conflict management style and school climate in elementary schools in South Carolina. Principal conflict management style is an aspect of principal leadership style. In a 2004 study sponsored by The Wallace Foundation, Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom found that "leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn in school" (p. 3) and that leadership effects are usually strongest when and where they are needed most. The report further asserts what practitioners have likely experienced, which is that effective leaders contribute to student learning indirectly, to a great extent through their influence on other people and on features of the organization. This indirect influence, as it involves those aspects of school climate related to teachers and their work, is the focus of this study.

The study extends the research relating to leader conflict management style and its effects on organizational success within the field of organizational studies and in education. Within education, a number of recent studies have investigated one or more aspects of conflict management style, leadership style, and school climate (Blackburn, 2002; Blackburn, Martin, & Hutchinson, 2006; Dillard, 2005; Feiten, 2010; Hoffman, 2007; Reed, 2005; Robinson, 2010; Scallion, 2010; Tabor, 2001). With the exception of Scallion's qualitative study of school climate, the works cited have used quantitative research methods. The current investigation, using a mixed-methods approach, provides a different perspective on the study of these topics.

Study Design

This study examines principal conflict management preferences of South Carolina elementary school principals and the relationship of conflict management preferences to aspects of school climate. South Carolina public elementary school principals who had served in their present position for at least two consecutive prior years and who lead schools with a pre-kindergarten through grade five or a kindergarten through grade five configuration were invited to participate. Principal responses to the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory-II, Form B (ROCI-II)[1] instrument identified conflict management style preferences. Using quantitative correlation measures, the study investigated principal conflict management preferences and school climate indicators from South Carolina school report cards. From the conflict management profiles from the ROCI-II, the researcher selected for individual interviews seven principals

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[1] Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory-II, Form B. Used with permission from the © Center for Advanced Studies in Management. Further use or reproduction of the instrument without written permission is prohibited.

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representing varying conflict management styles. The interviews were designed to more deeply investigate principal conflict management style preferences and the ways these preferences come into play in principals' work with teachers. The intent was to gain a clearer understanding of the ways principals' work with teachers may relate to school climate.

Methodology

This research employed a mixed methods design to study the relationship between principal conflict management style preferences and elements of school climate and to probe for a deeper understanding of the relationship between conflict management style and school climate through investigating principals' understanding and use of conflict management styles in their work with teachers. Data on conflict management style were collected from principal responses to the ROCI-II, and school climate data were obtained from the South Carolina school report cards. A statistical correlation procedure was conducted to investigate the relationship between conflict management style and climate indicators. Following the analysis of principal conflict management preferences, seven principals were selected by the researcher for semi-structured individual interviews. The interviews explored principals' conflict management preferences as they relate to principals' work with teachers.

Limitations

A number of factors are related to school climate and school success. This study is limited to the study of principal conflict management style as it relates to school climate. The following limitations apply:

1. The instrument used to measure principal conflict management style preference, the (ROCI-II), is a self reporting instrument, and the results may be subject to reporter bias.

2. The conflict management styles studied are limited to the five measured by the ROCI-II.

3. The school climate factors studied are limited to those reported on the South Carolina school report cards.

Delimitations

The following delimitations further define the research:

1. The schools studied are public elementary schools within the state of South Carolina. Schools included in the survey serve students in four-year-old or five-year-old kindergarten through grade five, with grade five as the terminal grade in the school.

2. Principals included in the research must have served in their current assignment for at least two years prior to the research year.

3. Principals who were interviewed were selected by the researcher and responded to questions developed by the researcher. Different questions or the selection of different principals to be interviewed would have resulted in different interview responses and different qualitative data.

Organization of the Study

Chapter I introduced the study and presented the purpose, research questions, significance, methodology, limitations, and delimitations. Chapter II presents a review of the literature and research pertinent to the topic. Chapter III provides the research design

and methodology. Results of the research are presented in Chapter IV. Chapter V offers a summary of the findings, conclusions based on the findings, and recommendations for action and further research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The work of a school occurs within the context of the school's climate. When one spends time in a school, one detects a psychological atmosphere, a dynamic environmental quality unique to that school. This quality is of interest to researchers and practitioners concerned with improving the effectiveness of schools and affecting student learning.

Organizational Climate

The study of school climate has evolved from the organizational effectiveness studies of the twentieth century, and work from these studies has helped shape the understanding of climate. In a 1958 case study of interpersonal relationships in a bank, Argyris found three systems of interacting variables contributing to climate: formal organizational variables such as policies and procedures; personality variables of the workers such as abilities, values, and needs; and informal variables related to workers' attempts to carry out the mission of the organization while meeting their own needs as well. Organizational climate, according to Argyris, is "composed of elements representing many different levels of analysis" (p. 516). One variable or set of variables alone does not constitute the organization. The elements or variables viewed together in a meaningful pattern represent a new level of analysis, organizational behavior.

Psychologist Kurt Lewin's (1935, 1997) field theory also describes three units of analysis within organizations: the person, the environment or field, and behavior.

Behavior, Lewin asserts, arises from the interaction of the individual and the organizational environment, or climate. In another discussion of organizational climate, Forehand (1968) sets forth three sets of variables: environmental, which refer to an organization's size and structure; personal, which include the motives, attitudes, and aptitudes workers bring to the work environment; and outcome variables, which relate to job satisfaction, motivation, and productivity. Focusing also on environmental factors and behavior, Sells (1968) holds that study of organizational climate "requires concern with the physical and social environmental contexts as well as with behaviors of persons in organizational situations" (p. 85).

Taguiri (1968) describes organizational climate as consisting of four parts: ecology, milieu, social system, and culture. Ecology refers to the physical and material aspects of the environment; milieu, to persons and groups; social system, to the patterns of relationships of persons or groups; and culture, to the values, belief systems, and meaning systems of the environment. This understanding of organizational climate, which is widely accepted (Van Houtte, 2005), provides a frame for other studies, including the work of Anderson (1982), cited in this research.

School Climate

In a 1979 study of school climate, Brookover et al. found that schools with effective learning climates had three general characteristics: the ideology of the school, the school's organization, and the school's instructional practices (p. 3). These researchers saw the interaction of all three characteristics, not just one or two in isolation, as key in producing effective learning environments. In another 1979 study, Moos

investigated school environments by looking at three variables: relationship dimensions, personal or growth orientation, and system maintenance and change. He, too, studied the interaction of factors in producing school climate in educational settings. Subsequent researchers have been interested in the interplay of climate variables as well.

Among the early students of school climate were Andrew W. Halpin and Don B. Croft, who researched school climate for the United States Department of Education, which published a report of their work in 1962.   From their research, Halpin and Croft developed the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire (OCDQ), which measures teacher-teacher and teacher-principal interactions. The OCDQ has undergone a number of revisions; and separate versions for elementary, middle, and high schools are currently in use (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). The elementary version defines the climate of elementary schools in six behavioral dimensions: supportive principal behavior, directive principal behavior, restrictive principal behavior, collegial teacher behavior, intimate teacher behavior, and disengaged teacher behavior (Hoy, Tarter, & Kottkamp, 1991). These six behavioral dimensions can be combined to yield four dimensions of school climate: engaged, disengaged, closed, and open (Reed, 2005), all referring to interactions of principal and teachers.

In 1982, Anderson conducted a comprehensive study of school climate based on more than 200 references. The study is organized around the taxonomy of climate-related terms developed by Taguiri in 1968: ecology, milieu, social systems, and culture. In Anderson's work, ecology refers generally to the environment, including buildings, grounds, materials, equipment, and financial incentives; milieu, to general well-being; social system, to characteristics of interaction such as competitiveness, cohesiveness,

intimacy, and aloofness; and culture, to characteristics such as intellectual orientation, esprit, and goal direction. In her conclusion, Anderson emphasizes that the mechanisms by which individual and group level variables interact to create positive school climate are unclear beyond a theoretical level. She urges further study, stating that "we are left with many gaps in our knowledge of school climate" (p. 411).

Other research has provided important data regarding school climate as well. In a 1988 monograph for the American Association of School Administrators, Sweeney listed 10 factors common in schools with positive climates. These are as follows: a supportive, stimulating environment; a student-centered environment; positive expectations; feedback; reward; a sense of family; closeness to parents and community; communication; achievement; and trust. These factors refer to interactions of principal, teachers, and students and attitudes of each group.

In 1992, Sweeney reported on research conducted in more than 600 schools across the United States that used the School Improvement Inventory, an instrument developed for use in the Iowa State University School Improvement Model (SIM) project. From these data, Sweeney described key beliefs that affect school faculty and their interactions as related to school climate. These beliefs relate to the current study of principal conflict management style and its relationship to school climate, particularly in the descriptions of personal characteristics that influence interpersonal interactions. These key beliefs are listed below:

> *Respect for the individual*, or the extent to which teachers convey consideration
> for the needs and values of each person in the school;

Self esteem, or the extent to which teachers feel that they are valued by

administrators, students, parents, and community;

Sense of efficacy, or the extent to which teachers feel that they and the school

make a difference;

Control, or the extent to which teachers consider that they have sufficient

influence on events and activities that occur in the school;

Achievement orientation, or the extent to which teachers strive for results;

Collegiality, or the extent to which teachers work together and with

administrators, share with and help each other, and receive help and support from

their supervisors; and

Trust, or the extent to which confidentiality, honesty, expertise, and fairness are

exhibited by supervisors and colleagues. (p. 71)

These values and beliefs describe key aspects of teacher-principal interactions and characterize aspects of school climate.

South Carolina school report cards contain a number of indicators associated with the climate of South Carolina schools, including items related to students, teachers, and parents. The next section will discuss the South Carolina school report cards and climate indicators. Of particular interest are the climate factors related to principals and teachers, since these are pertinent to the questions asked in the current study.

School Climate and School Report Cards

School report cards, sometimes referred to as school profiles or performance reports, are means of informing the public about the status of schools; and a number of states issue them. Report cards can vary from state to state and sometimes from district

to district in appearance, content, and mode of delivery. Most contain a variety of information related to student achievement and school climate (Johnson, 2003).

South Carolina's school and district report cards are a requirement of South Carolina's Education Accountability Act of 1998 (SC Code of Laws, Title 59, Chapter 18), which mandates that each individual school and school district in the state issue an annual report card to inform parents and the public about the school's performance. According to the law, report cards must provide student performance indicators and "should also provide a context for the performance of the school," including "information in such areas as programs and curriculum, school leadership, community and parent support, faculty qualifications, evaluations of the school by parents, teachers, and students." The law also requires that the report card provide "information on promotion and retention ratios, disciplinary climate, dropout ratios, dropout reduction data, student and teacher ratios, and attendance data" (SC Code of Laws, 59-18-900 (D)). From these data, information on school climate can be obtained.

In a study of the development and use of school profiles, or report cards, Johnson (2003) grouped the indicators from school report cards into four categories: context, resource, process, and outcome. These categories represent elements of school climate, including those reported in school report cards. Context indicators include data such as the percentage of students participating in free or reduced lunch, percentage of students in various ethnic categories, student mobility rate, and demographic information regarding student body and community. Resource indicators refer to items such as per-pupil expenditure, staff turnover rate, teacher educational level, and types of resources available to a school for delivery of its services. Process indicators involve factors such

as educational policies and procedures, allocation of time during the school day dedicated to various subject areas, attendance rate, and school climate survey results. Outcome indicators include desired educational results such as scores on norm-referenced and criterion-referenced tests, percentages of students meeting state standards, and graduation rates.

South Carolina school report cards provide a variety of information in these categories, and a number of studies have used the indicators in research related to climate in South Carolina schools (Gettys, 2003; Stevenson, 2006; White, 2005). A list of key climate indicators from the South Carolina elementary report card follows:

1. Percent of teachers satisfied with the learning environment

2. Percent of teachers satisfied with the social and physical environment

3. Percent of teachers satisfied with home-school relations

4. Percent of students satisfied with the learning environment

5. Percent of students satisfied with the social and physical environment

6. Percent of students satisfied with home-school relations

7. Percent of students who are classified as gifted and talented

8. Percent of students retained

9. Percent of students who have been suspended or expelled (for violent or criminal offenses)

10. Percent of students older than usual for grade

11. Student attendance rate

12. Percent of teachers returning from the previous year

13. Average teacher salary

14. Percent of teachers having advanced degrees

15. Percent of continuing contract teachers

16. Teacher attendance rate

17. Average teacher salary

18. Time per year spent in professional development.

Sweeney's 1988 research, which names 10 factors common to schools with healthy climates (a supportive, stimulating environment; a student-centered environment; positive expectations; feedback; reward; a sense of family; closeness to parents and community; communication; achievement; and trust), offers a means of providing increased specificity to Johnson's (2003) categories and a frame from which to look at climate indicators on the South Carolina school report cards. Table 2.1 shows the alignment among Johnson's report card indicators, Sweeney's factors in schools with healthy climate, and climate factors reported in South Carolina school report cards.

The current research investigates professional climate within schools, which is influenced by teacher perceptions and teacher-principal interactions. A number of school climate factors from the South Carolina school report card, although not all, are pertinent to the current work. The climate factors selected for this study refer to process and resource indicators and relate to teacher perceptions, teacher professional development, and teacher-principal interactions. These are as follows:

1. Percent of teachers satisfied with the learning environment

2. Percent of teachers satisfied with the social and physical environment

3. Percent of teachers satisfied with home-school relations

4. Percent of teachers returning from the previous year

Table 2.1

Alignment of Climate Indicators and School Report Card Variables

Johnson	Sweeney	South Carolina School Report Cards Climate Variables
Context: free and reduced lunch, ethnic categories, student mobility rate, demographic information about school and community		Percent of students eligible for gifted and talented, percent of students older than usual for grade
Resource: per-pupil expenditure, rate of staff turnover, teacher educational level, types of resources available to a school for delivery of services		Percent of teachers returning from previous year, percent of teachers with advanced degrees, percent of continuing contract teachers, teacher attendance rate, dollars spent per pupil, average teacher salary
Process: educational policies and practices such as student attendance rate and time allocated for instruction, school climate survey results	Supportive, stimulating environment; positive expectations; feedback; sense of family; classroom to teacher communication; trust	Results of school climate surveys (student, teacher, parent), student retention rate, student attendance rate, teacher professional development days
Outcome: graduation and dropout rates, norm- and criterion-referenced test results, percent of students meeting state achievement standards	Student achievement data	Percent of students retained, student performance on PASS

5. Percent of teachers having advanced degrees

6. Teacher attendance rate

7. Average teacher salary

8. Number of days per year spent on professional development.

To illustrate the relationship among Johnson's (2003) indicators and Sweeney's (1988) factors, South Carolina school report card climate indicators, and the climate indicators selected for this study, factors from each are presented in Table 2.2. Of note is that the climate variables identified for use in the current research are classified as resource and process variables; the majority of Sweeney's climate indicators relate to process.

Conflict Management

Conflict is inherent in organizations, and managing it is a function of the leader. As the nature of organizations has evolved over time, so have the role of conflict in them and the work of the leader in responding to conflict situations. Early organizational theorists viewed conflict as detrimental to organizations. Now conflict is considered a natural phenomenon, "a normal human condition that is always present to some degree" (Schein, 2010, p. 95), and students of organizations see unresolved conflict rather than conflict itself as a deterrent to organizational effectiveness.   The manner in which conflict is handled has potential to affect organizations and influence organizational outcomes (Blake & Mouton, 1964; Rahim, 2001; Thomas, 1976, 1992). Effectively managing rather than eradicating conflict has become a function of an effective leader.

Conflict Management Theories

In 1964, Blake and Mouton developed a model of five modes of handling interpersonal conflict based on two attitudes of the manager: concern for production and

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Table 2.2

Alignment of Climate Indicators, School Report Card Variables, and Climate Variables in Current Research

Johnson	Sweeney	South Carolina School Report Cards Climate Variables	Climate Variables in Current Research
Context: free and reduced lunch, ethnic categories, student mobility rate, demographic information about school and community		Percent of students eligible for gifted and talented, percent of students older than usual for grade	
Resource: per-pupil expenditure, rate of staff turnover, teacher educational level, types of resources available to a school for delivery of services		Percent of teachers returning from previous year, percent of teachers with advanced degrees, percent of continuing contract teachers, teacher attendance rate, dollars spent per pupil, average teacher salary	Percent of teachers returning from previous year, percent of teachers with advanced degrees, teacher attendance rate, and average teacher salary
Process: educational policies and practices such as student attendance rate and time allocated for instruction, school climate survey results	Supportive, stimulating environment; positive expectations; feedback; sense of family; classroom to teacher communication; trust	Results of school climate surveys (student, teacher, parent), student retention rate, student attendance rate, teacher professional development days	Teacher satisfaction with learning environment, teacher satisfaction with social and physical environment, teacher satisfaction with home-school relations, time spent in professional development
Outcome: graduation and dropout rates, test results, percent of students meeting state academic standards	Student achievement data	Percent of students retained, student performance on PASS	

concern for people. The conflict handling modes based on this dual concern model are as follows: forcing, withdrawing, smoothing, compromising, and problem solving. Blake and Mouton's work is significant in the field of conflict management and continues to be a reference point for a number of theorists and researchers (Barker, Tjosvold, & Andrews, 1988; Rahim, 2001; Thomas, 1976, 1992; Van De Vliert & Kabanoff, 1990).

In work that has spanned several decades, Thomas (1976, 1992) expanded Blake and Mouton's work to develop a conflict management grid based on two basic dimensions of intent: assertiveness, or concern for one's own interests; and cooperativeness, or concern for the interests of the other party. Thomas presents five modes of handling conflict based on these intents: competing, which involves the intention to win at the expense of the other; accommodating, the opposite of competing and which involves sacrificing one's own needs for those of the other; compromising, which involves both assertiveness and cooperation and can be considered as splitting the difference; collaborating, a synergistic approach that involves confronting a conflict and working through it with the other party to reach a win-win solution; and avoiding, characterized by uncooperativeness and unassertiveness.

From Thomas's work, Rahim (2001) differentiated five styles of handling conflict based on concern for self and concern for others. These five styles of managing conflict – integrating, obliging, compromising, dominating, and avoiding – are the modes assessed by the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory-II (ROCI-II), the measure of conflict management preferences used in this study.

Conflict Management Styles

Rahim's (2001) five styles of managing conflict based on the two dimensions of concern for self and concern for others are as follows:

Integrating – based on a high degree of concern for self and for others. In this mode, participants confront problems and miscommunication and look for solutions to the problem that will satisfy all parties. This style is characterized by collaboration. Often the product is a new solution not previously put forth by any of the involved parties.

Obliging – based on low concern for self and high concern for others. This style is also known as accommodation. The party is interested in satisfying the other's concerns without attending to his or her own.

Dominating – based on high concern for self and low concern for others. This style is also known as competing, and usually results in a win-lose outcome.

Avoiding – based on low concern for self and others. This style is characterized by suppression, denial, withdrawal, buck-passing, or looking the other way.

Compromisin*g* – based on intermediate concern for self and others. This involves give-and-take among the parties, with each giving up something to arrive at a mutually agreed-upon solution.

These five styles of managing conflict are those investigated in the current study.

Conflict Management in School Settings

Schools are complex, dynamic organizations, and opportunities for conflict abound. Considering the current strong focus on accountability and student achievement, circumstances in which conflict is probable for teachers and administrators increase.

Even under less demanding conditions, conflicts among the professional staff of a school are likely. Early in the study of organizations, theorists recognized the potential for the conflict between personal goals of the employees and those of the organization (Lunenburg and Ornstein, 2008). In a large study of educational conflict, Corwin (1966) found that professionals in a bureaucratic setting are more likely to be conflictive than professionals in a professional setting or bureaucrats in a bureaucratic setting. Thus, the nature of the school setting and the work of teachers and administrators are likely to produce conflict. As schools strive to increase student achievement, staffs need to work collaboratively to confront problems and look for solutions. To do this effectively calls for a climate of trust and mutual respect. How can a principal's approach to managing the conflicts inherent in the school setting and the demands of the work affect professional climate?

Principal Leadership and Conflict Management

Leadership influences organizations; principal leadership influences schools. Just what constitutes leadership and precisely how leadership influences organizations have been the subject of research, speculation, and debate for decades, and the results are inconclusive. In 1974, Stogdill, a researcher of leadership, asserted that "there are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept" (p. 7). Others have agreed (Hanson, 2003; Yukl, 1989). Research on what constitutes leadership and the ways it impacts organizations has continued to be a topic of study, however. A number of writers and researchers provide comprehensive reviews of the history of educational leadership theory and research (Hanson, 2003; Hoy & Miskel, 2008; Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008; Marion, 2002). The study of leadership continues.

The following paragraphs outline the work of two teams of researchers, Kouzes and Posner (1987) and Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee (2004), whose theories of leadership have influenced and continue to impact the current landscape and are particularly related to aspects of leadership that involve conflict management.

In work based on their research and published in 1987, Kouzes and Posner identify five practices that characterize strong leaders. These five practices are presented below:

Good leaders challenge the process. The authors point out that "leadership is an active, not a passive process" (Kouzes and Posner, 1987, p. 8). Good leaders are willing to challenge the system and the status quo in order to look for new paths to effectiveness and improve the outputs of the organization.

Good leaders inspire a shared vision. These leaders visualize the results they want, describe these in terms their followers understand, and enlist their followers in subscribing to the vision and working toward its realization. In a definition of leadership that captures this process, Lezotte and McKee (*What Effective Schools Do: Re-Envisioning the Correlates*, 2011) describe leadership as "the ability to take a 'followership' to a place they have never been and are not sure they want to go" (p. 53). This description of leadership incorporates the notions of trust and collaboration echoed in current literature on leadership, trust, and organizational effectiveness (Ciancutti & Steding, 2000; Covey, 2006; Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee, 2004; Tschannen-Moran, 2004).

Good leaders enable others to act. They develop cooperative goals, foster collaboration toward meeting those goals, and encourage ongoing interactions among

employees. In nearly every instance, cooperation is considered more effective than competition, or conflict. "There is a negative relationship between achievement and competition" (p. 138), assert Kouzes and Posner (1987).

Good leaders model the way. Members of an organization learn to trust leaders who "say what they mean and mean what they say" (Lezotte and Snyder, 2011). These leaders' actions are consistent with their beliefs, and they lead by the example of their observable behavior.

Good leaders encourage the heart. They have high expectations of themselves and others and confidence that these expectations will be met. They provide firm direction, ample encouragement, personal attention, and feedback. Efforts and successes are recognized and appreciated.

Good leaders, then, according to Kouzes and Posner (1987), challenge, inspire, enable, model, and encourage.

In work that has grown from research related to emotional intelligence, Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee (*Primal Leadership: Learning to Lead with Emotional Intelligence*, 2004) identify four leadership competencies, or domains, that characterize effective leaders: self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, and relationship management.   Two of these domains, self-awareness and self-management, refer to aspects of personal competence; two domains, social awareness and relationship management, refer to social competence. Each domain includes related competencies. The authors assert that, although no leader they've worked with has exhibited all 18 competencies, highly effective leaders generally display strength in at least a half dozen,

including one or more in each of the four domains. The four emotional intelligence domains and their associated competencies are discussed below and outlined in Table 2.3.

Self-awareness: Effective leaders are aware of their feelings and the ways in which their feelings affect them and their work. They have done the work to be able to identify and articulate their key values. These leaders realistically assess their own strengths and limitations, invite constructive criticism and feedback, ask for help when they need it, and do the work necessary to make improvements and cultivate new strengths. Self-aware leaders' realistic understanding of personal strengths and weaknesses allows them to display and act with self-assurance.

Self-management: Leaders with healthy self-management skills are able to control inappropriate emotions and impulses and can often channel them toward positive outcomes. These leaders display a healthy transparency, an "authentic openness to others about one's feelings beliefs, and actions" (Goleman et al., 2004, p. 254). They readily admit their own errors or shortcomings and are willing to confront ethical shortcomings in others. Leaders who practice effective self-management can handle multiple demands with equanimity. They are flexible, adaptable, and "limber in their thinking in the face of new data or realities" (Goleman, et al., p. 254). Leaders who display high self-management hold themselves and the people they work with to high standards. They focus on continual learning and improvement for themselves, the people they lead, and their organizations. Leaders with strong self-management display a healthy sense of initiative. They approach situations with optimism.

Table 2.3

Emotional Intelligence Domains and Associated Competencies Identified by Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee

Domain	*Leadership Competency*
Self-Awareness	• Emotional self-awareness • Accurate self-assessment • Self-confidence
Self-Management	• Self-control • Transparency • Adaptability • Achievement • Initiative • Optimism
Social Awareness	• Empathy • Organizational Awareness • Organizational Awareness • Service
Relationship Awareness	• Inspiration • Influence • Developing Others • Change Catalyst • Conflict Management • Teamwork and Collaboration

Social awareness: Social awareness is a third domain of emotion intelligence. Leaders with healthy social awareness are attuned to the emotional signals of others and display empathy appropriately.   They get along well with others, including those from diverse backgrounds or cultures. Socially aware leaders have a sharp sense of social and political awareness and can discern social networks, unspoken rules, and informal power structures in organizations. They are good listeners.

Relationship management: This domain relates most directly to engagement with other people and draws on the competencies of the three other domains. It consists of the competencies of Inspiration, Influence, Developing Others, Change Catalyst, Conflict Management, and Teamwork and Collaboration. Leaders who inspire involve others in moving toward common goals. They engender a high degree of enthusiasm and group cohesiveness and model the expectations they have of others. Leaders with a high degree of influence use their understanding of others to engage both individuals and groups in particular initiatives and goals of the organization. Leaders who are skilled in developing others understand the strengths, limitations, and motivations of the people they work with and are adept at coaching and encouraging these people to grow. Change catalysts are able to perceive the need for change and to find a way forward, engaging others as they do so. This competency is closely related to Kouzes and Posner's (1987) leadership practice of challenging the process. Leaders who are skilled conflict managers are able to bring conflict issues forward, articulate the views of all parties, and involve all participants in reaching an acceptable conclusion. Leaders strong in teamwork and collaboration are able to bring others together and support the establishment of trusting, collaborative relationships among organizational groups, reflective of Kouzes and Posner's leadership principle of enabling others to act.

Principal Conflict Management Style and School Climate

In their works cited earlier, Kouzes and Posner (1987) and Goleman et al. (2004) relate conflict management to organizational leadership. This relationship extends to the relationship of principal leadership, conflict management style, and school climate. This association is illustrated in the Interstate School Leaders Licensure (ISLLC) Standards

and indicators, particularly in Standards 2, 3, and 5. Standard 2 calls for school administrators to promote success by "advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth" (p. 234). Standard 3 calls for the school administrator to act as a "leader who promotes the success of all students by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment" (p. 235). Standard 5 calls for the school administrator to be a "leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner" (p. 238). The references in the ISLLC Standards to conflict management are general in nature but clear in the implication that conflict management skills are important to administrator success. The understanding is that schools with an effective learning environment, that promote professional growth of the staff, and that are characterized by integrity and fairness thrive.

Conflict Management Style Studies

Several studies have investigated principal conflict management style. Using a sample of 30 secondary principals and 150 teachers, Blackburn (2002) studied the relationship between conflict management style of secondary principals and the school culture factors of professional development and teacher collaboration. This study used the ROCI-II, Form B; the ROCI-II, Form A, which self-reports for measuring the interpersonal conflict management styles of one's superior; and a survey instrument that measures factors of school culture. Two culture factors, professional development and teacher collaboration, were pertinent to this study. The research indicated that, based on principals' perceptions of their conflict management style, there was no relationship

between principal conflict management style and either of the culture factors. The conclusions of Blackburn, Martin, and Hutchinson (2006) support these findings.

In 2001, Tabor studied the relationship of conflict management and interpersonal communication style of 64 elementary principals. The study used the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory-I (ROCI-I), which measures three independent dimensions of organizational conflict: intrapersonal, intragroup, and intergroup. It also used a communication competence scale to measure the interpersonal communication competence of principals and the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire for Elementary schools (OCDQ-RE) to gather school climate data. Teachers in selected schools were the respondents for each of the surveys. The study found no significant difference between perceptions of the teachers in the study regarding the relationship between the principal's conflict management style and school climate or between perceptions of the teachers in the study regarding the relationship between the principal's interpersonal communication competence and school climate. The study did find a statistically significant relationship between conflict management style and interpersonal communication competence of the principal and school climate indicated in one intrapersonal conflict subtest and one communication competence scale. No statistically significant relationships were found between the other subtests.

A 2005 study by Dillard investigated conflict management styles of 195 secondary school assistant principals. Conflict management style was measured using the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict MODE instrument, and subjects were categorized on one independent variable: gender. The study sought to determine if there were differences between conflict management style scores of male and female members of the sample

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and if there were differences between conflict management style scores as a function of age, school size, or salary. The findings indicated no significant differences between conflict management scores of male and female assistant principals in the study and no statistically significant differences in conflict management style scores as a function of age, school size, or salary. The study reports that the competing mode for both females and males had low mean scores, indicating a low use of this mode, or style, in conflict situations.

In a study that investigated principal emotional intelligence, leadership, and openness in 67 elementary schools, Reed (2005) used an emotional competence inventory developed by Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee (2004) to measure emotional intelligence competencies in four domains: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and social management. The instrument is based on third-party perceptions; in this case, teachers who worked with the principals involved in the study completed the instruments. Reed found that conflict management was the area in the relationship management domain on which principals scored lowest.

In a 2007 study that sought to determine whether sense of humor moderates the relationship between leadership style and conflict management style, Hoffman used a leadership questionnaire; a sense of humor scale; and, to measure conflict management style, the ROCI-II, Form B, all of which are self reporting. The participants were 98 students in leadership positions on a college campus. The Integrating conflict management style was the most preferred conflict management style of these subjects; Avoiding was the least preferred style. This study found significant correlations between sense of humor and the Integrating and Dominating conflict management styles but not

between sense of humor and the Avoiding, Compromising, or Obliging styles. Results also showed significant correlations between follower rated transformational leadership style and the Integrating and Compromising conflict management styles and a significant negative relationship between laissez-faire leadership style and the Compromising conflict management style. There were no significant correlations found between follower reported leadership style and the Dominating or Obliging conflict management styles. In self reporting conflict management style and leadership style, significant correlations were found between transformational leadership style and the Integrating, Dominating, and Compromising conflict management styles.

In these studies, conflict management preferences were measured through both leader self assessment and follower assessment of leader preferences. Three studies assessed established conflict management preferences, one measured three independent dimensions of organizational climate, and one measured conflict management competency as a component of emotional intelligence. One study used the Thomas-Kilman MODE instrument; two used the ROCI-II, Form B; one used the ROCI-II, Form A; one used the ROCI-I; and one used an emotional competence inventory. Two studies involved elementary school principals, with a different instrument for assessing conflict used in each study; neither of the elementary school studies used the ROCI-II. Two studies investigated secondary administrators' conflict management preferences, one involving principals and one involving assistant principals; a different instrument for measuring conflict management preferences was used in each. The fifth study involved college students. Instrumentation, sampling plans, data collection procedures, and data analysis varied among the studies, as did results. These studies were those that resulted

from a detailed search for studies involving conflict management and school climate. While providing a basis for beginning to understand school administrator conflict management preferences and practices, additional research such as that of the current study is warranted.

Chapter II presented a review of the literature pertinent to this study. Chapter III provides the research design and methodology.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed methods design to examine the relationship between principal conflict management style and school climate in public elementary schools in South Carolina.

Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What conflict management styles do South Carolina's elementary school principals prefer?

2. What relationship exists between principal conflict management style and the following resource indicators of school climate: percent of teachers returning from the previous year, percent of teachers with advanced degrees, average teacher salary, and teacher attendance rate?

3. What relationship exists between principal conflict management style and the following process indicators of school climate: percent of teachers satisfied with the learning environment, percent of teachers satisfied with the social and physical environment, percent of teachers satisfied with home-school relations, and engagement in professional development?

4. In what ways do principal conflict management style preferences relate to principals' work with teachers?

This chapter presents definitions, sampling plan, instrumentation, data sources, methodology, data collection and processing, and data analysis strategies.

Definitions

The following definitions and explanations are offered to provide clarity to important concepts and terms used in this study:

School climate: For this study, school climate refers primarily to the climate in which the teachers and administrators work. It includes formal and informal organizational patterns, the personalities of the members, the patterns of interaction among them, and the formal and informal leadership in the school.

School climate indicators: School climate indicators are those characteristics of a school that have potential to influence or may occur, in part or totally, as a result of a school's climate. In this study, school climate indicators are those obtained from South Carolina school report cards.

School climate resource indicators: School climate resource indicators refer to the percent of teachers returning from the previous year, percent of teachers with advanced degrees, average teacher salary, and teacher attendance.

School climate process indicators: School climate process indicators refer to the percent of teachers satisfied with the learning environment, percent of teachers satisfied with the social and physical environment, percent of teachers satisfied with home-school relations, and days per year per teacher spent on professional development.

Conflict management style preferences: The conflict management style preferences in this study refer to responses to interpersonal conflict based on the two dimensions of concern for oneself and concern for others. Five terms are used to describe these preferences:

Integrating **–** shows a high degree of concern for self and for others. Participants

look for win-win solutions to the problem.

Obliging – shows low concern for self and high concern for others. The party

accommodates, or yields his or her own interests to the interest of the other.

Dominating – shows high concern for self and low concern for others. The party

engages in competition, seeking to win at the expense of the other. The outcome

is usually a win-lose situation.

Avoiding – shows low concern for self and others. The party withdraws from the

conflict.

Compromising **–** shows intermediate concern for self and others. Each party

gives up something to get something else. None of the participants comes away

from the conflict getting everything they wanted.

Elementary School: For this study, an elementary school is a school with a grade range

beginning with pre-kindergarten or kindergarten and ending with grade five.

Instrumentation

The Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory-II, Form B (ROCI-II), represented

in Appendix A, was selected to measure conflict management style preferences because it

provides a measure of the five conflict management styles prevalent in the literature and

allows a person to identify favored and less favored styles. Means, standard deviations,

intercorrelations, and test-retest reliabilities of the ROCI-II subscales fell between .60 and

.83. Internal consistency reliability assessed with Cronbach's alpha and Kristoff's

unbiased estimate of reliability ranged between .72 and .80 and between .65 and .80,

respectively (Rahim, 2001, 2004).

Eight school climate indicators from the South Carolina school report cards were selected to measure school climate. These were selected because they are available for all public elementary schools in South Carolina and because their inclusion on the state school report cards indicates their significance to educators and the public as measures of school climate. In addition, a number of the indicators have been used in prior studies in South Carolina (Gettys, 2003; White, 2005), and their use in this study extends the investigation.

The interview questions were developed by the researcher to probe for a deeper understanding of principal conflict management style, particularly as it relates to the principal's interaction with teachers in affecting school climate. Interview questions are found in Appendix B.

Sampling Plan

This study looked at principal conflict management style and its relationship to school climate in elementary schools in South Carolina. The target sample was all public elementary schools in South Carolina with an entry grade of pre-kindergarten or kindergarten and a terminal grade of five whose principal was returning for at least the third year, and the principals of those schools. The researcher contacted the superintendent's office in each school district in South Carolina via email to inform districts of the nature of the proposed research and allow superintendents to decline participation for principals in their district (see Appendix C for superintendent introductory email letter). From data compiled from the South Carolina Department of Education website, 297 schools in 48 districts met the study criteria. The research was conducted in 40 districts. Six districts declined, and approval or additional information

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from two districts was received too late in the school year to include those schools in the study. From the participating districts, 176 principals met the criteria for inclusion and were invited to participate in the study. Seven principals from those returning surveys were selected for individual interviews.

Data Sources

The research questions answered by particular data sets are as follows:

1. What conflict management styles do South Carolina's elementary school principals prefer? Principal conflict management style preferences were determined from data obtained from the ROCI-II, a conflict management style preference instrument which was completed by principals.

2. What relationship exists between principal conflict management style and the following resource indictors of school climate: percent of teachers returning from the previous year, percent of teachers with advanced degrees, average teacher salary, and teacher attendance rate? Principal conflict management style preferences were determined from data obtained from the ROCI-II. School climate resource indicators were obtained from data on South Carolina school report cards. Statistical correlation procedures were used to investigate possible relationships between principal conflict management style and resource indicators of school climate.

3. What relationship exists between principal conflict management style and the following process indicators of school climate: percent of teachers satisfied with the learning environment, percent of teachers satisfied with the social and physical environment, percent of teachers satisfied with home-school relations,

and engagement in professional development? Principal conflict management style was determined from data obtained from the ROCI-II. School climate process indicators were obtained from data on South Carolina school report cards. Statistical correlation procedures were used to investigate possible relationships between principal conflict management style and process indicators of school climate.

4. In what ways do principal conflict management style preferences relate to principals' work with teachers? Interviews with selected principals representing three different conflict management preferences added depth to the understanding of principal conflict management preferences. Questions were designed to probe principals' understanding of the conflict management styles they prefer and the ways their preferences may relate to their work with teachers and affect the climate of a school.

Methodology

A mixed methods design was used in the study. Creswell (2002) describes a mixed method design as a procedure "for collecting both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study, and for analyzing and reporting this data based on a priority, sequence, and level of integration of information" (p. 61). This study used a quantitative correlation procedure to analyze the relationship between principal conflict management style preferences and elements of school climate and then probed for a deeper understanding of the relationship between principal conflict management preferences and school climate through investigating principals' understanding and use of conflict management styles in their work with teachers. Data on conflict management style preferences were collected

from principal responses to the ROCI-II, and school climate data were obtained from the South Carolina school report cards. Following analysis of the ROCI-II results, seven principals with varying conflict management styles were selected by the researcher for semi-structured individual interviews. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) describe the interview process as one that "is used to gather descriptive data in the subjects' own words so that the researcher can develop insights on how subjects interpret some piece of the world" (p. 103). The interviews in this study explored principals' conflict management preferences as they relate to principals' work with teachers. A semi-structured interview format was chosen for the study. Semi-structured interviews contain both close-ended and open-ended questions (Creswell, 2002), with advantages to each. "Predetermined close-ended responses can net useful information to support theories and concepts in the literature" (Creswell, p. 205), while open-ended responses, "can allow the participant to provide personal experiences that may be outside or beyond those identified in the close-ended options" (Creswell, p. 205). The purpose in using semi-structured interviews in this research was to gain both perspectives.

<div align="center">**Collection and Processing of Data**</div>

Each of the 176 principals in participating districts whose schools served pre-kindergarten through grade five or kindergarten through grade five and who had served in their position for at least two years prior to the research year were contacted. Principals had the option of completing the survey online or as a paper copy. Principals received both an email letter (see Appendix D) and a letter sent by postal mail (see Appendix E) explaining the purpose of the study and requesting their participation. The email letter contained a link to an online version of the ROCI-II so that principals could complete the

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survey online. The correspondence sent by postal mail contained, in addition to the

letter, a paper copy of the ROCI-II and a stamped, self-addressed envelope for return.

Principals who did not respond within two weeks were sent a follow-up email (see

Appendix F) with a link to the online version of the ROCI-II as well as a follow-up letter

sent by postal mail (see Appendix G) with a copy of the ROCI-II and another self-

addressed, stamped envelope. One district required that participants submit an informed

consent form (see Appendix H). Principals in that district received an email letter (see

Appendix I) with a reference to the informed consent form and a link to the online

version of the ROCI-II. They also received a letter sent by postal mail (see Appendix J),

along with a copy of the informed consent form, a paper copy of the ROCI-II, and a self-

addressed, stamped envelope. A numerical coding system was used to track the return of

principal surveys from each school. Principals who had requested them were mailed a

copy of their individual ROCI-II results. A copy of that letter, which was personalized

for each recipient, is found in Appendix K. Appendix L contains a summary of

participant numbers.

After collecting and analyzing responses to the ROCI-II, the researcher scheduled

interviews with seven principals who represented three different conflict management

preferences. Five of the interviewees represented the Integrating conflict management

style preferred by the majority of principals who responded to the survey. Two

principals, each representing a different conflict management preference, were selected as

well. The researcher also considered school size; geographic location within the state as

well as within urban, rural, suburban, or small town areas; school Absolute rating on the

South Carolina school report cards; and gender in making interview selections. Appendix

M presents a summary of characteristics of interviewed principals. Interviews were conducted by telephone. During the interviews, the principals were asked the seven interview questions developed by the researcher. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed. Data regarding school climate were obtained from South Carolina school report cards. All data have been treated with strict confidentiality to protect anonymity of participants.

Data Analysis Strategies

The ROCI-II is a self-reporting instrument that measures a person's style of handling interpersonal conflict with subordinates. The instrument consists of 28 items and uses a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree in order to assess five styles of handling interpersonal conflict: integrating, dominating, obliging, avoiding, and compromising. South Carolina's school report cards, issued for each school annually, contain a number of performance indicators, including the four resource indicators and the four process indicators of school climate used in this study. The measures of teachers with advanced degrees, teachers returning from the previous year, teacher attendance rate, teachers satisfied with the learning environment, teachers satisfied with the social and physical environment, and teachers satisfied with home-school relations are reported as percents; average teacher salary and time spent in professional development are based on yearly numbers. Principals were interviewed individually using the questions designed for this purpose. The interviews were intended to provide a deeper understanding of principal conflict management preferences and their use in principals' work with teachers.

Data were analyzed according to the following process:

1. Score the ROCI-II according to directions. Data yielded a conflict management preference for each principal in one of the following five categories: integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising; and in one case, an equal preference for two categories.

2. Obtain school climate indicators from South Carolina school report cards, available on the South Carolina Department of Education website. Data for six of the indicators were reported in percents; data for annual yearly salary were presented as schools' averages; time spent on professional development was presented as days per teacher per year.

3. Enter principal conflict management style preference data and school climate data into Excel and the statistical software program SPSS.

4. Analyze the relationship of principal conflict management style preference and school climate indicators using the Spearman's rho correlation procedure.

5. Select and interview seven principals representing a variety of conflict management style preferences. Use the questions developed for this purpose to obtain greater understanding of principal approaches to managing conflict in their schools.

6. Transcribe and code principal interviews.

7. Analyze data from principal interviews.

8. Compare quantitative and qualitative results to more fully understanding principal conflict management style preferences and the relationship to school climate.

Table 3.1 summarizes the sources of data and data analysis strategies used in this study.

Table 3.1

Summary of Research Questions, Data Sources, and Analyses

Research Questions	Data Sources	Data Analysis
1. What conflict management style do South Carolina's elementary school principals prefer?	ROCI-II scores	Scoring according to prescribed protocol for the instrument
2. What relationship, if any, exists between principal conflict management style preference and the following resource indicators of school climate: percent of teachers with advanced degrees, percent of teachers returning from the previous year, teacher attendance rate, and average teacher salary?	ROCI-II scores SC school report cards	Correlation
3. What relationship, if any, exists between principal conflict management style and the following process indicators of school climate: percent of teachers satisfied with the learning environment, percent of teachers satisfied with the social and physical environment, percent of teachers satisfied with home-school relations, and time spent in professional development?	ROCI-II scores SC school report cards	Correlation
4. In what ways do principal conflict management style preferences relate to principals' work with teachers?	Semi-structured interviews	Transcription, coding, and analysis of interviews

Chapter III gave the research design and methodology for the study. Chapter IV presents the data and provides an analysis.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

This study examined the relationship between principal conflict management style and school climate in elementary schools in South Carolina. Chapter IV reports the findings of the four research questions presented in Chapter I. It presents data collection procedures, demographic information, and results of the quantitative and qualitative findings.

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected from elementary school principals in South Carolina serving their current school for at least the third consecutive year and whose schools have a four-year-old kindergarten through grade five or five-year-old kindergarten through grade five enrollment configuration, and from South Carolina school report cards. As a first step in conducting the study, the researcher contacted superintendents to provide information about the study and give superintendents the opportunity to decline their district's participation. From the 48 districts that had principals meeting the study criteria, 40 participated. Within these 40 districts, 176 principals met the study criteria and were invited to participate. These principals received a copy of the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory-II (ROCI-II) via email as well as postal mail and were asked to complete the inventory and return it to the researcher. Of this number, 99 principals, or 56 %, returned a survey. Ninety-seven of the surveys, or 55%, were usable. Data from

these 97 principals and the schools they serve are included in the study. Also as a part of the research, seven principals who returned surveys were interviewed regarding their conflict management practices. Results of these interviews were used in answering question four of the study.

Specifically, this study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What conflict management styles do South Carolina's elementary school principals prefer?

2. What relationship exists between principal conflict management style and the following resource indicators of school climate: percent of teachers returning from the previous year, percent of teachers with advanced degrees, average teacher salary, and teacher attendance rate?

3. What relationship exists between principal conflict management style and the following process indicators of school climate: percent of teachers satisfied with the learning environment, percent of teachers satisfied with the social and physical environment, percent of teachers satisfied with home-school relations, and engagement in professional development?

4. In what ways do principal conflict management preferences relate to principals' work with teachers?

Demographic Information

South Carolina consists of three major geographic regions: the Upstate, the Midlands, and the Lowcountry regions. For the purposes of this study, counties in the Upstate include Abbeville, Anderson, Cherokee, Chester, Greenville, Greenwood, Laurens, Oconee, Pickens, Spartanburg, Union, and York. Midlands counties include

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Aiken, Allendale, Bamberg, Barnwell, Calhoun, Chesterfield, Clarendon, Dillon,

Edgefield, Fairfield, Florence, Kershaw, Lancaster, Lee, Lexington, Marion, Marlboro,

McCormick, Newberry, Richland, Saluda, and Sumter. Lowcountry counties include

Berkeley, Beaufort, Charleston, Colleton, Dorchester, Georgetown, Hampton, Horry,

Jasper, Marion, Orangeburg, and Williamsburg. Schools from each of the three regions

are represented in the study.

School size information is based on student enrollment figures for 2011 listed by

the South Carolina State Department of Education. The size of the schools in the study

ranged from an enrollment of 107 students to an enrollment of 1200 students. Seven

percent of schools had enrollments of between 100 and 250 students. Forty-two percent

had enrollments of between 251 and 500 students. Thirty-three percent had enrollments

of between 501 and 750 students, and four percent had enrollments of more than 1000.

As a requisite for inclusion in the study, principals were to have served in their

current position for at least the third consecutive year. Analysis showed that 38% of the

participating principals had served from three through five years, 26% had served from

six through eight years, 13% had served from nine through 11 years, and 21% had served

twelve or more years. Eleven principals in the study had served only three years in their

current position; the longest-serving principal had served 27 years. The average length of

service in the current position was eight years.

Responses to Research Questions

Research Question One

Research question one asked: What conflict management styles do South

Carolina's elementary school principals prefer? This question was answered using data

derived from principal responses to the ROCI-II. Using SPSS, frequencies were run for

the following five variables: Style 1 (most preferred), Style 2, Style 3, Style 4, and Style

5 (least preferred). Of the 97 principals whose responses were analyzed, an

overwhelming number (91%) indicated that Integrating was their most preferred conflict

management style. For each of the four remaining style categories, 3% or fewer

principals selected that category as a most preferred style. Analysis showed that 54% of

the respondents preferred Compromising as the second most preferred style, 19%

indicated Obliging, and 10% indicated Avoiding. When considering their third

preference, 34% of principals indicated Obliging, 25% chose Avoiding, 18% chose

Compromising, and 11% showed Dominating. In considering their fourth preference,

27% chose Obliging, 26% chose Avoiding, 22% indicated Dominating, and 14%

indicated Compromising. Of their least preferred conflict management style, 61% of

principals indicated Dominating, and 24% chose Avoiding. In summary, of the 97

principals who responded to the survey, 91% rated Integrating as their most preferred

conflict management style, 54% indicated Compromising as their second most preferred

style, 34% chose Obliging as their third choice, 27% listed Obliging as their fourth

choice, and 61% indicated Dominating as their least preferred style. Table 4.1 outlines

these findings.

Table 4.1

Principal Conflict Management Style Preferences

	Style 1 Most Preferred	Style 2	Style 3	Style 4	Style 5 Least Preferred
Integrating	91%	4%	1%		
Obliging		19%	34%	27%	8%
Compromising	3%	54%	18%	14%	3%
Avoiding	1%	10%	25%	26%	24%
Dominating		4%	11%	22%	61%

Note: N=97
Note: Rounding occurred

Research Question Two

Research question two asked: What relationship exists between principal conflict management style and the following resource indicators of school climate: percent of teachers returning from the previous year, percent of teachers with advanced degrees, average teacher salary, and teacher attendance rate? Principal conflict management style preferences were determined from data obtained from the ROCI-II. School climate resource indicators were obtained from data on the South Carolina school report cards. The data show a range in resource indicators among the schools studied.

As Table 4.2 illustrates, between 40% and 92% of teachers in these schools have advanced degrees, and between 64% and 97% of the teachers returned from the previous year. Teacher attendance rate among the schools studied varied from a low of 85.7% to a

high of 97.3%. Teacher salary across schools varied, also, from about $38,000 to about

$57,000, with the average teacher salary at $46,848.42.

Table 4.2

Descriptive Statistics for Resource Indicators of School Climate

	% Teachers w Adv. Degrees	% Teachers Returning	Teacher Attendance Rate	Avg. Teacher Salary
N	97	95	97	97
Mean	-	-	94.86	46,878.42
Min	40	64	85.7	37,970.00
Max	92	97	97.3	56,695.00

Statistical correlation procedures were used to investigate possible relationships

between principal conflict management style and resource indicators of school climate.

Since four separate nonparametric correlation tests for significance were conducted,

alpha was adjusted using the Bonferroni correction method to 0.0125.

Using the Spearman's rho statistic, the researcher examined the relationship

between principal most preferred conflict management style and the percent of teachers

with advanced degrees. The researcher found no significant correlation, $\underline{r}(97) = -.025$, p

= .811, existing between principal most preferred conflict management style (i.e., Style 1)

and the percent of teachers with advanced degrees. Table 4.3 illustrates the finding.

Table 4.3

Spearman Correlations for the Relationship between Principal Most Preferred Conflict Management Style and Percent of Teachers with Advanced Degrees

Correlations

			Style 1 Most Preferred	% Teachers w/Adv Degrees
Spearman's rho	Style 1 Most Preferred	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.025
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.811
		N	97	97
	% Teachers w Adv Degrees	Correlation Coefficient	-.025	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.811	.
		N	97	97

Using a second Spearman's rho statistic, the researcher examined the relationship between principal most preferred conflict management style and the percent of teachers returning from the previous year. The researcher found no significant correlation, $r(95) = -.059$, p=.570, existing between principal most preferred conflict management style (i.e., Style 1) and the percent of teachers returning. Table 4.4 illustrates the finding.

Table 4.4

Spearman Correlations for the Relationship between Principal Most Preferred Conflict Management Style and Percent of Teachers Returning from the Previous Year

Correlations

			Style 1 Most Preferred	% Teachers Returning
Spearman's rho	Style 1 Most Preferred	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.059
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.570
		N	97	95
	% Teachers Returning	Correlation Coefficient	-.059	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.570	.
		N	95	95

Using a third Spearman's rho statistic, the researcher examined the relationship between principal most preferred conflict management style and the rate of teacher attendance. The researcher found no significant correlation, $\underline{r}(97) = -.026$, p=.801, between most preferred conflict management style (Style1) and teacher attendance rates. Table 4.5 illustrates the finding.

Table 4.5

Spearman Correlations for the Relationship between Principal Most Preferred Conflict Management Style and Teacher Attendance Rate

Correlations

			Style 1 Most Preferred	Teacher Attendance Rate
Spearman's rho	Style 1 Most Preferred	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.026
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.801
		N	97	97
	Teacher Attendance Rate	Correlation Coefficient	-.026	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.801	.
		N	97	97

Using a fourth Spearman's rho statistic, the researcher examined the relationship between principal most preferred conflict management style and average teacher salary. The researcher found no significant correlation, r(97) =-.055, p=.594, existing between most preferred conflict management style (i.e., Style 1) and average teacher salary. Table 4.6 illustrates the finding.

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Table 4.6

Spearman Correlations for the Relationship between Principal Most Preferred Conflict Management Style and Average Teacher Salary

Correlations

			Style 1 Most Preferred	Avg. Teacher Salary
Spearman's rho	Style 1 Most Preferred	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.055
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.594
		N	97	97
	Avg. Teacher Salary	Correlation Coefficient	-.055	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.594	.
		N	97	97

Research Question Three

Research question three asked: What relationship exists between principal conflict management style and the following process indicators of school climate: percent of teachers satisfied with the learning environment, percent of teachers satisfied with the social and physical environment, percent of teachers satisfied with home-school relations, and engagement in professional development? Principal confict management style was determined from data obtained from the ROCI-II. School process indicators were obtained from data on South Carolina school report cards. Statistical correlation procedures were used to investigate possible relationships between principal conflict management style and process indicators of school climate. The data show a range in process indicators among the schools studied.

As Table 4.7 illustrates, among the schools included in the study, between 60% and 100% of teachers are satisfied with their schools' learning environment; between 76% and 100% of teachers are satisfied with their schools' social and physical

environment; and between 13% and 100% of teachers are satisfied with home-school relations. Engagement was determined by the number of days during the year committed to professional development. This varied among the schools studied from 5.2 days to 26.7 days, with 13 as the average number of professional development days.

Table 4.7

Descriptive Statistics for Process Indicators of School Climate

	% Teachers Satisfied w Learning Environment	% Teachers Satisfied w School's Social/ Physical Environment	% Teachers Satisfied w Home-School Relations	# Professional Development Days
N	96	96	96	97
Mean	-	-	-	12.6
Min	60	76	13	5.2
Max	100	100	100	26.7

Statistical correlation procedures were used to investigate the possible relationships between principal conflict management style and process indicators of school climate. Since four separate nonparametric correlation tests for significance were conducted, alpha was adjusted using the Bonferroni correlation method to 0.0125. Using the Spearman's rho statistic, the researcher investigated the relationship between principal most preferred conflict management style and the percent of teachers satisfied with their school's learning environment. The researcher found no significant correlation, r(96)=-.027, p=.795, existing between most preferred principal conflict

management style (i.e., Style 1) and the percent of teachers satisfied with the school

learning environment. Table 4.8 illustrates the finding.

Table 4.8

Spearman Correlations for the Relationship between Principal Most Preferred Conflict Style and Percent of Teachers Satisfied with the School Learning Environment

Correlations

			Style 1 Most Preferred	% Teachers Satisfied w Learning Environment
Spearman's rho	Style 1 Most Preferred	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.027
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.795
		N	97	96
	% Teachers Satisfied w Learning Environment	Correlation Coefficient	-.027	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.795	.
		N	96	96

Using a second Spearman's rho statistic, the researcher investigated the

relationship between principal most preferred conflict management style and the school's

social-physical environment. The researcher found no significant correlation, r(96)=-

.076, p=.460, existing between most preferred conflict management style (Style 1) and

the percent of teachers satisfied with the school's social and physical environment. Table

4.9 illustrates the finding.

Table 4.9

Spearman Correlations for the Relationship between Principal Most Preferred Conflict Management Style and Percent of Teachers Satisfied with School Social and Physical Environment

Correlations

			Style 1 Most Preferred	% Teachers Satisfied w School's Social / Physical Environment
Spearman's rho	Style 1 Most Preferred	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.076
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.460
		N	97	96
	% Teachers Satisfied w School's Social / Physical Environment	Correlation Coefficient	-.076	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.460	.
		N	96	96

Using a third Spearman's rho statistic, the researcher examined the relationship between principal most preferred conflict management style and percent of teachers satisfied with home-school relations. The researcher found no significant correlation $r(96)=-.090$, $p=.384$, existing between principal most preferred conflict management style (Style 1) and the percent of teachers satisfied with home-school relations. Table 4.10 illustrates the finding.

Table 4.10

Spearman Correlations for the Relationship between Principal Most Preferred Conflict Management Style and Percent of Teachers Satisfied with Home-School Relations

Correlations

			Style 1 Most Preferred	% Teachers Satisfied w Home-school Relations
Spearman's rho	Style 1 Most Preferred	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.090
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.384
		N	97	96
	% Teachers Satisfied w Home-school Relations	Correlation Coefficient	-.090	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.384	.
		N	96	96

Using a fourth Spearman's rho statistic, the researcher investigated the relationship between principal most preferred conflict management style and the number of professional development days per year. The researcher found no significant correlation, r(97)=.126, p=.219, between most preferred principal conflict management style (i.e., Style 1) and the number of professional development days. Table 4.11 illustrates the finding.

Table 4.11

Spearman Correlations for the Relationship between Principal Most Preferred Conflict Management Style and Number of Professional Development Days

Correlations

			Style 1 Most Preferred	# of Prof Dev Days
Spearman's rho	Style 1 Most Preferred	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.126
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.219
		N	97	97
	# of Prof Dev Days	Correlation Coefficient	.126	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.219	.
		N	97	97

Research Question Four

Research question four asks: In what ways do principal conflict management style preferences relate to principals' work with teachers? To answer this question, the researcher interviewed seven of the principals who submitted a completed ROCI-II questionnaire. Principal responses to the interview questions provided the qualitative data used in answering this question. The seven principals interviewed represent the three geographic regions of the state. The sample includes males and females; principals in urban, suburban, and rural areas; and principals of schools with student enrollments ranging from less than 200 to more than 1000. Schools with Excellent, Good, Average, and Below Average South Carolina school report card absolute ratings are represented in the interview sample. Appendix M presents a summary of characteristics of the interviewed principals.

Analysis of principal responses to the ROCI-II showed that 91% of participating principals favor Integrating as a conflict management style. Of the principals

interviewed, five indicated Integrating as their preferred conflict management style; one

indicated Avoiding as the most preferred style, with Integrating as the second most

preferred style; and one indicated Compromising and Integrating as equally most

preferred. Similarly, principal responses to interview questions show a number of

commonalties in principal conflict management practices. The interviews added detail to

the findings from the ROCI-II, providing specific examples of the application of conflict

management style descriptions. The practices are detailed in the four sections that

follow. Some topics and examples appear in more than one section because principals

discussed particular qualities and processes in response to more than one question.

  Principal conflict management preferences and practices. Principals were

aware of their personal preferences for handling conflict and indicated that they are

deliberate in their approaches to conflict situations. Six of the seven agreed that the

conflict management style preference identified by the ROCI-II is their preferred style.

One principal, whose primary conflict management style preference was identified by the

ROCI-II as Avoiding and whose second preference was identified as Integrating,

considered Integrating to be more nearly her preferred style. This principal stated that

working ahead of the occurrence of conflicts in order to prevent them was a characteristic

of her approach to managing conflict, but that, when conflicts occurred, addressing them

in an integrating manner was descriptive of her prevalent conflict management style. The

principals found that different situations require different approaches to handling conflict.

One mentioned that males as contrasted with females and new as contrasted with veteran

teachers required different approaches. Several principals said that in working through a

problem with a group that could not reach a consensus, the principal had to make the call.

Two principals described processes in which they delegated conflict management of particular situations to subordinates and at times had to override the subordinates' conflict management decisions. One principal described this as using conflict management situations as a "teachable moment." All of the principals spoke of the importance of listening in the conflict management process. "I like to hear what the person has to say, and sometimes in debriefing, just listening to them they see their own mistake. Then it makes it easy on you to say what you need to say." Principals noted that trust was important to effective conflict management, as was acknowledging conflict when it arose. Six of the principals mentioned that working with employees who needed to improve performance was one of the most difficult conflict management situations, and that in these instances the conflict management approach depended on the persons involved. All of the principals spoke of the importance of flexibility in conflict management, tailoring approaches to the situation and the parties concerned.

Developing conflict management styles. Principals mentioned a number of similar processes in describing how they developed their conflict management styles. The majority spoke of administrators and other mentors they had worked with when they were teachers and assistant principals, saying that they learned a great deal from these leaders of what to do and occasionally "learning from others what not to do" as they were developing their own conflict management styles. Four of the principals mentioned leadership institutes they had attended as being helpful, gleaning from the assessments and simulations in those programs information about their own leadership and conflict management preferences. One principal said that after the feedback from a leadership institute and from self-observation she realized that "I was probably more avoiding that I

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wanted to be, and so it was something I've really tried to work on, because when I was a young principal, I wanted to be the good guy all the time." One said that from his work in a leadership institute "one of the things I quickly learned is that I need to talk less and listen more." Another had read several books on conflict management. Experience and the growth of self knowledge have been important to the principals in developing their conflict management styles.

Conflict management, teachers, and school climate. Each principal expressed the importance of conflict management in their work with teachers and shared examples from their work. Several principals mentioned issues related to scheduling, such as setting times for related arts activities, language arts and mathematics extension lessons, faculty meeting times, and field days. As something the principal encourages, teachers at one school frequently come to the principal with ideas they want to try. In working through the details of putting these ideas into action, conflict sometimes arises. The conflict is usually related to the need for the teacher or teachers making the request to understand how their plan would fit into the larger operation of the entire school. Discussion and working through the points of conflict generally result in a plan that suits all parties, the principal says. Several principals mentioned conflicts among staff members that eventually involved the principal. One principal discussed involving teachers in how funds are spent and noted that conflicts sometimes arose in making those decisions. The most difficult conflict scenarios appeared to be those regarding teachers whose performance needed improvement. All of the principals who discussed this issue noted conversations with the teachers involved. Although these conversations may have

been integrative at some point, this was an example principals gave of times when a conflict management style other than Integrating may have ultimately prevailed.

The principals mentioned the importance of setting the tone for professionalism, particularly at the beginning of the school year; getting to know the individuals and groups they work with; listening to teachers; being clear about expectations; working as a team with teachers; and dealing promptly and directly with conflict when it arises. The principals also emphasized keeping the focus on children and making decisions based on what is best for them.

One principal says that he tries at the beginning of the school year to set the tone for professional interactions by reminding teachers that "if we want to be treated as professionals, we need to act as professionals." He says of the school he leads that "we want to come to a place where we feel comfortable and where we feel like our opinion's valued." Another says, "I think everybody being on the same page before everything starts is critical." Another speaks about the importance of being a role model for her staff, saying that "we're their role model just as anything else. How we deal with issues helps them to deal with issues in their own classrooms." One veteran says that a key to working effectively with her staff is teachers "knowing that I'm going to listen to them and hear them and vice versa." Bringing groups of teachers together – a grade level group, for instance – to deal with potential conflict issues is a practice mentioned by one principal. This principal also invites teachers to sit in on hiring interviews of teachers who will be working on their grade level with the understanding that their working together is important to the school's climate. "Our school does have for the most part a strong team existence," she says.

In professional development for their staffs, principals address conflict management processes as well. One principal led a year-long book study designed to address classroom management practices that also incorporated conflict management practices among the professional staff. Another principal considered what she had learned through a leadership institute she attended so important that she developed a similar experience for her staff. Among the activities of this program were those in which participants learned about their own strengths, including ways of dealing with conflict. This knowledge, shared among the entire staff, has contributed to a strong positive school climate in which, the principal says, "Lots of days . . . I would say there are not conflicts whatever of any substance" that arise among the staff.

Principals emphasized trust and listening as keys to an effective school climate. One said, "I do try to do my best to set the table up and make it a culture around here where we feel comfortable coming and talking to each other." Another observed that "a teacher has got to feel – you've got to let them know that they can trust you." One shared that "I tend to be a kind of cut-to-the-chase kind of person. You know, 'let's just get to what it is,' and I have to kind of watch that a little bit because I think sometimes I kind of come across as uncaring."

Dealing with conflicts directly as they arise was important to these principals. "You want to get everything out on the table" stated one. Another said of conflict that "it's something you've got to get a handle on, or it can eat you up." One principal asserted that "the best way to do it is to hit it head on, straight-forward and honest, and make things right as quickly as you can." One commented that "if you don't solve

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conflict, it will fester and get bigger and bigger, and it becomes something that stands in the way of the teachers doing what they are supposed to."

New principals and conflict management. Principals had suggestions for new principals regarding conflict management. For the most part, principals thought that on-the-job training was an effective way of learning how to manage conflict. One veteran says, "You've got to get in there and handle it to know how you're going to handle it. . . . I think it's something kind of like student teaching. You've got to get in there and do it to realize what works for you and what doesn't work." One recommends "going into a new school to learn as much as you can about that community with the students, the parents, the teachers" and recommends "getting opinions as you do that." Another spoke of the importance of listening and of developing "the mindset that you are a facilitator as a principal – not the dictator."

Several principals spoke of the benefit in having, particularly for new principals, mentors among peers or other administrators. One suggested that going into a new situation, a principal consider establishing a relationship with a group of veteran teachers at the school and using the group as a sounding board as well as a means of learning about the school and its traditions. Principals who had participated in leadership development institutes recommended that process as helpful to new principals, one describing the work done at a leadership institute as "some of the best staff development I've ever had." Another recommends reading books on conflict management. These principals were clear that new principals would benefit from being aware of the importance of addressing conflict. One said: "One of the things that will either make you or break you as a leader is your ability to deal with conflict and not run away from it and

pretend it's going to take care of itself." From the analysis of the principal interviews, four themes pertinent to conflict management preferences and practices emerged: the importance of listening; the importance of establishing trust; the importance dealing with conflict quickly and directly; and, for principals, the value in developing self knowledge. These are discussed in Chapter V.

Summary of Findings

This chapter analyzed the data collected to address the four research questions presented in Chapter I. The major findings are as follows:

1. South Carolina principals who completed the ROCI-II indicated by a large percentage (91%) that Integrating is their most preferred conflict management style. Three percent or fewer principals indicated one of the other four conflict management style preferences measured by the ROCI-II (Obliging, Avoiding, Compromising, and Dominating) as their preference. Of the principals surveyed, 54% indicated Compromising as their second preference. Obliging, at 25%, was most favored by principals as their third preference. As a fourth preference, Obliging at 27% and Avoiding at 26% were most frequently selected. Dominating was the least preferred conflict management style of 61% of the principals.

2. The researcher found no significant correlation between principal most preferred conflict management style and the four resource indicators of school climate: percent of teachers returning from the previous year, percent of teachers with advanced degrees, average teacher salary, and teacher attendance rate.

3. The researcher found no significant correlation between principal most preferred conflict management style and the four process indicators of school climate: percent of teachers satisfied with the learning environment, percent of teachers satisfied with the social and physical environment, percent of teachers satisfied with home-school relations, and engagement in professional development.

4. The interviewed principals considered conflict management to be an important skill and conflict management processes as contributing to positive school climate. From the conversations, four themes emerged: the importance of listening; the importance of establishing trust; the importance of dealing with conflict quickly and directly; and, for principals, the value in developing self knowledge. Principals viewed developing effective conflict management strategies as a key skill for new and veteran principals.

Chapter IV presented analysis and discussion of the data collected for this study. Chapter V reviews the purpose of the research, summarizes and discusses the findings, and offers considerations for practitioners as well as recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents a summary of the study and conclusions drawn from the research findings presented in Chapter IV. It offers considerations for action and recommendations for further research.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to examine the relationship between principal conflict management style and school climate. Research was conducted to identify conflict management style preferences of South Carolina elementary school principals, determine whether a relationship exists between conflict management preference and eight indicators of school climate, and investigate ways principal conflict management preferences are associated with school climate as climate relates to principals' work with teachers. Conflict management style preferences were measured using the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory-II (ROCI-II), which identified five conflict management styles: Integrating, Obliging, Avoiding, Dominating, and Compromising. School climate was assessed using the following eight indicators of school climate reported on South Carolina school report cards: percent of teachers returning from the previous year, percent of teachers with advanced degrees, teacher attendance rate, average teacher salary, percent of teachers satisfied with the learning environment, percent of teachers satisfied with the social and physical environment,

percent of teachers satisfied with home-school relations, and time spent in professional development. Interviews with seven principals who completed the ROCI-II assessment provided data to expand the understanding of principal conflict management style as it relates to school climate and principals' work with teachers.

Study Design

The study was designed to include South Carolina elementary school principals who serve schools with grades spanning four-year-old kindergarten through grade five or five-year-old kindergarten through grade five and who were serving in their present assignment for at least the third consecutive year. Superintendents in South Carolina school districts were contacted to inform them of the study and allow them to decline participation of the eligible principals in their districts. From participating districts, which represented all geographic areas of the state, 176 principals were asked to complete the ROCI-II survey. Ninety-seven principals, or 55%, returned usable surveys. From this group, the researcher selected seven principals with whom to conduct semi-structured interviews. Five of the seven had a conflict management style preference of Integrating as indicated by the ROCI-II, one had a preference of Avoiding, and one equally preferred Integrating and Collaborating. Data from the 97 principals' surveys and the schools they serve are included in the reporting, along with qualitative data provided through the seven principal interviews.

Research Questions

The study sought to answer four research questions and employed both quantitative and qualitative methods. For question one, a descriptive procedure was used. Questions two and three, which investigated possible relationships between principal

conflict management style preferences and school climate indicators, were answered

using the Spearman's rho procedure, appropriate for nonparametric measures. Analysis

of semi-structured interviews served as the basis for answering question four. Chapter IV

presents detailed discussion of the results. A summary of the findings follows.

Research question one: What conflict management style do South Carolina's

elementary school principals prefer?

Analysis of principal responses to the ROCI-II, which identified the five conflict

management style preferences Integrating, Obliging, Avoiding, Dominating, and

Compromising, showed that South Carolina elementary school principals

overwhelmingly, at 91%, prefer Integrating as their most preferred conflict management

style. Three percent or fewer principals indicated any one of the other four conflict

management styles as their most preferred style.

Research question two*:* What relationship, if any, exists between principal

conflict management style preference and the following resource indicators of school

climate: percent of teachers with advanced degrees, percent of teachers returning from

the previous year, average teacher salary, and teacher attendance rate?

The Spearman's rho statistic was used to study the relationship between principal

conflict management style preference and the four resource indicators of school climate.

Results of the analysis showed no significant correlation existing between principal

conflict management style preference and percent of teachers returning from the previous

year, percent of teachers with advanced degrees, average teacher salary, and teacher

attendance rate.

Research question three: What relationship, if any, exists between principal conflict management style preference and the following process indicators of school climate: percent of teachers satisfied with the learning environment, percent of teachers satisfied with the social and physical environment, percent of teachers satisfied with home-school relations, and time spent on professional development?

The Spearman's rho statistic was used to study the relationship between principal conflict management style preference and the four process indicators of school climate. Results of the analysis showed no significant correlation existing between principal conflict management style preference and percent of teachers satisfied with the learning environment, percent of teachers satisfied with the social and physical environment, percent of teachers satisfied with home-school relations, and time spent on professional development.

Research question four: In what ways do principals' conflict management preferences relate to their work with teachers?

The interviews showed a number of commonalities among the seven principals interviewed. All were aware of their personal preferences for handling conflict and conscious of the ways they managed conflict situations. They considered conflict management an important part of their work and provided specific ways in which effective conflict management among principal and staff contribute to a positive school climate. Although principals were aware of their conflict management style preferences, they emphasized that different situations may call for different approaches and were willing to use approaches other than their most preferred when necessary. Several

themes emerged. The importance of listening, establishing trust, addressing conflict quickly and directly, and developing self-knowledge received particular emphasis.

Principals' awareness of their conflict management style preferences was accompanied by their awareness of how their conflict management styles developed. Principals had learned from mentors and family members and from observing the ways other administrators approached conflict. The principals mentioned books they had read, leadership institutes they had attended, and their own early experiences as teachers and administrators. Self-reflection had been beneficial to these principals as they developed their conflict management styles.

Discussion and Conclusions

Discussion of Overall Findings

The purpose of this study was to determine conflict management style preferences of South Carolina elementary school principals and examine the relationship between principal conflict management style and school climate. The quantitative findings show that the sample group of principals overwhelmingly prefer the Integrating conflict management style. The findings indicate, as well, that no significant relationship exists between principal conflict management style preference and the eight indicators of school climate used in the study. Interviews with seven principals added to the understanding of the ways principals use conflict management strategies in their work with teachers. Four themes emerged from the interviews: the importance of listening; the importance of establishing trust; the importance of dealing with conflict quickly and directly; and, for principals, the value in developing self knowledge.

Discussion of Quantitative Findings

Ninety-one percent of principals in the study identified Integrating as their most preferred conflict management style. That Integrating was the most preferred style was not surprising. That this style, or any one style, however, was so strongly preferred was unexpected. Several possible explanations for this, while speculative, are presented; others may exist as well. One consideration is the setting in which the principals work. Much of the work in elementary schools is collaborative. Individuals who prefer to work in this manner may be drawn to environments that call for this type of expertise. Correspondently, the work environment may foster the development of the skills of collaboration and an integrating conflict management style. The interviewed principals expressed an awareness of the importance of the skills that characterize an integrating and collaborative manner of working with people. They spoke of teamwork among the staff, of "all being on the same page," and of modeling behaviors for teachers that would carry over into classrooms, one commenting that principals are role models for teachers, and that "how we deal with issues helps them to deal with issues in their own classrooms." Another consideration is cultural setting. Southern United States has a tradition of politeness and decorum which often includes approaching conflicts indirectly. This larger social context may influence conflict management behaviors and preferences as well.

The quantitative findings provide links to three studies cited in Chapter II. In Blackburn's 2002 study, which used the ROCI-II, Integrating was the most preferred style of the 30 secondary school principals whose scores were reported in the research. Dillard's 2005 study of 195 secondary school assistant principals used the Thomas-

Kilmann MODE instrument, which reports five conflict management style preferences similar to those reported on the ROCI-II, and found Compromising, comparable to Compromising on the ROCI-II, to be the most preferred style and Collaborating, comparable to Integrating on the ROCI-II, to be the second most preferred style of these respondents. These two preferences represent, although in reverse order, the most preferred and second most preferred conflict management style preferences in the current study. Hoffman's 2007 study, which used the ROCI-II, identified Integrating as the most preferred conflict management style preference of the 98 college student leaders in that study. Also of note is that, similar to the current study's findings in which principals indicated Dominating as their least preferred style, Blackburn found Dominating to be the least preferred conflict management style of the principals in that sample; and Dillard identified Competing, analogous to Dominating on the ROCI-II, as the least preferred style in her study. In contrast, Hoffman's college students indicated Avoiding as their least preferred style. A third point of comparison between the current study and Blackburn's and Dillard's studies is that, although different in a number of ways, none of the studies found a significant relationship between principal self reported conflict management style and the variables named in the studies.

In considering the conflict management style preferences of the participants in the current study as well those in the studies cited above, it should be noted that Integrating was identified as the preferred – or in one case, the second most preferred – style, not the only style these respondents used. It should be noted also that in each of these studies conflict management style preferences were self reported, and were reported in regard to conflicts with subordinates, not conflicts with supervisors or peers.

Investigating conflict management preferences from different perspectives is a reasonable consideration. The overwhelming preference for the Integrating conflict management style found in this study offers an example. Additional investigations of elementary principals' conflict management preferences could yield similar results; likewise, results might vary. If further studies find the Integrating style, or any one style, preferred by such a large percentage of participants, looking at the findings through the lenses of different instruments or qualitative procedures should be considered. The Recommendations section of this study provides specific suggestions.

Discussion of Qualitative Findings

The principal interviews were conducted to investigate ways that principal conflict management preferences relate to principals' work with teachers. In addition to expanding the understanding of the ways principals manage conflict, analysis of these data offered a number of connections to related literature. Examples of these connections follow.

The Integrating style is described by Rahim, the developer of the ROCI-II, as appropriate "in utilizing the skills, information, and other resources possessed by different parties to define or redefine a problem and to formulate effective alternative solutions" (2001, p. 81). Closely paralleling Rahim's definition, Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee assert that that "leaders who manage conflicts best are able to draw out all parties, understand the differing perspectives, and then find a common ideal that everyone can endorse" (2004, p. 256). The Integrating style is reflective, too, of Peter Senge's idea of dialogue, based on its Greek root, *dia-logos:* "A free-flowing of meaning through a

group, allowing the group to discover insights not attainable individually" (1994, p. 10).

Principals' descriptions of their work illustrate these aspects of the Integrating style.

The principal conversations provided examples from practitioners of the application of conflict management principles, and of the Integrating style in particular. Collecting the qualitative data provided the researcher with "the opportunity to learn about what you cannot see" (Glesne, 2007, p. 81). Additionally, as the principals responded to the interview questions, they offered access to their thoughts and practices, providing "serendipitous learnings that emerge from the unexpected turns in discourse that your questions evoke" (Glesne, p. 81). These enriched the findings.

The interviews highlighted, in particular, four themes: the importance of establishing trust with teachers, the importance of listening; the importance of addressing conflict promptly and directly; and, for these principals, the importance of developing self-knowledge. The work principals described as building trust included being open and accessible; being clear with their staffs about their expectations, particularly regarding professional behavior; and being honest and truthful. These qualities echo qualities Covey cites in *The Speed of Trust* of clarifying expectations, being open and transparent, and making a point to "talk straight" (2006, p. 236). In research on what followers expect of their leaders, Kouzes and Posner (1987, 1993) found honesty the most frequently selected leadership characteristic. The emphasis on trust is also echoed by Tschannen-Moran (2004), who speaks of effective principals as those who promote trust in schools by "demonstrating flexibility, focusing on problem solving, and involving teachers in important decisions" (p. 188), thus demonstrating trust in their staff. Sweeney (1992), whose work is discussed in Chapter II, found in his research of over 600 schools

across the United States that trust and collegiality are primary factors in effective school climates. In *Built on Trust: Gaining Competitive Advantage in Any Organization*, Ciancutti and Steding (2000) hold that trust within an organization is more than simply a highly regarded human value; it is a quality that can be created within an organization that will give the organization a competitive edge. In their discussion, they offer a profound statement in simple terms when they say that that the best starting point for handling any situation is to simply tell the truth.

The principal interviews also brought out principals' beliefs that listening was an important conflict management strategy. Management literature reinforces this assertion. Covey (2006) recommends: "Listen before you speak. Understand. Diagnose. . . . Don't assume you know what matters most to others. Don't presume you have all the answers – or all the questions" (p. 214). Goleman et al. emphasize the effectiveness of leaders who "listen attentively and can grasp the other person's perspective" (2004, p. 255). Kouzes and Posner consider "listening to what other people have to say and trying to appreciate and understand their particular viewpoints" an important ingredient in building trust (1987, p. 152). The principals shared their thoughts on listening. One said, in describing the way she approached most conflict situations: "I try to be aware and just listen and hear all sides." Another said: "I've made a conscious effort when someone's in here to be a better listener and to hear what they say and truly listen to them." A third expressed the belief that an important part of solving conflicts with a staff member is when "a person is in private and they can talk about things and get it on the table." Still another said: "I think that's one of the big things, is you've got to be a listener. You've

got to." The principals were clear that listening was an important conflict management strategy for them.

Another theme that emerged from the interviews was the importance of facing conflicts, dealing with them, and not letting them fester. A number of quotes from the principals regarding addressing conflict quickly and directly are presented in Chapter IV. Principals also said: "You can't ignore things. Don't let them fester." "One thing that will either make you or break you is your ability to deal with conflict." "In most cases, I'll want to confront it head-on." This approach is endorsed in *Primal Leadership,* in which Goleman et.al. say: "Leaders who manage conflicts best are able to draw out all parties. . . . They surface the conflict, acknowledge the feeling and views of all sides, and then redirect the energy toward a shared ideal" (2004, p. 256). Covey (2006) advises: "Take issues head on, even the 'undiscussables.' Address the tough stuff directly" (p. 191). Kouzes and Posner reflect this position when they say that "you need to deal honestly with problems before they happen" (1993, p. 107). The interviews with the principals demonstrated the value they place in doing this.

All of the principals interviewed were conscious of their conflict management preferences and practices and aware of how these developed. Four of the seven mentioned attending at least one leadership development academy and participating in assessments and activities that gave them insight into their conflict management preferences. One principal had read a number of books on leadership and conflict management. The principals spoke of the value of these experiences. Five of the seven mentioned the importance of working with and observing, early in their careers, other administrators and leaders. These principals referred to the importance of mentors when

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they were new administrators as well as in their current positions. All seven discussed the value of experience in developing their conflict management styles. Kouzes and Posner (1993) speak to the importance of leaders knowing themselves. Goleman et al. (2004) consider strong self-awareness and self-management to be key leadership competencies. The principals demonstrated a high degree of self awareness and self management as they discussed the processes through which they developed their conflict management skills, and they indicated continued effort in that area.

Discussion of School Climate

This study of the relationship between principal conflict management style and school climate justifies an additional look at school climate and its indicators.   As discussed in Chapter II of this study, defining school climate has challenged researchers. Determining appropriate climate indicators as been a challenge, as well. This study has used climate indicators from the South Carolina school report cards; their use on the report cards indicates their importance in South Carolina.   Data for the resource indicators are drawn from South Carolina Department of Education information on teachers returning from the previous year, teachers with advanced degrees, average teacher salary, and teacher attendance numbers.   Data for one of the process indicators – days per year per teacher spent on professional development – are drawn from South Carolina Department of Education information as well. Only three of the eight indicators – percent of teachers satisfied with the school learning environment, percent of teachers satisfied with the social and physical environment, and percent of teachers satisfied with home-school relations – report results of teachers' responses to climate-related factors. Using different or additional climate indicators, particularly those that assess specific

aspects of climate related to teacher collaboration and innovation, may provide a fuller view and specific information helpful in producing school climates supportive of the professional practices that enhance student outcomes.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to investigate the conflict management styles of South Carolina elementary school principals as these preferences relate to school climate. The study found an overwhelming preference among the sample group of principals for the Integrating conflict management style. Interviews with seven principals, the majority of whom preferred the Integrating style, provided examples of ways principals use conflict management in their work with teachers and added to an understanding of the Integrating conflict management style. Descriptions of collaboration offer suggestions for professional practice that may contribute to improved student outcomes. Analysis of quantitative data was useful in looking at current findings in light of the results of the few prior studies that were available and are cited in Chapter II. Combined, the findings suggest a tentative indication of principal conflict management preferences.

In providing a look at conflict management preferences of elementary school principals, the study expands the understanding of this aspect of principal leadership and provides specificity to the understanding of professional collaboration in schools. Finding no relationship between conflict management style preferences and measures of school climate has value as well, in that it leads to further questions and implies the need for additional study. Recommendations for practice and further research follow.

<center>**Recommendations**</center>

The intent of this study was to examine the relationship between principal conflict management style and school climate, with the goal of furthering the knowledge regarding factors that contribute to school improvement. The data analysis indicated that 91% of the principals surveyed preferred the Integrating conflict management style. The data also showed no statistically significant relationship between principal conflict management style and eight indicators of school climate reported on South Carolina school report cards. Analysis of principal interviews revealed four themes that expanded the understanding of administrator conflict management practices in schools: listening, establishing trust, addressing conflict quickly and directly, and developing self-knowledge. These themes relate to conflict management and organizational literature and are pertinent to leadership and administrative practice.   The findings hold implications for educational agencies and practitioners as well as offer direction for future research.

Implications for Action

The importance of self-knowledge was clear among the principals interviewed. The principals referred to books they had read and leadership institutes they had attended and discussed new learning about conflict management practices that had resulted from this work. All of the principals cited the benefits of association with mentors and colleagues. The principals spoke of articulating expectations for their staffs regarding professional behavior, and two described professional development activities they had provided for their staffs that included conflict management information.   The findings lead to the following recommendations:

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1. State boards of education should look closely at the benefits of requiring, or at minimum encouraging, all new principals to participate in leadership training programs such as those the interviewed principals described that would include individual assessments, simulations, individual and group learning, and associations with mentors. The work would provide occasions for receiving feedback from mentors and colleagues as well as from instruments such as the ROCI-II with the goals of increasing self-knowledge, providing opportunity for reflection, and fostering personal and professional growth.

2. Districts should consider professional growth opportunities for administrators in their districts that include use of the ROCI-II or other instrument that yields individual conflict management preferences. Used individually or with a mentor, this would extend self-knowledge; used collectively in problem-solving situations, this could benefit both individual participants and the organization. Work that leads to an understanding of each conflict management style and appropriate applications of each should be a part of such study. Goleman et al. (2004) speak of the importance for leaders of concurrent individual and organizational learning. The conversations with principals reflected similar views.

3. Principals should consider offering professional development programs for their staffs that include use of the ROCI-II or other instrument that yields individual conflict management preferences. As mentioned above, both individuals and the organization stand to benefit.

Recommendations for Further Study

Conflict management and school climate, separately and in relation to each other, offer rich ground for inquiry. A fairly large body of research exists related to conflict management and school climate as well as to the broader area of leadership, of which conflict management is a part. Few studies, however, have investigated conflict management as it relates to school climate. The results of this study contribute to the research and raise a number of questions as well. The questions, in turn, suggest areas for further research.

Of particular note are these questions:

- Elementary principals in the study overwhelmingly preferred the Integrating conflict management style. Is this preference limited to elementary principals in South Carolina, or does it reflect the preferences of elementary principals in other geographic regions nationally and internationally as well as those who lead schools of other grade configurations such as middle schools and high schools?

- Do principals' self-assessed conflict management preferences align with their conflict management practices as viewed by their staffs?

- This study found no significant correlation between principal conflict management style and eight indicators of school climate. What would be the results of conducting similar research using other climate indicators?

Recommendations for future research follow:

1. Conduct similar quantitative research using the ROCI-II with middle and high school principals in South Carolina, principals of non-public schools, and

principals in other states. A larger sample would give a fuller picture of

principal conflict management preferences and possibly identify trends as well

as outliers.

2. Conduct similar interviews with middle and high school principals as well as

principals from other geographic regions. Conflict issues related to school

climate may contrast greatly among schools of different grade configurations

and geographic regions. Looking at conflict management among a broader

range of principals would add to the understanding of school climate,

particularly if different conflict management preferences were identified. The

similarities and differences of conflict issues among this broader sample of

principals would also increase understanding of effective, and possibly

ineffective, conflict management strategies and leadership behaviors of

principals.

3. Investigate school climate using indicators other than those reported on the

South Carolina school report cards. As an example, the Organizational

Climate Descriptive Questionnaire (Hoy, Tarter, and Kottkamp, 1991),

measures six aspects of principal and teacher behavior and climate openness.

An investigation of the relationship of principal conflict management style

and other indicators of school climate may show a different pattern of

correlation. The current research cannot be replicated in other states because

the measure of climate indicators in this study is limited to South Carolina

only. If similar research is done in schools other than South Carolina public

schools, identification and quantification of climate indicators common to

those schools would be necessary. As the Core Standards and the common assessments are implemented among the 45 states that have adopted them, common measures of factors related to school climate and student achievement would be useful

4. Consider using the ROCI-II, Form B, with principals and a corresponding instrument, the ROCI-II, Form A, with teachers. The ROCI-II, Form A, allows subordinates to assess their supervisors' conflict management style. Having data from teachers they supervise as well as from the principals themselves would allow principals to determine congruence of their self-perceptions and the perceptions of their teachers regarding conflict management behavior. This information would assist principals in developing self-knowledge and possibly lead to related professional development activities.

5. As an extension of the research to measure congruence of principal conflict management style as identified by leader (principal) and followers (teachers), consider investigating the relationship of conflict management style congruence and school climate indicators. Results of such a study could help clarify the significance of conflict management in the study of school climate.

6. Research on principal conflict management preferences related to gender, ethnicity, and number of years in a position is limited. Studies related to these factors would broaden the understanding of conflict management style preferences and practices.

In schools, conflict management is one of the primary functions of the principal. This study looked at principal conflict management preferences and eight indicators of school climate. Analysis of the data showed a strong preference among the principals in the study for the Integrating conflict management style and no significant relationship between principal conflict management style preference and the eight indicators of school climate studied. Analysis also showed an emphasis on building trust, listening, dealing with conflict promptly and directly, and development of self-knowledge as important aspects of conflict management among the principals who were interviewed. As the importance of education continues to be a part of the national conversation, the work within schools and the people who perform that work will continue to receive focus. Studies such as this will add to the knowledge of what works in schools and where one might look for further study and understanding.

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APPENDIX A

Sample Items from the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory-II
(Total number of items on the inventory is 28.)

	Strongly Agree				Strongly Disagree
I try to work with my subordinates for a proper understanding of a problem.	—	—	—	—	—
I generally try to satisfy the needs of my subordinates.	—	—	—	—	—
I use my influence to get my ideas accepted.	—	—	—	—	—
I try to stay away from disagreement with my subordinates.	—	—	—	—	—
I try to find a middle course to resolve an impasse.	—	—	—	—	—

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

1. When you are involved in a conflict situation – or a potential conflict situation –

    with a staff member or members, are you aware of your personal preferences for

    handling conflict?

2. Do you agree with the ROCI-II designation of your preferred conflict

    management style?

3. Do you find that there are situations with teachers that require differing

    approaches to handling conflict? Will you describe one or two situations that

    have required different conflict management approaches?

4. How did you develop your conflict management style? Was this conscious and

    deliberate?

5. How important is conflict management to your work with teachers?

6. In what ways do you see conflict management affecting school climate as climate

    relates to teachers and their work?

7. What are your thoughts regarding new principals and conflict management?

APPENDIX C

Superintendent Introductory Email Letter

Dear (supt):

As a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policies at the University of South Carolina, I am conducting my dissertation research on the relationship of principal conflict management style and school climate. As part of the research study, I would like to survey elementary school principals regarding their conflict management style preferences.

The study will include principals of K-5 or 4K-5 schools who have served in their present position for at least two years prior to the current year. The conflict management survey instrument is the Rahim Organizational Conflict Instrument-II (ROCI-II). The 28-item Likert-style survey will take around 10 minutes to complete and can be completed with paper and pencil or online. Principals will be able to obtain their individual scores, which will indicate a conflict management style preference. Individual scores will be available only to participants themselves. Following analysis of conflict management style surveys, I plan to interview a maximum of 10 participating principals statewide to gain a deeper understanding of the ways principals handle conflict. Climate indicators will be drawn from school report cards. <u>Individual principals, schools, and districts as well as identifying factors from interviews will remain strictly confidential</u>. Sample questions from the ROCI-II and interview questions follow this page and are attached to the email as well.

My plan is to contact principals between February 24 and March 2. If you need additional information or have concerns about the participation of principals in your district, please let me know. Your support and the participation of principals in your district are critical to the success of this study, and I am grateful to you for taking the time to consider this information. I can be reached at (803) 285-1974 or at kmboucher@comporium.net . You may also contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Julie Rotholz, at (803) 777-2831 or at jrotholz@mailbox.sc.edu .

Thank you in advance for your assistance with this project.

Miriam Boucher
Ph. D. Candidate
University of South Carolina

APPENDIX D

Principal Initial Email Letter

Dear Principal,

As a requirement of my doctoral degree in Educational Administration at the University of South Carolina, I am conducting dissertation research investigating the relationship between principal conflict management style preferences and school climate indicators in elementary schools in South Carolina, and am seeking your help. The climate indicators will be drawn from the South Carolina school report cards. The study will include elementary principals who have worked in their current position for at least two years prior to the current report card year and whose schools reflect a 4K-grade 5 or 5K-grade 5 organizational pattern.

Attached is a copy of the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory-II (ROCI-II), an instrument that will provide conflict management style preferences. I would appreciate very much your completing it and returning it to me within 10 days of receipt of this email. The time involved is around 10 minutes. I am sending a hard copy of the survey by postal mail as well, so you can complete the survey and return it in the envelope provided if you prefer.

At all times during and following the study, principal anonymity and confidentiality will be protected. At no time during or upon completion of the study will individual results be shared with others or individual principals or schools be identified. I will be glad to share the results of your conflict management survey with you individually, as well as an executive summary of the research. Please let me if you are interested in receiving these.

If you have any questions, please call me at (803) 285-1974 or email me at kmboucher @comporium.net; or contact my advisor, Dr. Julie Rotholz, at (803) 777-2831 or jrotholz@mailbox.sc.edu. As a former elementary principal, I know how busy you are, and appreciate your taking the time to consider this request. I will be very grateful for your assistance in this research.

Sincerely,

Miriam Boucher

(insert link)

APPENDIX E

Principal Initial Postal Mail Letter

Dear Principal,

One of the most important responsibilities of a principal is handling conflict. In research that I am conducting for a doctoral degree in Educational Administration at the University of South Carolina, I am studying conflict management styles of elementary school principals in South Carolina and investigating whether relationships exist between conflict management preferences and school climate indicators found on the South Carolina school report cards.

For the research, I will look at conflict management style preferences of elementary principals who have served in their current positions for at least two years prior to the most recent report card year and whose schools serve grades 4K-5 or 5K-5. Principals are asked to complete the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory-II, Form B (ROCI-II), which should take around 10 minutes.

Enclosed is a copy of the ROCI-II and a self-addressed stamped envelope. I ask that you complete the Inventory and return it to me within ten days of the receipt of this letter. I am also sending via email a letter with a link to the survey so that you can respond online if you prefer. Principal anonymity and confidentiality will be protected throughout the study and ensuing publication.

Please call me at (803) 285-1974 or email me at kmboucher@comporium.net; or contact my advisor, Dr. Julie Rotholz, at (803) 777-2831 or jrotholz@mailbox.sc.edu if you have any questions. If you would like the results of your individual conflict management style preference survey or a copy of the executive summary of this study when completed, please indicate below and return with your survey.

Know that I appreciate your taking the time to consider this request and will be grateful for your participation in the study.

Sincerely,

Miriam Boucher

_____I would like my confidential individual ROCI-II results.
_____I would like to receive an executive summary of the overall study results when
        completed.

APPENDIX F

Principal Follow-Up Email Letter

Dear Principal,

Recently you received an email and a postal letter with a survey, the Rahim
Organizational Conflict Inventory-II (ROCI-II). Your response to the survey would be
very helpful to me.

I am working toward a degree in Educational Administration from the University of
South Carolina and conducting research that looks at principal conflict management style
preferences and school climate indicators. School climate indicators will come from the
South Carolina school report cards, and information on principal conflict management
preferences will come from principal responses to the ROCI-II. Completing the survey
should take around 10 minutes. Responses to the survey are completely confidential, and
no individual principal, school, or district will be identified in the reporting. If you have
any questions, please contact me at kmboucher@comporium.net or my advisor, Dr. Julie
Rotholz, at jrotholz@mailbox.sc.edu

You can access the survey by clicking this link: (insert link) I would very grateful I you
would complete the survey and will be happy to send you the confidential individual
results at the completion of the study. I know how busy principals are, and appreciate
your taking the time to consider this request.

Sincerely,

Miriam Boucher

APPENDIX G

Principal Follow-Up Postal Mail Letter

Dear Principal,

Recently you received an email and a postal letter with a survey, the Rahim
Organizational Conflict Inventory-II (ROCI-II). Your response to the survey would be
very helpful to me.

I am working toward a degree in Educational Administration from the University of
South Carolina and conducting research that looks at principal conflict management style
preferences and school climate indicators. School climate indicators will come from the
South Carolina school report cards, and information on principal conflict management
preferences will come from principal responses to the ROCI-II. Completing the ROCI-II
survey should take around 10 minutes. Responses to the survey are completely
confidential, and no individual principal, school, or district will be identified in the
reporting. If you have any questions, please contact me at kmboucher@comporium.net
or my advisor, Dr. Julie Rotholz, at jrotholz@mailbox.sc.edu

If you would complete the enclosed survey and return it to me in the envelope provided, I
would appreciate it very much. I will also send a copy of the survey by email, should you
prefer to complete the survey online.

The many demands on a principal's time are familiar, and I thank you for taking the time
to consider this request.

Sincerely,

Miriam Boucher

_____I would like my confidential individual ROCI-II results.

_____I would like to receive an executive summary of the overall study results when
        completed.

APPENDIX H

Informed Consent Form

I agree to participate in the doctoral dissertation study conducted by Miriam Boucher, doctoral candidate at the University of South Carolina. The study investigates the relationships between principal conflict management style and school climate.

I understand that:
- The school district is neither sponsoring nor conducting this research.
- There is no penalty for not participating.
- Participants may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Signed:_____

Printed name:_____

Date:_____

_____I would like my confidential individual ROCI-II results.

_____I would like to receive an executive summary of the overall study results when completed.

APPENDIX I

Principal Email Letter with Informed Consent

Dear Principal,

Recently I sent you a postal letter with a survey, the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory-II (ROCI-II). Your response to the survey would be very helpful to me.

I am working toward a degree in Educational Administration from the University of South Carolina and conducting research that looks at principal conflict management style preferences and school climate indicators. School climate indicators will come from the South Carolina school report cards, and information on principal conflict management preferences will come from principal responses to the ROCI-II. Completing the survey should take around 10 minutes. Responses to the survey are completely confidential, and no individual principal, school, or district will be identified in the reporting. If you have any questions, please contact me at kmboucher@comporium.net or my advisor, Dr. Julie Rotholz, at jrotholz@mailbox.sc.edu

You can access the survey by clicking this link: (insert link) I would very grateful if you would complete the survey by postal mail or email and will be happy to send you your confidential individual results at the completion of the study. Your district requires a signed informed consent form, so please return that to me in the self-addressed envelope sent earlier.

 I understand the many demands on a principal's time, and appreciate your taking the time to consider this request.

Sincerely,

Miriam Boucher

APPENDIX J

Principal Postal Mail Letter with Informed Consent

Dear Principal,

One of the most important responsibilities of a principal is handling conflict. In research that I am conducting for a doctoral degree in Educational Administration at the University of South Carolina, I am studying conflict management styles of elementary school principals in South Carolina and investigating whether relationships exist between conflict management preferences and school climate indicators found on the South Carolina school report cards.

For the research, I will look at conflict management style preferences of elementary principals who have served in their current positions for at least two years prior to the most recent report card year and whose schools serve grades 4K-5 or 5K-5. Principals are asked to complete the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory-II, Form B (ROCI-II), which should take around 10 minutes.

Enclosed a copy of the ROCI-II, along with an informed consent form that your district requires and a self-addressed stamped envelope. I ask that you fill out the informed consent form and complete the inventory, returning both to me within ten days of the receipt of this letter. I am also sending via email a letter with a link to the survey so that you can respond online if you prefer. With email participation, I will still need you to sign and return the informed consent form. Be assured that principal anonymity and confidentiality will be protected throughout the study and ensuing publication.

Please call me at (803) 285-1974 or email me at kmboucher@comporium.net; or contact my advisor, Dr. Julie Rotholz, at (803) 777-2831 or jrotholz@mailbox.sc.edu if you have any questions. If you would like the results of your individual conflict management style preference survey or a copy of the executive summary of this study when completed, please indicate below and return with your survey.

Know that I appreciate your taking the time to consider this request and will be grateful for your participation in the study.

Sincerely,

Miriam Boucher

_____I would like my confidential individual ROCI-II results

_____I would like to receive an executive summary of the overall study results when completed.

APPENDIX K

Principal Conflict management Style Response Letter

Dear   ,

This spring I asked you to participate in conflict management style research I am conducting through the University of South Carolina by completing and returning the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory (ROCI-II). I am grateful to you for doing this. This letter contains your conflict management style preferences identified by the ROCI-II and related information on conflict management styles.

The research identifies five styles of managing conflict: integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising. Each style is useful, depending on the nature of the conflict, circumstances surrounding the conflict, and the parties involved. Although people generally use all five styles, the research indicates that most people have a preferred style or styles.

Your preferences are given below, ranging from your most preferred to least preferred. Enclosed is an explanation of each style. If you have any questions, please email me at kmboucher@comporium.net or call me at 803-285-1974.

Thank you for participating in this project.

Sincerely,

Miriam Boucher

Conflict Management Style Preferences

APPENDIX L

Summary of Participant Numbers

Information on school numbers is extracted from the South Carolina School Report Cards

for 2010-2011 posted on the South Carolina Department of Education website.

Number of elementary schools in South Carolina   631

Number of schools in South Carolina comprised of 4K-grade 5 and 5K-grade 5:   362

Number of schools in South Carolina comprised of 4K-grade 5 and 5K-grade 5
with principals who have served in their current position for three or more years: 297

Number of schools comprised of 4K-grade 5 or 5K-grade 5 with principals who
have served in their current position for three or more years and are located in a
district participating in the study   201

Number of schools comprised of 4K-grade 5 or 5K-grade 5 with principals who
have served in their current position for three or more years, are located in a
district participating in the study, and have been approved by their by their districts
for participation   176

Number of surveys returned   99

Number of usable surveys   97

APPENDIX M

Characteristics of Interviewed Principals

Principal	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Location	Up-country	Up-country	Low-country	Up-country	Mid-lands	Mid-lands	Low-country
Population Area	Rural	Small town	Rural	Small town	Subur-ban	Urban	Rural
School Enrollment Range	100-250	501-750	251-500	251-500	1000+	501-750	501-750
Gender	Female	Male	Female	Female	Female	Male	Female
Report Card Absolute Rating	Below Average	Excel-lent	Good	Average	Excel-lent	Excel-lent	Average
Yrs. Experience At School	3	9	7	5	3	4	10
Conflict Mgmt. Preference	Avoid-ing	Integrat-ing	Integrat-ing	Integrat-ing	Integrat-ing	Integrat-ing	Integrat-ing & Compro-mising