



**School Principals' Experiences of Ethical Leadership during times of  
Accountability: Complexities, Dilemmas and Dynamics**

**By**

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Thesis Submitted to the School of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal in  
the Discipline of Educational Leadership, Management and Policy in fulfilment  
of the academic requirements for the degree, Doctor of Philosophy

**College of Humanities, School of Education**

**Pietermaritzburg, South Africa**

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**January 2024**

## DECLARATION

I, Celumusa Bethuel Hlongwane, declare that:

- i. The research reported in this thesis is my original work except where otherwise indicated.
- ii. This work has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
- iii. This thesis does not contain other persons' writing, data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other researchers. Where other written sources have been quoted, then:
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Signed:



Date: 16 November 2023

### **STATEMENT BY THE SUPERVISOR**

This thesis was submitted with/~~without~~ my approval.



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Date: ----18 November 2023-----

Supervisor: Prof. TT Bhengu

## ETHICAL CLEARANCE



20 April 2023

Celumusa Bethuel Hlongwane (219090967)  
School Of Education  
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear CB Hlongwane,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00005471/2023

Project title: School principals' experiences of ethical leadership during times of accountability: Complexities, dilemmas, and dynamics

Degree: PhD

### Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 16 March 2023 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. **PLEASE NOTE:** Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

This approval is valid until 20 April 2024.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Health Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

### Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

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Founding Campuses:  Edgewood  Howere College  Medical School  Pietermaritzburg  Wavellville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

## DEDICATIONS

After a number of years have lapsed walking with the Lord, finally, I have come to the realisation of the words written in the book of Job 42:2 as well as Mark 9:23 where it is stated that “all things are possible to those who believes because God’s purpose upon them can never be thwarted”. To this end, I am the living testimony to these two verses. Obtaining this PhD wouldn’t be possible without the Lord Jesus Christ’s grace and mercy upon me. Indeed, *udumo lumfanele!*

Overwhelmed with deep emotions, I sincerely dedicate this thesis to:

My late parents, Khombisile Lahliwe (*MaNdlovu: intomb’ emhlophe ka Ngiqondile no Zethu phans’ eNyamvubu*) Hlongwane and Mmiseni Hlongwane. Despite both my parents being illiterate to the extent they would simply put a cross whenever they had to sign official documents; it humbles me to the core that I have finally obtained this PhD. Being born and raised from extreme poverty with five siblings, my mother had always been a housewife but I do not recall a single day we went to bed hungry nor failing to pay our school fees. Sadly, she was called to rest in May 2018. Concerning my father (a polygamist man with two wives and twelve children), now I understand the challenges he went through in life as the sole provider to support his two illiterate housewives with twelve dependants; hence, some of my siblings have only primary education while others have secondary education. Indeed, *ngizalw’ insizwa mina:*

UNomakhexa

UGxaba lembadad’ umanyathela

Unobhambath’ islonda sikamakoti

UMsun’ wasal’ etsheni

Uskhwama samasende

UMbadada! (*Igagu lendoda eyishay’ ingoma nesishiyameni*)

My late grandparents, Nomadiphu (*MaNgubane*) Hlongwane and Mshayeni (*Gologo 25 uyabab’ uyinhlabu, Sitshul’ ubhontshisi, Shlang’ esahlul’ abashuk’ eMabomvin, iNgaj’ egijim’ eziswini kubafazi*) Hlongwane, I will be forever grateful to be your own grandson. Oral history remarks that few months after I was born, my grandfather (Mshayeni) took me in his laps under a gigantic Red Ivory tree (*UMncaka*) few metres next to his kraal at iNcunjane (Msinga) homestead and unequivocally foretold my academic journey and that I would be a great teacher. Remarkably, that great tree still stands to date despite the homestead having perished in the

early 1990s. With those words, I will always be grateful to *thee* son of Novanzi (*Novanzi' omuhle ngemlenze*) ka Mhlushwa. I will always be grateful to *thee* nephew of Maphepha (Nhlangano); Bhekuzulu; and Balekile.

My other half; my twin; and my wife (Magauda Conity MaMnisi/ Nkutha Hlongwane), we would never have envisioned even in our wildest dreams that we could achieve this PhD together. There is no single person who deserves this qualification more than you do. Indeed, sisuka kude! You had had spent countless nights on your own while I was busy with my studies at the university. I believe, very few women (if there is any) who can stand that. With love, gratitude, and humbleness today I present to you our hard-earned PhD qualification covered in a red academic gown delivered to you by Dr. CB Hlongwane (Your Husband). I am saying, *wen' uyiGolide lamaNgwane!*

Lastly, all AmaNgwane: Nina baka Ndungunya; kaBambazi; kaNgwadi; kaZikhali, kaMatiwane (*iGwalagwala lakithi elimadol' abomvu*); kaMasumpa; kaTshani; kaNsele, kaNgwadi. BoMasinga sileke; bonduku zinobulongwe; bo Sangweni, with pride, I say this PhD belongs to you in all the length and breadth of Swayimane (my home village), Bergville, Msinga, Bulwer, Eastern Cape, and in Lesotho. Now we have at our disposal a wealth of knowledge that is proudly produced eMaNgwaneni and will be used by generations to come in order to lead schools, businesses, organisations, churches, government departments and even families around the world.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study would not have been possible if it were not for the priceless support and assistance from these individuals:

- My supervisor, Prof. TT Bhengu for his guidance, patience, and unwavering belief in my abilities that I was well capable of achieving this PhD. I want to state it categorically that I wouldn't have made it without you Ngcolosi. Above all, the professional support that you provided me with was immeasurable. To this effect, I am grateful and envy those who are, were, will be under your tutelage. What more can I say about the mutual understanding we had towards each other, yet you remained professional at all times. Sometimes I am tempted to conclude that it is because we share the same agony considering how our forefathers (Chief Matiwane and Chief Nkungu) were subjected to a more or less similar assassination. With those words, I say, Mepho! very few can match your humility, simplicity and professionalism.
- Dr. P E Mthembu (Wits University) for enhancing and motivating my PhD registration at UKZN.
- Prof. S E Mthiyane (University of Pretoria) for constant engagements on academic matters especially those that are of ethical leadership nature.
- Dr. K Shumba for his dedication, kindness, humility, and the critique he demonstrated whenever I consult him on academic related matters.
- All school principals for agreeing to participate in this study. Sometimes one feel like mentioning each and every one of you, unfortunately, due to ethical reasons, one is forbidden to such priceless act. From the bottom of my heart, I truly thank you.
- KZN DBE for granting me permission to conduct research in selected schools in the uMgungundlovu District.
- My siblings (Khanyisile; Mandlenkosi (Zwangaye); Bukani (Zephrid); Siyabonga (Khethukuthula); Mxolisi (Khumukani), Mlungisi (Nqamo) and Nonjabulo (Khethi), I don't have much words to utter other than to say let us unite and not forget our upbringing. To Nonjabulo in particular, we thank you for taking care of our parents' home post their departure.

- My mother in-law (Mmataseleng Esther Nkutha) for embracing me like her own biological son even post the passing away of my mother.
- My in-laws (the list is endless) for their unconditional love and accepting me as a member of their family.
- Finally, the Church in Pietermaritzburg for its unwavering love and support. When I was added in the Church some years back, I soon met spiritual mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, nephews, nieces, and uncles. Together we have shared triumphs, pains, losses, deaths, sorrows, successes, and victories. By and large, you don't cease to pray for us, hence the attainment of this PhD. This Church has always been known for advocating education despite the late Apostle Mr. Absalom Dlamini (commonly known as Bab' Dlamini) had only primary education. Who can forget Mr. B.I Mbeje, Mr. Elijah Dlamini and Mr. Motion Ndlovu (all late) for being there for us when we needed them the most. I will forever be indebted to these giants for embracing and treating me as their own son when I lost my biological father in May 2001 and invested in my spiritual being. *Kinina nonke BaZalwane, ngithi Ngiyabonga!*



## **ABSTRACT**

Several studies have highlighted the importance of ethical leadership during this era of accountability. Scholarship suggests that ethical leadership is at the heart of school life as decisions are underpinned by ethics. This study explored school principals' experiences of ethical leadership. The study further examined why school principals enacted ethical leadership the way they do. Underpinned by the interpretive paradigm, a qualitative design and a case study methodology, six school principals were interviewed using semi-structured interviews. Documents reviews were used to augment data generated through interviews. Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory, Chaos Theory, Accountability Theory, and Stakeholder Theory were used as theoretical lenses to frame the analysis of data. Data was subjected to thematic cross-case analysis. To this effect, a meta matrix analysis tool and Document Review Schedule were used to thoroughly analyse data generated from interviews and documents respectively.

The study found that school principals embrace ethical leadership in their leadership as school leaders because they are of the strong view that it yields many benefits in the entire school environment. Also, the findings of the study suggest that school principals have a clear understanding of ethical leadership; however, some still enacted unethical leadership practices. The study found that some school principals are conscious that ethical awareness is their responsibility as school leaders and the latter is enhanced through human interaction. To achieve this endeavour, the study found that some school principals believe in being exemplary and have taken upon themselves to enhance ethical leadership in their schools while others collaborate with other stakeholders like teacher unions, the DBE, Traditional Leaders and even Taxi Drivers' Associations. This thesis concludes that the nexus between accountability and ethical behaviour remains elusive, as a result, ethical leadership for some school principals remains a pie in the sky; in some instances, it is a well-preached gospel that is hardly practiced. Since this study was conducted in one education district where six school principals participated in the study, I therefore recommend another study of the phenomenon to be conducted. To this effect, a mixed method study that will also include statistical data is recommended in order to allow for data to be extrapolated to a wider population.

## **ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>AGM</b>	Annual General Meeting
<b>B.Ed. Hons.</b>	Honours in Bachelor of Education
<b>CES</b>	Chief Education Specialist
<b>CM</b>	Circuit Manager
<b>CPF</b>	Community Policing Forum
<b>DBE</b>	Department of Basic Education
<b>DCES</b>	Deputy Chief Education Specialist
<b>DH</b>	Departmental Head
<b>DoE</b>	Department of Education
<b>DP</b>	Deputy Principal
<b>DRS</b>	Document Review Schedule
<b>EEA</b>	Employment of Educators' Act
<b>ELRC</b>	Educational Labour Relations Council
<b>HoD</b>	Head of Department (Provincial)
<b>HR</b>	Human Resources
<b>HSSREC</b>	Human and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
<b>IP</b>	Interview Protocol
<b>KZN</b>	KwaZulu- Natal
<b>LRA</b>	Labour Relations Act
<b>LTSM</b>	Learning and Teaching Support Material
<b>M.Ed.</b>	Master's in Education
<b>MEC</b>	Member of the Executive Council
<b>NATU</b>	National Teachers' Union
<b>NGO</b>	Non Governmental Organisation
<b>PAM</b>	Personnel Administrative Measures
<b>PGCE</b>	Post Graduate Certificate in Education
<b>PhD</b>	Doctor of Philosophy
<b>PL1</b>	Post Level 1
<b>PSC</b>	Public Service Commission

<b>RSA</b>	Republic of South Africa
<b>SACE</b>	South African Council for Educators
<b>SADTU</b>	South African Democratic Teachers' Union
<b>SAPS</b>	South African Police Services
<b>SASA</b>	South African Schools Act
<b>SGB</b>	School Governing Body
<b>SMT</b>	School Management Team
<b>SOEs</b>	State Owned Enterprises
<b>SRI</b>	Stanford Research Institute
<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom
<b>USA</b>	United States of America

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

#### 1.1 Introduction

*Ethical leadership is the missing link in decision making and has resulted in the collapse of large businesses, State Owned Enterprises (SOEs), and public institutions, both locally and globally- Professor Bonang Mohale (Mohale, 2018, p. 1).*

The above statement by Professor Bonang Mohale locates the issue of ethics at the core of leadership for people tasked with the responsibility of leading institutions. Therefore, in the context of this thesis, this statement suggests that school principals need to embrace ethical leadership in their leadership practices if they must curb and remedy chronic dysfunctionality and the leadership crisis that characterises some schools in South Africa and elsewhere in the world. Ethical leadership is at the heart of the schools' functionality as decisions are influenced and shaped by ethics (Arar & Saiti, 2022; Robbins & Trabichet, 2009). I believe school principals thus need a solid ethical consciousness and ethical awareness in their leadership in order to stop schools from failing or even collapsing.

Through this multiple case study, I looked at school principals' experiences of ethical leadership during times of accountability, considering the complexities and dilemmas of leading schools as open and dynamic organisations. I aimed to understand and learn from the experiences of the selected school principals regarding ethical leadership, what they consider as causes of unethical leadership practices, as well as how and why they enact ethical leadership the way they do. This is the first chapter of the thesis that consists of seven chapters. In this chapter, I begin by providing the background of the study; this is followed by a detailed discussion of the rationale for conducting this study. The statement of the problem follows the rationale. Following the rationale are the research questions, after which the significance of the study is discussed. Subsequent to the significance of the study is the presentation and discussion of key concepts. This is followed by the discussion of the delimitations of the study, and the outline of the study, and lastly, I conclude the chapter.

## **1.2 Background of the study**

School principals who enact ethical leadership as school leaders have much to gain. Such a premise is possible as Bansal and Kumar (2018), as well as Tyre (2018) postulate that ethical leadership yields personal, as well as organisational benefits. These scholars further opine that enacting ethical leadership enables school principals to gain trust from other stakeholders and teachers, which then makes the principal's job easier and more enjoyable (Bansal & Kumar, 2018; Tyre, 2018). Likewise, in their leadership as school leaders, ethical school principals embrace accountability as an essential element of school governance (Maile, 2002). This belief is possible because ethical leadership enhances school principals' accountability to all relevant stakeholders in education (Ozan et al., 2017). I believe that school principals who are driven by the ideals of ethical leadership have the deep obligation of reporting to the school community and other stakeholders about the quality of service they offer. Reporting to various stakeholders in education by school principals is then executed with ease because integrating accountability in educational leadership helps to improve service delivery, control indiscipline, and increase efficiency (Usman, 2016). Similarly, in an era of burgeoning school accountability, the enhancement of ethical leadership becomes imperative for school principals. This idea is possible because in their practices as school leaders, such school principals embrace ethical values like honesty, transparency, accountability, fairness, just, openness, prudence, and respect (Ghanem & Castelli, 2019; Katranci et al., 2015; Ozan et al., 2017; Prinsloo, 2016; Vikaram et al., 2021). Subsequently, ethical conduct that is accountability-driven will soon become the culture of the school. As a result, reporting and providing justifications to relevant stakeholders by the school principal, Deputy Principals (DPs), Departmental Heads (DHs) and Post Level 1 (PL1) educators for the decisions they have taken, becomes an easy exercise which is worthy of being executed. However, for the purpose of this study, only school principals' enactment of ethical leadership during times of accountability forms the key focus of this inquiry.

As earlier echoed by Mohale (2018) in the excerpt in the introduction, the absence of ethical leadership paralyses many aspects of school leadership, including accountability. I believe that such a premise is possible because unethical leadership practices by a school principal adversely affect educators, School Management Team (SMT), School Governing Body (SGB),

learners, and other stakeholders in education because it creates an environment that is not conducive for school functionality (Oduol, 2021).

According to reports from Ireland presented by Snow et al. (2021), the lack of ethical leadership in schools can result in educators locking their doors and working as independent contractors (i.e., duck and cover just to get through the day), because they become hesitant to perform any duty assigned to them. This in turn, will lead to the erosion of quality education. As a result, a few toxic behaviours may ensue; these include, but are not limited to absenteeism, disregard of others' dignity, power abuse, favouritism, indiscreet information sharing, abuse of resources, and personal interest, ultimately becoming the culture of the school due to unethical leadership practices (Sam, 2020). In such a school, accountability just becomes an aspired dream and a mere fantasy because nobody takes responsibility for their actions (including the school principal for that matter). In the same vein, Eze and Onwudinjo (2021) identify numerous challenges that hinder accountability by school principals. Remarkably, the difficulty of satisfying and embracing various stakeholders in education is among the challenges. I am convinced that these challenges are also perpetuated by an increased call for accountability, high expectations on educational leadership, the infusion of digital technology in education, a paradigm shift in teaching and learning, as well as the advent of democracy in South Africa, which ultimately brought multiple changes in the educational leadership landscape (Bhengu, 2012; Cuellar & Giles, 2011; Daljit, 2009). Such changes in the educational leadership landscape means that schools as complex and open systems, will have to regularly interact with their stakeholders and ultimately be modified by their environment (Human-Vogel & Bouwer, 2005). Quite telling, the changes in educational leadership that were brought by the advent of democracy in South Africa necessitated accountability to other stakeholders by school principals becoming a central feature in the life of schools (Bhengu, 2012). Notwithstanding its importance, Eze and Onwudinjo (2021) emphasise that being accountable to all stakeholders in education by school principals is a most difficult exercise. Moreover, leadership in the 21<sup>st</sup> century must be executed in a dynamic context and not in a fixed context because the school environment is continuously changing (Daljit, 2009).

Despite several international and local studies that have emphasised the significance of enacting ethical leadership during times of accountability, there is also a myriad of reports and allegations of unethical behaviour and malpractice by some school principals globally. For

example, reports from the United States of America (USA) by DeMatthews and Serafini (2021) suggest that some school principals enact unethical leadership in their leadership by neglecting their accountability responsibility. In the United Kingdom (UK), Somantri and Sardin (2017) accentuate that school principals are confronted by the challenge of enacting ethical leadership including ‘getting things right’ and ‘getting right things’ in their leadership as school leaders. According to Snow et al. (2021), in Ireland school principals’ enactment of toxic unethical leadership practices result in schools having to deal with the aftermath of gradual erosion in the quality of education. Likewise, postulations from Turkish schools emphasise the lack of ethical understanding from educators resulting in the collapse of trust towards school principals (Katranci et al., 2015). Notwithstanding the claims from these developed countries, suggesting the prevalence of unethical leadership practices by school principals, evidence from China and Türkiye by Katranci et al. (2015) and Liu and Yin (2023) respectively, indicate that there is a paucity of empirical studies on school principals’ enactment of ethical leadership despite its significance for educational leadership. A huge gap thus exists in this regard.

Additionally, the significance of ethical leadership can never be overemphasised, Sabir (2020) accentuates that its research is still in its infancy stage even though it is viewed as a prominent approach in which leadership can be defined. Such postulations by Sabir (2020) on research on ethical leadership being in its infancy are congruent with several other scholars, including Alishahi et al. (2021); Katranci et al. (2015); Liu and Yin (2023); (Mansur et al., 2020); and Pansiri et al. (2021) who mourn the limited literature being recorded globally on the former vis-à-vis educational leadership. Along these, Chik (2020) places emphasis on the need for further research in the field of ethical leadership in relation to educational leadership. I fully concur with these accentuations of the shortage of empirical studies on ethical leadership in relation to educational leadership. I have discovered that most works written on ethical leadership are found in businesses and very few are in educational leadership. This is of great concern if one considers the damning report from the South African Council for Educators (2020), indicating that 550 cases of educators’ misconduct (including school principals) were resolved and finalised during the period 2019/2020 in South Africa. Also, the media is inundated with cases of unethical conduct by school principals as alluded to elsewhere in this thesis. The above debates underscore the need to understand this aspect of leadership in the context of citizenry that demands to be kept abreast of all developments in education. This is

an underlining of ethical leadership in times of accountability, complexities, and dynamics of various kinds.

### **1.3 Rationale for the study**

The rationale for conducting this study emanates from my experiences while I was still occupying an entry level position as PL1 educator, also known as a teacher. Also, after I was appointed as a school principal in 2014 (in a different school), the desire to conduct this study intensified. The rationale for conducting this study thus also emanates from my experience as a school principal.

#### Observed accountability dilemmas as a PL1 educator.

As a PL1 educator in a secondary school with more than thirty educators, cases of misconduct against educators were not uncommon. They ranged from administering corporal punishment (illegally) to chronic rates of teacher absence without leave; from insubordination to indolent behaviour, and from sexual relationships with learners to suspected sexual harassment activities. These were some of the cases that were not uncommon at the school those days. Surprisingly, in most reported cases, I could observe that the school principal would opt to not to take any action to combat such maladies. In other words, the only decision that the principal would take would be to take no decision that would help address these challenges. Due to non-action, some teachers even called him Mr Bystander<sup>1</sup>. As a result, educators lost hope in his leadership. Some even opted not to report their challenges to him due to his habit of inaction. As an educator who was also in charge of the Students' and Teachers' Christian Movement at school, it enabled me to work closer with Mr Bystander.

My role in the Christian Movement gave him courage to share most of his leadership challenges, including confiding in me on the dilemmas he faced daily when he had to take ethical decisions against an educator who had violated the code of professional ethics. As caring as he was, he would literally tell me that his dilemma would deepen the moment he thought about the consequences of reporting the educator accused of maleficence to the Circuit Manager (CM). As a result, he would find himself being caught between the law as well as

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<sup>1</sup> Not his real name

policies governing the education profession and his conscience. He would ultimately decide to sweep the matter under the carpet. He would not report the matter that could possibly result in the teacher facing disciplinary action or being dismissed. As a result, accountability was seriously compromised under his leadership since he would fail to report alleged cases of misconduct to the CM and the SGB. Unfortunately, he did not think about the possible repercussions of not reporting the matter or the injustices suffered by the aggrieved parties in the matter.

#### Observed accountability dilemmas as a school principal.

This aspect of my rationale relates to my own experiences as a school principal. The decision to conduct this study was further triggered by a personal ordeal that I encountered as a school principal when I had to take an ethical decision to resolve a case involving a Foundation Phase Departmental Head (DH) in her late twenties and a teacher in her late fifties (59 years to be precise). The DH had, on numerous occasions, reported the difficulties of working with the educator, citing instances of insubordination as she constantly failed to carry out instructions without any reasonable cause. Further to that, she regularly excused herself from performing certain professional duties and extra mural activities without valid permission and reason. Such acts are classified as misconduct in terms of Section 17 of Employment of Educators Act (EEA) No. 76 of 1998 and the sanctions for such a case include a fine, a final written warning, leading to dismissal if appropriate (Department of Education, 1998). The educator had previously been fined and had received the final written warning and was thus, facing dismissal. The cases were investigated and were discovered to be legitimate. The dilemma emerged for me as a school principal when the educator in question started to show remorse for her misconduct and began to share her personal problems, including divorce proceedings and financial difficulties. Additionally, she was due to retire the following year after twenty-five years of service. If I opted to report her to the CM (as my immediate senior) and she was subsequently dismissed, she would then have lost all her retirement benefits.

While I was contemplating what actions to take, and delaying my accountability responsibility to the CM, I inadvertently found myself enacting unethical leadership by violating legislation governing my accountability responsibility as a school principal. For example, Section 5.1.4(g) of the Policy on the South African Standard for Principalship in the Department of Basic

Education (2015) stipulates the school principals' responsibilities including having to account regularly to key stakeholders in education whenever ethical or legal breaches occurred. Furthermore, Section 5.1.4(i) of the same policy, emphasises that school principals are obligated to fulfil the school's legislative and statutory accountability to the national and provincial education departments. In corroboration with this section, Section 16(3) of the South African Schools Act (SASA) (Republic of South Africa, 1996b) clearly stipulates that in their official capacity (*ex officio*), school principals are accountable to the provincial Head of Department (HoD), however, this was violated by my own actions. In the same vein, Section 195(1)(a) of the South African Constitution which emphasises that public administration must abide by a high standard of professional ethics was also breached by my inactivity (Republic of South Africa, 1996a). Lastly, Section 195 (1)(f) of the Constitution which places emphasis on public administration personnel exercising accountability in their practices was also trampled upon. Consequently, my inability to report the educator to the CM meant that I was enacting unethical leadership in my leadership as a school principal. Failure to account to the CM is an illegal act and a violation of ethical leadership which is tantamount to being dishonest, unfaithful, deceitful and irresponsible (Brown & Mitchell, 2010; Sam, 2020). Drawing from the sections of legislation mentioned above, one can easily conclude that school principals' accountability responsibility is non-negotiable. Subsequent to that, my inability to report the matter to the CM meant that I was seriously jeopardising my own career as a school principal, also, disciplinary proceedings could be instituted against me due to my inactivity.

On the other hand, pressure was mounting on me as a school principal from the educators, the SGB, the SMT, and parents to report her to the CM. With all the evidence presented, it was crystal clear that she was guilty of misconduct and had to be dismissed. As a principal, I found myself in a deep ethical dilemma (a situation whereby the decision maker finds himself/herself in a confusing situation that necessitates choosing (from a set of principles, values, beliefs and ideals) between my conscience and feeling sorry for the teacher, considering the consequences on one hand, and educational policies on the other (Kimber & Campbell, 2014). Deep down in my heart, I knew that my failure to report the matter to the CM was unethical and was seriously compromising my accountability responsibility to the CM and the SGB. Through my inactivity, teaching and learning were subsequently affected as some educators felt that I was treating the educators' concern with kid gloves. On the flip side, some felt that as the school principal, I



was not doing enough to discipline the educator in question, while others felt she was being victimised by the school. Suddenly, the staff was divided, and the school was in turmoil.

By and large, from my observation as an educator and my experience as a school principal (as indicated above), I have learnt the hard way the importance of school principals being conscious of their ethical awareness of how they handle the complexities, dilemmas and dynamics associated with their accountability responsibility in a school as an open system. In an open system, the school interacts with its environment as well as its stakeholders and such interactions are the breath of life in the school; hence, ethical awareness becomes crucial (Lunenburg, 2010). Ethical awareness sets the tone for good ethical practice, while ethically conscious school principals infuse ethics into their leadership as school leaders (Louw, 2015). Consequently, ethical consciousness will result in school principals achieving optimum accountability.

Nevertheless, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, schools as organisations have become more unpredictable, complex, dynamic, and fluid in nature (Bush, 2011; Zulu et al., 2021). Postulations by Bush (2011) and Zulu et al. (2021) are an indication of the complexities and dilemmas of enacting ethical leadership during the heydays of increased accountability in a dynamic school environment. School principals are thus not only accountable to their CMs (as their immediate seniors) but to several role players in education including parents, SGB, learners, the community at large, and other stakeholders who might have interests in the affairs of the school. This multifaceted nature of accountability intensifies the complexities and dilemmas of enacting ethical leadership for school principals. Sadly, some school principals seem to be unconscious of ethics and the web of accountability (Dladla, 2020; Dwangu & Mahlangu, 2021; Komba, 2017; Louw, 2015). In agreement with these researchers, Fransson and Grannas (2013) highlight the unfeasible search for the “right thing” by school principals choosing between conflicting options in relation to different stakeholders’ views of educational leadership as the essence of dilemmas. This experience spurred me on to want to understand if other school principals faced such dilemmas as I did. Additionally, it is important that such incidents do not remain anecdotes, but become empirical evidence of what happens in schools and thus, generate empirical knowledge. Having outlined the background and rationale in the two sections above, I now move on to the formal declaration of what the problem is.

## **1.4 Statement of the problem**

The South African government has in the past made notable strides in promoting ethical leadership, as well as highlighting accountability while mitigating unethical leadership practices among public officials including school principals. For example, in 1996, the Public Service Commission (PSC) was established in terms of Chapter 196 of the South African Constitution with the mandate of promoting high standards of professional ethics in the public sector including public schools, (Public Service Commission, 2010). Also, in 2001, the government published a document titled 'Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy', which was intended to enhance ethical leadership and the promotion of human rights values by encouraging school principals to infuse ethics and accountability into their leadership (Department of Education, 2001). Again, in 2005, the government introduced an initiative called Batho Pele (meaning people first), which was aimed at improving integrity within the public administration through stricter monitoring of public officials' compliance to ethical practices and leadership (Cheteni & Shindika, 2017). Lastly, the Policy on the South African Standard for Principals was gazetted in 2016 by the Minister of Basic Education with the intention of cultivating ethics and accountability specifically for school principals' leadership (Department of Basic Education, 2015).

Notwithstanding the interventions by the South African government in cultivating an ethical culture of accountability for public officials including school principals, scholarly reports and those in the media space prove otherwise. For example, Mthiyane and Mudadigwa (2021) comment on the ethical lapse in schools being reported in the print and electronic media skyrocketing in recent years. Such remarks concur with Cronje (2016) who comments on jobs-for-cash scandals by school principals and on the increase in unethical practices in schools, with Gauteng taking the lead. In the same vein, Dibete and Potokri (2021) point towards school principals, SGBs, and administrative officials engaging in unethical practices such as disregarding policies; omission of duties; and poor internal control of the matters related to functioning of finance committees. Likewise, Schwella (2013) opines on South Africa producing several bad and unethical leaders. Such remarks are in alignment with what was reported as early as in 2001 in the Public Service Commission (2001), highlighting that 102 of 238 public employees were dismissed for unethical conduct. In the same article, it was also concluded that South African schools are not safe from corruption and unethical leadership

practices by school principals. Notably, du Plessis (2014) warns us of the prevalence and damaging impact of corruption in South African education and other unethical leadership practices endangering the country's social, economic, and political future. Despite its damning impact, sadly, a shortage of literature on ethical leadership in school leadership is recorded in international, African, and local literature (Alishahi et al., 2021; Katranci et al., 2015; Liu & Yin, 2023; Mansur et al., 2020; Pansiri et al., 2021).

There seems to be a problem with some school principals enacting ethical leadership during times of accountability. Despite Section 195(1)(a) of the South African Constitution emphasising and mandating public administration personnel to abide by a high standard of professional ethics, as well as Section 5.1.5(g) of the Policy on the South African Standard for Principalship which requires school principals to report to the CM educators' cases of misconduct in terms of the Agreements of the Educational Labour Relations Council (ELRC) and PSC, anecdotal evidence suggests that even during these times of increased accountability in South Africa and worldwide, some school principals enact unethical leadership by failing to report cases of misconduct to relevant stakeholders including the CMs and other departmental officials. Such evidence resonates with reports from the South African Council for Educators (SACE) which indicate that there is an insignificant number of reported cases of misconduct brought against educators (including school principals) compared with the number of educators in the system (South African Council for Educators, 2017). I believe that such unethical leadership practices are perpetuated by accountability pressures related to schools being complex and dynamic organisations, which may lead to school principals being caught in the dilemmatic of how to satisfy various stakeholders' views, aspirations and expectations.

Also, during times of failed accountability, some school principals, *firstly*, tend to overlook and ignore the seriousness of their own unethical conduct (their failure to report) to the CMs, the SGB, and other departmental officials; *secondly*, some school principals display an inability to act against an educator accused of maleficence; *thirdly*, sometimes some school principals further fail to report acts of maleficence to the CM and other relevant stakeholders; and *lastly*, some school principals have learnt to cover the tracks of their own unethical leadership practices. This problem negatively impacts on the educators, the SGB, the SMT, parents, learners, the CMs and other departmental officials as trust relationships between the school principal and these stakeholders collapses. The possible cause of this problem might be

dishonesty, irresponsible, unprofessionalism, or even impropriety on the side of the school principal. Perhaps a study which investigates school principals' experiences of ethical leadership during times of accountability might remedy the situation.

### **1.5 Significance of the study**

This study is intended to unearth school principals' experiences of ethical leadership during times of accountability. Given that schools have become more unpredictable, complex, dynamic, and fluid in nature, school principals are thus bound to encounter multiple dilemmas in pursuit of enacting ethical leadership in the days of burgeoning accountability. The study is also intended to uncover what the participating principals regard as the causes of unethical leadership practices among school principals. Current scholarship is not silent on this topic; some empirical evidence from DeMatthews and Serafini (2021); Mthiyane and Mudadigwa (2021); Pansiri et al. (2021); Snow et al. (2021); Somantri and Sardin (2017); and Vikaram et al. (2020) suggest that some school principals enact unethical leadership in their leadership as school leaders. The study further seeks to solicit how school principals enact ethical leadership practices in a complex school environment, characterised by multiple stakeholder participation. Of equal importance, the study also seeks to understand why school principals enact ethical leadership in a particular way during times of accountability. Given these postulations, the study is necessary in educational leadership.

Drawing from studies conducted in Europe, Asia, Latin America, and Africa, a shortage of empirical literature is noted in relation to school principals' enactment of ethical leadership during times of accountability, considering the complexities, dilemmas and dynamics associated with schools as open organisations (Alishahi et al., 2021; Katranci et al., 2015; Liu & Yin, 2023; Mansur et al., 2020; Pansiri et al., 2021). A huge gap which warrants further investigation has been identified from this phenomenon. The present study is also significant because it will be used to encourage future research on school principals' experiences of ethical leadership during accountability, considering the complexities, dilemmas, and dynamics associated with schools as open organisations. The study will further provide researchers, possibly policy makers and school principals with knowledge about the significance of enacting ethical leadership during times of burgeoning accountability. Finally, this study will add to the body of literature in South Africa about this important issue. The ultimate

significance of this study is to contribute to the existing limited body of knowledge of school principals' experiences of ethical leadership during times of accountability since the real purpose of any research is to expand the scientific knowledge in particular research (Welman et al., 2005).

The significance of ethical practice in educational leadership and the subsequent paucity of literature to that effect is not only prevalent in Western Countries, but is also notable in Asia, the Middle East, and Latin American countries. For example, in Malaysia, it is maintained that school principals are facing issues regarding their integrity and accountability (Vikaram et al., 2020). Furthermore, in Jordan, Al-Omari and Algaseem (2020) opine that some school principals have a challenge of maintaining consistent ethical behaviour in their leadership as school leaders. Also, the findings from Iran presented by Alishahi et al. (2021) highlight that some school principals face multiple ethical leadership challenges like a lack of professional ethics, a lack of social communication ethics, a lack of technical educational ethics, an absence of spiritual ethics, a lack of behavioural ethics and lack of decision-making ethics. Moreover, these researchers comment about Iranian school principals demonstrating poor communication at school, lacking trust, as well as lacking respect and other unethical leadership practices that are associated with school principals in their leadership (Alishahi et al., 2021). These unethical leadership practices were quite common at the height of the COVID- 19 pandemic. Similarly, in Chile, it is argued that some school principals act as institutional managers rather than as moral agents which then mitigates against ethical leadership (ethic of care to be precise) which must underpin their leadership (Cuellar & Giles, 2011). Despite Aljbour (2020) emphasising the significance of ethical leadership in making schools better places by uprooting ethical malpractices, a Brazilian article by Mansur et al. (2020) highlights a few empirical studies that were conducted on school principals' ethical leadership experiences, despite its growing interest and its positive benefits. Drawing from examples from European countries, Asia, Middle East, and Latin American countries, strong evidence exists about the shortage of empirical literature on school principals' experiences of ethical leadership during times of accountability. A huge gap thus exists (as earlier to alluded) in this regard (Katranci et al., 2015; Mansur et al., 2020).

Furthermore, in Africa, similar assertions are mentioned. For instance, a study conducted by Pansiri et al. (2021) in Botswana, reveals that ethical leadership is a major concern in African

schools. The study further highlights the media in Botswana being inundated with stories of moral decay in the standard of ethical leadership in schools. In harmony with these narratives from Botswana, an article from Zambia by Mwela and Mulenga-Hagane (2020) claims that reported cases of unprofessional misconduct by educators are rife. As a result, some educators including school principals end up being dismissed as a result of their unethical conduct. Also, findings from Oduol (2021) obtained from Kenyan schools, suggest that unethical behaviour is common among school principals, which ultimately harms individuals, relationships with other stakeholders, and organisations. In Uganda, Mugizi et al. (2019) proclaim that poor performance by teachers, including school principals, as well as late reporting for duty and not executing their professional duties are common ethical malpractices among teachers and school principals. Lastly, in the Kingdom of Eswatini, at least five school principals are dismissed annually for charges levelled against them for the misappropriation of school funds (Myende et al., 2020). Despite these disturbing remarks about school principals' ethical leadership enactment in Africa, a paucity of empirical studies has been recorded in literature (Liu & Yin, 2023; Pansiri et al., 2021).

## **1.6 Research questions**

- What are the school principals' experiences of ethical leadership during times of accountability?
- What are the views of the school principals regarding the causes of unethical leadership in schools during times of accountability?
- How do school principals enhance ethical leadership during times of accountability considering the complexities, dilemmas, and dynamics associated with the school as an open organisation?
- Why do school principals enact ethical leadership during times of accountability, the way they do?

## **1.7 Definitions of key concepts**

There are eight key terms that are defined operationally in this section. These terms are school principal, ethical leadership, educational leadership, experience, dilemmas, stakeholders, butterfly effect and multiple case study. These terms are discussed below.

## **School principal**

The term school principal refers to a school leader who is responsible for the school functioning, teaching and student learning (Iachini et al., 2016); stimulates the school climate (Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012); supports school staff and instructional processes (Printy, 2010); establishes and preserves the vision of the school (Bhengu & Myende, 2016); promotes partnership between the school, students, families and other community partners (Bhengu & Myende, 2016; Myende, 2018, 2019; Whitley, 2010); strengthens the collaborative capacity and leadership within the school (Whitley, 2010); and serves as a link between the school and the district office (Copland, 2003). Therefore, in the context of this study, a school principal is a person who ensures that the school achieves the goals for which it exists. Further discussion of this term is provided in Section 2.6 of Chapter Two.

## **Ethical leadership**

This study is about ethical leadership experiences of school principals. Therefore, it is crucial that the concept ‘ethical leadership’ is defined. Ethical leadership can be defined as the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, promotion of such conduct to followers through a two-way communication, reinforcement and decision- making (Brown & Trevino, 2006; Liu & Yin, 2023; Vikaram et al., 2020). Correspondingly, ethical leadership at school is the demonstration of personal values by a school principal like honesty, accountability, righteousness, just, trustworthiness, reliability, sincerity, reciprocity, democratic decision making, power sharing, fairness, respect, compassion, sympathy, gentleness, and prudence (Esmaelzadeh et al., 2017; Ghanem & Castelli, 2019; Vikaram et al., 2020; Vikaram et al., 2021). According to Naidoo (2015), ethical leadership is about influencing people through principles, values and beliefs that embrace what is defined as the right behaviour. In the Islamic context, it is claimed that ethical leadership is embedded on five principles viz. respect for others, serving others, showing justice, displaying honesty, and building community (Indra & Kustati, 2019). Ethical leadership is thus firmly rooted in the school principal’s ability to inspire educators and subsequently, his/her acceptance as credible and a role model who is worthy of emulation (Esmaelzadeh et al., 2017).

## **Educational leadership**

Educational leadership can be described as the ability of a school leader (school principal in this study), to influence School Management Teams (SMTs), educators, learners, SGB, parents and other stakeholders in education to collectively achieve the desired school goals (Bush & Glover, 2014). Despite scholars disagreeing about a common definition of educational leadership, at least they unanimously sing the same tune on ‘influence’ being at the heart of educational leadership. For example, Cuban (1988); Mullins (2010); Mullins and Christie (2016); and Yukl (2002) are of the view that educational leadership is a process of influencing others. Over and above influence, Bush and Glover (2014) and Bush and Middlewood (2005) believe that educational leadership is grounded on school principals’ firm personal and professional values, and involves his/ her ability to develop and articulate the vision of the school. Moreover, educational leadership concentrates on school principals as people, their behaviours, and their interaction processes with those they lead (Bass et al., 2009). As per Bush (2011) and Bush et al. (2010) citing Cuban (1988, p. xx). A clear definition of educational leadership is presented as follows:

*By leadership, I mean influencing others’ actions in achieving desirable ends.*

*Leaders are people who shape the goals, motivations, and actions of others.*

*Frequently, they initiate change to reach existing and new goal...Leaders...takes...much ingenuity, energy and skill.*

More detailed discussion of educational leadership can be found in Section 2.7 of Chapter Two.

## **Experience**

There are varied ways different scholars define the term experience. For instance, Doidge (2007) and Fox (2008), suggest that from an individual perspective, experience is a complex interaction between the body, sensory inputs and neurological processing. These scholars further believe that an experience is a relationship with the world we, as humans encounter, interpret, feel, and shape. Experience can thus be viewed as a multi-layered phenomenon in which individuals make sense of the world through cultural, cognitive, sub-conscious and personal interpretive layers, by negotiating norms and dominant values, attending to immediate human relationships, and through an individual context within larger societal and historical positioning (Fox, 2008). Likewise, Acampado (2019), defines experience as the interaction or



transaction between living organisms and their environment such that a state of equilibrium and satisfaction is achieved. According to Roth and Jornet (2014), experience is a category of thinking and a continuous process that includes people (their intellectual, affective, and practical characteristics), their material and social environment, their transactional relations (mutual effects on each other), and affect. These researchers further maintain that experience is not confined and concealed within individuals but extends in space and time across individuals and setting in the course of unfolding societal relations. The continuous process of making sense of an event that we have lived through and has run its course and comes to a determinate conclusion is commonly referred to as having an experience (Dewey, 1929). As per Fox (2008), 'having' an experience involves verbal and nonverbal translation contextualised through culture, history, politics, and language.

## **Dilemmas**

The term dilemma refer to a situation in which a person (school principal in this study) is required to deal with and manage two or more competing alternatives, values, obligations, and commitments that are in conflict with each other resulting in 'no right thing to do' (Fransson & Grannas, 2013; Ramsey & Khan, 2021; Yin et al., 2014). Fransson and Grannas (2013) believe that the unfeasible search for the 'right thing' among conflicting options in relation to multiple stakeholders in education is the essence of dilemmas. This premise is possible because dilemmas contain elements of contradiction, conflict, paradox, and inconsistency in the way they are perceived and resolved, since the process of dealing with one aspect may cause other aspects to become unsatisfactory or more problematic. Scager et al. (2017) are of the view that these conflicts are multiple in nature and equally viable with each having strengths and weaknesses in leadership. As a result, a school principal facing a dilemma may realise that all alternatives need to be considered, however, only one option can be pursued at a time (Ramsey & Khan, 2021). These remarks clearly suggest that dilemmas provide options for choosing one alternative over the other, and as such, the decision to pursue involves sacrificing the one not pursued.

Interestingly, Fransson and Grannas (2013) suggest that dilemmas should not be regarded as a specific event or situation but as ever present in peoples' living spaces and 'not out there per se', as a result teachers, including school principals often find themselves in situations in which

there is no right way of acting but ‘only a way of acting for the best’. Since dilemmas are ever present in peoples living spaces, educational leadership is not immune to them. For example, Scager et al. (2017) and Walton and Rusznyak (2019) proclaim that the very nature of educational leadership is dilemmatic, contradictory, and paradoxical with school principals having to balance competing demands, and a variety of interests from various stakeholders in their leadership. Also, Scager et al. (2017) voice their acknowledgement of dilemmas being central to education, and having become endemic in the teaching profession. Similarly, Fransson and Grannas (2013) suggest that school principals interact with multiple stakeholders in education, and therefore, they must make more complex decisions, which may generate more dilemmas. This may result in school principals managing recurring dilemmas rather than solving the problems (Fransson & Grannas, 2013). These scholars further indicate that dilemmas are the product of school principals’ internal negotiation between different views, ideals, values, positions, and actions. As a result, school principals find themselves in dilemmas of various magnitudes, and they must navigate through contradictory viewpoints (Yin et al., 2014). Regrettably, dilemmas cannot be fully solved as they are ever present in school principals’ leadership space (Fransson & Grannas, 2013). It is against this belief that Yin et al. (2014) are of the view that school principals need coping mechanisms to manage dilemmas presented to them.

## **Stakeholders**

One of the most commonly used concepts in leadership and management circles is that of stakeholders. These are defined as individuals, groups and organisations that have an interest in the functionality and the performance of the school and are subsequently involved in its welfare and success (Freeman et al., 2007; Harrison et al., 2015; Mashau et al., 2014; Paine & McCann, 2016). According to the Department of Education (2000), stakeholders are all the role players in an organisation such as the school. Stakeholders are further distinguished as either internal and external stakeholders (Laplume et al., 2008; Paine & McCann, 2016). Internal stakeholders refer to those stakeholders who work within the school daily and who largely control what goes on there (Paine & McCann, 2016). Similarly, Benn et al. (2016) contend that internal stakeholders are primary stakeholders by virtue of having a contractual relationship with the school, and as such the latter cannot survive without the former. Internal stakeholders in a school include the principal, teaching and non-teaching staff, learners, SGB,

parents, and district officials (Mashau et al., 2014; Paine & McCann, 2016). Contrary to that, external stakeholders are those individual, groups and organisations who have an interest in the school's affairs but are outside the day-to-day functioning of the school and do not directly determine what goes into producing the outcomes and are they are influenced by the actions taken by the school (Paine & McCann, 2016; Putra & Suryanawa, 2022). External stakeholders are sometimes called secondary stakeholders since they influence and affect the school, while they can also be influenced and affected by the school's actions even though they are not essential for its survival (Benn et al., 2016). External stakeholders include special interest groups; competitors (in the form of competing schools, feeder and feeding schools); media; and community at large (Benn et al., 2016; Harrison et al., 2015; Laplume et al., 2008). A detailed discussion on stakeholders is found in Section 3.3 of Chapter Three.

### **Butterfly effect**

A butterfly effect is an element of Chaos Theory. As such, the butterfly effect argues that a butterfly flapping its wings in Brazil can set off a tornado in Texas, United States (US) two years later (Gleick, 1987b; Hayles, 1990; Trivedi, 2021). The butterfly effect simply implies that a minor or insignificant change, action or decision in the system (*a* system being an object studied in some field which might be abstract or concrete; simple or complicated; linear or non-linear), can have a far-reaching impact on other systems and outcomes which may not be related to our system (Daljit, 2009; Mehta, 2019; Rickles et al., 2007; Trivedi, 2021). Further discussions on the butterfly effect can be found in Section 3.4 of this thesis.

### **Multiple case study**

A multiple case study is case study research in which the researcher identifies a few cases - and studies them in some depth (Rule & John, 2011). In a multiple case study, one issue or concern is selected, but the researcher uses multiple cases to illustrate the issue (Creswell, 2007). Moreover, if a study requires more than one case to be investigated, a multiple case study is needed (Stake, 1995). A multiple case study approach is supported by the belief that selecting more than one case results in a better understanding of the phenomenon since the researcher can detect the similarities, differences and comparisons in the data generated from the cases (Creswell, 2007; Rule & John, 2011; Stake, 1995). Studies that are considered to be convincing

and robust are usually conducted using multiple cases (Yin, 2014). Further discussion on the multiple case study is found in Section 4.4 of Chapter Four.

### **1.8 Delimitations of the study**

According to Leedy et al. (2021), delimitations of a study deal with what the researcher will not do when conducting a study. Delimitations are the researcher's self-imposed restrictions in the study by describing the parameters and the scope of the study (Miles & Scott, 2017). Theofanidis and Fountouki (2018) maintain that delimitations are in the researcher's control and are mainly concerned with the researcher deciding on the boundaries and demarcations of his/her study. Delimitations are an integral part of research because they define the boundaries of the study while informing the readers of what is included, what is left out, and why those decisions were taken (Mauch & Birch, 1998). Interestingly, delimitations imply limitations on the populations to which the findings of the study can be generalised because they enable the researcher to decide on the participants, their gender, their age, their race, their positions, how they were sampled, as well as the rationale for such actions (Rudestam & Newton, 2015). As a result, delimitations prevent the researcher from claiming that the findings of his/her study are true for all people at all places (Bryant, 2004).

In harmony with the claims presented in the preceding paragraph, Leedy et al. (2021) suggest that in order to delineate the study, the researcher must take into consideration limiting the sample size, selecting the general location, and delineating the specific boundaries of the study. Given that in South Africa there are nine provinces with eighty-one education districts, with thousands and thousands of school principals, these considerations become significant in my study (Mkhongi & Musakwa, 2020; Motala et al., 2015). Furthermore, in the uMgungundlovu District (in the KZN province where the study is conducted), there are twelve education districts with a total of 489 schools, 127 high schools, 50 independent (private schools), and 33 combined schools (Mkhongi & Musakwa, 2020). Given the impossibility of addressing all these contexts, the present study is conducted in six schools (primary and secondary public schools) in the uMgungundlovu District, KwaZulu-Natal Province, South Africa.

## **1.9 Outline of the study**

This section provides an outline of the whole thesis by giving a summary of what each chapter contains.

### **1.9.1 Chapter One**

Chapter One introduces and provides an orientation to the study. It does this by firstly, giving a background of the study's problem, then providing a formal statement of the problem, the rationale, the significance of the study, as well as the research questions which underpin the focus of the study. The definition of key concepts, the delimitations of the study, as well as the outline of the study follow. The chapter ends with a conclusion.

### **1.9.2 Chapter Two**

This is a second chapter, and it provides a broader understanding of what has been done in the area of ethical leadership and accountability. The chapter does this by reviewing literature and thus, it presents critical engagements on current debates on this subject from both the local and international perspectives on ethical leadership.

### **1.9.3 Chapter Three**

Chapter Three provides a detailed discussion of the theories that constitute a theoretical framework for the study. There are four theories that constitute a theoretical framework, and these are Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory, Chaos Theory, Accountability Theory, and Stakeholder Theory.

### **1.9.4 Chapter Four**

Chapter Four presents a detailed account of the research design and methodology that was followed in examining the narrated experiences of the school principals regarding their understanding and practices of ethical leadership, and thus, respond to the research questions guiding the study. Key descriptions of the research paradigm, research design, multiple case study methodology, sampling, data generation methods and data analysis techniques are

presented. The chapter concludes by providing an account of how ethical issues were observed during the study.

### **1.9.5 Chapter Five**

This chapter is about the presentation of the findings that were arrived at after an analysis of data. The chapter provides a detailed presentation of raw data from the six school principals who participated in this study. The data is presented thematically, guided broadly by the research questions on school principals' experiences of ethical leadership during times of accountability. No literature is utilised in the presentation of raw data.

### **1.9.6 Chapter Six**

Chapter Six presents a detailed interpretive and theoretical analysis and discussion of the qualitative data. This is a second level of analysis of data, and it entails the discussion of emerging themes from the raw data that was presented in the previous chapter. Literature that was reviewed in Chapter Two as well as the theories that were discussed in Chapter Three are injected into the discussion to enhance the quality of the discussion.

### **1.9.7 Chapter Seven**

Chapter Seven presents conclusions that are drawn from the findings that were presented in Chapter Five and discussed in Chapter Six. This chapter is the final chapter which draws from the discussion of findings to make conclusions that lead to the emerging model that explains how ethical leadership as experienced by school principals that participated in the study can be enhanced. Furthermore, the chapter presents the recommendations for various stakeholders.

### **1.10 Conclusion**

This chapter presented an introduction and orientation of the study. It introduced the study of school principals' experiences of ethical leadership during times of accountability, and discussed the complexities, dilemmas and dynamics involved around ethical leadership. The chapter also presented a background to the problem and presented a formal statement of the problem, the rationale, as well as the significance of the study. Other key elements of the thesis

such as the research questions, operational definitions of key concepts, delimitations, and an outline of the study are presented. Overall, the chapter has succeeded in showing the need to understand ethical leadership practices of school principals and what the principals generally regard as some of the dilemmas in exercising ethical leadership. The next chapter delves deeper into various dimensions of ethical leadership from the perspectives of both local and international scholarship.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEWING LITERATURE RELATED TO ETHICAL LEADERSHIP AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter provided the orientation to the study. The study is intended to unearth school principals' experiences of ethical leadership during times of accountability. Given that schools have become more unpredictable, complex, dynamic, and fluid in nature, school principals are thus bound to encounter multiple dilemmas in pursuit of enacting ethical leadership in the hey days of burgeoning accountability. This chapter explores literature related to the importance of ethical leadership and school principals' experiences of ethical leadership during times of accountability in a complex, non-linear environment fraught with various dilemmas and contradictions. Literature related to the causes of unethical leadership practices by school principals is also reviewed. Furthermore, literature is also examined in relation to philosophical and operational questions about how and why schools enact ethical leadership in a particular way during times of accountability considering the complexities, dilemmas and dynamics associated with schools as open organisations. Also, sub-topics that are deemed crucial to this study are reviewed and include ethics in educational leadership, school principals in education, the development of educational leadership, accountability and its implication for school principals, complexities in education, and dynamic school environments.

#### **2.2 The importance of ethical leadership and school principals' experiences during times of accountability in a complex, dilemmatic and dynamic school environment**

Several studies have reported on the importance of ethical leadership in schools during times of accountability (Katranci et al., 2015; Vikaraman et al., 2018). Ethical leadership is at the heart of the schools' functionality as decisions are influenced and shaped by ethics (Arar & Saiti, 2022; Robbins & Trabichet, 2009). Despite its importance, Cheteni and Shindika (2017) remark on the paucity of literature on ethical leadership in the United States of America (USA) with regards to public sector contexts as most studies seem to focus on businesses. Similarly, in the African context, research conducted on ethics and ethical leadership is mainly dominated by the private sector and it is limited in the public sector (including schools) (Cheteni &



Shindika, 2017). These remarks clearly point to a huge gap that exists with regards to ethical leadership during times of accountability in schools. With the South African government declaring education an apex priority, the government's expenditure on education provisioning had to be increased accordingly (Chisholm, 2004; Gernetzky, 2016; Monyooe, 2017). With such lucrative financial injections on educational provisioning by the government, as well as broad media coverage on education, one would presume that for school principals to achieve optimum accountability, ethical leadership would subsequently become central in their leadership. School principals ultimately had to be more tactful in executing their roles as representatives of the provincial Head of Department (HoD) ensuring professional management of the school (Mestry, 2004, 2010; Republic of South Africa, 1996b). This delegated authority by the HoD to school principals meant that the latter had to be more accountable for their actions (Mestry, 2010). Further, in the modern world, there is broad media reporting (as earlier alluded to) on educational matters, which then results in parents and the community at large having a greater awareness of the expected practices by the school principal, hence, greater accountability is needed from the latter (Somantri & Sardin, 2017). This is because ethical leadership is essential in terms of competing accountabilities, as well as for ensuring that ethical practices within the school are implemented (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016).

Brown and Trevino (2006) define an ethical leader as a leader who abides by moral values, principles and moral conduct in their actions and decision-making, while being able to inspire the followers to be equally ethical in pursuit of achieving the school's vision and mission. Correspondingly, ethical leadership at school is the demonstration of personal values by the school principal like honesty, accountability, righteousness, justness, trustworthiness, reliability, sincerity, reciprocity, democratic decision making, power sharing, fairness, respect, compassion, sympathy, gentleness, and prudence (Edwards et al., 2023; Esmaelzadeh et al., 2017; Ghanem & Castelli, 2019; Vikaram et al., 2020; Vikaram et al., 2021). According to Naidoo (2015), ethical leadership is about influencing people through principles, values and beliefs that embrace what is defined as the right behaviour. In the Islamic context, it is claimed that ethical leadership is embedded on five principles viz. respect for others, serving others, showing justice, displaying honesty, and building community (Indra & Kustati, 2019). Ethical leadership is thus firmly rooted in the school principal's ability to inspire educators and subsequently, to accept him/her as credible as a role model who is worthy of emulation

(Esmaelzadeh et al., 2017). In the light of these perspectives, one can easily conclude that ethical leadership is the kind of leadership that is founded on basic human rights principles like respect for human dignity, democratic values, access to information and transparency, as well as equality and freedom as enshrined in the South African Bill of Rights (Republic of South Africa, 1996a).

Interestingly, Maslow (1943) in his hierarchy of needs theory, believes that optimum enactment of ethical practices is the highest order of functioning which falls under self-actualisation. Such thinking suggests that after the school principal has satisfied physiological needs (basic teaching and learning in the school); safety needs (staff, parents, SGB, and learners feel safe and protected in the school); love and belonging needs (school's capacity for being trusted, valued, and accepted by various stakeholders); and esteem needs (school's desire for reputation and respect from other stakeholders); s/he can finally strive for self-actualisation (Maslow, 1943). I believe that a school principal's realisation of his/ her own potential, including but not limited to their ability to satisfy and account to various stakeholders in education, as well as optimum enactment of ethical leadership practices, is the highest order that the former can then seek in relation to the current study. In Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, self-actualisation lies at the top of the pyramid. Achieving self-actualisation by school principals (for example, optimum enactment ethical leadership practices and the ability to satisfy and account to all stakeholders in education), results in their own personal growth, self-fulfilment, and self-discovery in their roles as school leaders (Maslow, 1943). This then proves beyond reasonable doubt that optimum enactment of ethical leadership and satisfying all stakeholders (through accountability) by the school principal is not an easy exercise.

As earlier indicated, in times of accountability, the importance of enacting ethical leadership by school principals can never be over emphasised. Such thinking is supported by the fact that accountability entails being answerable to one's clients (moral accountability) (Dwangu & Mahlangu, 2021; Eriksen, 2021); being liable to oneself, and one's colleagues (professional accountability) Mestry (2010); being responsible to one's employers (contractual accountability) (Mestry, 2004, 2010); and giving an account of actions taken (Mestry, 2004). Dwangu and Mahlangu (2021) posit that accountability is also institution centred, with school principals taking responsibility for the services provided by the school. By virtue of having reciprocal relationships between the principals, teachers, the SGBs and education officials,

leadership accountability ensures compatibility between the quality of education rendered and value-for-money (Dwangu & Mahlangu, 2021; Komba, 2017). It is for these reasons that one can place emphasis on school principals' ethical leadership practices as being central in achieving accountability.

In corroboration with the above arguments, schools as complex organisations are characterised by a number of interconnected role players who interact with each other, depend on each other, and co-adapt over time to enhance the effective functionality of the school (Fidan & Balci, 2017; Jansen, 2020; Larsen-Freeman, 2016). However, the existence of these numerous stakeholders in the school environment ultimately leads to uncertainty, instability, an unpredictable school environment and confusion in achieving accountability (Fidan & Balci, 2017; Henry, 2016). Subsequently, dilemmas faced by school principals in their leadership intensifies by virtue of the principal being ever present in people's living spaces (Fransson & Grannas, 2013). With the school principal being the key role player among various stakeholders in education, the principal is bound to encounter multiple dilemmas in his/her ethical leadership practices because the difficulty of satisfying and accommodating all role players is a common challenge among school principals globally (Eze & Onwudinjo, 2021).

Drawing from how accountability is conceptualised and portrayed in the literature one could strongly conclude that a school principal who is inspired by the ideals of ethical leadership in his/her practice, will definitely achieve optimum accountability. Such a narrative is possible because in his/her leadership, transparency, accountability, honesty, truthfulness, justice, care, compassion, fairness, trustworthiness, sincerity, respect, professionalism, love, and other positive values (values underpinning ethical leadership) are demonstrated and executed with ease, by virtue of such values being deeply crafted in the principals' veins, forming part of internal personal traits that characterise them (Hlongwane, 2021). Similarly, Ozan et al. (2017) places emphasis on ethical leaders' ability to enhance their accountability to all relevant stakeholders in education. Such a premise is possible because ethical school principals view leadership as serving others and being accountable (Indra & Kustati, 2019). Moreover, ethical school principals have embedded personal values, demonstrating self-confidence, maturity, and courage in decision-making, while being determined to seek solutions to problems (Department of Basic Education, 2015).

Inasmuch as ethical leadership is vital in ensuring accountability in the day-to-day operation of the school, a study conducted by Vikaram et al. (2020) in Malaysia, advocates for approaches to be devised that will enhance school principals' understanding of the concept. These researchers also reveal that school principals shared some traces of understanding of what ethical leadership is, but their justification lacked a clarification of how ethical leadership contributes to a holistic schools success including, accountability (Vikaram et al., 2020). Contrary to the Malaysian context, in South Africa, Dladla (2020), in his multiple case study (where six school principals and twelve educators participated in the study), it was revealed that school principals showed profound understanding of ethics but improperly enacted ethical leadership in their practice as school leaders.

Additionally, in the same case study (indicated in the preceding paragraph), conducted in Malaysia by Vikaram et al. (2020), the findings suggest that ethical leadership is a common experience in their leadership. These findings are consistent with the findings by Papaloi et al. (2022) which suggest that school principals in Great Britain, Germany, Italy, Spain, and France possess ethical traits such as integrity, honesty and sincerity. The article by Vikaram et al. (2020) further reveals that inasmuch as school principals enact ethical leadership in their practice; however, they lack understanding of their actions. Remarkably, earlier research findings by Vikaraman et al. (2018) have indicated high to moderately high practices of ethical leadership by school principals. School principals' experiences of ethical leadership are also supported by 438 teachers who responded in a nationwide questionnaire where the findings revealed that principals throughout Malaysia enact ethical leadership (Vikaram et al., 2021). The results from teachers also corroborated the views of three interviewed school principals (who participated in the same mixed methods study with teachers) which indicates that principals, in their leadership practised several dimensions of ethical leadership. Some of the ethical leadership experience that are commonly practised by school principals in Malaysia, include integrity, fairness, people orientation, power sharing, ethical guidance, role clarification, and a concern for sustainability (Kalshoven et al., 2010; Vikaram et al., 2020; Vikaram et al., 2021).

Correspondingly, in Amman (Jordan), the findings of Aljbour (2020) obtained from 80 teachers who were randomly selected from ten public schools, revealed that the incidence of experiencing ethical leadership by school principal is very high. The study further indicated

that school principals in those schools were honest, kind, kept their promises, and supported the teachers under their leadership. Contrary to such findings, in South Africa, inasmuch as school principals show profound understanding of ethics, ethical leadership is improperly enacted (Dladla, 2020). This suggests that some South African school principals show an excellent understanding of ethical leadership, yet their practice proves otherwise. Also, findings by Dladla (2020), in commenting on poor enactment of ethical leadership by school principals, suggest that it is not an isolated revelation but rather, it aligns with the findings of Schwella (2013) who opines that South Africa is producing several bad and unethical leaders. Such remarks are congruent with what was reported as early as 2001 in the Public Service Commission (PSC) report which highlighted that 102 of 238 public employees were dismissed for unethical conduct (Public Service Commission, 2001; Serfontein & de Waal, 2015). In the same article, it was also concluded that South African schools are not safe from corruption and unethical leadership practices by school principals. Dibete and Potokri (2021) corroborate these findings by pointing out that school principals engaged in numerous unethical leadership practices.

### **2.3 Prevalence and causes of unethical leadership by school principals**

Despite several international and local studies having emphasised the significance of ethical leadership during times of accountability, there is also a myriad of reports and allegations of unethical behaviour and malpractice by school principals globally. For example, reports from the USA by DeMatthews and Serafini (2021) suggest that school principals enact unethical leadership by neglecting their accountability responsibility. In the UK, Somantri and Sardin (2017) attest that school principals are being confronted by the challenge of enacting ethical leadership, including ‘getting things right’ and also ‘getting right things’ in their practice as school leaders. According to Snow et al. (2021), school principals’ enactment of toxic unethical leadership practices in Ireland result in schools having to deal with the aftermath of a gradual erosion of quality education provision. Likewise, postulations from Turkish schools highlight the lack of ethical leadership understanding from educators, which has resulted in the collapse of trust towards school principals (Katranci et al., 2015).

Notably, these ethical turpitudes by school principals are not only occurring in the western countries as shown in the previous paragraph but are also notable in other parts of the world

such as Asia, the Middle East, and Latin American countries. For example, in Malaysia, it is maintained that school principals are facing issues regarding their integrity and accountability (Vikaram et al., 2020). Furthermore, in Jordan, Al- Omari and Algaseem (2020) opine that school principals have a challenge of maintaining consistent ethical behaviour in their leadership. Also, findings from Iran, presented by Alishahi et al. (2021) highlight that school principals face multiple ethical leadership challenges such as a lack of professional ethics, lack of social-communication ethics, lack of technical-educational ethics, absence of spiritual ethics, lack of behavioural ethics and lack of decision-making ethics. Moreover, these researchers allude to the fact that Iranian school principals also demonstrate poor communication at school, a lack of trust, as well as a lack of respect as other unethical leadership practices that predominate leadership of school principals (Alishahi et al., 2021). These unethical leadership practices were quite common at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, in Chile, it is argued that some school principals act as institutional managers rather than moral agents, which then stands against ethical leadership (ethic of care to be precise) which must underpin their leadership (Cuellar & Giles, 2011).

Furthermore, in Africa, similar remarks have been mentioned. For instance, a study conducted by Pansiri et al. (2021) in Botswana, reveals that ethical leadership is a major concern in African schools. The study further highlights that the media in Botswana is inundated with stories of moral decay in the standard of ethical leadership in schools. In agreement with these narratives from Botswana, an article from Zambia by Mwela and Mulenga- Hagane (2020) mentions a number of reported cases of unprofessional conduct by educators as being rife, and as a result, some educators including school principals, end up being dismissed due their unethical conduct. Also, findings by Oduol (2021), obtained from Kenyan schools, suggest that unethical behaviour is common among school principals, which ultimately, harms individual relationships with other stakeholders, and organisations. In Uganda, Mugizi et al. (2019) proclaim that poor performance by teachers, including school principals, as well as late reporting for duty and not executing their professional duties, are common ethical lapses among teachers and school principals. Lastly, in the Kingdom of Eswatini, at least five school principals are dismissed annually for charges of misappropriation of school funds having been levelled against them (Myende et al., 2020). Despite these disturbing remarks on school principals' ethical leadership enactment in Africa, a paucity of empirical studies has been recorded in the literature.

Notwithstanding the interventions earlier mentioned in the significance of the study (Section 1.5 of Chapter One), by the South African government in cultivating an ethical culture and accountability among public officials, including school principals, scholarly reports and those in the media space prove otherwise. For example, Mthiyane and Mudadigwa (2021) posit that ethical lapses in schools are being reported by the print and electronic media as sky rocketing in recent years. Such remarks are in agreement with Cronje (2016) who accentuates that jobs-for-cash scandals by school principals indicate an increase in unethical practices in schools, with Gauteng province taking the lead. In the same vein, Dibete and Potokri (2021) point that school principals, SGBs, and administrative officials are engaging in unethical practices such as disregarding policies, omission of duties, and poor internal control on the matters related to the functioning of finance committees. Likewise, Schwella (2013) opines that South Africa is producing a number of bad and unethical leaders. Such remarks are in alignment with what was reported as early as in 2001 in the Public Service Commission report as cited by Serfontein and de Waal (2015) which highlights that 102 of 238 public employees were dismissed for unethical conduct. In the same article, it was also concluded that South African schools were not safe from corruption and unethical leadership practices by school principals. Notably, du Plessis (2014) warns us on the prevalence and the damaging impact of corruption in South African education and other unethical leadership practices that are endangering the country's social, economic and political future. Despite its damning impact, regrettably, a shortage of literature on ethical leadership in school leadership is recorded on the international, African and local literature.

It is quite telling that a qualitative study by Mthiyane and Mudadigwa (2021) conducted from four schools in Gauteng, South Africa, highlights the factors that cause school principals to conduct themselves unethically. The study remarks on factors such as materialism; principals' living beyond their means; thus, being tempted to indulge in the abuse of school funds and abuse of power (principals abusing school funds for personal gain); a lack of policy implementation; a lack of proper school structures were identified as the causes of ethical turpitudes in South African schools (Mthiyane & Mudadigwa, 2021). In Italy, social influences, egocentrism, self-justification, exposure to incremental dishonesty, loss aversion, challenging performance goals, as well as time pressure are labelled as the causes of unethical leadership (Belle & Cantarelli, 2017). In both these countries, greed and dishonesty seem to be common

as reasons for unethical practice by school principals (Belle & Cantarelli, 2017; Mthiyane & Mudadigwa, 2021).

#### **2.4 The significance of enacting ethical leadership during times of accountability and how school principals can enhance ethical leadership in their leadership as school leaders**

Despite the challenges faced by school principals (as earlier shown in Section 2.3 of Chapter Two) in enacting ethical leadership in their practice as school leaders, several studies, including those by Cuellar and Giles (2011), Indra and Kustati (2019), as well as Papaloi et al. (2022), have highlighted the reasons why school principals should infuse ethics and morality in their leadership as school leaders. For example, in a quantitative research study conducted from 451 educators from six European countries (*viz.* Greece, Great Britain, Germany, France, Italy and Spain), the study reveals that ethical leadership affected educators' performance by prompting them to develop ethical attitudes and behaviours beyond their roles (Papaloi et al., 2022). The study also mentions that ethical leadership encouraged moral behaviour among educators, reduced workplace deviance and counterproductive behaviour (Papaloi et al., 2022). Also, in another quantitative study conducted in Indonesia among 80 teachers in eight Islamic secondary schools, the study's findings highlight ethical leadership's ability to influence school principals' success in realising the vision and mission of the school (Indra & Kustati, 2019). In the same study, it is further argued that an ethical leader helps build and strengthen the school by allowing educators to confront the conflicts by implementing change (Indra & Kustati, 2019). In the same vein, Shapiro and Stefkovich (2016) claim that ethical leadership further helps educators to overcome values that are contradictory with those of the school.

In Chile, a multiple case study was conducted with 8 school principals who were purposively selected to participate in the study. Notably, the study postulates that education is a moral endeavour; hence, ethical leadership is at the core of education (Cuellar & Giles, 2011). The study further suggests that in a complex and dynamic school environment, characterised by external accountability pressures, school principals must be grounded in strong ethical values that serve to deal with external imposition. In view of these assertions from Chile, I am convinced that ethical leadership practices equip school principals and educators with coping mechanism to deal with a complex and ever-changing school environment. This is in alignment with a study conducted in Botswana, where it is revealed that ethical leadership serves as a tool



for effective school leadership given that it promotes good governance (Pansiri et al., 2021). It also postulates that it contains more powerful intrinsic behaviour traits like truthfulness, unselfishness and trustworthiness which are rarely displayed by most leaders.

In order to enhance ethical leadership, school principals should be ethically conscious, with a deep understanding that ethical behaviour will ultimately be the culture of the school (Den Hartog, 2015). In schools where ethical leadership is enacted, educators view principals as their role models and learn socially ethical normative values by mimicking the latter's ethical behaviours (Bandura, 1977; Den Hartog, 2015; Ogunfowora, 2014; Wang et al., 2021). One can thus easily conclude that ethical leadership is deeply influenced by Social Learning Theory because it is also acquired through human interaction (Bandura, 1977, 1986; Den Hartog, 2015; Den Hartog & Belschak, 2012; Wang et al., 2021). In addition, Wang et al. (2021) proclaim that ethical leaders act both as moral persons and moral managers. Besides, Khoza (2011) advocates for the involvement of all stakeholders to enhance ethical leadership in schools, since the success of any organisation depends on the effort of all stakeholders. The involvement of all stakeholders will ultimately force school principals to practise ethical leadership, as they will be conscious that they are part of the team and do not work in silos. Enactment of ethical leadership by school principals is influenced by accountability since school principals will be transparent, professional, fair and honest in their dealings by virtue of being mindful that at any time, they might be called to answer and justify their actions and decisions (Ozan et al., 2017). Likewise, Pushpa (2012) declares that ethical leaders create teams in their schools in their quest to enhance ethical leadership and an ethical working environment. Such thinking is consistent with Mangena (2012) who views justice as residing within the community.

Drawing from the preceding paragraphs and other sources of literature I have consulted to conceptualise ethical leadership, I have realised that, to some degree, ethical leadership is inseparable from ethics. Searching scholarly articles on ethical leadership in most cases, yields intense description of ethics. As a result I have decided to discuss ethics since it contains rich information on educational leadership which will enrich the current study as reflected in the ensuing section. Therefore, the role of ethics in educational leadership is a critical aspect that should not be ignored.

## 2.5 Ethics in educational leadership

Several scholars, including Rebores (2001), as well as Somantri and Sardin (2017) remark that the complexity of ethics yields difficulty in its conceptualisation. According to these scholars, this difficulty emanates from human conduct which is the crux of ethics (Somantri & Sardin, 2017). Rebores (2001) also indicates that conduct does not merely occur in a human being, but that it originates from the totality of a person; hence, the difficulty in understanding ethics. Despite this difficulty, most scholars are unanimous about the genesis of ethics. Researchers concur that ethics has its roots from the Greek word *ethos*, meaning conduct, character or custom (Aljbour, 2020; Dewey & Tufts, 1908; Hazarika, 2020; Karen & Udemeh, 2021; Mathur & Corley, 2014; Ozan et al., 2017; Pietersen, 2018; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011; Somantri & Sardin, 2017). In addition, Karen and Udemeh (2021) and Ozan et al. (2017) reveal that initially, ethics were once used in reference to customs and practices that differentiate societies or group from others. These researchers mention that later on, people started using character and temper for ethics to describe decent behaviours (Karen & Udemeh, 2021; Ozan et al., 2017). Contributing to the definitions presented by these scholars, ethics can thus be conceptualised as internal personal traits that each individual possesses and which form part of each person's make up (Hlongwane, 2021). Also, the issue of ethics is not only limited to the behaviours and actions of school principals, but it further includes the practices of the teaching profession, those of the Department of Education, as well as those of the school (Mathur & Corley, 2014).

Furthermore, early attempts to define ethics date back centuries to the era of Plato (427-347 B.C.) and Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), (Aljbour, 2020; Somantri & Sardin, 2017). According to Ehrich et al. (2011), Plato is credited with saying 'ethics is what we ought to do or how we ought to live our lives'. I believe that ethics are thus, about how people should behave and conduct themselves in relation to others and it encompasses concepts like honesty, responsibility, trustworthiness, fairness, accountability, compassion, empathy, kindness, and prudence. Contrary to this justification, some scholars define ethics in terms of what they are not, for instance, fraud, corruption, deception, and abuse of power (Cranston et al., 2006). To this effect, Somantri and Sardin (2017) warn on defining ethics based on what it is not, thus presenting the potential danger of prescription in what people ought (not) to do in life and professionally. This dissonance results in ethics being a highly disputed and subjective concept.

Similarly, some scholars, for example, Derr (2012); Dewey and Tufts (1908); and Somantri and Sardin (2017) view ethics as a discipline and a science that deals with conduct considered to be right or wrong, good or bad. I believe that ethics as a science, can be used as a way of understanding and examining the morals, conduct and good life (Derr, 2012).

Evidence from various sources of literature indicates that ethics are a prerequisite and universal concept that is championed across the spectrum, irrespective of race, religion, profession, group, gender, geography, creed, and culture. Some believe that ethics tend to outweigh religion in terms of recognition and supremacy (Nirupama & D'Souza, 2021). All professions seemingly advocate for ethics. From business to accounting; law to medicine; politics to journalism; astronomy to engineering; social sciences to natural sciences; as well as art, music and sport; ethics are central to each of these disciplines. Interestingly, ethics are also advocated even by criminals, which can be easily labelled as an 'unethical grouping.' For example, Peacock and Theron (2007) and Shayi (2008) suggest that prison gangs require their members to be obedient and loyal to the ethics guiding their respective gang. This clearly suggests that the issue of ethics is far reaching, across all disciplines. Such thinking aligns with Somantri and Sardin (2017) who liken ethics to air by virtue of it being all around, but only noticed in its absence. Likewise, educational leadership is not unsusceptible to ethics.

Furthermore, as a school principal, I have experienced being conflicted and finding myself in dilemma-filled spaces, common to educational leadership. Such a space is a result of yearning to do something good, while simultaneously, experiencing a temptation for fulfilling one's self-interest (Fransson & Grannas, 2013). In this space of dilemma, the issue of ethics become vital because, I imagine, yearning for something good is like a soft-spoken voice that speaks to school principals' heart to choose good over evil. In similar fashion, Somantri and Sardin (2017) suggest that ethics are needed more than ever before in educational leadership. They point out that school principals in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are faced with even more daunting decision-making difficulties, thus necessitating their ethical consciousness and effective leadership (Somantri & Sardin, 2017). To achieve this endeavour, ethics and principles are further mentioned as a means to channel their decisions and practices to get things right and getting right things (Somantri & Sardin, 2017). Apart from this postulation, several benefits associated with ethics in educational leadership are recorded in the literature. These benefits include, but are not limited to, helping education systems to run smoothly (Hazarika, 2020); ethically-

driven school principal sets the ethical tone in the school (Bansal & Kumar, 2018; Ehrich et al., 2015); helping school principals, SMT and educators to make decision on their own while preparing students to fulfil future roles in the society as responsible and ethical citizens (Nirupama & D'Souza, 2021), and positively affecting school principals' lives and society (Aljbour, 2020). The benefits also include enhancing accountability in all relevant stakeholders in education (Ozan et al., 2017), and the promotion of effective interaction between the school principal and other stakeholders in education (Engelbrecht et al., 2014). Similarly, Cuellar and Giles (2011) view education as a moral endeavour; embracing ethics in education by those in leadership, including school principals, SMT, educators, non- educators, teacher unions, SGB, and parents, that can never be overemphasised.

Inasmuch as ethics are acknowledged by most (if not all) professions, Bowen et al. (2006) mention that students preparing to enter the business, medical, and human services professions are exposed to ethics and ethical decision-making in their university and college coursework. As a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) candidate who is keen to understand the phenomenon more, I may be tempted to envy the efforts of these fields. However, research also indicates that these attempts are a mere exposure and are not intended to drill the students on the concept. For example, Louw (2015) reveals that a study by the Ethics Institute of South Africa in nine universities and across 224 educators from primary and secondary schools in Gauteng, Mpumalanga and North West Province, was conducted with the aim of determining whether ethics are incorporated in the curricula of schools and universities. The findings showed that ethic courses are generally one semester long and account for between 2% and 3% of the entire qualification in business schools. Such shocking findings make one deliberate on how school principals and other leaders learn about ethics. Do ethical values come naturally, and as a result, school principals rely on their morality and conscience? This could then create havoc since the two are very subjective. According to Hlongwane (2021), this might be one of the reasons that has resulted in some educators and school principals' ethical conduct being questioned and leaving much to be desired for some time. If the content on ethics is so minimal at universities, how then do we expect school principals to learn about ethics and be ethical? A huge gap thus, exists in terms of training educational leaders about ethics in general. Regrettably, Bowen et al. (2006) also voice their concern on educational leadership lagging behind with regards to infusing ethics at institutions of higher learning, in training programmes for student educators *vis-à-vis* other disciplines, including business, medical, and human services.

In concluding this section, I would advise readers to engage with Section 3.2.1 of Chapter Three (the four lenses of the Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory: ethic of care, ethic of justice, ethic of critique and ethic of profession) since I believe it will deepen and enrich the understanding of the phenomenon.

## **2.6 School principals in education**

According to Weis (1992), the first use of the concept ‘principal’ is hard to trace; however, Pierce (1935) proclaim that the concept first appeared in 1838 with the first appointed principal being a male. Interestingly, Weis (1992) also mentions that the actual date of when the term was first used is not apparent but he maintains that certain factors led to its development in 1844. In analysing these two conflicting statements from these seminal scholars, I am inclined to believe that the term was developed around the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Before this era, heading the school was vested upon the schoolmaster who was the school teacher and was also in charge of teaching all the subjects to students of all levels, record keeping, caring for the buildings, making of reports, and monitoring the school buildings (Weis, 1992). For example, in the then Cape colony, South Africa, the first school was established in 1658 and a sick comforter was appointed as the schoolmaster (Booyse et al., 2011). This statement clearly shows that even in the Cape, during this era, managing the school was vested upon the schoolmaster since principals were non-existent. A subsequent increase in learner enrolment meant that several teachers and assistants had to be increased. This increase resulted in the evolution of Schoolmasters to Head Teachers (Weis, 1992).

The title of the Head Teacher varied from ‘Chief Teacher’ to ‘Head Teacher’ to ‘Principal Teacher’ and the duties were similar from school to school. Subsequently, the Ordinance of the Common Council of Buffalo in 1853 gazetted the scope to be covered by the principal (Weis, 1992). Cuban (1988) mentions a growing number of schools combined with efficiency in responding to ballooning learner enrolments, freeing of schoolmasters from teaching, as well as the grading of schools to have led to the evolvement of the titles Schoolmaster, Head Teacher, and Chief Teacher to the modern-day principal.

Notwithstanding the evolution that resulted in the birth of principalship, the concept is still in use but described differently in different countries. For instance, in the UK, the term Head Teacher is sometimes used interchangeably with school principal (Bush, 2018; Bush et al., 2010). In Ghana, according to Brion and Cordeiro (2020) and Esia- Donkoh (2014), the term Head Teacher is being used, referring to someone obligated with the responsibility of leading the school. Likewise, in Zimbabwe, school head is preferred to principal (Chinooneka, 2020). In many countries including South Africa, Nigeria, Jordan, Kosovo, and Indonesia; the term school principal is used when referring to school leaders (Aljbouir, 2020; Bhengu & Mthembu, 2014; Chikoko et al., 2015; Karen & Udemeh, 2021; Ngcobo & Tikly, 2010; Noor & Sofyaningrum, 2020; Terziu et al., 2016). In the context of this study, the term school principal will be used.

A school principal refers to a school leader who is responsible for the school functioning, the teaching and learning of students (Iachini et al., 2016), stimulating the school climate (Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012), supporting instructional and school staff (Printy, 2010), preserving the vision of the school (Bhengu & Myende, 2016), promoting partnerships between the school, students, families, and other community partners (Bhengu & Myende, 2016; Myende, 2018, 2019; Whitley, 2010), strengthening the collaborative capacity and leadership within the school (Whitley, 2010), and serving as a link between the school and the district office (Copland, 2003). Furthermore, a school principal has the obligation to ensure that the school is managed satisfactorily in compliance with the applicable legislations, regulations, and Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM) as prescribed (Department of Basic Education, 2022). Also, the PAM document in the Department of Basic Education (2022) puts emphasis on administrative responsibilities, personnel matters, academic performance matters, teaching, extra- and co-curricular activities, as well as interacting and communicating with various stakeholders in education as core duties that must be executed by school principals daily in their practice as school leaders. Apart from these duties, school principals in South Africa are also mandated by SASA as per Republic of South Africa, (1996b) for the professional management of the school; to act as a representative of the HoD; to serve as *ex officio* member of the SGB and to provide support to the SGB in schools' governance matters, and to be responsible for school academic performance. This host of responsibilities vested upon school principals portrays a vivid picture of how daunting a principalship position is designed to be. Additionally, the complex socio-cultural milieu of schools poses new and extended challenges

to school principals. Interestingly, Chikoko et al. (2015) proclaim that school principals in high performing schools execute these tasks with ease, diligence, and dedication, and end up gaining services from qualified and dedicated teachers.

Considering the overwhelming character of the principalship position, as mentioned in the aforementioned paragraph, I can say without fear of contradiction that school principals should continuously sharpen their leadership acumen and upskill themselves for the daunting task at hand. This is significant considering the complex and dynamic school environment where school principals exercise their leadership ability. Such thinking aligns with Fuller et al. (2011) and Hallinger and Heck (1996) who maintain that school principals' training programmes are essential for school effectiveness and school improvement. Regrettably, little attention to school principals' training programmes is noted in most countries globally. For example, in countries like England, Iceland and many European countries such as Belarus, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Hungary, Portugal, Greece, and Sweden, leadership preparation is neglected and teachers become school principals without any specialised training (Bush, 2018; Bush & Oduro, 2006; Thody et al., 2007). In these countries, school principals have no formal compulsory qualifications that will prepare them for the daunting tasks they face. This phenomenon is also notable in Australia and New Zealand. For instance, a study by Cheng et al. (2009) posit that no formal pre-service preparation is needed in order to become a school principal in these two countries. This is of great concern since common knowledge suggests that these developed countries usually set the trend in the educational policy, training, and reform for the developing countries of Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean Islands. I believe that the absence of adequate pre-service and compulsory formal qualifications for school principals could result in a global educational leadership catastrophe, which may cause school principals to rely heavily on their experience and common sense (Bush & Oduro, 2006) instead of sound teaching gained through training.

Similarly, on the African continent, in countries like Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria, and Botswana, no formal requirement is needed for school principals to be employed as school leaders as they are mostly appointed on the basis of successful record as educators (Bush, 2018; Bush & Glover, 2016; Bush & Oduro, 2006). Similarly, Ofoegbu et al. (2013) further state that in the context of Nigeria, school principals are appointed on the basis of political affiliation, ethnicity and religion. They further maintain that school principals only have teaching qualifications

which means that educational leadership is vested in the hands of technically unqualified personnel. This widespread deficiency clearly necessitates an urgent turnaround strategy to redesign training programmes for school principals. According to Fuller et al. (2011), collaboration between heads of states, governments, political leaders, academics, civil society organisations, institutions of higher learning, and teacher unions is required to rethink and redesign school principals' appointment and training programmes. They further emphasise that such collaboration is vital because having suitably qualified principals who have received pre-appointment preparation training is crucial for the effectiveness of school leadership (Fuller et al., 2011).

In addition, the phenomenon of school principals lacking formal pre-service training is not only unique to some European and other African countries, but it is also happening in South Africa as Bush (2018) notes its prevalence. Bush et al. (2011) affirm that a mere three-year teaching qualification and a minimum of seven years teaching experience are the only requirements needed for appointment to a principalship position in this country. In Gauteng Province, South Africa, the findings from research conducted reveal that 66% of school principals had not progressed beyond their first degree to complete further postgraduate qualifications (Bush & Oduro, 2006). In Mpumalanga Province, a case study by van der Westhuizen et al. (2004), further corroborates such findings and shows that many serving school principals lacked basic management training prior to and after their entry into principalship positions. These patterns further suggest that inasmuch as principalship is a complex and challenging position, it is still an underrated profession considering its minimal attention to professional development and its leniency towards the need for school principals to have post-graduate education qualifications. Also, Hlongwane (2021) believes that most school principals ascend to the principalship position by default. In their initial training programmes as educators, aspiring teachers had a strong desire to become educators that will effectively disseminate the curriculum. Through their hard work and effectiveness in teaching, they soon find themselves in the highest office at school; sadly, without any adequate skills or training necessary for the new environment. Such a phenomenon is of great concern as Fuller et al. (2011) highlight the importance of school principals' preparation programmes in doctoral and research institutions having an institutional capacity to effectively prepare school leaders. Their study further reaffirms the correlation between a principal who attended preparation programmes and his/her effectiveness in ensuring student's achievement. In his conclusion, Bush (2018) questions other countries'



failures to prescribe principals' leadership qualifications if countries like Canada, Chile, China, France, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, and most of the states in the USA can effectively implement such programmes.

## **2.7 The development of educational leadership**

A presentation submitted by Bush (2011), as well as Bush and Glover (2014), indicates that the field of education has evolved and developed from 'educational administration' to 'educational management' and later to 'educational leadership'. Likewise, Bush (2011) mentions that 'administration' is still widely used in North America and Australia to describe the organisation of educational bodies, and activities of their principals and senior staff. Scholars like Fotini (2022) believe that administration and management are complementary to each other, yet they have distinct roles, while Connolly et al. (2019) are of the view that the two are synonymous concepts. In view of this perspectives, I am convinced about the existence of a thin line that separates educational administration and educational management which cannot be overlooked. Surprisingly, the knowledge that underpinned the definition of educational administration before 1950 was not derived from any empirical findings (Heck & Hallinger, 2005). Its practices were based on stories told by former administrators in referring to their personal experience. It is further mentioned in Heck and Hallinger's (2005) article that gaining scientific knowledge on the underlying practice of educational administration was not easily achieved. For example, Heck and Hallinger (2005) highlight a lack of evidence of progress on important issues in empirical studies conducted in educational administration during 1950s and 1960s.

By virtue of its early development, previously drawn from several more established disciplines like sociology, political science, economics and general management, the agreed definition of educational management is still missing in the literature (Bush, 2011; Bush & Middlewood, 2005). Despite this, Bush (2011) further pronounces that educational management is a field of study and practice that is concerned with the day-to-day operations of schools. Moreover, he highlights that the origin of educational management seems to have been in the USA in the early part of this century. It was derived from management principles applied to industry and commerce which were migrated to an educational context to meet the needs of schools as

organisations (Bush, 2003). In the UK, he mentions that as a field of study, educational management was introduced in the 1960s.

By and large, educational management entails maintaining efficiency and effectiveness in organisational arrangements (Bush, 2011; Cuban, 1988). It encompasses a set of activities directed towards efficient and effective utilisation of organisational resources in order to achieve educational goals and objectives (Bush & Middlewood, 2005). Educational management is often used in relation to an organisational hierarchy, with those in higher positions having more power and responsibility than those at the bottom of the hierarchy, for the attainment of educational objectives (Bush, 2011; Connolly et al., 2019). It is an executive function for carrying out the agreed policy and relates to implementation or technical issues (Bush et al., 2010; Bush & Middlewood, 2005). Notwithstanding the development of the terminology from ‘administration’ to ‘management’ and later to ‘leadership’, leadership and management must be given equal prominence for effective school operations and the achievement of the set goals (Bush, 2007, 2011; Bush et al., 2010; Bush & Middlewood, 2005). Equal emphasis on educational management in schools is essential because according to Bush (2007) and Caldwell and Spinks (1992), educational management is central to school functionality due to its ability to prioritise goal setting, needs identification, priority setting, planning and budgeting.

Drawing from how educational management has been conceptualised by the scholars, as expressed in the preceding paragraphs, I am of the view that it is about ‘getting things done’ at the school to achieve school effectiveness and improvement. Over and above getting things done, educational management entails ‘doing things right’ and ‘doing right things’. Doing things right in education entails efficiency while doing the right things in education entails effectiveness (Johnes et al., 2017). As formal organisations, schools operate under hierarchical system with school principals at the helm using rational means to achieve efficiency and effectiveness (Bush, 2011). The school principal subsequently, delegates duties to the SMT and to the educators while in turn monitoring, controlling, and evaluating performance. I believe that developing strategic plans; assessment and moderation plans; time tabling; controlling, checking, and monitoring of SMTs, educators’, as well as learners’ work; budgeting; goal settings; induction and mentoring of SMT members, educators, and SGB; and target setting are a true reflection of practical implementation of educational management in

schools. These activities are executed by the school principal in advancing the efficient and effective utilisation of school resources to achieve organisational goals and educational objectives.

Similarly, several scholars have agreed on the absence of a universal definition of educational leadership. Researchers like Bush et al. (2010); Bush and Middlewood (2005); Bush and Glover (2014) and Mullins (2010) are of the view that conceptualising educational leadership is very subjective and yields many interpretations. This subjectivity in the agreed definition of educational leadership leads to difficulty in grasping its essence which, according to English (2003) results in ‘frailties, complexities, contradictions, and discontinuities’. For example, some scholars prefer using school leadership (Bush & Glover, 2014, 2016; Leithwood et al., 2020; Leithwood & Seashore-Loius, 2012); while others (Mullins, 2010) use leadership; and the another cohort of researchers (Bush, 2003, 2007, 2011; Bush et al., 2010; Bush & Middlewood, 2005; Connolly et al., 2019; Heck & Hallinger, 2005; Sellami et al., 2019) prefer using educational leadership. What is evident from these scholars is that these terms are used interchangeably, which then contributes to the confusion in mastering its understanding. However, for the purposes of this study, educational leadership will be adopted.

Furthermore, educational leadership is a relative novel concept that emerged in the 1990s as accountability pressures were mounting on school principals to balance many roles including being an interpersonal facilitator, information manager, and decision-maker (Bush, 2011; Gunter, 2001). According to Gunter (2004), in the 1990s, marketing, strategic planning, and accountability pressures propelled the growth of educational leadership in schools, particularly performance-driven educational leadership. This era necessitated school principals to be visionary and initiate change to adapt to the new challenges at hand (Cuban, 1988; Northouse, 2016). Despite the scholars disagreeing about the common definition of educational leadership, however, they unanimously sing the same tune on ‘influence’ being at the heart of educational leadership. For example, Cuban (1988); Mullins (2010); Mullins and Christie (2016); and Yukl (2002) share the idea that educational leadership is a process of influencing others. Over and above influence, Bush and Glover (2014) and Bush and Middlewood (2005) believe that educational leadership is grounded on a school principal’s firm personal and professional values, and involves his/her ability to develop and articulate the vision of the school. Moreover, educational leadership concentrates on the school principals as people, their

behaviours, as well as their interaction processes with those they lead (Bass et al., 2009). According to Bush (2011) and Bush et al. (2010) citing Cuban (1988, p. xx), a clear definition of educational leadership is presented as follows:

*By leadership, I mean influencing others' actions in achieving desirable ends.*

*Leaders are people who shape the goals, motivations, and actions of others.*

*Frequently, they initiate change to reach existing and new goal...Leaders...takes...much ingenuity, energy and skill.*

Additionally, Gunter (2004) declares that educational leadership is less about the 'must' of being a leader and is more about doing, leading, influencing, and experiencing leadership in general. Drawing from how educational leadership has been presented in the previous paragraphs, I can easily deduce and emphasise that it is about the school principals' ability to influence, motivate, and inspire his/ her SMT members, educators, learners, and SGB in order to achieve educational goals and set goals for effective school functionality. In achieving this endeavour, school principals use the professional and personal traits at their disposal to influence their subordinates for the attainment of set objectives of the school. Educational leadership is thus firmly grounded in the school principals' character. In the same vein, Bush et al. (2010) posit that educational leadership is not only to be implemented with a clear sense of educational purpose, but also that it should be based on a strong ethical and moral stance. When practised in schools, educational leadership positively contributes to school improvement as it does not necessarily occur within the hierarchical structure of an organisation but rather manifests itself at different levels (Mullins, 2010). It thus allows even junior staff members to exercise their leadership acumen by taking initiative in bringing about the required change in the organisation. Also, it inspires those in education (irrespective of their positions) to be creative, responsible and embrace accountability when executing their duties. Such a premise is possible as Mullins (2010) maintains, with several educators operating as leaders even though their post description does not qualify them as leaders.

As highlighted earlier in this study, educational leadership is a subjective, complex and variable concept that can generate frailties, contradictions, confusion, and discontinuities in assimilation (Bush, 2011; Bush et al., 2010; Bush & Glover, 2014; English, 2003; Northouse, 2016; Yukl, 2002). To mitigate these challenges, Mullins (2010) presented seven approaches as a framework to consider for mastery in educational leadership. These seven approaches include *firstly*, the qualities or traits approach, which suggests that school principals possess inherited

characteristics or personality traits that allows them to focus on the person in the job and not the job itself; *secondly*, a functional or group approach, which assumes that school principals can sharpen their leadership skills because leadership can be learned and developed as it focuses on what the leader does (functions) in relation to his/her subordinates; *thirdly*, leadership is a behavioural category, which stresses the school principals' behaviour and its influence on educators, the SMT, learners, and SGBs performance as it emphasises the importance of leadership style; *fourthly*, styles of leadership, which focus on what the school principal does (function of leadership) and the subsequent effect on educators, the SMT, the learners, and the SGBs; *fifthly*, a situational approach and contingency model, which is grounded in the versatility of the school principal as it is founded on the belief that there is no single leadership style that is appropriate for all situations, *sixthly*, transformational leadership, which entails a school principal's ability to motivate his/her subordinates, creating a vision for transforming performance of the school, and appealing to the higher ideals and values of the followers; *lastly*, inspirational leadership, which is founded on the school principal's charisma and how s/he uses his/her personal qualities to influence educators, the SMT, the learners, and the SGBs. However, it is beyond the scope of this study to discuss in depth each of these seven approaches.

Interestingly, the evidence from literature clearly shows the existence of a close relationship between educational management and educational leadership despite a continued debate concerning the two. Currently, there is a strong emphasis on the demonstration of the interrelationship between educational management and educational leadership and to see them as synonymous concepts (Mullins, 2010). The two are equal in status but at opposite ends of the continuum and should be accorded equal prominence (Bush, 2007, 2011; Bush et al., 2010; Caldwell & Spinks, 1992; Mullins, 2010). Remarkably, the emergence of educational leadership in the 1990s did not dissolve educational management; as a result, the two perfectly complement each other. For effective school functionality and improvement, school principal can never opt for one at the expense of the other (for instance, educational leadership at the expense of educational management and vice versa), but both need to be implemented concurrently. This premise is supported by Bush and Middlewood (2005) who remark that schools that are overly managed but under led tend to lose a sense of spirit or purpose which can lead to an erosion in school functionality. Also, they mention that poorly managed schools with strong charismatic leaders soar temporarily only to crash shortly thereafter. I am

convinced that school principals should practise both educational management and educational leadership in pursuit of ensuring school effectiveness, school improvement, and school functionality. I am of the view that school principals must wear a management cap together with a leadership cap. Wearing dual caps is mandatory for school principals as Mullins (2010) provides a clear distinction on educational management and educational leadership. In his distinction, he reiterates an old adage that leaders are doing the right thing, while managers are doing thing right; also, he indicates that leaders are influential while managers are authoritative. Lastly, he mentions that leaders create change whereas, managers create stability. These distinctions prove beyond reasonable doubt that school principals should accord equal importance to both educational management and educational leadership.

## **2.8 Accountability and its implications for school principals**

According to Wagner (1989), the term “accountability” was first used in the early 1600s, and it referred to a statement that explains one’s conduct, or a statement or exposition of reasons, causes, grounds, motives, as well as to furnish a justifiable analysis. Further, this researcher emphasises the centrality of accountability as being one’s ability to give account and being answerable when questioned about his/her decision, conduct and action. Hall et al. (2017) opine that the scholarly interest in accountability in recent times can be traced to early research by Klimoski (1972), as well as Klimoski and Ash (1974) as the protagonists of accountability. Correspondingly, Hall et al. (2017) also postulate that the conceptualisation of accountability by Tetlock (1985b), fostered a global call to pay attention to accountability in the public and the private sector. According to Lerner and Tetlock (1999), accountability is a modern buzzword in education, health care, civil and criminal justice, business, and politics. In addition, accountability is a fashionable concept in political sciences and public administration (Hu, 2017; Schillemans et al., 2022). These researchers maintain that the dominance of accountability in these different fields is being propelled by the scholarly debates in popular publications on who should answer to whom, for what and under what ground rules.

Likewise, school principals as professionals are obliged to take full responsibility for their actions and decisions pertaining to the school’s affairs. This premise is informed by the fact that, central to accountability, is the acceptance of responsibility for decisions and the foreseeable consequences of action or inaction, and setting examples for others (Mansouri &

Rowney, 2014; Maphosa et al., 2012; Sambo & Kanyane, 2020). Along with this argument, in South Africa accountability is often used interchangeably with responsibility, and it is mentioned as the seventh fundamental value among the given ten (viz. democracy, social justice and equity, equality, non-racism and non-sexism, ubuntu, open society, the rule of law, respect, and reconciliation) that are enshrined in the South African Constitution and relevant to education (Department of Education, 2001). Interestingly, Mansouri and Roney (2014) portray accountability as an umbrella term that covers other concepts like transparency, equity, efficiency, responsiveness, and integrity. Since education is a basic human right as enshrined in Section 29 of the South African Constitution, school principals thus have the constitutional responsibility of ensuring that schools are functional, regardless of the limited resources and other challenges that might hinder their success (Department of Education, 2001; Republic of South Africa, 1996a). Therefore, accountability places emphasises on school principals as being responsible for the advancement of the nation by ensuring that quality education is provided in schools (Department of Education, 2001).

Despite accountability being conceptualised in the preceding paragraph as having to do with responsibility, transparency, equity, efficiency, responsiveness and integrity, several scholars have added another layer to the concept. For example, researchers, including Argon (2015); Dwangu and Mahlangu (2021); Eze and Onwudinjo (2021); Lerner and Tetlock (1999); Mestry (2004); Reddick et al. (2020); Sambo and Kanyane (2020) and Wagner (1989), believe that accountability is the process of being called ‘to account’ (answerability) to some authority for one’s action or decision taken. Also, Mansouri and Roney (2014) point to accountability as holding school principals responsible for schools’ performance. In the same breath, accountability expresses continuing concerns for checks, oversight, surveillance, and institutional constraint on the exercise of power (Maile, 2002). It thus implies three methods of controlling the use of power by school principals through enforcement, monitoring and answerability (Hu, 2017; Maile, 2002). Furthermore, Maile (2002) and Maphosa et al. (2012), remark that accountability can be extended to *moral, contractual, professional and social accountability*. These scholars contend that *moral accountability*, is based on the premise of what is morally good as dictated by ethical considerations (Maphosa et al., 2012). Drawing from this premise, moral accountability in relation to school principals is derived from their conscience of doing what is morally right in their practice as school leaders. A good example for this would be a school principal who opts not to execute his administrative responsibility

as per the PAM Document as stipulated by the Department of Basic Education (2022) which emphasises this responsibility as core function vested upon school principal. A question then might be, is it ethically and morally proper for school principals to display such behaviour when dealing with the matters concerning the school as a complex organisation? In moral accountability, school principals are expected to perform administrative responsibilities to the best of their abilities (Maile, 2002; Maphosa et al., 2012). Within the same line of thinking, *contractual accountability* implies that school principals enter a legally binding contract with their employer (DBE), specified in the terms and conditions of employment (Maile, 2002). In this regard, during their appointment as school leaders, school principals, subconsciously, agree to comply with Section 20(4)(5) of SASA as per Republic of South Africa (1996b), which mandates them to comply with all the requirements set out for their employment in public schools. In essence, school principals are agreeing to comply with all the legislations guiding their employment including the Policy on the South African Standard for Principalship as well as the PAM document (Department of Basic Education, 2015, 2022).

In addition, *professional accountability* is also critical for school principals as it implies that school principals are accountable for the profession and their colleagues (Maphosa et al., 2012). In relation to the current study, professional accountability implies that school principals are mandated to report regularly to the CM, the SGB and other district officials on issues pertaining to the school. Failure to report to these stakeholders by a school principal, puts the whole profession into disrepute and affects his/her colleagues as well. Lastly, Maphosa et al. (2012) mention that teachers, including school principals have a critical role to play in society. School principals' awareness of their roles in society signifies *social accountability*. According to Maphosa et al. (2012) school principals have a significant role in community development projects and should be actively involved in community development. In this regard, school principals should form partnerships with sister departments like: Department of Health, Department of Social Development, and Department of Home Affairs, local municipality, universities, businesses, and traditional leaders to enhance community development projects (Myende, 2018, 2019).

However, the complexity of stakeholder involvement in schools has subsequently, made accountability a very complex exercise which has become exceedingly difficult to execute (Joannides, 2012; Messner, 2009; Nuwagaba et al., 2022; Sinclair, 1995). In the same breath,



Hall et al. (2007) remark that individuals bear multiple accountabilities in their organisations. These researchers regard these multiple accountabilities as a web of accountabilities. Considering these multiple accountabilities, as defined by Hall et al. (2007), school principals are accountable to Member of the Executive Council (MEC), District Directors, CMs, educators, non-educators, the SGB, parents, learners, and other external stakeholders who have interests in the school's affairs. Moreover, scholars like Hu (2017); Reddick et al. (2020) and Schillemans et al. (2022) accentuate that these multiple accountabilities by school principals must be executed either *vertically*, *horizontally*, or *diagonally*. In vertical accountability, school principals as agents of change and transformation, account to their hierarchical superiors (for example, the CM and other departmental officials) for their actions, performance, decisions and even inactions (Schillemans et al., 2022). Rather than accounting only to superiors and subordinates (principal-agent relationship), accountability also involves community participation, interest groups, media, and other external stakeholders which has consequently resulted in the gradual erosion of vertical accountability (Reddick et al., 2020).

According to Schillemans et al. (2022), school principals' answerability to these secondary stakeholders is called horizontal accountability. Horizontal accountability emphasises the exercise of accountability to the entire school community, that is, to all constituents within the school environment-school principal, the SMT, the educators, the SGB, parents, the community, and learners, rather than only to the hierarchy of the organisation (Goldring & Rallis, 1993). Regrettably, horizontal accountability is indirect to citizens and is delegated to state entities including the auditor-general, human rights commission, parliament, and legislative investigative commissions for enforcement (Hu, 2017; Reddick et al., 2020). However, in practice, both elements of vertical accountability and horizontal accountability are a common (Hu, 2017). This scholar further claims that combining the two accountability styles is called diagonal accountability or hybrid accountability (Hu, 2017). Diagonal accountability is the form of accountability where school principals as agents, account to bodies working independently from hierarchical superiors yet with authority, for example: courts, ombudsmen, public protector, and media (Hu, 2017; Reddick et al., 2020; Schillemans et al., 2022).

Given that accountability is a *sine qua non* of educational leadership, its benefits can never be over emphasised (Adenugba & Sa, 2010; Ghanem & Castelli, 2019). According to Masoge and Pilane (2014), accountability allows CMs and other district officials to determine whether

school principals are performing to the required standards. As per Komba (2017), accountability improves service delivery in schools. In agreement with this view, Argon (2015) indicates that the creation of an environment of trust increase learner achievement, a peaceful and sincere school environment, a transparent school environment, an increase in motivation, and effective conduct of teaching and learning, which are some of the benefits of accountability in educational leadership.

Contrary to the benefits listed in the previous paragraph, accountability also poses some limitations on educational leadership. Mansouri and Rowney (2014) and Nuwagaba et al. (2022) lament the confusion and difficulty in comprehension of what accountability means, how it is implemented, how it is enforced, as well as how it is measured. Congruent with this belief, Joannides (2012); Messner (2009); and Sinclair (1995) contend that accountability is a complex, abstract and elusive concept, while West et al. (2011), are of the view that accountability is a slippery concept that is used in different ways in different areas, in different contexts, and in different disciplines, and that it is not easy to maintain. Similarly, evidence from China indicates that even the most developed democratic states cannot meet the accountability standards effectively because of its complexity and elusiveness (Hu, 2017). The study also mentions that Chinese public officials have an accountability challenge in terms of theory and practice. The paper further highlights another challenge that clouds accountability, that being the lack of general accountability law; it is a basic guideline for elementary questions such as who is the accountee? Who is the accouter? What accountability is being sought? Where is accountability being sought? How are the officials (including school principals) being held accountable? Which actions of accountability are being sought? Emphasising the difficulty of maintaining accountability, Mizel (2009) postulates that for a concept that was adopted by education from the lexicon of business, clarity on who must account is not straightforward. I believe that it is for this reason that at times, one can find school principals pointing towards educators for poor performance or blaming the SMT for failing to submit school improvement plans to the district office, or even accusing the SGB and parents for learners' late coming and absenteeism (Bhengu & Mthembu, 2014). Due to a culture finger-pointing and counter finger-pointing, these stakeholders may also condemn the school principal for any failure associated with school functionality, effectiveness, and improvement.

Despite an increase in accountability pressures for school principals, sadly, these demands do not always lead to accountable behaviour, as some school principals sometimes fail to report vital information to the relevant stakeholders (De Cremer & Dijk, 2009; Lerner & Tetlock, 1999). Such an observation has also been supported by Rothstein et al. (2008) who posit that a widespread criticism is directed against education officials (including school principals) for failing to account for their actions and decisions. Also, in the current study, I have indicated how I, as a school principal failed to report an educator who was involved in possible misconduct and how Mr Bystander shielded educators in similar predicaments. Such unethical actions clearly indicate that accountability pressures do not always lead to accountable behaviours.

In pursuit of balancing the benefits and limitations of accountability, I have developed a strong feeling that its implementation leaves much to be desired, notwithstanding it being a widely accepted concept globally (Mansouri & Rowney, 2014). A closer look at the benefits and limitations suggests that the theory of accountability outweighs its practice. Having said that, even the available literature on theory of accountability seemingly does not address the questions posed earlier by Hu (2017) in his study regarding accountability. This then poses a challenge especially in a complex school environment, constituting multiple accountabilities. One can argue that such blurriness somehow adds up on the public perception which views principalship as a daunting and overwhelming position if it is not clear how accountability should be executed at school level by school principals.

## **2.9 Complexities in education**

*The role of the principal in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has become more complex... In order to cope with the ever-rising challenges of the system, school principals must be ready to see themselves as a change agent... The need for complex professional skills should be the prerequisite for elevation to the position of the principalship-* (Ekundayo, 2010).

Drawing from the excerpt from Ekundayo (2010), one can easily conclude that complexity has to do with something that is complicated, hard, difficult, and intricate. However, several scholars, including Fidan and Balci (2017), as well as Kamensky (2011) put emphasis on

complexity as standing apart from these mentioned concepts, including ‘complicated’ for that matter. Johnson (2007) mentions the difficulty of defining complexity due to the different perspectives provided in various disciplines. This difficulty is further perpetuated by scientists who do not welcome the general definition adopted in many fields which regards complexity as a phenomenon that arises from interaction among numerous things. As a result, most scientists prefer using the definition of complexity developed by the Santa Fe group which defines it as an integrated and at the same time rich and varied condition of the universe which cannot be comprehended in a linear fashion (Fidan & Balci, 2017).

Contrary to the definition by the scientists, several scholars are of the view that complexity is associated with the interaction of several interconnected parts and variables that make for unpredictability and uncertainty in an organisation (Feryok, 2010; Henry, 2016; Johnson, 2007; Larsen- Freeman, 2016; Mason, 2008; Myende & Maifala, 2020; Tourish, 2019; Van Zyl et al., 2020; Walton et al., 2019). Also, complexity is viewed as the interaction between components (individuals, stakeholders, departments, groups, organisations and so forth) of a system, *vis-à-vis* the system, and such interaction between the components does not necessarily follow a predictable course (Mbengue et al., 2018). Contributing to these views, Oliver (2010) describes complexity as being characterised by interconnected, overlapping membership and crosscutting affiliations. As a result, in the current study, the latter definition of complexity will be adopted by virtue of its popularity in education. It must be noted that at the heart of the latter definition is the *interaction of several interconnected parties*. Interaction of several interconnected parties is appropriate for this study because it has also adopted Stakeholder Theory as is discussed in Section 3.3 of Chapter Three.

The notion of complexity was developed from the fields of physics, biology, chemistry, economics, archaeology, law, and sociology (du Plessis, 2021; Haggis, 2008; Mason, 2008, 2014). As a field of science, it was introduced by Warren Weaver (a scientist-mathematician) in the late 1940s (Trombly, 2014). Also, Trombly (2014) schools us on the etymology of complexity as stemming from *Latin* implying ‘interwoven’, which draws attention to the evolving interrelationships among the system’s elements. Therefore, complexity emphasises that complex organisations should be regarded, not as the sums of their constituent parts, but as a networked whole (interwoven). Despite being developed from physics, biology, chemistry and economics, complexity is very popular in educational leadership as means of viewing

schools as complex organisations (du Plessis, 2021; Duan & Shi, 2021; Kuhn, 2008; Mason, 2008, 2014; Myende & Maifala, 2020; Oliver, 2010; Trombly, 2014; Walton et al., 2019).

From a layman's analysis of the extract by Ekundayo (2010) on principalship being a complex position, one can deduce that central to the principals' position is the interaction with various stakeholders in education (like, the SGB, the SMT, educators, parents, district officials, learners, and teacher unions) who are the heartbeat of the schools' functionality, effectiveness, and improvement. The extract further suggests that school principals as part of the stakeholder web, have the responsibility of enhancing change in the schools they lead so as to mitigate the challenges facing schools. It is further suggested that school principals should acquire a complex (interrelated and interconnectedness) leadership skill as a prerequisite for their appointment as school leaders. In line with this assertion, complexity offers a new way of understanding that the principalship position is very challenging and poses the difficulty of satisfying the needs of all stakeholders in education; and, as a result, under a complexity model, principalship is a nested position within a complex context (Walton et al., 2019).

Consistent with the thinking that views principalship as a complex responsibility, some scholars are of the view that education, including schooling in general, is a complex endeavour. For example, Fidan and Balci (2017) opine that hierarchical organisation, including schools are complex organisations, built on interrelated stakeholders. Furthermore, schools as organisations are complex systems, composed of numerous interrelated webs of stakeholders, beliefs, organisational structures, and objectives (Barker, 1995). In harmony with these narratives, Duan and Shi (2021) suggest that schools as complex systems have different components and stakeholders which are all interconnected, and continually interact and co-adapt over time. These components include school principal, SMT, SGB, educators, learners, parents, district officials, teacher unions, and special interest groups who might have an interest in the affairs of the school. Schools as organisations are complex systems, composed of numerous interrelated webs of stakeholders, beliefs, organisational structures, and objectives (Barker, 1995). It is against these presentations that Tourish (2019) believes that organisations (including schools) are best understood as complex organisations, comprising interconnected interactions between various stakeholders. Drawing from this cohort of researchers, one can point out that not only is the role of the school principal complex, but also, that the education system, as well as schools in which principals operate, are also complex in nature. Such a

complexity in the principalship, education, as well as schools, make a school principals' job one of the most challenging, overwhelming and trickiest endeavour to execute. Regrettably, school principals will have to manoeuvre through the complex leadership trenches without formal pre-service training to prepare them for the complex task ahead (Bush, 2018; Bush et al., 2011; Bush & Oduro, 2006; Ofoegbu et al., 2013; Thody et al., 2007).

According to Kuhn (2008), educational leadership provided by school principals, that is driven by complexity is viewed as an activity that is undertaken by individuals, socially interacting with each other while employing various forms of reference that orientates meaningful activity. This researcher further mentions that such school principals acknowledge that all stakeholders in education are multi-dimensional, non-linear, interconnected, and unpredictable. At the core of his arguments, Kuhn (2008) alludes to the whole being ever present within the parts. This thinking simply suggests that the life and breath of the school (whole) is the product of the active interaction of various stakeholders (parts) in education. In a similar fashion, Myende and Maifala (2020) accentuate that school principals, in a complex school environment, acknowledge that leadership is an outcome of relational interactions among stakeholders; as such, these relationships and interactions become central in their leadership as school leaders. It is further mentioned that leadership in the complex school environment is not a fixed commodity that one person possesses, but it emerges through the relationships and interactions between various stakeholders in education (Bhengu & Myende, 2016; Myende & Maifala, 2020). I believe that educational leadership in a complex school environment is not solely embedded in the school principal but is an act of *isixaxa mbiji*<sup>2</sup> (Naicker & Waddy, 2003). According to Bhengu (2012), this concept epitomises collectivism, collaboration, and wholeness. Consistent with the *isixaxa mbiji* belief, Murakami- Ramalho and Benham (2010) use a fishing net metaphor to demonstrate effective leadership in a complex school environment, where all parties stand around the fishing net as equals. These researchers further mention that in the process of trawling, sometimes one person pulls harder than another, and sometimes, another person pulls for another (Murakami-Ramalho & Benham, 2010). Interestingly, they further put emphasis on everyone in the leadership circle being treated with equal respect because everyone in a circle is a leader. This collective effort by all stakeholders which defies race, gender, ethnicity, class, culture, and religion is done with the common goal of getting maximum output. In essence, educational leadership in a complex school

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<sup>2</sup> An iSiZulu language phrase for pulling together

environment unifies people into social groups, rather than being a process of dominance and control (Tourish, 2019). Similarly, when complexity is acknowledged and embraced in a school, such a school will have much to gain. This idea is supported by the fact that complexity allows all stakeholders in schools to paddle for a common goal, while allowing the SMT, the SGB, the CMs, the educators, the learners, the teacher unions, the parents, the districts officials, and the community to make decisions that are appropriate for them in their local constituencies (Trombly, 2014). The school will immensely benefit since the active participation of these stakeholders in decision-making procedures adds a new layer to school effectiveness, improvement, and functionality (Fidan & Balci, 2017).

According to Kuhn (2008), complexity in a school develops imaginative, creative beings that can convert complex ideas into possibilities. In the same vein, complexity presents preferred ways of thinking about the school as a complex organisation while simultaneously, pointing out at the impossibility of accuracy in predicting the outcome. It further fosters reflection and thoughtfulness, and in this regard, it does not offer educational leadership a recipe of ‘tried and tested’ but, rather, a space of thinking otherwise (Kuhn, 2008). However, leading in a complex school environment can also pose numerous dilemmas and challenges for school principals, as Tourish (2019) mentions that complexity is far from straightforward.

Contrary to the popular belief that views complexity in educational leadership as an activity undertaken by individuals, socially interacting with each other, Tourish (2019) emphasise the notion of school principals being vested with legitimate authority to define the criteria whereby the school’s success is determined and they are primary responsible for organisational success. Also, an emphasis on complexity as an essential element of educational leadership can result in school principals relegating and shifting their accountability, and responsibility to other stakeholders in education. For example, school principals can hide behind, for instance, the SMT and educators, when they must account for poor performance to the SGB, the CMs and the district officials. Correspondingly, the SGBs, the SMT, the educators, the learners, and the community at large subconsciously believe that the actions and decisions of the school principals are unchallengeable and require little interrogation (Tourish, 2019). This idea clearly shows that notwithstanding, schools are complex organisations, other stakeholders still hold high regard for school principals and often seek direction, order, control, and clear policy articulation from them (Fenwick, 2012). In addition, this scholar remarks that some school

principals may feel that their authority is being undermined and their professional knowledge is being questioned due to complexity (Fenwick, 2012). Complexity also results in some school principals becoming demotivated and developing a strong feeling of being unseated from their throne of leadership. Remarkably, Fenwick (2012) laments that conflicts, dissonance, and dramatic tensions among different stakeholders in a complex school environment, may be catalysts for change and dynamic emergence. In view of this perspective, I believe that complex schools' tread on a slippery slope and are always vulnerable to toxicity. This then suggest that complexity can have unintended consequences in the school environment.

## **2.10 Dynamism of the school environment**

*Everything in the world is in the process of change. Perhaps, the only thing that does not change is the change itself- Mashayekhi, Ali (Jahed et al., 2022).*

The above extract by Mashayekhi, cited in Jahed et al. (2022), made me to pause for a second and think about how the world is and has evolved from what it was in the past to what it is today. From management to leadership, monarchies to democracies, first industrial revolution to fourth industrial revolution, and from traditional manufacturing processes to the 21<sup>st</sup> century technological advancement. All these events are strong evidence on the dominance of change. Notably, even the pestilences are changing! Indeed, everything in the world is changing swiftly (Jahed et al., 2022). For example, in their time, nobody could imagine the collapse of the Roman Empire, the downfall of the French Revolution, the overthrow of Soviet Union dominance, the fall of Timbuktu and the Kingdom of Mali, as well as the demise of apartheid in South Africa (Harper, 2016; Jansen, 2018; Koosmann, 2010; McCauley, 2014). However, by virtue of change being inevitable, these systems of government are all history. In a similar fashion, schools and school principals' leadership practices are also changing and will keep on changing. These changes indicate how dynamic the world, including schools has become (Creemers & Kyriakides, 2010). Collyer (2016) maintains that changes in education are accelerated by globalisation, technology, and deregulation.

As earlier mentioned, schools as organisations are also faced with change which in the main is propelled by societal, cultural, political, policy, and ideological changes (Jappinen, 2017). Also, Goldring and Rallis (1993) highlight that schools in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are changing, and as



a result, they are making changes that meet the needs of the varying contexts and different stakeholders in education. These researchers define such schools as *dynamic schools* because in these schools, numerous changes are occurring simultaneously at different levels (Goldring & Rallis, 1993; Jappinen, 2017). Subsequently, such schools evaluate their effectiveness and explore various ways of improvement. Dynamic schools strive to be in alignment with the forces of global and educational change. Such schools take charge of change, adopt new changes, respond to innovation and activities to address change they face (Goldring & Rallis, 1993). Furthermore, such schools do not react to change but instead view change as an opportunity for self- improvement.

Correspondingly, Jackson (2000) mentions that there is change everywhere; customer awareness, externally focused, people centred, leadership intensive, values driven, and dynamic mechanisms are some common characteristics underpinning dynamic organisations including schools. Employees and other stakeholders of dynamic schools possess a strong desire to change in attaining self and school improvement (Jahed et al., 2022; Jappinen, 2017). In such schools, school principals and SMTs pay close attention to the way in which the school is treating parents and learners. As a result, school principals and the SMTs closely monitor and analyse learners' performance to the satisfaction of the parents and learners as customers of the school (Jackson, 2000).

Furthermore, Jackson (2000) remarks that dynamic organisations closely pay attention to the changes that happen in the world at large including the broader education fraternity. This awareness is done with an intention of ensuring that the organisations adapt to changes imposed upon them by the external world. To this effect, dynamic schools are conscious that at the heart of their success are educators, SGB, parents and learners who are the main nerve of their success. As a result, these stakeholders are kept informed by the school principal and the SMT on the progress, changes, and threats, which subsequently, provide these stakeholders with opportunities to have a say on the matters affecting the school. Such consultations are driven by dynamic schools being people centred. Subsequently, school principals of dynamic schools have a strong conviction about the efficacies of leadership. Such principals understand that leadership is practised by anyone including those in junior positions. As a result, dynamic schools view leadership as a process of collective leadership or shared leadership (Goldring & Rallis, 1993). In line with this narrative, leadership is perceived as what people do, and not a

title or a position that one occupies (Jackson, 2000). Also, in dynamic schools, a set of clear and well understood values, a mission and vision are present and are the nucleus to be embodied by all stakeholders. In such schools, principals work to ensure that these values, missions and visions are alive each day of the school. School leaders ensure that these values are mentioned consciously and, sometimes sub-consciously, when decisions are taken. While on these important issues, I am thinking about some schools where the vision and mission document is non-existence. Additionally, some school principals, SMT, SGB, and educators cannot even articulate their school's vision and mission. I just wonder if all these issues that Goldring and Rallis (1993), as well as Jackson (2000) speak about feature in the minds of such school leaders? Lastly, by virtue of dynamic schools having a keen sense of what is happening around the world, they are thus constantly and actively listening to their CMs, parents, educators, learners, feeder schools, feeding schools, businesses, media and other stakeholders who might have interest in the affairs of the school (Jackson, 2000).

By and large, a dynamic school can be perceived as a school in which collective decision-making processes exists among all relevant stakeholders in education, namely, school principal, educators, SMT, SGB, non-educators, learners, and parents (Goldring & Rallis, 1993). In such schools, these stakeholders articulate goals, visions, missions, values, and planned strategies for achievement. In dynamic schools, various stakeholders from different backgrounds and upbringing bring different expertise to the fore for the benefit of the school, while working together in influencing the organisational culture (Murakami- Ramalho & Benham, 2010). As a result, dynamic schools represent a relatively autonomous, self-defining organisations while engaging in an ongoing process of change for improvement.

Having analysed the features of a dynamic school as shown in the preceding paragraphs, it is evident that such schools demand a paradigm shift in school principals' leadership approaches. In a dynamic school, I believe that traditional leadership approaches where the school principal is perceived to be the Alpha and Omega of the school is a thing of the past. Such thinking is congruent with what Jappinen (2017) and Jensen and Lund (2014) suggest, that no organisation can survive if it relies on one person. Also, Jensen and Lund (2014), are of the view that in a dynamic school, school principals need to collaborate with parents, SGBs, social services agencies, and other stakeholders for school effectiveness and improvement. These researchers further warn that a school principal may be great as the head of the school but is no more than

the first among equals (Jensen & Lund, 2014). The success of a dynamic organisations is dependent on the pool of capable leaders (Kelly, 2022; Jackson, 2000). As such, Jackson (2000) sums up with a quote from John Adair which says, “no one is perfect but a team can be”.

Drawing from postulations from the previous paragraph, one can conclude that the role of the school principal in a dynamic school is insignificant, yet, very significant. The previous passages might have portrayed a picture which, to some, might suggest that a school principal is one of many in dynamic school leadership. However, this thinking is just a misconception as scholars emphasise the significance of the school principal in a dynamic school environment. For example, Goldring and Rallis (1993) suggest that school principals in dynamic schools are not simply leaders but they are leaders by virtue of being facilitators and school flag bearers. Additionally, such school principals listen, reflect, and take a stand on thorny issues affecting the school because they are conscious that the buck stops with them. Notwithstanding this, leadership in dynamic school environments is viewed as a collective interaction among various parties (an act of *isixaxa mbiji* as in the complexity in Section 2.9 of this chapter), the role of the school principal can never be over emphasised as an accounting officer in a dynamic schools as the buck stops with them (Murakami- Ramalho & Benham, 2010; Republic of South Africa, 1996b). According to Jahed et al. (2022), school principals of dynamic schools promote constant improvement of the staff and also create an environment conducive for accepting change and they are positive about change.

Similarly, Jackson (2000) provides an important distinction between consensus and consultation, which normally leads to perceiving the role of a school principal in a dynamic school environment as insignificant. In his presentation, he proclaims that people normally confuse the two in decision making (Jackson, 2000). According to Tomlin (2021) consensus decision making is about seeking solutions to which everyone agrees. Scholarship suggests that consensus decision making is the weakest form of decision-making because it often ends up that the decision agreed upon is the lowest common denominator (Jackson, 2000). Contrary to that, consultative decision-making involves people in decision-making (Hammoud, 2011). To this effect, consultative decision-making is about suggesting the solution, discussing it and offering options and then deciding on the appropriate decision (Hammoud, 2011; Jackson, 2000). At the end, the person in charge (the school principal in the present study) makes the

final decision after all the other stakeholders have been involved or consulted in that process. These scholars further mention that the school principal will refine and improve the contributed ideas from various constituencies during the dialogue process, then come up with a final decision (Hammoud, 2011; Jackson, 2000). In view of these comparisons, the role of a dynamic school principal is irreplaceable and undying. As a representatives of the provincial HoD, dynamic school principals should embrace the ideals of consultative decision-making as opposed to a consensus model. Dynamic school principals apply participatory approaches in decision making. Such school principals are deeply conscious that the buck stops with them. Also, in their practices as school leaders, they do not divorce their accountability from their responsibility as school principals.

Despite Kelly (2022) emphasising that dynamic leadership is central to leading schools, a dearth of literature is noted. To this effect, Goldring and Rallis (1993) are remarkable scholars who provide rich and informative data that can enhance dynamic leadership in schools. It is against this background that the ensuing paragraphs evolve around these researchers. According to Goldring and Rallis (1993), being a facilitator; the balancer; the flag bearer and bridger; the inquirer; the learner; and the leader are the distinct roles that must be executed by the school principal of a dynamic school. These roles are briefly discussed below as presented by Goldring and Rallis (1993). As *facilitators*, school principals create conditions whereby, the SMT, educators, non-educators and learners perform their duties with a strong sense of personal efficacy. Such school principals motivate, coordinate, and legitimise the work of their subordinates. They ensure that decisions are collaborated but are conscious that they are in charge of seeing that decisions are implemented. As *a balancer*, such a school principal recognises that a dynamic school is part of a systems hierarchy. As such, their decisions will be influenced by mediating with the district office and the school, often termed as a middle management. In this regard, a strong link and communication between the school principal of a dynamic school, the CM, and other district official is emphasised (Goldring & Rallis, 1993). Against this thinking, as a balancer, it is unthinkable that a school principal could fail to report acts of misconduct by educators to the CM as we had seen with Mr Bystander as described in the rationale (Section 1.4 of Chapter One).

*As a flag bearer and bridger*, the school principal oversees linking the school with the external environment. Dynamic school principals work to communicate and build relationships with the

community constituencies that will serve to support the school's internal affairs. Such school principals build the bridges that link the school with the surrounding world and bear their school flags across those bridges to welcome those who wish to support the mission of the school (Goldring & Rallis, 1993). To this end, I argue that such school principals act as ambassadors of the school to the external world.

*As inquirers*, dynamic school principals question themselves on where their schools have gone, where they are heading, and their progress. As a result, they lead the process of collaborative problem-solving and shared decision-making while examining themselves and the school's activities with a critical eye (Goldring & Rallis, 1993). To this effect, dynamic school principals ensure that they are evaluated as facilitators, balancers, flag bearers and bridgers, and finally as inquirers. As a *learner*, the education of a dynamic school principal is not an event; a once-off event for that matter, but rather, it is a process; a lifelong endeavour (Department of Basic Education, 2015, 2022). As school leaders who reflect and learn, dynamic school principals inspire their subordinates and other stakeholders in education to be reflective practitioners. Such school principals also rely on both formal and informal mechanisms for learning and reflection (Goldring & Rallis, 1993). As a *leader*, inasmuch as the job of a dynamic school principal is not an easy one, complex and overwhelming in nature, and requiring collaborative interactions between various stakeholders in education, school principals must always be conscious that the buck stops with them (Murakami- Ramalho & Benham, 2010). As representatives of the provincial HoD, school principals' role as school leaders can never be delegated and relegated to any of the stakeholders in education including, SMT members, the DHs, or even Senior and Master Teachers (Department of Basic Education, 2022; Republic of South Africa, 1996b). This should not suggest that school principals do not have to delegate for a specific time their duties. However, what this implies is that even when they have delegated their duties to other school-based leaders, accountability always remains with them as the buck stops with them.

To sum up, one can conclude that in a dynamic school environment where numerous changes occur simultaneously at different levels, the role of the school principal is still supreme and permanent. Despite the decision-making processes involving members of the SMT, educators, non-educators, parents, and learners in a consultative approach being exercised, school principals in these schools command a lot of authority by virtue of being conscious of their *ex*

*officio* responsibility. Such school principals are visible, are at the fore-front, are the facilitators, are flag bearers and bridgers, are life-long learners, and they consult in decision-making processes. Dynamic school principals are ethical, transparent, fair, compassionate, professional, and account regularly to circuit managers, the SMT, parents, the SGB, educators, learners, and other stakeholders on matters concerning the school (Edwards et al., 2023). To this end, dynamic school principals are linked to the CMs and the circuit office with ongoing exchange of information (Goldring & Rallis, 1993). They are thus viewed as the mediators and the link between the school, circuit office, and the community (Copland, 2003). To this effect, it is unimaginable for a dynamic school principal to withhold vital information from the CM and the SGB, as it has been reported about Mr Bystander in the rationale section of Chapter One.

## **2.11 Conclusion**

The chapter has presented a review of literature related to various issues focusing on ethical leadership during times of accountability. It has unpacked the importance of ethical leadership and school principals' experiences of ethical leadership during times of accountability in an environment of complexities, dilemmas, and complex school environments. Also, the literature related to the prevalence and causes of unethical leadership by school principals was discussed. Furthermore, the literature related to philosophical and operational questions on why and how school principals enact ethical leadership in a particular way during times of accountability considering the complexities, dilemmas and dynamics associated with schools as an open organisation was also examined. Lastly, the sub-topics that are deemed crucial to this study, which are reviewed, include ethics in educational leadership, school principals in education, development of educational leadership, accountability and its implication for school principals, complexities in education, and dynamic school environment. In the ensuing chapter, a detailed discussion of theories that make up a theoretical framework for this study will be presented.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **POSITIONING THE STUDY IN THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter reviewed the literature related to school principals' experiences of ethical leadership during times of accountability. It unpacked the importance of ethical leadership and school principals' experiences of ethical leadership during times of accountability in a complex, unpredictable and complex school environment where principals face innumerable dilemmas. Also, the literature related to the prevalence and causes of unethical leadership by school principals was discussed. Furthermore, literature related to operational and philosophical questions on how and why school principals enact ethical leadership in a particular way during times of accountability considering the complexities, dilemmas and dynamics associated with schools as an open organisation, were also examined.

In the ensuing chapter, a theoretical framework that guided me in understanding school principals' experiences of ethical leadership during times of accountability is discussed. There are four theories that constitute the theoretical framework for this study. In presenting this chapter, I begin by providing the reasons why a theoretical framework was preferred over a conceptual framework in this study. Explaining the choice of theoretical framework for this study is imperative considering the debate among scholars, and the lack of clarity and inconsistencies that exist between a conceptual framework and a theoretical framework (Kivunja, 2018; Varpio et al., 2020). What follows is the presentation of the discussion of the four theories namely, Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory, Chaos Theory, Accountability Theory, and Stakeholder Theory. Lastly, the rationale for framing the study within the Butterfly Effect of the Chaos Theory is presented.

#### **3.2 Theoretical framework and its benefits**

Several scholars including Grant and Osanloo (2014) and Varpio et al. (2020) have highlighted numerous benefits of framing a study with a theory. Among these benefits, Grant and Osanloo (2014) highlight the theory's ability to provide the researcher with a clear direction and to move

beyond intuition to a solid basis for understanding and conceptualising a topic within the context of the study. Such a premise is possible because the theory is viewed as a generalised statement of ideas that explain, assert, or predict the relationship or connections between the phenomena within the limits of critical bounding assumptions (Kivunja, 2018). This scholar further maintains that a theory brings together ideas, interrelated concepts, definitions, and propositions that explain or predict events or situations by specifying relations in the phenomena (Kivunja, 2018). Interestingly, a theory is developed by experts in a particular field after conducting empirical research using a grounded theory methodology, as such, not every Tom, Dick and Harry should claim developing a theory (Grant & Osanloo, 2014; Kivunja, 2018). It is then adopted by scholars to frame their studies.

Following the same line of thinking about expanding the debate on the theory, the framework is worth mentioning in research. According to Imenda (2014), a framework in research is a structure that provides guidance for the researcher as the study's questions are fine-tuned, data generation methods are selected, and data analysis are planned. This scholar further emphasises that once the data has been generated and analysed, the framework will then be used as a mirror to check on the consistencies, inconsistencies, and discrepancies between the former and the findings (Imenda, 2014). In view of these points, I can say that the framework is like the yardstick that researchers use to compare the generated qualitative data with the former. In doing so, the researcher wears the theoretical lenses, to frame his/her study. Drawing from the earlier paragraphs on the theory, as well as the framework, a theoretical framework can thus be conceptualised. The theoretical framework is a structure that can hold or support a theory in research, as it is a synthesis of thoughts of the gurus in a particular field of research (Swanson, 2013). Similarly, Varpio et al. (2020) suggest that a theoretical framework is developed from one or more theories used to scaffold the study. Within the same line of thinking, Kivunja (2018), describes a theoretical framework as comprising theories that are expressed by experts in a particular field of study into which a researcher plans to conduct a study and provides a theoretical 'coat hanger' for his/ her data analysis and interpretation of results. As a theoretical coat hanger, I believe a theoretical framework can be used to make the connections between the research topic; research problem; data analysis; interpretation of results; and the discussion of findings. However, several scholars, including Grant and Osanloo (2014); Hughes et al. (2019); Imenda (2014); and Kivunja (2018) mention that a theoretical framework is often referred to as the conceptual framework even though these two terms are neither synonymous



nor interchangeable. Treating these terms synonymously often lead to vagueness, confusion, and inconsistency in research. In order to elucidate the ambiguity that exists between the two, a clarification is provided as reflected in the ensuing paragraph.

Contrary to the theoretical framework which is derived from existing theory from the experts in the particular field, a conceptual framework comprises the researcher's own thoughts on the identification of the research topic, the problem to be investigated, the questions to be asked, the literature to be reviewed, the methodology to be used, the data generation methods to be used, the data analysis and the interpretation of findings, as well as the recommendations and conclusions of the study (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). According to Kivunja (2018), a conceptual framework is an umbrella term relating to all the concepts and ideas that occupy the researcher's mind as s/he contemplates, plans, and reads, up to concluding his/ her research project. It is thus, the product of the researcher's own thinking about the research study, which is contrary to the theoretical framework as it comprises other peoples' theoretical perspectives that the researcher interprets as relevant to his/ her study. A conceptual framework is further mentioned as the logical master plan for the entire research project, while the theoretical framework is only a little sub-set of the conceptual framework (Kivunja, 2018). A clear distinction between the two is portrayed by the same scholar in his analogy where he imagines the conceptual framework as the house, while also visualising the theoretical framework as the room that serves a particular purpose in the house (Kivunja, 2018). To this end, the conceptual framework is necessary when the researcher is investigating either a new or an underdeveloped area of qualitative research (Hughes et al., 2019).

For this qualitative research, a theoretical framework is adopted. I have chosen to adopt the theoretical framework because it is an important lens through which the generated data and the embedded meaning within the data can be magnified to reveal the connections that make meaning in answering the research questions and addressing the research problem (Kivunja, 2018). It will thus enhance my understanding of the data analysis, the research findings, and the recommendations. The theoretical framework will also help me to make sense of the findings. As postulated by Yamauchi et al. (2017), a theoretical framework will also be helpful to define, analyse, and interpret the findings. Furthermore, a theoretical framework is more powerful when it integrates theories that capture different aspects of the phenomenon of the study (Maxwell, 2005). It is for this reason that I have decided to integrate four theories into

this study. The theories that have been incorporated in the study are: the Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory, Chaos Theory, Accountability Theory, and the Stakeholder Theory. These theories are discussed below.

### **3.2.1 Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory**

The first theory that forms part of a theoretical framework for this study is Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory. Drawing from Section 1.3 of Chapter One, I highlighted the complex dilemmas Mr Bystander and I encountered in our leadership as school principals where we ultimately found ourselves having difficulty to account to the CM regarding educators who had violated the codes of professional ethics. The difficulty to account to the CM was mainly caused by multiple stakeholders participating in our schools as a complex organisations. To this end, the Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory was adopted in this study because of its strength in outlining the central considerations school principals should take into account when dealing with ethical dilemmatic situations in a complex school environment (Berkovich & Eyal, 2020, 2021; Caldwell et al. (2007). Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory was chosen because it further enhances school principals' moral maturation thereby developing the latter's sense of moral identity and their ability to cope with complexity and reflect on their cognition (Berkovich & Eyal, 2021). According to Starrat (1994), the Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory is an essential framework for building ethical schools and developing ethical school leaders.

Scholarship suggests that the Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory was developed by Robert Starrat in 1994 as the first of its kind to address the issue of ethics in education and improve ethical decision-making by school principals (Berkovich & Eyal, 2020, 2021; Starrat, 1991,1994). In his novel theory, Starrat (1994), focused on an ethic of care, an ethic of justice and an ethic of critique as three lenses to be used in ethical decision-making by school principals in their leadership of schools (Shapiro & Gross, 2013, 2016; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011, 2016). Post its birth in 1994, the theory encountered notable developments in the early 2000s, and revisions were made by Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) and Starrat (2012). These revisions of the Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory resulted in the birth of ethic of profession as the fourth lens to be used in ethical decision-making by school principals (Berkovich & Eyal, 2020, 2021; Shapiro & Gross, 2013, 2016; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011, 2016). According to Caldwell et al. (2007) and Shapiro and Gross (2016), Robert Starrat laid the foundation on

which Shapiro and Stefkovich (2001, 2005, 2011, 2016) developed the modern Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory. These four lenses (i) ethic of care, ii) ethic of justice, iii) ethic of critique and iv) ethic of profession of the Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory are discussed next with each lens supported by the critical questions that school principals should ask themselves when dealing with ethical dilemmatic situations and decision-making, as presented by Caldwell et al. (2007); Gross and Shapiro (2004); and Tekel and Karadag (2017). However, presenting and analysing the responses in each of the questions given under each Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory lens is beyond the scope of this current study.

#### **i) Ethic of care**

There is agreement between society at large and scholars that education is about the development of learners so that they can fit into the adult world. In relation to the current study, my initial view is that accountability can be easily achieved by the school principal valuing and treating those under his/her leadership and other stakeholders with dignity, care, respect, and putting their interests first (Berges- Puyo, 2022; Ehrich et al., 2015). This selfless attitude from such school principals towards other stakeholders in education indicates an ethic of care. According to Gross and Shapiro (2004) and Tekel and Karadag (2017), ethic of care was developed by feminist scholars challenging the dominant and patriarchal ethic of justice. It is founded on the belief that individuals (school principals in the current study) consider the outcomes of their decisions, actions, and even inactions (Shapiro & Gross, 2016; Tekel & Karadag, 2017). To this end, school principals who carefully ponder the consequences of their actions and decisions are called teleologists by scholars including Cranston et al. (2006); Hunt and Vitell (2006) and Tyler (2014).

Central to their leadership, school principals who advocate an ethic of care put human relationships at the heart of their leadership and embrace the foregrounding values of love, respect, compassion, care, trust, loyalty, empowerment, and sensitivity towards all stakeholders in education including those under their leadership (Ehrich et al., 2012; Gross & Shapiro, 2004). As shared by Ehrich et al. (2015), the ethic of care principle champions the dignity and worth of all individuals. In schools where an ethic of care is championed, a positive and caring school culture is evident within the SMT, the SGB, educators, learners, and parents, with all having a sense of ownership of the school, as they are conscious that their ideas are

valued (Klenowski & Ehrich, 2016). According to Berges- Puyo (2022) and Perry (2018), caring is the most important element in schools with the school principal being compassionate and empathic to those under his/her leadership in order to provide successful education for learners. Given the prevalence of ethical turpitudes among educators including school principals (as was earlier submitted in Section 1.4 of Chapter One of the current study), I believe an ethic of care subsequently becomes the panacea to mitigate unethical conduct by school principals since it helps to capture, retain and enforce societal morals and values (Mthiyane & Mudadigwa, 2021).

Despite its unquestionable benefits in creating a caring, loving and sensitive school environment, I am convinced that it results in school principals dismally failing to account to CMs about educators' alleged cases of misconduct (as it was presented in Section 1.3 of Chapter One). I believe this is its major weakness. In concluding this lens, Caldwell et al. (2007) and Gross and Shapiro (2004) presented the questions that school principals who advocate the ethic of care ask themselves in their decision-making processes. These questions are presented next.

- Who will benefit from what I decide?
- Who will be hurt by my actions?
- What are the long- term effects of a decision I make today?
- If I am helped by someone now, what should I do in future about giving back to this individual or to society in general?

## **ii) Ethic of justice**

As is the case with regard to the ethic of care, scholars are in agreement that justice should be prioritised in schools (Tekel & Karadag, 2017). According to Gross and Shapiro (2004) and Starrat (1991), school principals who advocate for an ethic of justice act according to what is right, since the latter focuses on right and laws. Such school principals' leadership is characterised by incrementalism, faith in the legal system and hope for progress (Caldwell et al., 2007; Gross & Shapiro, 2004). This belief is further corroborated by Kutsyuruba and Walker (2013) who postulate that at the heart of the ethic of justice lies right, law, policies and concepts such as fairness, equality and individual freedom. According to Shapiro and Gross (2016), an

ethic of justice is the first step in the decision-making process which is concerned with the legal systems, fairness, and freedom.

Furthermore, some scholars including Cranston et al., (2003, 2006) and Hunt and Vitell (2006) regard school principals who are driven by an ethic of justice as deontologists. These scholars base their argument on such school principals being policy driven and who strictly implement the given policy and the piece of legislation without considering the impact of their decision (Cranston et al. 2003, 2006; Hunt & Vitell, 2006). I believe that to such school principals, educational policies, circulars, rules, and laws are sacrosanct and are considered as the Alpha and Omega guiding their decision-making. As such, to them, 'it is a policy or nothing'. Interestingly, it is not uncommon to meet some school principals who are unequivocal in stating that they lead their schools by the book.

Central to an ethic of justice, is the equal and fair treatment of all stakeholders by the school principal (Arar & Saiti, 2022). I am convinced that such school principals, in their leadership view the South African Constitution as the roadmap that guides their decision-making as it explicitly advocates for equality before the law (Republic of South Africa, 1996a). Subsequently, a fair and equal treatment for all is notable in those schools. This equitable treatment for all is central to the ethic of justice. In the ethic of justice, the standard of due process is maintained with the school principal striving to protect the human rights of all stakeholders in education (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016). In schools where an ethic of justice is pursued, school principals ensure that decision-making is shared and is democratic; as a result, the overall culture of collaboration among stakeholders is evident (Klenowski & Ehrich, 2016). To this effect, school principals value and consider each relevant stakeholder in school before making an ethical decision.

As mentioned at the beginning of this Section, Caldwell et al. (2007); Gross and Shapiro (2004); and Tekel and Karadag (2017) present critical questions that school principals who are inspired by the ethic of justice ask themselves when faced with an ethical dilemmatic situation and decision-making. These questions are presented below:

- Is there a law or policy that would be appropriate for resolving a particular ethical dilemma?
- Why is this law or policy the correct one in this particular case?

- How would the law or policy be implemented?

However, it is worth noting that achieving fairness (as suggested by the ethic of justice) in an organisation, characterised by complex stakeholder participation (like a school) is not a walk in the park. Achieving fair and equal treatment of all stakeholders in education will always encounter numerous barriers and subsequently, reach a cul-de-sac. As claimed by Tekel and Karadag (2017), an ethic of justice falls short of providing suggestions about what should be done when what is fair for one is unfair for another. To this effect, Starrat (1991) underlines the need to consider individual philosophies. Therefore, it is always important that leadership in the schools is willing to learn from both the errors that may have been made as well as from the successes that may have been achieved.

### **iii) Ethic of critique**

In trying to understand barriers to fairness, the ethic of critique thus emerges (Perry, 2018). This lens of the Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory was conceived after some scholars discovered tensions between an ethic of justice, right, laws, and the concept of democracy (Gross & Shapiro, 2004). Consistent with Gross and Shapiro (2004), Arar and Saiti (2022) and Starrat (1991) indicate that an ethic of critique directly relates to an ethic of justice because individuals within the school scrutinise its climate and culture and subsequently interpret the environmental stimuli in order to give meaning and form attitude. The ethic of critique allows school principals to ask how things are the way they are and challenge the *status quo* in the Education Department (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016). As suggested by Tekel and Karadag (2017), an ethic of critique is necessary to address the difficulties that school principals face in their leadership of school. It is aimed at awakening school principals to inequities in society and, in particular, to injustices in education at all levels (Shapiro & Gross, 2016).

Asking why things are the way they are and challenging the status quo (as presented in the preceding paragraph) constitutes the essence of ethic of critique and has its foundations in the Critical Theory to question power structures in schools as complex organisations (Berges-Puyo, 2022; Ehrich et al., 2015; Mathur & Corley, 2014; Perry, 2018; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016). As propounded by Ehrich et al. (2015), ethic of critique requires school principals to reflect on current policies so that they can uncover injustices and exploitation embedded in

social structures. Ethic of critique thus, empowers school principals to not just be consumers of policy, circulars and other official documents presented to schools by the department of education, but that they should analyse such documents to identify some injustices and exploitations to the most vulnerable members of the school community (Berges- Puyo, 2022; Ehrich et al., 2015; Perry, 2018). I strongly believe that school principals should read the fine prints to identify the ‘hidden policy’ within the policy documents that might lead to exploitation in the school environment. In this regard, I am of the strong view that school principals should critique whether the presented policy aligns or collide with the South African Constitution (the supreme law in the country) (Republic of South Africa, 1996a), the Bill of Rights, the Employment of Educators Act (EEA) (Department of Education, 1998), the Labour Relations Act (LRA) (Republic of South Africa., 1995), and the South African Schools Act (Republic of South Africa, 1996b). Similarly, school principals should be able to critique these mentioned legal frameworks to uncover some injustices that these policy documents might present to the marginalised and the most vulnerable members of the society. At its heart, ethic of critique challenges the inequality in all its manifestations and aims to create fairer and more responsive school practices (Klenowski & Ehrich, 2016).

To enhance the debate on ethic of critique, Caldwell et al (2007); Gross and Shapiro (2004); and Tekel and Karadag (2017) presented hard questions that school principals that champion ethic of critique ask in order to uncover injustices and exploitations to the most vulnerable members of the school community (Berges- Puyo, 2022; Ehrich et al., 2015; Perry, 2018). These questions are based on social class, race, gender, vulnerable groups, marginalised groups, and other areas of difference (Gross & Shapiro, 2004). These questions are presented next:

- Who makes the laws or policy?
- Who benefit from the law, rule or policy?
- Who has the power?
- Who are the silenced voices?

Notwithstanding that ethic of critique allows school principals to be champions of human rights by uncovering injustices and exploitation that is embedded in social structures, Tekel and Karadag (2017) warn that it fails to offer a detailed plan for reconstructing the social order being critiqued.

#### **iv) Ethic of profession**

In order to achieve these ethical standards mentioned in the preceding paragraphs (care, justice, and critique), professionalising the teaching profession with clear codes, rules, and principles guiding the profession becomes central (Hlongwane, 2021; Shapiro & Gross, 2013). The formulation of the codes, rules and principles that are in line with traditional concepts of justice signifies an ethic of profession. The ethic of profession is founded on the belief that school principals as leaders should promote the success of all students by acting with fairness, integrity, and in an ethical manner (Gross & Shapiro, 2004; Tekel & Karadag, 2017). Relative to the current study, school principals should treat those under their leadership with fairness, integrity, and in an ethical manner. According to Shapiro and Stefkovich (2001), the ethic of profession places the child's best interest at the heart of educational leadership. To this effect, it examines what it mean for school principals to be professionals and what behaviours are considered acceptable by the profession (Shapiro & Hassinger, 2007).

The ethic of profession focuses on moral aspects of the teaching profession as in other professions like business, medicine, law, theology and others (Mathur & Corley, 2014). As highlighted by Shapiro and Gross (2016), an ethic of profession expects educators and school principals to organise themselves and formulate their own professional and personal codes of ethics. In organising themselves, school principals place the interests of educators under their leadership as paramount (Shapiro & Gross, 2016). It is for this reason that various regulatory professional bodies are created with the intention of bestowing on the teaching profession the status and dignity it deserves (Mathur & Corley, 2014; Msibi & Mchunu, 2013; Shapiro & Gross, 2013). For example, the General Teaching Council for Scotland and Northern Ireland; the Teaching Council of Zambia; the Teachers' Registration Council of Nigeria; National Teaching Council of Ghana; as well as South African Council of Educators (SACE) in South Africa exist for the sanctification and professionalising the teaching profession in these respective countries (Ezeugbor, 2017; Galanouli, 2010; Halliday, 1999; Nawa, 2018; South African Council of Educators, 2000; South African Council of Educators, 2002; Weir, 2001). These professional codes of ethics serve as the guideposts for the teaching profession while giving image and character to the profession (Perry, 2018). Also, they are created to serve the best interest of those under the leadership of school principals including learners, as well as promoting professional standards and decision making (Mathur & Corley, 2014). In this regard,



school principals should embrace the professional codes of ethics in line (with the ethics of profession) and include relevant stakeholders in decision-making.

As has been the case with the the preceding three lenses, Caldwell et al (2007); Gross and Shapiro (2004); and Tekel and Karadag (2017), present questions that are raised by school principals that advocate for an ethic of profession in their leadership as school leaders. School principals that champion an ethic of profession ask these questions because they have the best interest of the learners (educators relative to the current study) at heart (Tekel & Karadag, 2017). These questions are:

- What is the best interest of the student/ educator?
- Does a proposed resolution take into account my personal and professional codes and/ or the codes of professional organisation?
- What is my best professional judgement for resolving or solving this particular dilemma?

In conclusion, the Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory seems to dominate most empirical studies that focus on ethical eadership as well as those that deal with ethical dilemmas and it is commonly used as a framework in research in educational leadership (Chibaya, 2021; Dladla, 2020; Dlungwane, 2021; Klenowski & Ehrich, 2016; Mathur & Corley, 2014; Mudadigwa, 2021; Perry, 2018). Furthermore, the pioneers of Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory including Robert Starrat, Joan Shapiro, Jacqueline Stefkovich, and Steven Gross are renowned researchers in the field of educational leadership (Caldwell et al., 2007; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016; Starrat, 1994). As a result, being a school principal and a PhD candidate who is deeply inspired by the ideals of ethical leadership, I can say that I am honoured to have conducted this research on the ethical leadership phenomenon and the dilemmas therof, and subsequently use the above theory in my study. Borrowing from the Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory in the current study suggests that the present study used a the theory that has been tried and tested in educational leadership due to its popularity in framing research. I believe adopting this theory will thus results in rich and credible findings.

### 3.2.2 Chaos Theory

The second theory that constitutes the theoretical framework is Chaos Theory. The theory was adopted for this study because it cautions school principals that a trivial action, decision, or an ethical leadership practice (like accountability, transparency, honesty, and even punctuality) which can be easily overlooked by some school principal can have a significant impact on the entire school environment (Akmansoy & Kartal, 2014). Therefore, nothing should be taken for granted. Chaos Theory further puts emphasis on school principals being conscious about being ethical all the time; it cautions them to be conscious about ethical leadership practices which might, on the surface, look unimportant or insignificant as ethical leadership has the potential to produce untold results in the entire stakeholder web and environment (Barker, 1995). To this effect, Chaos Theory keeps school principals on their toes by enabling them to be conscious that their “small decisions, behaviours, actions, inactions, and leadership practices” can affect the whole school and the entire school environment in an unpredictable way (Daljit, 2009). Framing this study with Chaos Theory is appropriate if one considers several negative stories around reported instances of unethical practices, as alluded to in the introduction chapter of this study. As I have done with the first theory, I believe that, again, a brief discussion on the origin of Chaos Theory should be made. Similarly, its use and prevalence in educational leadership should be presented. Presenting such information will show that Chaos Theory is not alien to educational leadership.

According to a definition provided by Trivedi (2021), the word “chaos” originates from the Greek word “Khaos”, meaning gaping nothingness. In the same way, Lorenz (1993) maintains that chaos is an ancient word which denotes a complete lack of form or systematic arrangement. However, in the contemporary description, it is often described in reference to the absence of some kind of order that ought to be present. Mathematicians believe that defining chaos is difficult; however, they are of the view that it is simple to recognise because it relates to the complicated natural system’s behaviour that is completely unpredictable (Trivedi, 2021). Drawing from the perspectives provided by these scholars, I am convinced that chaos is about unpredictability of nature, yielding abrupt disorder and a lack of systematic or organisational arrangement.

The origins of Chaos Theory can be traced back in the late 1800s to the early 1900s from the observations in mathematics, physics and the natural world (Ahmed, 2014; Coveney & Highfield, 1991; Gleick, 1987a; Hayles, 1990; Mackey, 1999; Mehta, 2019). Despite its early origin in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by Henri Poincare (1854- 1912), (*a French mathematician who investigated the solar system*), it was only in the early 1970s that a significant development of the theory was made by Edward Lorenz who was an American meteorologist and is also regarded as a pioneer of the theory (Iqbal et al., 2016; Mbengue et al., 2018; Trivedi, 2021). Further, Lorenz (1993) is popularly known for the development of the “Butterfly Effect” in Chaos Theory, which argues that a butterfly flapping its wings in Brazil can set off a tornado in Texas, USA two years later (Gleick, 1987b; Hayles, 1990; Trivedi, 2021). The Butterfly Effect simply suggests that a minor or an insignificant change, action, or decision in the system (*a system being an object studied in some field which might be abstract or concrete; simple or complicated; linear or non-linear*), institution, or organisation can have a far-reaching impact on other systems and outcomes which may not be related to our system (Daljit, 2009; Mehta, 2019; Rickles et al., 2007; Trivedi, 2021). According to Van Zyl et al. (2020), Chaos Theory suggests that in an unpredictable and uncertain school environment, school principal makes sense of patterns and brings order by directing change to fix an institutional problem or to achieve a goal. Furthermore, these scholars opine that the rationale behind Chaos Theory is shifting the school principals’ mindset to accept and strategically navigate through uncertainty and unpredictability as an emergent component in a rapidly changing school environment (Van Zyl et al., 2020).

Consistent with the assertions of the mathematicians, who highlight the difficulty of defining Chaos Theory, but also say that it is simple to recognise, I believe that providing some basic characteristics of the theory will assist in capturing its essence. Some notable features of Chaos Theory include (a) Non-linearity; (b) Complexity; (c) Strange attractors; (d) Sensitive to initial condition; (e) Dynamic; (f) Fractals; (g) Aperiodic; (h) Perturbation; (i) Self- organising, open and adaptive. These nine constituent elements of the Chaos Theory are discussed next.

The concept *Non-linearity* refers to a system under which the input is not proportional to the output (Rickles et al., 2007). It is the extreme opposite of linear system (which is a predictable state that satisfy a superposition principle). In a linear system, inputs are proportional to outputs which yield a predictability of results, whereas, at the heart of a non-linear system is the notion

of unpredictability since the input cannot produce the same output. The second element is complexity. *Complexity* in addition to non-linear relationship, in Chaos Theory is characterised by multiple indefinable and unknowable ways so that no system of linear equations can represent. It cannot be extrapolated from the properties of individual elements (Rickles et al., 2007). Complexity is the interaction between components (individuals, stakeholders, departments, groups, organisations, *et cetera*), of a system *vis-à-vis* the system, and such interactions between the components does not necessarily follow a predictable course (Mbengue et al., 2018). Schools as organisations are complex systems, composed of numerous interrelated webs of stakeholders, beliefs, organisational structures, and objectives (Barker, 1995). The third element is that of *Strange attractors*. According to Ahmed (2014), *strange attractors* are all those stakeholders that are involved in the school because the more people are involved in an organisation, the more their decision and actions will result in unexpected outcomes and will initiate unforeseen events. Strange attractors do not necessarily have to act in a positive manner but can also have a negative impact on the whole, entire system.

The fourth element is known as *Sensitive to initial condition*, and it is a distinct feature of Chaos Theory. Sensitivity to initial condition highlights small changes in the initial condition which may yield a massive difference in the final state (Fahim & Talabari, 2014). This narrative is what was earlier described as the Butterfly Effect. The Butterfly Effect originally refers to a butterfly flapping its wings in Brazil, subsequently, the air movement eventually triggering a tornado in Texas two years later (Fahim & Talabari, 2014; Lorenz, 1993). According to the Butterfly Effect, Chaos Theory believes that in a dynamic system, a small change in the initial condition triggers a huge chain reaction of the entire system. Such changes are non-linear and unpredictable (Lorenz, 1993). The fifth element is dynamic. *Dynamic* phenomena of Chaos Theory occur when something changes (Fahim & Talabari, 2014). Chaotic behaviours are dynamic in a sense that they change over time, and there exist a large variety of patterns by which this change can occur. These cannot be predictable. *Fractals* is the sixth element of Chaos Theory, and according to Fahim and Talabari (2014), a fractal refers to a never-ending pattern that is infinitely complicated. These patterns are self-similar across different scales and are created through the repetition of a simple process repeatedly, in an ongoing process thus, producing a more complicated structure. Being influenced by the process of recursion, fractals are images of dynamic systems. Lorenz (1993) posits that fractals in Chaos Theory's

perspective mean that a simple routine, action, or decision can produce a strange and complex result (because the inputs are not proportional to the output/ non- linearity).

The seventh element of Chaos Theory is called *aperiodic*. Aperiodic refers to a time interval that is characterised by the occurrence of a certain phenomenon. A variable is periodic when it repeats its past behaviour after the passage of a fixed period or time interval (Fahim & Talabari, 2014). On the contrary, behaviour is aperiodic when no variable influencing the state of the system undergoes a completely regular repetition of values. Therefore, an aperiodic behaviour is very unstable and highly complicated as it never repeats itself and continues to show the effects of any small change and modification of the system (Fahim & Talabari, 2014). Since Chaos Theory is highly unpredictable and random, it qualifies to have aperiodic behaviour. *Perturbation* is the eight element of Chaos Theory. *Perturbation* refers to the forced change in an organisation (Daljit, 2009). Such change can result in a sudden shift to a new state, an immediate return to the old state or a long transience in one or the other (Daljit, 2009). Perturbation (change) implies that when change confronts the system, the system automatically works to respond to the change and in the process begins to use up its own energy. *Self-organising, open and adaptive* is the ninth and the last element of Chaos Theory. It refers to a spontaneous and huge restructuring that occurs in systems that face the faces of entropy and create new regimes of order and structure (Fahim & Talabari, 2014). Capra (1983) claims that in a self-organising environment, a system evolves to an unpredicted pattern of response that the system self-determines for its own sustainability. This researcher further opines that open systems can be described as open to new matter and energy infusion as they evolve. The capacity to self-organise shows that complex and chaotic systems are adaptive to the changes and modifications.

In essence, as attributed by Phuthi (2016), Chaos Theory relates to the unpredictability (non-linearity) and the uncertainty of events taking place in an organisation. Furthermore, Phuthi (2016) also describes Chaos Theory as a period of transition in which changes occur in unpredictable, irregular, and uncertain ways. Such thinking resonates with Sterman (2000) who remarks that change is a buzzword in modern times. In his work, he further argues that some changes are “wonderful, others defiling the planet, other changes impoverishing the human spirit, and others threatening our survival”. I am of the strong belief that in a chaotic school environment, change is constant to which the institution must adapt. Moreover, the ability to

change is what creates order , or rather change breeds order and the process leads to continued growth and sustainability (Daljit, 2009). I believe that in a chaotic school environment, a school principal must embrace change while strategically navigating through uncertainty and unpredictability in a rapidly changing school environment (Van Zyl et al., 2020). Likewise, change is at the heart of Chaos Theory, which the school must adapt to.

Drawing on how Chaos Theory is presented and zooming in on its common features, as shown in the preceding paragraphs, I can say that Chaos Theory is characterised by non-linear behaviour in a school as an organisation (unpredictable). Such non-linearity is caused by multiple interacting stakeholders in the system (complexity). This then results in unpredictable, uncertain, volatile and aperiodic results as dilemmas dominate the whole discourse. As a result, an insignificant and small action, decision, (even inaction) in the school by one of the key stakeholders (the school principal in the present study) can have a massive impact and change (which is way greater than the input) in the entire school environment (sensitive to initial conditions/the Butterfly Effect). In a complex organisation like a school, unexpected behaviours and outcomes are bound to happen which will ultimately initiate unanticipated result because of several different stakeholders that are involved and are interacting in the day-to-day functioning of the school (strange attractors). Therefore, school principals find themselves having to choose from a set of principles, values, and norms (dilemmas) due to the complex and open systems nature of the school. Such behaviour will happen in a never-ending pattern, which is infinitely complicated by the unordered interactions between all stakeholders (primary and secondary) in the school that satisfies its features as an open and complex organisation (fractals). Ultimately, the school will be characterised by ever-changing behaviours, self-organising, and adapting to its social environment (*school social environment referring to the nature of interactions between the various stakeholders in the school*) in pursuit of meeting the demands of various stakeholders (dynamic) (Johnson, 2009).

Also, in a chaotic, complex, non-linear school environment, that is characterised by butterfly effects, change becomes inevitable. Such thinking aligns with Stoll and Fink (1995) who are of the view that patterns of work and living must and will change. Such change will happen with or without the human drive. The possibility of experiencing change in a chaotic, complex, and non-linear school environment (where various stakeholders regularly interact in an orderly and unordered fashion) is very high. Hence, the significance of Chaos Theory. According to

Phuthi (2016), Chaos Theory is a necessary condition for change in a social system. This researcher further claims that Chaos Theory is not suitable for a stable condition or fixed state but rather is responsible for changing the relationship between the stakeholders rather than changing the stakeholders themselves (Phuthi, 2016).

Remarkably, Chaos Theory has been applied in many scientific and engineering fields like astrophysics, computer science, aerodynamics, chemistry, biology, and economics (Mbengue et al., 2018). According to Ahmed (2014), Chaos Theory has also found its way into a broader management literature and is considered a powerful new perspective from which to view organisations. As such, it continues to become more and more prominent in various social science fields like philosophy, sociology, management, and education (Akmansoy & Kartal, 2014; Farazmand, 2003). Similarly, in educational leadership, Chaos Theory is very popular and its introduction within the field can be attributed to Sungaila (1990) in the landmark title, ‘The new science of chaos’ (Evers & Lakomski, 2012). Subsequently, Chaos Theory has been used to examine a range of educational issues, specific themes in the professional development of teachers, curriculum and instruction, as well as examining educational change (Cvetek, 2008; Glickman et al., 2010; Wong, 2013). Despite its origin in the mathematics and natural world, the appropriateness of Chaos Theory for educational leadership in schools as complex organisations can never be over-emphasised. This belief is possible because schools as organisations are chaotic systems which evolve over time due to interactions among educators, SMT members, principals, SGB members, parents, district officials, teacher unions, interest groups, media, and other external stakeholders who might have interest in the affairs of the school (Lartey, 2020). This researcher further remarks that predicting the impact of these interactions in the school environment is almost impossible because the same interaction can result in different outcomes depending on its initial state (Lartey, 2020).

Furthermore, I believe that the rise in the stakeholder participation in educational matters and the resulting increased accountability in schools have subsequently created a more complex, fluid, and open schools’ environment. The active involvement of the web of stakeholders in education has brought about rapid change in the educational landscape and leadership (Lartey, 2020). As a result, school principals’ traditional leadership approaches need to change, adapt, and evolve to the new demands of achieving optimal accountability to all relevant stakeholders in education. For schools as open system, their survival depends on their interaction with these

stakeholders and their surrounding environment; hence, school principals are obligated to take pride in their work and report and provide necessary support to these stakeholders (Van Zyl et al., 2020). Drawing from these assertions, I can say without fear of contradiction that the winds of change are sweeping the educational landscape in an unpredicted manner; hence, school principals must adapt to such perturbations for the sustainability and survival of the school.

Tellingly, the third and the fourth research questions (Section 1.6 of Chapter One) are respectively intended at unearthing how school principals enhance ethical leadership during times of accountability considering the complexities, dilemmas and dynamics associated with the schools as open systems; as well as soliciting why school principals enact ethical leadership the way they do during times of accountability. The open nature of the environment under which schools operate has brought about a rapid change in educational leadership. In view of these perspectives, Chaos Theory is appropriate for this study. Chaos Theory views change as constant condition under which schools must adapt to (Daljit, 2009). The ability to change is what creates a conducive school environment. Furthermore, Chaos Theory cautions that the single negative influence on educational leadership can yield a far-reaching negative impact and change in the entire system and vice versa. This phenomenon is what was earlier discussed as the Butterfly Effect (or sensitivity to initial condition) which is central to Chaos Theory. I can safely say that the Butterfly Effect questions the drop in the ocean narrative.

In addition, in a complex and dynamic school environment, the Butterfly Effect postulates that change in the school environment is not only limited to the principal for initiation but can emerge from any direction. Such an idea is consistent with what Barker (1995) suggests; that the Butterfly Effect of Chaos Theory can originate from all levels and corners of the school including students, parents, staff, educators, SGB member, community members, and school principals. However, in the context of this study, the focus of the Butterfly Effect is on the school principal's actions or non-actions. Similarly, according to Fullan (2007), change may either be imposed (even by natural events or other stakeholders in education other than the principal) or is self-inflicted. In the event that a minimal behaviour is having an enormous impact in the entire school environment, it may not be initiated by the school principal, the principal needs to change and apply adaptability and transformational leadership skills to manoeuvre through uncertainty and unpredictable school environment (Van Zyl et al., 2020).



Interestingly, over and above Chaos Theory being sensitive to initial condition or the impacts of the Butterfly Effect, it also empowers school principals in their leadership to shift their mindsets to accept and strategically navigate through uncertainty and an unpredictable school environment (Van Zyl et al., 2020). These scholars suggest that Chaos Theory in an uncertain and unpredictable school environment can assist the school principal make sense of patterns and brings order by directing change in order to fix the organisational problem at hand (Van Zyl et al., 2020). Moreover, Parra and Tan (2021) credit Chaos Theory for the ability to equip school principals with adaptive and transformational leadership skills in relation to other stakeholders in education, while providing responsive leadership styles to turbulent, complex, and dynamic school environments. Other benefits of Chaos Theory for school principals include its ability to help them accept complexities and unpredictability in the schools they lead and become ‘agents of chaos’ (Cvetek, 2008). This can only be achieved if school principals accept complexity and unpredictability in their school environment, and not only by responding to problematic leadership situations in a novel and unpredictable way but, also by ‘chaotising’ their leadership according to the principles of Chaos Theory. According to Ahmed (2014), by understanding Chaos Theory, school principals can use it as a means of rethinking educational leadership processes through the provision of new perspectives on educational systems and how interactions between different stakeholders influence the school and change in its trajectory. Also, school principals’ understanding of Chaos Theory enables them to be responsive to trivial changes and their impact on the entire school environment (Musselwhite & Herath, 2007). This in turn can help such school principals create minor changes in their action, decisions, and leadership approaches, knowing very well that their small change may make a greater positive change in the school. I am convinced that a school principal who is driven by the ideals of Butterfly Effect and non-linearity principles of Chaos Theory, will be always conscious that his/her small actions (even inaction as we have seen on the Rationale) could have a significant consequence on the school. Accordingly, such school principals will be sensitive to their ethical leadership practices (by infusing ethical values like respect, honesty, truthfulness, prudence, transparency, *et cetera*, in their leadership); embracing accountability in their leadership; and acknowledging relevant stakeholders as partners in education. Therefore, school principals will be conscious that their failure to comply with these values can lead to an unpredictable, unstable, and volatile atmosphere in the school or even bring it to its knees. Therefore, Chaos Theory is perfectly appropriate for this study.

To sum up, both the Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory and the Chaos Theory are perfectly appropriate for this study. These two theories complement each other to the extent that one expands where the other falls short in practice. For example, the Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory discusses ethics in educational leadership, while Chaos Theory discusses the impact of ethics in educational leadership. To this end, the Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory provides a descriptive presentation of ethical leadership while the latter provides the operational aspects of ethical leadership. With these first two theories focusing on ethical leadership, the last two theories focus on accountability in a complex school environment characterised by multiple stakeholders.

### **3.2.3 Accountability Theory**

The third theory that forms part of a theoretical framework for this study is Accountability Theory. Accountability Theory was adopted because it provides vigilance and cautions school principals to take full responsibility for their actions, inactions, and decisions (Lerner & Tetlock, 1999). Also, Accountability Theory reminds school principals about being answerable and that they must be able to provide justifications for their actions, inactions, and decisions to various stakeholders in education (Myende et al., 2018; Ogina & Ramare, 2019). To get a deeper understanding of Accountability Theory, I believe that it is appropriate that I present its brief origin and its relevance for, and popularity in the educational leadership sector. I strongly believe that digging through its roots and prior application to educational leadership will sharpen my thinking and I will be able to evaluate its relevance to the study.

As earlier mentioned in Section 2.8 of Chapter Two, Wagner (1989) opines that the term “accountability”, as it was first used in the early 1600s, referred to a statement of explaining one’s conduct, or a statement or exposition of reasons, causes, grounds, and motives, as well as to furnish a justifiable analysis. Further, this researcher posits that the centrality of accountability is that it is one’s ability to give account and be answerable when questioned about his/her decisions, conduct and actions (Wagner, 1989). Hall et al. (2017) accentuate that scholarly interest in accountability is recent and can be traced to early research by Klimoski (1972) as well as Klimoski and Ash (1974) as the protagonists of accountability. Correspondingly, Hall et al. (2017) also postulate that the conceptualisation of accountability by Tetlock (1985b) was to foster a global call for accountability in the public and the private

sector. Subsequently, such interest in accountability gave birth to the concept of Accountability Theory. According to Vance et al. (2013), Lerner and Tetlock (1999), Tetlock (1985b), and Tetlock (1985a) are the scholars that developed Accountability Theory.

I have chosen Accountability Theory for this study because it views school principals as agents whose behaviours, actions and decisions are subject to evaluation by an audience or principle (Frink & Klimoski, 2004; Myende et al., 2018; Ogina & Ramare, 2019). Lerner and Tetlock (1999) further regard school principals as agents that must be called to answer and justify their actions and decisions. Not only that, agents are accountable and should justify the standard procedures they employed in decision-making and they are also accountable for the quantity and quality of their work outcome (Hall et al., 2007). As a result, failure to provide a satisfactory justification for their actions will ultimately yield negative consequences for the agent. Conversely, the provision of a satisfactory justification by the agent will result in positive consequence (Lerner & Tetlock, 1999). Besides that, Accountability Theory further explains what can be regarded as lawful, as described the organisational policies, and how the actions of individuals reflect the will to act in the best interest of the organisation and stakeholders (Myende et al., 2018). Also, Accountability Theory explains the expected behaviour, formal reporting relationships, and performance monitoring and evaluations (Frink & Klimoski, 2004; Hall et al., 2007). It focuses on decisions, actions and behaviours that are related to ethical issues (Frink & Klimoski, 2004).

Notably, Frink and Klimoski (2004) highlights the centrality of Accountability Theory in arousing interpersonal expectations while emphasising the importance of the consequence of compliance and ultimately, linking the task and activities to the agents. In addition, these scholars also submit that in response to a need for accountability, organisations create mechanism of formal reporting, performance evaluation, reward systems, and disciplinary procedures (Frink & Klimoski, 2004). In the same breath, Hall et al. (2007) remark that individuals bear multiple accountabilities in their organisations. These researchers regard these multiple accountabilities as a web of accountabilities. Considering multiple accountabilities, school principals are accountable to a number of stakeholders including the MEC, the District Directors, the SGBs, the CMs, the educators, learners, and other external stakeholders who might have interest in the affairs of the school (Hall et al., 2007). In the context of my study,

this theory will assist me in making judgement about the extent to which the participating school principals' understanding of accountability is consistent with the ideas expressed above.

Similarly, scholars like Hu (2017); Reddick et al. (2020) and Schillemans et al. (2022) describe the notion of multiple accountabilities by school principals as having to be executed either vertically, horizontally, or diagonally/hybrid. In vertical accountability, school principals as agents, account to the hierarchical superiors (for example, circuit manager and other departmental officials) for their actions, performance, decisions, and even inactions (Schillemans et al., 2022). Furthermore, rather than accounting only to superiors and subordinates (principal-agent relationship), accountability also involves community participation, interest groups, and other external organisations or structures which then, results in the gradual erosion of only-vertical accountability (Reddick et al., 2020). According to Schillemans et al. (2022), school principals' answerability to these secondary stakeholders is called horizontal accountability. Horizontal accountability is indirect, focused on citizens and may be delegated to state entities, including the Auditor- General, Human Rights Commission, Parliament, and legislative investigative commissions for enforcement (Hu, 2017; Reddick et al., 2020). However, in practice, both the elements of vertical accountability and horizontal accountability are a common practice (Hu, 2017). This scholar further claims that combining the two accountability styles is called diagonal or hybrid accountability. Diagonal accountability is the form of accountability in which school principals, as agents account to bodies working independently from hierarchical superiors, yet with authority. For example, the courts, Ombudsmen, Public Protector, Human Rights Commission, and media are a good example of diagonal accountability when they seek answers from school principals (e.g., on violation of human rights practices by the school) (Hu, 2017; Reddick et al., 2020; Schillemans et al., 2022).

Interestingly, accountability was viewed as the buzzword in the 1990s as it dominated in the health care field, civil and criminal justice, politics and other fields (Lerner & Tetlock, 1999). During this era, debates about who should answer to whom, for what, and under what ground rules appeared in scholarly, as well as popular publications. Likewise, in the field of education, accountability became very popular (Fairchild & Zins, 1992; Lerner & Tetlock, 1999; Miller, 1995). As a result, a plethora of literature on accountability has been recorded in the field of educational leadership. Evidence from Eze and Onwudinjo (2021); Fenwick (2007); Mestry

(2010); Smith and Benavot (2019) and White (2020) portray a vivid picture of the dominance of accountability in educational leadership. Notwithstanding, the popularity of the concept in educational leadership, a paucity of studies are framed with Accountability Theory. Articles by Baroutsis (2016); Myende et al. (2018) and Ogina and Ramare (2019) are a few notable studies that are framed by Accountability Theory in educational leadership. Other papers, for example Frink and Klimoski (2004) and Nuwagaba et al. (2022) framed their work within Accountability Theory with the former in human resources management and the latter in development studies. That Accountability Theory has been used to frame several studies in different fields, is suggestive of its versatility in the academic space.

Given the justification that has been provided in the preceding sections, it is evident that Accountability Theory is suitable for this study. Accountability Theory provides vigilance and cautions school principals about being answerable to various stakeholders and being able to give clear justification for their actions to various stakeholders in education. Accountability Theory is suitable for this study because it reminds school principals that their decisions and actions are subject to evaluation by the CMs for example, and other district officials, as well as different stakeholders in education. Besides, Accountability Theory further emphasises that school principals must expect to be called on to justify their actions (including their inability to report certain cases to the relevant officials like CMs). Accountability Theory also suggests that school principals' failure to provide justification and to report cases of misconduct is an offence which will ultimately yield negative consequences for them, namely that disciplinary measures can be instituted against them for shielding and covering acts of maleficence by educators.

### **3.2.4 Stakeholder Theory**

The fourth theory that makes up the theoretical framework is Stakeholder Theory. Stakeholder Theory was adopted in this study because it emphasises the notion that all stakeholders in education have the right to obtain information about school's activities, actions, and decisions that can influence their decision-making (Freeman et al., 2010; Freeman et al., 2020). Similarly, Stakeholder Theory places emphasis on school principals' responsibility for disseminating vital information to other stakeholders on matters affecting the school (Freeman et al., 2010). From a Stakeholder Theory perspective, it is unthinkable that a school principal can conceal vital

information from key stakeholders as was the case with Mr Bystander, whose example was used to highlight the existing challenges in some schools. Details in this regard are provided in Section 1.4 of Chapter One. To this end, Stakeholder Theory advocates for school principals to treat all stakeholders in education with fairness, transparency, honesty, and trustworthiness (Harrison et al., 2015). It is for these reasons that Stakeholder Theory was chosen as one of the theories underpinning this study. In addition, I believe that it is imperative to provide the origin of Stakeholder Theory and unearth how previous studies within educational leadership have used this theory in their research. Obtaining such information will assist in identifying the strengths, weaknesses, and relevance of Stakeholder Theory in relation to this study.

The term “stakeholder” was first used in 1963 in the Stanford Research Institute’s (SRI) internal memorandum (Freeman, 1984). Credit is given to Eric Rhenman and his Scandinavian contemporaries (i.e., Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and later Finland) for the development of the concept (Bondenson, 2003; Freeman, 1984). Scandinavian contributions to the concept are viewed as “the historical trail” stemming from “the original work” of the SRI (Strand & Freeman, 2015). Notably, these two scholars highlight the contribution made by the Scandinavians on the development of the concept including the first publication and the description of the concept in the early 1960s; the introduction of the first stakeholder map; and the development of the three tenets of Stakeholder Theory (Bondenson, 2003; Freeman, 1984). In 1968, Rhenman (who was a visiting scholar at Stanford) imported the discussions on stakeholders and reiterated the term “Stakeholder Theory” (Freeman et al., 2010). Subsequently, Stakeholder Theory was developed in 1980 (Khadija, 2022). Along with Rhenman’s contributions, Freeman (1984) provided some of the earliest and most influential conceptualisations of Stakeholder Theory as reflected in the subsequent paragraph (Haataja, 2020).

Freeman (1984) postulates that all stakeholders have the right to obtain information about the organisational activities, actions, and decisions that can influence their decision making (Putra & Suryanawa, 2022). Stakeholders are defined as individuals, groups and organisations that have an interest in the functionality and the performance of the school and subsequently who are involved in its welfare and success (Freeman et al., 2007; Harrison et al., 2015; Mashau et al., 2014; Paine & McCann, 2016). Further, the Department of Education defines stakeholders as all the role players in an organisation such as a school (Department of Education, 2000;

Mashau et al., 2014). For this study, I use stakeholders in the broadest sense to include all individuals, groups and organisations that have an interest in the functionality and the performance of the school.

According to Stakeholder Theory, stakeholders are distinguished as either internal or external stakeholders (Laplume et al., 2008; Paine & McCann, 2016). Internal stakeholders are those stakeholders who work within the school daily and, largely control what goes on in there (Paine & McCann, 2016). Similarly, Benn et al. (2016) contend that internal stakeholders are primary stakeholders by virtue of them having a contractual relationship with the school, and as such, the school cannot survive without them. Internal stakeholders in a school include the school principal, teaching and non-teaching staff, learners, the SGB, parents, and district officials (Mashau et al., 2014; Paine & McCann, 2016).

In contrast, external stakeholders are those individual, groups and organisations who have an interest in the school's affairs but are outside the day-to-day functioning of the school and do not directly determine what goes into producing the outcomes nor are they influenced by the actions taken by the school (Paine & McCann, 2016; Putra & Suryanawa, 2022). External stakeholders are sometimes called secondary stakeholders since they influence and affect the school, while also, they can be influenced and affected by the school's actions even though they are not essential for its survival (Benn et al., 2016). External stakeholders include special interest groups; competitors (in the form of competing schools, feeder and feeding schools); media; and the community at large (Benn et al., 2016; Harrison et al., 2015; Laplume et al., 2008). As suggested by Freeman (1984) and Freeman et al. (2007), organisations (including schools) should be viewed as groupings of stakeholders and the former's purpose should be to manage various stakeholder interests, needs and aspirations. In the same vein, school principals have the responsibilities of meeting the needs, interests, and viewpoints of various stakeholders. This responsibility is vested upon school principals because they are obliged to act as agents to ensure the survival of the school and to safeguard the long-term stake for each stakeholder (Asiyai, 2015).

Drawing from Stakeholder Theory perspectives, I would presume that school principals must view themselves as part of the entire stakeholder web and should refrain from working in silos and from withholding vital information to circuit managers, the SGB, the parents, the

educators, or the learners. This narrative is informed by Freeman (1984) who accentuates that all stakeholders have the right to obtain information about the organisational activities, actions, and decisions that can influence their decision-making. Furthermore, Freeman et al. (2020) declare that Stakeholder Theory focuses on the school principal's "knowing how" to engage stakeholders in education and create value for them. This premise is supported by the belief that Stakeholder Theory advocates for treating all stakeholders with fairness, transparency, honesty, trustworthiness, and even generosity (Harrison et al., 2015).

Drawing from these perspectives, Stakeholder Theory is appropriate for the current study. Stakeholder Theory proposes that school principals act as part of the entire stakeholder web. It also places emphasis on the school principal's prerogative and responsibility for divulging and sharing vital information about the school's activities, including decisions and actions with other stakeholders. From a Stakeholder Theory perspective, school principals as ethical leaders are obliged to exercise a great deal of transparency, accountability, honesty, fairness, truthfulness, care, and integrity when dealing with and disseminating school information to other stakeholders on matters affecting the school (Harrison et al., 2015). In the introduction to the study, I outlined some of the challenges around certain behaviours which seemed to violate the rights of stakeholders to information. Details on these issues can be found in Section 1.3 and 1.4 of Chapter One. Based on those narratives, Stakeholder Theory is suitable for this study as it locates the school principal at the heart of disseminating vital information to other stakeholders on matters affecting the school. Furthermore, it advocates for ethical and professional treatment of all stakeholders by the school principal.

However, inasmuch as a plethora of articles has been published on Stakeholder Theory, my review of the literature suggests that most of these works are in the business sector, focussing on accounting, as well as management (Freeman, 1984, 2004; Freeman et al., 2007). Notably, several studies including, Hickman and Akdere (2017), Khanyile (2018), and Stocker and Boaventura (2020), indicate that most of the research conducted on Stakeholder Theory is also found in higher education leadership. In my quest to understand the prevalence of previous empirical research conducted on Stakeholder Theory in educational leadership, I found that there is a paucity of studies in the schooling sector where Stakeholders Theory has been used. Research articles by Gilly (2013) and Khadija (2022) are some of the works that touch on Stakeholder Theory in educational leadership. Other articles like Gichohi (2015); Torres



(2021); as well as Yaro et al. (2015) elaborate on the concept of stakeholders in educational leadership without framing their work with Stakeholder Theory. For example, Gichohi (2015) framed his work with Bush (2003) on a collegial model of stakeholder involvement. Therefore, there is a visible gap that exists on the empirical studies that are framed by the Stakeholder Theory *vis-à-vis* educational leadership.

To sum up, both Accountability Theory and Stakeholder Theory are perfectly suitable for this study. These two theories complement each other in this study. Importantly, Accountability Theory cautions and reminds school principals about their answerability responsibility and that they should expect to be called on to justify their decisions and actions to relevant structures. Besides, with Stakeholder Theory, school principals as agents in the stakeholder web, are obliged to share information about the school's activities and to justify their actions to relevant stakeholders in education. Further, in reporting to relevant stakeholders about their actions and the school's activities, school principals should embrace ethical values like honesty, transparency, and integrity in their leadership practices. With the first two theories (Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory and the Chaos Theory) focusing on ethical leadership issues, these two theories (Accountability Theory and the Stakeholder Theory) focused on accountability issues in a complex school environment characterised by multiple stakeholders.

In conclusion, Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory; Chaos Theory; Accountability Theory; and Stakeholder Theory are perfectly suitable for this study. The Multiple Ethical Paradigm was chosen as a theoretical lens in the current study because of its ability to enhance and deepen the conceptualisation of ethics in educational leadership, handling the dilemmas associated with this phenomenon, and improving ethical decision-making by school principals. The Butterfly Effect of Chaos Theory was adopted to frame this study because it awakens school principals to be conscious of their minor ethical values (most that were discussed in the Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory) since they can have a domino effect in the entire school environment. Both these theories focused on ethical leadership issues in educational leadership. As was pointed out earlier, Accountability Theory and Stakeholder Theory complement, and are in harmony with each other in the sense that Accountability Theory cautions and reminds school principals about their answerability responsibility to relevant structures, whilst Stakeholder Theory views school principals as agents in the stakeholder web who are obliged to share information about the school's activities and justify their actions to relevant

stakeholders. These two theories focused on accountability issues in a complex school environment characterised by multiple stakeholders. In view of this explanation, I am of the strong view that Accountability Theory and Stakeholder Theory are two sides of the same coin; whilst the Chaos Theory explains the benefits of enacting Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory by school principals. To this end, these four theories are perfectly suitable for this study.

### **3.3 Conclusion**

This chapter has provided a detailed account of four theories (Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory, Chaos Theory, Accountability Theory, and Stakeholders Theory) that formed a theoretical framework for this study. In discussing each theory, I gave a discussion about the origin and development of the theory, and thereafter, I provided a discussion about its constituent elements and how it is appropriate for this study. In justifying the relevance of each theory for my study, I have also indicated how these theories complement one another in assisting with the analysis and seeking an understanding of how and why school principals in this study do what they do in terms of providing leadership. In addition, as part of my justification for using each of the four theories, I have indicated how elements of each theory contribute to understanding leadership practices of the six principals who participated in this study. The next chapter delves more deeply into a discussion of the research design and methodology that was used in the study.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter presented a detailed discussion about the theoretical framework underpinning the study. This chapter presents the research design and methodology in this qualitative multiple case study which is aimed at understanding school principals' experiences of ethical leadership during times of accountability. I begin this chapter by locating the study within the interpretive paradigm and providing a justification for why this particular paradigm was chosen for this study. Furthermore, the choice of qualitative research design, case study methodology, sampling of cases, sampling instrumentation, data generation methods, data analysis, and trustworthiness of the study are presented. Of particular importance, the justification about why the concept of data generation was preferred over 'data collection' is elucidated, as well as why I have chosen the concept crystallisation over triangulation techniques. The chapter is then concluded with a discussion on how ethical issues were observed, and the limitations of the study are outlined.

#### **4.2 Locating the study within the interpretive research paradigm**

In conducting research, it is imperative that the researcher positions his/her study in a particular research paradigm. Locating the study in a particular paradigm is significant because it allows the researcher to position and align himself/herself within the research process by anticipating some philosophical assumptions of how the world works and how knowledge is generated or produced in the study (Bryman & Bell, 2019; Kuhn, 1970). In this study, the interpretive research paradigm was adopted to enhance my positioning in relation to the philosophical assumptions of how knowledge is generated. Positioning yourself as a researcher within a particular philosophical assumption is called paradigmatic positioning (Kuhn, 1962, 1970). Before I elaborate on the interpretive paradigm, I begin by briefly explaining the etymology of the term paradigm.

The word "paradigm" was first used by Kuhn (1962), when referring to a philosophical way of thinking. According to Kivunja and Kuyini (2017), the word 'paradigm' originated from Greek

where it means 'pattern'. Also, Denzin and Lincoln (2018) and Mackenzie and Knipe (2006), are of the view that a paradigm is a world view or the basic sets of beliefs that guides research or an investigation. Likewise, Kivunja and Kuyini (2017), describe paradigm as the researcher's belief about the world that s/he lives in and wants to live in, and it constitutes the abstract beliefs and principles that shape how the researcher sees the world, and how s/he interprets and acts within that world. Drawing from how a paradigm has been explained by these scholars, I believe that a paradigm can thus be conceptualised as the researchers' philosophical views, beliefs, and perspectives of the phenomenon under investigation or scrutiny. Also, in trying to grasp the essence of the paradigm, I started by adopting a particular posture towards knowledge (epistemology) and the nature of reality (ontology) which directed me towards my choice of particular methodology and values (axiology) informing my study (Cohen et al., 2011; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Within the same line of thinking, Lincoln and Guba (1985b) further mention epistemology, ontology, methodology and axiology as four elements of the research paradigm. Derived from a Greek word, *epistemology* has its origins in the word 'episteme', meaning knowledge and referring to how we come to know something and how knowledge can be created, acquired and communicated (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Scotland, 2012). In understanding the epistemology, Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) emphasise the importance of asking the fundamental question of '*how we know what we know*'. In relation to this study, epistemology is related to acknowledging that knowledge is socially constructed between myself as the researcher and the participants. This interaction between the researcher and the participants to generate meaning implies subjective epistemology (Cohen et al., 2018). On the other hand, *ontology* is conceptualised as a branch of philosophy that is concerned with the assumptions that people make to believe that something makes sense or that it is real (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). It is concerned with what constitutes reality; in other words, it is concerned with what constitutes '*what is*'. According to Grix (2010), ontology is about the nature of social reality, the propositions about what exists, what it looks like, what units make it up and how those units interact with each other and with one another. In this interpretive, qualitative study with six selected participants, there will not be just one meaning that will be created, but there will be multiple meanings because of the multiple realities of the participants.

With regards to *methodology*, Keeves (1997) indicates that it refers to the broad term used for research design, methods, and procedures used in the research process, that are well-planned in advance to generate data. Methodology articulates the logic and flow of the systematic processes in conducting research while also incorporating the assumptions that are made, limitations that are encountered and how they are mitigated. Lastly, *axiology* encompasses the ethical issues that need to be considered when conducting research (Finnis, 1980). In line with this thinking, Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) describe axiology as defining, evaluating and understanding the concepts of right and wrong behaviour (ethical behaviour) relating to the research process. Remarkably, Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) emphasise the significance of these four elements of the research paradigm because they form the basic knowledge (epistemology), beliefs (ontology), norms (methodology), and values (axiology) that each paradigm holds in conducting research.

Moreover, research paradigms are categorised into four dominant paradigms, namely, positivist, interpretive, critical, and pragmatic paradigms (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Scotland, 2012; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). This study was located in the interpretive paradigm as it sought to understand the subjective world of human experience and retain the integrity of the phenomenon (Cohen & Manion, 1994). The interpretive paradigm is concerned with the detailed description of how people make sense of their worlds and how they make meaning of their actions (Cohen et al., 2018). This is because the interpretive paradigm views meaning as being constructed through human beings interacting with each other and playing a central role in understanding and defining the phenomenon under study, to make sense of it (van Rensburg et al., 2010). To this end, some scholars prefer using a constructivist paradigm as opposed to the interpretive paradigm (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Crotty, 1998; Mthembu, 2018; Opie & Brown, 2019). In this multiple case study, an interpretive paradigm was a preferred choice.

The interpretive paradigm was appropriate for this study since meanings of the school principals' experiences of ethical leadership during times of accountability was subject to my interpretation as the researcher, post the data generation phase from the participants. Furthermore, in this interpretive multiple case study, subjective epistemology prevailed because meaning attributed to school principals on ethical leadership enactment during times of accountability, considering the complexities, dilemmas and dynamics associated with the

schools as open organisations, was informed by my active interaction with the six sampled school principals (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). As a result, the knowledge (epistemology) was socially constructed or a co-creation between me (the researcher) and the interviewees, including the documents that were reviewed. Conducting a multiple case study with six school principals selected as cases, ultimately yielded multiple realities and those meanings made in the process were interpreted and reconstructed through human interactions between myself as the researcher and the participants (Chalmers et al., 2005). Yielding multiple realities in interpretive studies is called relative ontology. Moreover, I generated data through semi-structured interviews as well as documents reviews from the schools that were selected for participation while acting as a participant observer; hence, the study adopted naturalistic inquiry principles (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). Lastly, the study adopted a balanced axiology since the outcomes of the research reflected my values in that I tried to present a balanced report of the findings (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). In compliance with balanced axiology and ethical considerations, I ensured that the study complied with autonomy and non-maleficence principles. This is thoroughly elaborated in Section 4.9 of this chapter.

### **4.3 Locating the study within qualitative research design**

In this study, I chose a qualitative research design because of its appropriateness for the problem I explored. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), researchers use qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods designs to generate and/or collect data. They further claim that qualitative and quantitative designs representing different ends of the continuum with the mixed methods approach located in the middle (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meanings that the participants ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Qualitative research is a type of research that produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). On the contrary, quantitative designs refer to approaches of collecting data to test theories or hypotheses by examining the relationships between variables through number analysis and using statistical procedures (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Lastly, a mixed methods design refers to a research inquiry involving generating and collecting data using both the qualitative and the quantitative approaches, and integrating the two forms of data and using distinct designs that may involve philosophical

assumptions and theoretical frameworks (Creswell, 2015; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

For the current multiple case study, a qualitative design was adopted. The qualitative design was ideal for the study because data was generated from selected participants (school principals) through semi-structured interviews; as a result, subjective epistemology and relative ontology was noted. Adopting semi-structured interviews as a data generation method is another feature of qualitative designs. Furthermore, qualitative design utilises a multiplicity of data generation techniques or methods; and these include field notes, conversations, interviews (including semi-structured), photographs, documents reviews, recordings, and memos as data generation methods (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Such a perspective expands the earlier submission by the same scholars who suggest that qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive material practices that make the world visible (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In line with this view, documents reviews were also used to corroborate interview findings in this study. Using semi-structured interviews, as well as documents reviews as data generation methods fully qualify this study as a qualitative design. I relied on the participants' *verbatim* presentations and the documents to gain a deeper understanding of the school principals' experiences of ethical leadership during times of accountability. This practice was done simply because qualitative studies by their nature, are interpretive and seek to understand the social world through other people's interpretations of it (Bryman & Bell, 2019). Subsequently, meaning was a co-creation between the researcher and the participants (Wimpenny & Gass, 2000). Interpretation of generated data from the participants is at the heart of qualitative research designs.

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), qualitative research has its historic origin in anthropology, sociology, and the humanities. These scholars further mention narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study as some examples of qualitative research design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Driven by these assertions, this study was perfectly located within the qualitative design since it was conducted within the humanities field (in schools) and adopted a case study methodology. Notably, conducting qualitative research has proven to yield many benefits for researchers and participants. For researchers, it allows them to see the world through the eyes of the participants (Bryman & Bell, 2019). This in turn, can allow researchers to be empathic and understanding of the participants' lived

experiences without being judgemental. Also, qualitative research places emphasis on the process during data generation as it allows the participants to reflect on their actions, leading up to or following an event (Bryman & Bell, 2019). For example, in relation to this study, school principals narrated events that transpired prior to, and after their inability to report to their CMs acts of misconduct by educators. In addition, by virtue of qualitative research being flexible in its execution, it thus enables the researcher to change the direction of the investigation much more easily through probing questions that were not part of the field question and the interview schedule. It thus allows the researcher to unearth all the nitty gritty of the phenomenon.

However, adopting a qualitative stance in research was done with caution since I am mindful that it can yield some shortfalls. For example, qualitative research designs have been criticised for over-dependence on the researchers' values and opinions and hence, they are too subjective (Bryman & Bell, 2019). Moreover, qualitative research designs are also accused of being biased in their approach since the researcher decides on the participants, sampling, and what to be observed and heard (through interjecting and probing using semi-structured interviews) (Bryman & Bell, 2019). I believe that central to the criticisms of qualitative research designs is the researcher's influence on data generation, findings, and data analysis. Also, Mohajan (2018) mentions that qualitative research designs are normally time consuming, and they require lengthy time for data generation, analysis, and interpretation. Such cumbersomeness often results in important issues being overlooked and left unnoticed.

Having an experience of conducting a qualitative design study during my Masters, (which ultimately qualified me to pursue this PhD study), I can confidently say that I was aware and alert to these shortcomings; I anticipated the shortfalls of qualitative designs and was armed with trustworthiness techniques that would assist me in ensuring the credibility of the study's findings. For instance, member checking, audit trails, peer briefings, research peers, and involvement of the supervisor to regularly examine the process of data generation and analysis were part and parcel of the entire process of ensuring that the findings remained credible (Faan, 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1985a). These measures are explained in detail Section 4.8 of this chapter. Also, my previous experience in qualitative studies propelled me to be time conscious and stick to the work plan so that I would mitigate the caution by Mohajan (2018) which highlights the time-consuming nature of such designs.



#### **4.4 Positioning the study within the cases study methodology**

As mentioned in the preceding section, a qualitative design includes various research methodologies such as narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study (Bryman & Bell, 2019; Cohen et al., 2011, 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The current study adopted a qualitative design within an interpretive paradigm (as indicated in the preceding paragraphs), and case study methodology. The term methodology refers to the tactics that the researcher uses for sampling, data generation, documentation, and data analysis in order to critically study the social phenomenon (Maree, 2012; Straus & Corbin, 2008). As previously mentioned, there are several methodologies in qualitative research that researchers use to generate data including, but not limited to, case study, ethnography, action research, phenomenology, grounded theory, and narrative research (Cohen et al., 2011, 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, the case study methodology was adopted because it is an exploration of a case or cases through detailed, in-depth, and intensive data generation methods involving multiple sources of information (Gustafsson, 2017; Mishra & Dey, 2021; Yin, 2014).

Contrary to the earlier submission of discussing case study as a methodology, as presented by several scholars, including Creswell and Creswell (2018) and Creswell and Poth (2018), Yin (2018) epistemologically presents case study as the ‘method’ that investigates the case in-depth. I am of the view that such thinking by Yin (2018) relegates the former to the lower league of data generation like interviews, documents reviews, observations, and focus groups. I have strong convictions that classifying case study as a method is inappropriate considering that a case study design uses these data generation methods to generate data. In other words, a methodology is bigger than research methods. To this end, the definition by Yin (2018) was not adopted for the current study. Drawing from how scholars, including Creswell and Creswell (2018); Creswell and Poth (2018); Maree (2012); and Straus and Corbin (2008) have presented discussions about case studies, it can thus be conceptualised as a methodology that uses various data generation methods in order to get an in-depth perspective and trustworthy evidence from the cases being studied. Moreover, using multiple sources of data generation in a case study results in data converging in crystallisation (Ellingson, 2014; Maree, 2010, 2016; Polsa, 2013).

Significantly, Rule and John (2011) clarify the ‘case’ as a circumstance or problem that requires investigation. Also, a case can be a person, a small group, an organisation, a community, a nation, a classroom, a programme, a series of developments, an institution, or even a country that requires investigation (Rule & John, 2011; Schoch, 2020; Yin, 2018). For the current study, the cases that were investigated were school principals. Selected school principals (cases) were studied in-depth with the intention to understand their experiences of ethical leadership during times of accountability. Additionally, one of the pioneers in the seminal writings of case study, Yin (2003) distinguishes between three forms of case study, namely *exploratory*, *explanatory*, and *descriptive*. He explains an exploratory case study as a study that examines a phenomenon that has not been investigated before and can lay the basis for further studies. On the contrary, the explanatory case study attempts to explain what happens in a particular case or why it happens. Lastly, a descriptive case study presents a complete description of a phenomenon within its context (Rule & John, 2011; Yin, 2003, 2018). Moreover, a distinction is made between *intrinsic* and *instrumental* case studies. Regarding the intrinsic case study, the focus is on the case itself as a unique or innovative situation that is worth understanding more fully (Rule & John, 2011). In an intrinsic case study, the researcher is not interested in investigating the general problem or some other case, but in learning about that particular case (Stake, 1995). Contrary to that, an instrumental case study focuses on the particular issue and examines cases to explore this issue in depth (Rule & John, 2011).

Over and above the afore-mentioned case study types, *a collective case study or multiple case study* is worth mentioning. For the current study, a multiple case study was used. In a multiple case study, one issue or concern is selected, but the researcher uses multiple cases to illustrate the issue (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2018). When using a multiple case study, the researcher identifies a few cases and studies them in some depth (Rule & John, 2011). Furthermore, if a study requires more than one case to be investigated, subsequently, a multiple case study is needed (Stake, 1995). Multiple case study is supported by the belief that selecting more than one case results in a better understanding of the phenomenon since the researcher can detect the similarities, differences and comparisons in the data generated from the cases (Creswell, 2007; Rule & John, 2011; Stake, 1995). Also, studies that are convincing and robust are usually conducted using multiple cases (Yin, 2014).

In order to get an in-depth understanding of school principals' experiences of ethical leadership during times of accountability, I opted for a multiple case study by engaging six school principals (with five years and above experience as school principals) in the uMgungundlovu District. School principals were selected by virtue of being at the heart of enacting ethical leadership at this time where issues of accountability in schools is dominant and cannot be wished away. I opted to conduct a multiple case study because I sought to gain an in-depth understanding of school principals' experiences of ethical leadership through cross-site comparison (Chowdhury & Shil, 2021; Hussain & Hoque, 2002). As previously alluded to, using multiple case study ultimately allowed me as a researcher to compare, draw similarities and differences in the data generated from the selected cases. In addition, each case was treated as an independent entity. This subsequently resulted in rich and credible findings that were trustworthy.

#### **4.5 Sampling technique of cases in the study**

While I was consulting literature on sampling for this study, I was taken aback by the limited literature available on the concept in relation to qualitative studies. To this effect, the only notable book that spoke solely about sampling that I managed to engage was by Emmel (2013) titled "Sampling and choosing cases in qualitative research". This came as a surprise to me considering the popularity of the term in everyday language. This is of great concern if one considers that scholars including Emmel (2013); Gibbs et al. (2007); Kelly (2010); and Robinson (2014) stress that sampling is an important element of generating data in qualitative research. In relation to its limited coverage in literature, Gibbs et al. (2007) mention the lack of information provided as the biggest problem surrounding sampling. Similarly, Kelly (2010) believes that sampling has not been discussed extensively in the literature; while within the same line of thinking Robinson (2014) suggests that it has been given less attention in qualitative methodological textbooks and journals. Furthermore, Miles and Huberman (1994) warn that sampling may look easy in a single case, however, its sub settings, as well as a multiplicity of cases subsequently makes it difficult to decide where to look for those cases. Remarkably, and contrary to the limited attention given to sampling in qualitative studies, the literature proves that attention is given to sampling in quantitative research (Cohen & Manion, 1994; Cohen et al., 2011, 2018). A huge gap thus, exists with regards to sampling in qualitative research. While grappling with the dearth of literature in qualitative inquiry that speaks about

sampling as a concept, I have also noted that many books on qualitative research speak of ‘selection’ instead of ‘sampling’, apparently, because the term sampling is associated with quantitative research and positivism.

According to Gentles et al. (2015), sampling refers to the selection of data sources from which data will be generated to address the research questions. In a case study, sampling implies selecting cases that will best help the researcher to understand the case and the phenomenon under investigation (Stake, 1995). Kelly (2010) is of the view that sampling is the key element for any social research as it provides the basis of what the participants say about the phenomenon, regardless of their orientation. This scholar further describes sampling as the acquisition of data from across sections of the population in some lieu from each member (Kelly, 2010). Based on how sampling has been presented by these scholars, one can conclude that sampling entails the selection and recruitment of cases (in the event of a case study) and the participants to contribute to the data generation processes so as to allow the researcher to better understand the phenomenon under investigation.

In selecting and recruiting the cases and the participants to participate in research, researchers use various sampling methods to identify the cases, research sites, and the participants. Scholars mention convenience sampling, quota sampling, purposive sampling, snowball sampling, volunteer sampling, and theoretical sampling as examples of qualitative sampling techniques or methods (Cohen et al., 2011, 2018; Emmel, 2013; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). These sampling techniques are generally called *non-probability sampling* (only applicable in qualitative research) because the researcher recruits only the specific cases and participants to investigate the phenomenon, or when the total population is unknown (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). This practice is contrary to *probability sampling* which is only applicable to quantitative studies where the researcher recruits the subjects or respondents that represent the wider population (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). To this end, the sample sizes are smaller in qualitative studies compared to quantitative studies because the former aims at acquiring information that is useful for understanding the phenomenon, while the latter recruits subjects that represent the wider population for purposes of generalising the findings across the population (Gentles et al., 2015).

For the current study, the selection of participants and research sites was done through non-probability sampling in the form of *purposive* and *convenience sampling*. Purposive sampling involves selecting individuals who are knowledgeable and informed about the phenomenon and it applies specifically to qualitative research studies (Gentles et al., 2015; Mapp, 2008). In addition, Gentles et al. (2015) mention that purposive sampling refers to the selection of cases to be used in the study based on their anticipated richness and relevance of information in relation to the study's research questions. Moreover, Cohen et al. (2018) emphasise that purposive sampling is a feature of qualitative research where the researcher handpicks cases to be included in the sample based on the judgement of their typicality or possession of the particular characteristic(s) being sought. In view of these remarks, school principals were purposively selected from six research sites (primary schools and secondary schools) in the uMgungundlovu District, KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) Province, South Africa. Participants with five and above years of experience as school principals were purposively and conveniently sampled. Participants were interviewed in their natural settings, therefore, schools that were headed by the chosen school principals were used as research sites. This sample size was also influenced by Connelly (2010) and Mapp (2008) who emphasise that it should be as small as possible so that each case can be investigated in-depth. The participants were both female (three) and male (three) school principals. The diversity in the sample also helped me to gain a deeper understanding of school principals' experiences of ethical leadership during times of accountability.

Furthermore, convenience sampling was also used to select participants. As propounded by Etikan et al. (2016), convenience sampling is a sampling strategy in which the researcher targets a population that satisfies a certain practical criterion such as geographical proximity, easy accessibility, availability at given times and a willingness to participate in the study. It is the sampling strategy that is least expensive, least time consuming and most convenient (Taherdoost, 2016). Given that in South Africa, there are nine provinces with 81 education districts, thousands and thousands of school principals and 489 public schools in the uMgungundlovu District, convenience sampling became crucial in selecting the sample of six cases that were to be investigated (Mkhongi & Musakwa, 2020; Motala et al., 2015). Following these arguments, six schools that were easily accessible, located within the same geographical proximity and were willing to participate in the study were conveniently selected for participation.

All in all, using purposive and convenience sampling, a sample of six (6) school principals heading six (6) schools were selected for participation. Of particular importance, in the uMgungundlovu District (in the KZN province where the study was conducted), there are twelve education districts with a total of 489 schools; 127 secondary schools; 50 independent (private) schools; and 33 combined schools (Mkhongi & Musakwa, 2020). Given the impossibility of addressing all these contexts, the study was conducted in six schools (primary and secondary public schools) in the uMgungundlovu District. The six school principals were three females and three males. In the sampled schools, one school was a Former Model C, two were located in a semi-urban area, two were township schools, and the last one was located in a rural area. The sampled cases are indicated in the biographical information as shown in Table 1 below: This table is discussed at length in Section 5.2 of Chapter Five.

<b>Participants' name (Pseudonym)</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Highest Qualification</b>	<b>Years of experience as a school principal</b>	<b>School name and type (Pseudonym)</b>	<b>School location/ Classification</b>
1. Mr Galaxy	Male	Principal	B Com & PGCE	6 Years	Mars Primary school	Township
2. Mrs Reeve	Female	Principal	B.Ed. Hons	12 Years	Jupiter Primary School	Semi- urban area
3. Mrs Comet	Female	Principal	B.Ed. Hons	9 Years	Venus Primary School	Former Model C
4. Mrs Sirius	Female	Principal	B.Ed. Hons	8 Years	Mercury Primary School	Rural area
5. Mr Sun	Male	Principal	MEd	8 Years	Saturn Secondary School	Semi- urban area
6. Mr Star	Male	Principal	B.Ed. Hons	11 Years	Neptune Secondary School	Township

**Table 1:** Biographical information of research participants

#### **4.6 Recruitment of participants**

After I had identified and selected the cases to participate in the study using purposive and convenient sampling as discussed in the previous section (Section 4.5) of this chapter, I then had to start the process of recruiting the participants. Recruitment of participants is the most important element in conducting qualitative studies (Namageyo-Funa et al., 2014; Negrin et al., 2022). Recruitment of participants involves identifying potential participants and providing them with information to establish their interest to participate in data generation of the study (Manohar et al., 2018). To this end, Jessiman (2013) highlights the recruitment of the participants influencing the trustworthiness of qualitative studies. To achieve this endeavour, school principals that had proven track records in leading their schools were targeted. As a school principal myself, I relied on remarks that the CMs normally make about the best performing and compliant school principals. Such principals were normally used by the CMs as examples that other school principals should emulate in their leadership. My identification of such school principals was informed by the fact that also as a school principal myself, I wanted to learn from their experiences of ethical leadership during times of accountability. Also, I was driven by the themes that emerged from the literature and the research questions underpinning the study to recruit such a cohort of participants. I strongly believed that recruiting such school principals would produce rich data to enhance the present study.

Identified school principals were then recruited telephonically for participation in the study. After they were recruited, I then requested to visit them in their schools to issue them with consent forms to sign a declaration indicating their willingness to participate in the study. Also, other school principals suggested that I should e-mail them the consent forms to sign as a declaration of their willingness to participate in the study. E-mailed consent forms emphasised voluntary participation, ethical issues, as well as data management. School principals were given the chance to read and understand the conditions for their participation. During our meeting, the issue of voluntary participation, ethical issues including autonomy and non-maleficence, as well as data management (storing of audio recordings and transcripts) were emphasised. Importantly, such meetings were significant in developing rapport between me and the participants. In our conversation, I constantly made them aware that I was not there to judge them on their performance, but to learn from them as one of their peers. I also emphasised the fact that whatever we discussed would remain between the two of us, and no one would

know who said what; therefore, issues of confidentiality and anonymity were emphasised throughout our engagements.

#### **4.7 Data generation methods**

As a PhD candidate, doing a qualitative study, the generated knowledge from sampled participants and the findings of the present thesis is expected to contribute to the existing body of knowledge. In qualitative studies, data is generated as opposed to being collected. This is an ontological and epistemological issue which does not accept the existence of social reality and knowledge outside of the researcher being aware of it. However, I am conscious that choosing data generation over data collection might trigger a debate since the latter is preferred by most qualitative scholars, including Cohen et al. (2018); Creswell (2009); Creswell and Creswell (2018); and Creswell and Poth (2018). Nevertheless, Merriam (2009) cautions us about using the concept of data collection in qualitative research as misleading since it projects a picture that data is out there waiting for collection like the garbage bags on the pavement. This thinking is further supported by Mthembu (2018) who emphasises that knowledge is not just collected but, instead, it is socially constructed. Similarly, Goldkuhl (2019) cautions us on the usage of the concept of data collection in qualitative research as problematic since it may presuppose that researchers simply pickup ready-at-hand data to use in their research. This researcher further mentions that qualitative scholars cannot simply gather already existing data out of everyday life to enrich their research (Goldkuhl, 2019).

Significantly, in this qualitative study, I adopted a philosophical stance in choosing the interpretive paradigm (as earlier discussed in Section 4.2 of this chapter), which yielded subjective epistemology and relative ontology. Within the philosophical stance of the interpretive paradigm, meanings and knowledge are constructed through human beings interacting with each other; as such, subjective epistemology and relative ontology prevail. (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; van Rensburg et al., 2010). It is against this background that adopting data collection in relation to this interpretive qualitative multiple case study seemed to be inappropriate. I believe data collection leans more towards the positivist paradigm because quantitative researchers collect data only at one point in time (for example a survey investigation) (Goldkuhl, 2019). As a result, the positivist paradigm yields objective epistemology and a realism ontology (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Scotland, 2012). It is for these



reasons that the concept of data collection is rejected outright in this qualitative, interpretive multiple case study, and data generation is advocated.

When embarking on the fieldwork in a multiple case study located within the interpretive paradigm, the researcher plays a key role in interpreting the phenomenon under study as s/he is typically involved in a sustained and intensive experience with participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Yin, 2018). Koch (1995) is of the view that the researcher is equally as significant as the interviewee in a qualitative research interview. The interviewer seeks to establish the meaning of the phenomenon from the view of the participants (Chowdhury & Shil, 2021). This thinking aligns with Wimpenny and Gass (2000) who maintain that meaning is a co-creation between the researcher and the participants during data generation. To generate data for this multiple case study, I used semi-structured interviews (primary source of data generation in this present study) in conjunction with documents reviews (secondary source of data generation) (Cohen et al., 2011). Claims by Chowdhury and Shil (2021) highlight that interviews and official document are the main data sources in a qualitative case study.

Furthermore, choosing semi-structured interviews together with document reviews was done with the intention of crystallising data generation (Maree, 2007, 2010, 2016). Such a view is supported by Maree (2016) who accentuates that crystallisation is the practice of validating results by using multiple data generation methods and analysis. In crystallising, a qualitative researcher brings together interviews, observations, archival documents, images, and texts to quilt together broad and varied data generated from participants (Stewart & Gapp, 2017; Stewart et al., 2017). Using multiple data generation methods in qualitative research is called crystallisation (de Vries & Reinmann, 2018; Lewis & College, 2011; Maree, 2007, 2010, 2016; Stewart & Gapp, 2017; Stewart et al., 2017; Varpio et al., 2017). Crystallisation is supported in this study because it is a better lens to view the components of qualitative research by utilising different methods of data generation thereby, enhancing the trustworthiness of the study (Maree, 2007, 2010, 2016). In addition, Ellingson (2014) and Polsa (2013) classify crystallisation as a framework for conducting qualitative research. Since this present study was located within the interpretive paradigm and produced a subjective epistemological stance of generating knowledge and relative ontology such that meaning was generated through the interaction of the researcher and the participants, crystallisation was definitely the preferred option (de Vries & Reinmann, 2018). To this effect, crystallisation takes on an epistemological

stance of social constructionism by virtue of its emphasis on knowledge being constructed through intensive communication between the researcher and the participants during data generation process (de Vries & Reinmann, 2018).

Notwithstanding that, while crystallisation is not a new concept in qualitative research, one might remark on its unpopularity in usage (Stewart et al., 2017). This is of great concern if one considers the richness of crystallisation in relation to qualitative research. As mentioned by Ellingson (2014), crystallisation produces in-depth knowledge about a phenomenon through generating a deepened and complex interpretation. As a result, during the process of data generation, it also accommodates the voice(s) of the researcher (which ultimately enhances active interpretation of data) (de Vries & Reinmann, 2018). I can emphasise that crystallisation views the researcher as equally significant as the participant during data generation. I am of the strong belief that crystallisation suggests that without the researcher there will be no data to be generated; and in the same vein, without the participant, no data can be generated. To this end, crystallisation puts emphasis on producing rich and thick descriptions of the phenomenon under investigation (de Vries & Reinmann, 2018). Producing rich, in-depth, and thick description of the phenomenon is the essence of qualitative studies, in particular case study (Rule & John, 2011; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2004, 2014, 2018).

Adopting crystallisation in this present study will undoubtedly ignite another heated debate since several scholars view the practice of using multiple data generation as triangulation. Triangulation is rejected in this qualitative multiple case study because of its perceived leniency towards the positivist paradigm (Maree, 2007, 2010, 2016). As Maree (2010) mentions, triangulation is extensively used in quantitative studies to confirm and generalise the research findings. Despite several qualitative researchers having used triangulation in their studies, strong evidence also exists on their failure to support the adoption of the concept triangulation within the philosophical paradigm from which they operate (Maree, 2010, 2016). Farquhar et al. (2020) and Polsa (2013) postulate that the original purpose of triangulation was to establish the distance between any two points or the relative position or more points by using the vertices of a triangle or a series of triangles. Pausing for a second, analysing and conceptualising this statement by Farquhar et al. (2020), one does not need to be an intellectual or a research guru to realise that triangulation has its roots within the positivist paradigm and quantitative designs, since central to its formulation was the usage of triangles, angles, measurements, and numbers.

Similarly, Varpio et al. (2017) emphasise that triangulation was originally developed for geographical surveying and navigational purposes to enable users to home in on the location by mapping its relation to multiple points of reference. To this end, triangulation is used to validate data quantitatively (Polsa, 2013).

Notwithstanding, several qualitative studies have adopted triangulation in ensuring trustworthiness of the findings, some scholars, including Maree (2010) and Varpio et al. (2017) warn about the methodological and philosophical confusion it creates in qualitative research since triangulation is associated with fixed points, rigid structures, and single realities. To circumvent this methodological and philosophical confusion created by triangulation, in this multiple case study located within the interpretive paradigm, crystallisation was deemed appropriate in ensuring trustworthiness; as a result, triangulation was rejected outright. Crystallisation was chosen because it enhances quality in research while fostering a deeper understanding and more complex findings that reflect multiple realities (Polsa, 2013). Such a premise is possible as this scholar further emphasises that crystallisation provides room for multiple voices to be heard and acknowledges some other hidden voices (Polsa, 2013). Choosing crystallisation was further supported by de Vries and Reinmann (2018) who view it as an extended version of triangulation; while Polsa (2013) conceptualises crystallisation as a postmodernist deconstruction of triangulation which is valued way above the latter. To this effect, one can stress that crystallisation was perfectly suitable in this study.

#### **4.7.1 Semi-structured interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were used in this study as a data generation technique. As posited by Maree (2010), interviews provide the researcher with rich descriptive data that will help him/her to better understand the participants' construction of (epistemological assumption) knowledge and (ontological assumption) reality. Furthermore, Cohen et al. (2018) describe an interview as an exchange of views between two or more people in a topic of mutual interest. These researchers further regard interviews as a flexible tool for data generation, enabling multi-sensory channels in the form of verbal, non-verbal, seen, spoken, and heard information to be used (Cohen et al., 2018). To this end, some scholars including Cohen et al. (2018); Creswell and Creswell (2018); and Lincoln and Guba (1985b) mention a variety of interviews such as standardised interviews, in-depth interviews, structured interviews, unstructured

interviews, semi-structured interviews, face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, and informal conversation interviews as some of the different kinds of interviews that can be used to generate data in research. However, in this present study, semi-structured interviews were adopted to generate data.

I opted to use semi-structured interviews because they permit flexibility rather than a rigidity of the sequence of discussion, thereby, it allows the participants to raise and pursue issues that might not have been included in a pre-devised interview schedule (Cohen et al., 2011). By virtue of being open-ended in nature and developed well in advance with probes to enable the interviewer to gain clarity on any ambiguities and important points, semi-structured interviews are central to data generation in qualitative studies (Chan et al., 2013; Khan, 2014). Drawing from this postulation, semi-structured interviews were suitable for this multiple case study because they allowed me as the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding in trying to understand school principals' experiences of ethical leadership during times of accountability. As a result, semi-structured interviews were used as a primary source of data generation in this study. Semi-structured interviews (by virtue of being open-ended in nature) enabled the participants to broadly narrate and share the complexities, dilemmas and the dynamics associated with leading schools as open organisations that are characterised by multiple stakeholder participation. Semi-structured interviews also allowed me as the researcher to uncover hidden meanings through probing and interjecting. Additionally, I prepared the interview questions well in advance, being guided by the Interview Protocol (IP), and through probing and interjection (during the interview process), I was able to unearth all the nitty gritty relating to school principals' ethical leadership experiences, including the complexities, dilemmas, and dynamics relating to schools as open organisations. Also, to ensure that the interviews with the selected school principals, were of good quality, I ensured that the length of each interview was between 55 and 80 minutes (deMarrais & Lapan, 2003). All interviews conducted with the sampled participants were audio recorded with a voice recorder and a smart phone (Matlala & Matlala, 2018; Ratakumwa et al., 2020). In addition, records of the interview minutes and field notes were safely stored.

#### **4.7.2 Documents reviews**

Documents reviews were used as a secondary source of data generation to corroborate, augment or even contradict the evidence from the participants' interviews (Yin, 2014). Documents are the most important source of information to any person seeking official records to convince him/her that the event did happen (Cohen et al., 2018). Chowdhury and Shil (2021) maintain that documents allow the researcher to track what happened, when it happened and who was involved. In addition, Bowen (2009) postulates that document reviews are a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents (either printed or electronic) with the purpose of examining and interpreting data to elicit meaning, gain in-depth understanding and develop empirical evidence. Correspondingly, document reviews entail any written proof that gives information about the investigated phenomenon and exist with or without research being conducted (Fitzgerald, 2007). Furthermore, document reviews detail specific events and include public records, minutes of the meetings, reports, correspondence, personal papers, visual documents, physical materials, and artefacts (Maree, 2007; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Documents further help the researcher to supplement and corroborate interview data (Chowdhury & Shil, 2021).

De Vos et al. (2005) highlight numerous benefits of using document reviews to generate qualitative data. Some of the benefits of document reviews identified by these scholars include revealing other hidden information, revealing the series of events that had taken place way before the research started (including private interchanges the researcher would not normally be privy to, and even goals and decisions that the researcher might not have known), as well as providing the researcher with information about many things that cannot be observed (De Vos et al., 2005). It is against this background that document reviews were used as the secondary data generation method in this multiple case study to corroborate and complement interview findings.

However, I was also mindful of the possibility of an inability to access documents to support the interview findings (De Vos et al., 2005). To counter this possibility, I sought permission from school principals to view and analyse the documents pertaining to records of their enactment of ethical leadership during times of accountability. After I successfully conducted semi-structured interviews and had developed rapport with the sampled school principals, I

then requested them to show me how cases of misconduct by educators were handled as recorded in the interviews. I further indicated to school principals that requesting such documents was not intended at judging their ethical leadership acumen, but as a school principal myself, I explicitly stated that I wanted to learn more from their experiences about how they exercise accountability in their respective schools. The participants were requested to share any document that they had at their disposal that reflected on how cases of misconduct by educators were handled by the school. I further emphasised that *pseudonyms* were to be used to maintain confidentiality and anonymity of the participants and research sites (Coffelt, 2017). Also, school principals were told that schools' names on the documents were to be erased. Upon receipt, I made copies of such documents with the participants' consent. Additionally, school principals were allowed the option of e-mailing such documents to me should it be deemed be more convenient for them. Moreover, I also informed the participants that once the transcription was concluded, they would have access to the transcribed work (confirmability) so that they could verify the accuracy of how I represented their views and experiences.

For this study, the documents that were requested only focused on school principals' enactment of ethical leadership during times of accountability, including the evidence of how cases of misconduct by educators were reported to the CM by school principals. I had chosen to select documents that show how cases of misconduct by educators were reported to the CM by the school principal. This was being influenced by the personal experience I had with Mr Bystander; the difficulty I encountered when I had to report a PL1 educator accused of misconduct; and lastly, the evidence from South African Council for Educators (2017) which highlights the insignificant number of reported cases of misconduct labelled against educators in relation to the number educators in the system. Documents that were reviewed in this multiple case study *vis-à-vis* the school principals' enacting ethical leadership during times of accountability, included logbook entries, SGB minutes, educators' disciplinary records, records of submissions to the CM, meeting agendas, as well as school visit tools used by the CM and other departmental officials (as shown in Table 2 below). These documents were analysed with the intention of unearthing whether school principals enacted ethical leadership during times of accountability. Based on what emerged during the interviews, I then requested these documents from the sampled school principals to corroborate the interviews. The documents reviewed in this study were not older than three years at the time of the study.

Reviewing these documents ultimately allowed me as the researcher to crystallise data from the interviews (Yin, 2014). Most importantly, in order to facilitate the generation of data through documents review, I designed the Document Review Schedule (DRS) as shown in Table 2 below:

**Participant's Name:** ----- **Date:** -----

<b>Document Type</b>	<b>Content of the Document/ Summary</b>	<b>Date Actioned</b>	<b>Reason For Recording</b>	<b>Was the Matter Reported to CM?</b>	<b>Proof of submission/ reporting to CM/ not Reporting to CM</b>	<b>Date of Submission</b>
<b>1. Log book Entries</b>						
<b>2. SGB Minutes</b>						
<b>3. Educators' disciplinary Records</b>						
<b>4. Meetin Agendas</b>						
<b>5. School Visit Tool by CM</b>						

**Table 2:** DRS showing a summary of documents that were reviewed.

Table 2 above shows the DRS with a summary of reviewed documents in this present study. On the vertical axis, it reflects the documents that were reviewed to unearth school principals' experiences of ethical leadership during times of accountability in relation to the study. On the horizontal axis, it shows the specific details that validate or refute school principals' accounts of reporting cases of misconduct by educators to their respective CMs. Developing the DRS was crucial in this multiple case study because it increased the standardisation of data during data analysis. This was vital as Miles and Huberman (1994) warn about the difficulty of developing a good cross-case analysis, yet it is essential in deepening an understanding and explanation of the phenomenon.

### **4.7.3 Data generation instruments**

This section presents insights about the construction and application of data generation instruments in qualitative studies generally and in this study. Conducting a qualitative multiple case study requires intensive preparation from the researcher. This premise is also supported by Mohajan (2018) who cautions about such designs as being time consuming and demanding lengthy time for data generation, analysis, and interpretation. To mitigate such shortfalls, I ensured that intensive preparation was conducted before, during and after data generation. Also, the necessary instruments that would enhance data generation were organised as reflected in the ensuing paragraphs. Firstly, I designed the Interview Protocol (IP) that was going to guide the interview process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Developing the IP (as found in Appendix D of the current study) was vital in ensuring that the interview process was not derailed and that it proceeded as planned. The development of the IP was informed by the research questions, emerging themes from literature, and the theoretical framework. Importantly, the IP was shared with the Human and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) for approval during the ethical clearance application. It was subsequently approved. This then proves beyond reasonable doubt that the field questions that were posed during the interview process were appropriate for the study.

Secondly, I ensured that interviews with sampled cases were audio recorded using a digital audio recorder and a smart phone with each participants' consent (Matlala & Matlala, 2018; Ratakumwa et al., 2020). According to Khan (2014), audio recordings allow for preserving an accurate account of the interviews which can be replayed for analytical purposes. For the present multiple case study, audio recordings became the key instrument for generating data as they were replayed several times to gain familiarisation. Subsequently, field notes were used because the human mind tends to forget very quickly and therefore, notes were crucial to maintain generated data (Groenwald, 2004). Finally, for the data generated through document reviews, I designed the DRS. The DRS provided a summary of information on the type of document that was reviewed in relation to school principals' experiences of ethical leadership during times of accountability. Also, it included the content of the document, date actioned/documentated, rationale for recording, whether the matter was reported to the CM, proof of submission/ reporting/ non-submission /not reporting to the CM and the date of



submission/ reporting. Like the IP, the DRS was also shared with HSSREC for approval during the ethical clearance application. Subsequently, the application was approved. This then proves beyond reasonable doubt that the field questions that were posed during the interview process were appropriate in this present study. Documents that were evaluated using DRS are explained in Section 4.7.2 of this chapter.

#### **4.8 Data analysis methods**

Once the process of generating data through semi-structured interviews and the reviewing of documents from all six sampled cases was completed, I then started the process of data analysis. Data analysis includes organising, describing, accounting for, and explaining data in terms of the participants' definition and understanding of the phenomenon by noting all the patterns, themes, and categories from the generated data (Cohen et al., 2018; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). At this stage, I had the field notes, documents, and the recorded narratives from participants. Once the data was generated, I then thoroughly analysed it to identify emerging themes. According to Cruzes et al. (2015), thematic analysis is a strategy for identifying, observing, and reporting patterns and meanings (themes) from the data obtained from the participants. As opined by Terry et al. (2017), thematic analysis allows the researcher to make sense of the shared meaning and experiences from participants. Emerging themes were identified using the thematic cross-case analysis suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994). Thematic cross-case analysis is a data analysis strategy that looks for comparisons, differences, similarities, and commonalities in events, behaviours, and processes that are unit of analysis in a multiple case study (Carlsen, 2012; Merriam, 1998).

In analysing the data, each case was treated as an independent entity. Using field notes, voice recordings and documents, data were transcribed and put into smaller units to develop emerging themes from different cases while being guided by the research questions. Also, document reviews became vital in getting rich and in-depth data by exposing the hidden information as well as past decisions (on educators' misconduct) that were taken way before the research was conducted (De Vos et al., 2005). To thoroughly analyse the documents, data was reviewed and interpreted for the extraction of meaning and developing empirical knowledge (Bowen, 2009). Documents were reviewed using DRS as earlier discussed in Section 4.7.2 of this chapter. During this stage, I analysed, selected, made sense of, and

synthesised data contained in the documents. I also ensured the authenticity of each document by verifying the meeting's notices against the agenda and the minutes. Furthermore, the purpose and the resolutions (including evidence suggesting that school principals enact ethical leadership during times of accountability) were analysed (Cohen et al., 2011). In order to draw comparisons, similarities and differences in the data generated from participants through field notes, voice recordings, and the documents, I then designed a meta matrix thematic analysis tool (a master chart assembling descriptive data from each of the cases) as suggested by Miles & Huberman (1994). This enabled me to identify the themes that cut across cases and those that were unique to each case. Additionally, the development of the meta matrix analysis tool was guided by the research questions, the theoretical framework underpinning the present study, as well as the field questions. Using thematic cross-case analysis enhanced my insights, deepened my understanding and explanation of school principals' experiences of ethical leadership during times of accountability (Carlsen, 2012; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Miles et al., 2014). An example of the meta matrix analysis tool is shown in Table 3 below.

<b>Cases (Pseudonyms)</b>	<b>Experiences of ethical leadership</b>	<b>Causes of unethical leadership</b>	<b>How ethical leadership can be enhanced?</b>	<b>Reasons school principals enact ethical leadership the way they do</b>	<b>Impact of Butterfly Effect on school leadership</b>
<b>1. Mr Galaxy</b>					
<b>2. Mrs Reeva</b>					
<b>3. Mrs Comet</b>					
<b>4. Mrs Sirius</b>					
<b>5. Mr Sun</b>					
<b>6. Mr Star</b>					

**Table 3:** A meta matrix analysis tool

A meta matrix thematic analysis tool such as the one above can be used to draw comparisons, similarities, and differences from the data generated from participants through field notes and voice recordings (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Therefore, Table 3 above shows a meta matrix thematic analysis tool that was used as a cross-case analysis instrument in the present multiple case study. The tool indicates all the cases that participated in the study and the themes that

emerged as informed by the research questions and the theoretical framework underpinning the study. The tool was developed to identify the themes that cut across cases and those that were peculiar to each case (Miles & Huberman, 1994). According to Miles and Huberman (1994), a cross case analysis is crucial in enhancing generalisability and deepening understanding of the phenomenon.

#### **4.9 Trustworthiness of the study**

The critical moment in qualitative approaches occurs when trust in the research findings has to be determined. Trustworthiness refers to the extent to which the findings are an authentic reflection of the views of the participants who were interviewed (Curtin & Fossey, 2007). Trustworthiness thus guards and channels me as the researcher against complacency, carelessness and negligence during the research process. This claim is supported by Krefting (1991) who posits that trustworthiness is about ensuring the quality of the findings in qualitative research. In this multiple case study, I borrowed from Lincoln and Guba (1985a) who are regarded as pioneers of trustworthiness in qualitative research. Bryman and Bell (2019); Curtin and Fossey (2007); and Lincoln and Guba (1986) present credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as alternative constructs which are appropriate to determine the trust in qualitative research. Each of these criteria is presented in the paragraphs given below.

Inasmuch as qualitative approaches result in multiple realities, the researcher needs to develop confidence in the truthfulness of the findings from the participants under study. Krefting (1991) states that development of truth in findings reflects the *credibility* of the study. Moreover, she describes the occurrence of credibility in qualitative studies as taking place when the study presents an accurate interpretation of human lived experience that other people who also share the similar experience would immediately recognise such interpretations. For this study to be credible, I ensured that the findings from the six interviewed school principals were honest. Prolonged engagement with the participants, member-checking, and peer-debriefing were used to ensure credibility of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985a). In this multiple case study, all six school principals were given ample time to read the transcripts of the interviews and analysis of the documents to confirm their input. This helped to enhance the credibility of my interpretations.

Additionally, the quality of qualitative research can also be achieved should the findings be generalised and applied to other contexts with other groups (Krefting, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1986). *Transferability* occurs when the findings fit into other contexts outside the study setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985a). Krefting (1991) suggests that transferability is more a responsibility of the person wanting to transfer and apply the research findings in his/her own context rather than that of the original researcher. Therefore, for me to produce a transferrable empirical study, I was always conscious that my study would impact in an academic space and other researchers in other fields may use it to further their own research. As submitted by Faan (2016), I provided a thick description specifying the rationale for the chosen methodology, the study setting, the theoretical framework underpinning the study and the participants. I clarified the research process, the data generation methods, and specified the process for data analysis so that other researchers might easily decide whether this study could fit in their contexts. Also, peoples' attitudes, feelings, emotions, and life situations vary over time and are influenced by several factors such as socio-economic status or even death of a family member, colleague, or friend. Such changes might also affect the findings of the study if the participant interviewed was not in a 'good space'. These factors can thus compromise the quality of a study and result in inconsistencies in the findings. Findings of qualitative research need to be consistent if the inquiry were to be replicated with the same participants or in a similar context (Krefting, 1991). Guba (1981) advises that the findings should remain stable should the study be re-conducted. Trackable variability should be identified that might cause inconsistencies in the study as Guba (1981) and Krefting (1991) regard trackability as *dependability* and further discuss it as consistency of data even if the inquiry should be replicated with the same participants in a similar context. In the current multiple case study, I ensured that dependability was achieved through inquiry audits (Lincoln & Guba, 1985a). Research peers (through research cohort groups) were also permitted to get involved, participate in, criticise, and contribute to the study. The supervisor also examined the process and the products of the study. This helped in ensuring a clear direction.

Lastly, Krefting (1991) emphasises that qualitative studies should be free from biases in the research procedure and results. Shenton (2004) maintains that it is difficult to avoid operational bias in qualitative research since the researcher designs the sampling and questions. Steps should be taken to ensure that the research findings are neutral and are the result of the

participants' experiences. Such neutrality in findings is called *confirmability* (Faan, 2016; Shenton, 2004). For the present multiple case study, confirmability was ensured through an audit trail. An audit trail refers to a transparent description of research steps from the start to reporting the research findings (Faan, 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1985a). To maintain confirmability, I kept all records of activities conducted and the research steps were fully explained in this project. In addition, during the interview process, I ensured that member checking was conducted, which was meant to check if my interpretation was aligned with what the participant had told me. Confirmability also occurred when I returned the transcripts to the participants to read and confirm if the transcribed version accurately captured the content and message that they wanted to convey. That process also added another layer in terms of the credibility of the findings. After reading the transcripts, each participant retained the right to ask for the removal of some details in the transcript, should they believe that it might expose them to various forms of risk, including criminal cases being levelled against them. In other words, I am confident that all the details I have exposed in this thesis were deemed acceptable to the participants.

#### **4.10 Ethical issues**

Ethical consideration deals with what is morally acceptable or unacceptable when engaging with participants to obtain data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). For the study to be ethical, it should not be vulnerable to abuses such as misrepresentation, misidentification, and betrayal of trust, nor should it pose potential harm to its participants (Adu-Gyamfi & Okech, 2010). Before the data generation process could commence, ethical clearance from the University of KwaZulu-Natal had to be sought and granted; permission to conduct research from the KZN Department of Basic Education had to be sought and granted; a Gatekeeper's permission letter from the KZN Department of Education to conduct research in the sampled schools was indeed granted, and the participants' informed consent was granted before the research was initiated. Having been granted permission by the University of KwaZulu-Natal and KZN Department of Education to conduct research in sampled schools, meant that I had to be conscious of ethical issues.

Ethical considerations can be achieved through a standard sieve of autonomy and non-maleficence (Adu-Gyamfi & Okech, 2010; Lovat, 1998). For the present multiple case study,

autonomy was achieved by ensuring that all six school principals willingly participated in research without duress and coercion and that their rights to act as they choose were respected (Akaranga & Makau, 2016; Arifin, 2018). The participants were issued with information sheets, as well as informed consent forms specifying the issues of voluntary participation and their rights to withdraw from the study any time prior to or during the research process (Adu-Gyamfi & Okech, 2010). Also, promises of using *pseudonyms* were made and used to maintain confidentiality and anonymity of participants and research sites (Coffelt, 2017). Furthermore, to ensure that the study did not cause any harm (either psychological, physical, or emotional), non-maleficence was maintained (Adu-Gyamfi & Okech, 2010). I ensured for instance, that school principals were pre-warned of the possible emotional and psychological harm (like guilt, sorrow, anger, embarrassment, and self-blame) that might be triggered by their prior enactment of ethical leadership during times of accountability. I further informed them to feel free to indicate should they feel emotional or too uncomfortable to proceed with the interview. This allowed us to contemplate on the need for professional support to help the participants deal with such emotional and psychological trauma.

I ensured that a caring and supportive atmosphere was created during the data generation process. The participants were further advised to indicate should the process trigger any negative emotions related to their prior enactment or failure to enact ethical leadership as school principals. Such enactment or failure thereof might trigger feelings of self-blame, anger, hatred, distress, giving up, resignation or even suicidal thoughts. To this end, participants were also advised about consulting the District Educational Psychologists for necessary support. Moreover, the participants were also advised to join organisations like Educator Wellness SA which assists educators in, but not limited to, reducing school related stress, increasing their emotional strength, and improving their wellbeing and mental strength. I also provided regular feedback to the supervisor so that he would closely examine the process. This was done to consider if support measures should be provided to negatively impacted participants.

Also, as a school principal myself, I was mindful that my reflexivity in the study might somehow influence the research process and compromise the trustworthiness of the findings (Dodgson, 2019). To ensure that the findings in this study were a true reflection of the participants' presentation and were free from my bias as a school principal, I suspended all my own previous experiences of enacting ethical leadership during times of accountability (as

mentioned in the Rationale of this study) (Chan et al., 2013). Suspending my prior observation and my personal experience on the phenomenon allowed me to grasp the essence of the participants' lived experiences with wide-open senses (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Issues of trustworthiness, described in the previous section were observed as some of the ways to deal with issues of biases and ensure that what I call the findings, are indeed findings from the perspectives of the participants.

#### **4.11 Limitations of the study**

There is an isiZulu language adage which says '*Ayikho ingwe engenalo ibal' elimnyama*', which loosely translates in English as '*There is no leopard without a black spot.*' The underlying meaning that is embedded in this adage is that no matter how well-crafted and appealing an object can be, however, it is bound to have some weaknesses or blind spots that might undermine it. This proverb is also in alignment with the economics thinking which highlights the absence of the perfect market (Mohr, 2020). The same can be voiced with regards to research. No matter how well the study and the research process were conducted, it is bound to have some limitations. According to Hancock and Algozzine (2016), limitations are the restrictive weaknesses of the study and some of them are beyond the researcher's control. Since the present research adopted a qualitative case study methodology, located in the interpretive paradigm, its notable limitation was that it did not establish the causalities of school principals' experiences of ethical leadership during times of accountability (Queiros et al., 2017). Similarly, Bryman and Bell (2019) criticise qualitative studies for their subjectivity because of their over dependence on researchers' values and opinions. In this regard, qualitative studies may be biased in their approach since the researcher decides on the participants, sampling, and wants their presence to be felt during the data generation process through interjecting and probing (Bryman & Bell, 2019). Contributing to these condemnations, I can suggest that findings from qualitative studies are diluted with researchers' interpretations, analysis, opinions, and values, should extreme care not be taken in terms in observing trustworthiness issues alluded to in the previous sections.

It is extremely important that each study, despite the limitations that may be identified, remains trustworthy. No researcher would want to read research whose findings cannot be trusted. I ensured that each sampled case was investigated in-depth, and thick and rich descriptions were

also prioritised in this study. This was done with the intention of producing a credible empirical research study which will subsequently satisfy the conditions of trustworthiness as discussed in Section 4.8 of this chapter.

#### **4.12 Conclusion**

The present chapter presented the research design and methodology in this qualitative multiple case study which is aimed at understanding school principals' experiences of ethical leadership during times of accountability. I began this chapter by locating the study within the interpretive paradigm and provided justifications on why this paradigm was chosen in this study. Furthermore, the choice of qualitative research design, case study methodology, sampling of cases, sampling instrumentation, data generation methods, data analysis, and trustworthiness of the study were presented. Of particular importance, justification for why data generation was preferred over data collection was elucidated as well. Choosing crystallisation over triangulation was also clarified under the data generation methods. The chapter then concluded with a discussion of how ethical issues were maintained as well as what the limitations of the study might be. In the ensuing chapter, I will present, discuss, and analyse data generated from participants.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

#### 5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented a detailed discussion of the research design and methodology. In this chapter, the analysis and presentation of findings generated from semi-structured interviews and documents reviews with six school principals who were selected for participation are presented. As explained in Chapter One, I presented a nuanced conceptualisation of school principals' experiences of ethical leadership in order to understand how the latter is executed during times of accountability considering the complexities, dynamics and dilemmas of leading schools as open organisations. In generating and presenting data in this chapter, I was guided by the research questions, the IP, literature review and the theoretical framework. To this effect, the research questions as shown below were constructed.

- What are the school principals' experiences of ethical leadership during times of accountability?
- What are the views of the school principals regarding the causes of unethical leadership in schools during times of accountability?
- How do school principals enhance ethical leadership during times of accountability considering the complexities, dilemmas, and dynamics associated with the school as an open organisation?
- Why do school principals enact ethical leadership in during times of accountability the way they do?

In essence, the analysis and presentation of findings in this chapter is two-fold. In the first part of the chapter, I begin by providing the profiles of the participants who participated in this qualitative study. After profiling the participants, I present and give a descriptive analysis of the emerging themes from the interview transcripts. In discussing these themes, I draw from the work of Corden and Sainsbury (2006) and Eldh et al. (2020) who emphasise the use of *verbatim* quotes when presenting the data generated from the participants. These scholars further elaborate on numerous benefits of *verbatim* quotes, including providing evidence, explanation, representation, impression, providing vividness of the text, enhancing readability

and strengthening the findings (Corden & Sainsbury, 2006; Eldh et al., 2020). Also, the documents and visual materials obtained from participants are used to corroborate or identify certain contradictions that may exist in the generated data (Chowdhury & Shil, 2021; Maree, 2007, 2010; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Rose, 2016).

## 5.2 Brief profile of the participants

The profiles include the participants' name, gender, position, highest qualification, teaching experience, years of experience as school principal, school name and type, as well as the school's location. In protecting the identity of the school principals and schools, *pseudonyms* were used. In this regard, Coffelt (2017) suggests that *pseudonyms* must be used in order to maintain confidentiality and anonymity of participants and research sites. All selected participants were school principals (not in acting positions or DPs) and had more than five years' experience as principals. The participants' teaching experience ranged from 15 years to 36 years with Mrs Reeva having served the longest. Also, their years of experience as school principals ranged from 6 to 12 years, again with Mrs Reeva again having served the longest. The participants' biographical details are presented as shown in Table 4 below:

Participants' name	Gender	Position	Highest Qualification	Teaching Experience	Years as principal	Name of School	School location
Mr Galaxy	Male	Principal	B Com & PGCE	15 Years	6 Years	Mars Primary school	Township
Mrs Reeva	Female	Principal	B.Ed. Hons	37 Years	12 Years	Jupiter Primary School	Semi- urban area
Mrs Comet	Female	Principal	B.Ed. Hons	36 Years	9 Years	Venus Primary School	Former Model C
Mrs Sirius	Female	Principal	B.Ed. Hons	27 Years	8 Years	Mercury Primary School	Rural area
Mr Sun	Male	Principal	M.Ed.	22 Years	8 Years	Saturn Secondary School	Semi- urban area
Mr Star	Male	Principal	B.Ed. Hons	33 Years	11 Years	Neptune Secondary School	Township

**Table 4:** Biographical information of the research participants

Table 4 above provides a summary of the biographical details of the participants. The six participants were selected for participation in the present qualitative multiple case study (as

earlier mentioned in the previous paragraph). From the sampled cohort of school principals, three were females and the other three were males. Four participants hold Bachelor of Education Honours degrees (B.Ed. Hons.) as their highest qualification; one has Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) obtained after completing his Bachelor of Commerce (B Com) degree; and the last participant has Master of Education (M.Ed.) degree. Within the sampled schools, two are in semi-urban areas; two are in the township; one is located in an rural area; and the last one is a Former Model C school located in an urban area. The detailed presentation of individual profiling of each participant (using pseudonyms for participants and schools) is further discussed as shown in the following paragraphs.

Mr Galaxy is a male school principal at Mars Primary School (MPS) located in a township in Pietermaritzburg in the uMgungundlovu District. He holds a BCom degree and a PGCE certificate and has 15 years of experience as an educator and 6 years as a school principal. Among the sampled participants, he is the least experienced, both as an educator and as a school principal compared to his counterparts. Prior to his appointment as a school principal in 2017, he acted as a Departmental Head (DH) during the period 2012-2015 and served as a Deputy Principal (DP) from 2016 to 2017.

Mrs Reeva is a female school principal at Jupiter Primary School (JPS) located in a Pietermaritzburg semi-urban area in the uMgungundlovu District. She holds a B.Ed. Hons degree as her highest qualification and boasts 37 years of teaching experience and 12 years as a school principal. She is the most experienced participant both as an educator and a school principal. She had served as a DH from 2000 to 2010, acted as school principal in 2010 until 2011 when she was officially appointed as a school principal.

Mrs Comet is a female school principal at Venus Primary School (VPS), an ex-Model C school, located in an urban area of Pietermaritzburg in the uMgungundlovu District. She holds a B.Ed. Hons degree as her highest qualification and has 36 years teaching experience as an educator and 9 years as a school principal. During the period 2005 to 2015, she was employed by a certain publishing company as a Teacher Trainer; hence, she regards herself as an expert in curriculum related matters. She has also served as a DP in another secondary school in Pietermaritzburg.

Mrs Sirius is a female school principal at Mercury Primary School (MPS) situated in a rural area in the uMgungundlovu District. She holds a B.Ed. Hons degree as her highest qualification and has 27 years teaching experience as an educator and a further 8 years as a school principal. She was a DH prior to her appointment as a school principal in 2015.

Mr Sun is a male school principal at Saturn Secondary School (SSS) located in a semi-urban area of Pietermaritzburg in the uMgungundlovu District. He holds a M Ed. Degree as his highest qualification and is the most qualified among the sampled school principals. He further has 22 years teaching experience as an educator and 8 years as a school principal. Before his appointment as a school principal, he served as a DH between 2006 and 2015.

Mr Star is a male school principal at Neptune Secondary School located in a township in Pietermaritzburg in the uMgungundlovu District. He holds B.Ed. Hons degree as his highest qualification and has 33 years teaching experience as an educator and a further 11 years as a school principal. Prior to his appointment as a school principal in 2012, he had served as a DH from 2005 and acted as a DP in 2011 until his appointment as a school principal in 2012.

### **5.3 Presentation and discussion of findings**

Once the process of generating data through semi-structured interviews and reviewing documents from all six sampled cases was completed, I then started the process of data analysis. Using field notes, voice recordings and documents, data was transcribed and put into smaller units to develop emerging themes from different cases while being guided by the research questions and theoretical framework. Using *verbatim* quotes and documents obtained from the participants, assisted me as the researcher to supplement, corroborate or even to identify contradictions from the generated data (Chowdhury & Shil, 2021; Corden & Sainsbury, 2006; Eldh et al., 2020; Maree, 2007; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Furthermore, my analysis was underpinned by the ideals of thematic cross-case analysis to identify, compare, differentiate, and corroborate data generated from the participants (Carlsen, 2012; Merriam, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Also, in developing and presenting these themes through thematic cross-case analysis, I constructed four broad themes namely, the experiences of ethical leadership by school

principals; sources of unethical malpractices by school principals; accountability in a complex school environment and stakeholder involvement in a complex school environment. Correspondingly, sub-themes were developed from these broad themes. For example, sub-themes that were developed from experiences of ethical leadership by school principals included school principals' understanding of ethics and enactment of ethical leadership values in their leadership as school principals; learning about ethics and enhancing ethical leadership; ethical leadership as a well preached gospel that is least practised; the benefits of ethical leadership in schools; dilemmas faced by school principals in enacting ethical leadership in schools; and selective enactment of a single ethical leadership value yields greater benefits. Sub-themes that were developed from sources of ethical malpractices by school principals included unethical leadership practices by school principals; unrealistic time frames set by the Education Department on procurement of Learning and Teaching Support Material (LTSM); insufficient allocations, poor budgeting, and lack of capacity; as well as easy route to schools' purse. Furthermore, sub-themes which included, accountability is sacrosanct notwithstanding its selective application; reporting cases of misconduct to the Circuit Manager (CM) must be treated as a matter of urgency; failed accountability can lead to loss of trust from stakeholders; the dark side of 'minor' failed accountability; and dynamic leadership is at the heart of a complex school in ensuring accountability were developed from the broad theme accountability in a complex school environment. Lastly, stakeholder involvement in a complex school environment as a broad theme, was subsequently, divided into two sub-themes, and these were stakeholder involvement is central to ethical leadership in pursuit of accountability, as well as, accounting to multiple stakeholders is overwhelming. To this end, in analysing the data generated from participants in the present study, I borrowed from Braun and Clarke (2012) and Dawadi (2020) who emphasise an inductive approach to analysis, producing themes through data itself without paying much attention to the themes included in other studies and reviewed literature. These broad themes and sub-themes are presented as indicated below.

### **5.3.1 Experiences of ethical leadership practices by school principals**

In pursuit of understanding school principals' experiences of ethical leadership, I borrowed from Dewey (1929) and Fox (2008) who describe experience as a multi-layered phenomenon in which individuals make sense of the world (category of thinking) through cultural, cognitive, sub-conscious and personal interpretive layers. According to Fox (2008), 'having' an

experience involves verbal and non-verbal translation of the phenomenon through culture, history, politics and language. Similarly, Dewey (1929) defines experience as a continuous process of making sense of the phenomenon that we have lived, has run its course and comes to a determinate conclusion.

Findings from the participants' interviews suggest that school principals experienced and practised elements of ethical leadership as school leaders. Also, evidence from the sampled school principals further revealed that the participants provided voluminous data related to their experiences of ethical leadership. To this effect, this broad theme ended up producing six sub-themes. The sub-themes that emerged from this broad theme are (i) school principals' understanding of ethics and enactment of ethical leadership values in their leadership as school leaders; (ii) learning about ethics and enhancing ethical leadership; (iii) ethical leadership, as a well preached gospel that is least practised; (iv) the benefits of ethical leadership in schools; (v) dilemmas faced by school principals in enacting ethical leadership in schools; and (vi) selective enactment of a single ethical leadership value yields greater benefits. Using *verbatim* quotes, these sub-themes are presented below.

#### **i. School principals' understanding of ethics and enactment of ethical leadership values in their leadership as school leaders**

The data generated indicates that the participants demonstrated a clear understanding of ethics and strongly believed that ethical leadership is at the heart of school leadership. The findings further revealed ethical leadership values that the participants infused in their leadership as school principals. These revelations can be seen from the submission by Mrs Sirius when asked about her understanding of ethics and ethical leadership.

*I think ethics has to do with doing things morally and in an acceptable manner that warrants you to be able to explain why you acted in that manner if asked.*

Similar sentiments were also expressed by Mrs Reeva in her remarks, stressing that ethics are sacrosanct and that they deserved to be not compromised in their execution. This is what she said:

*Ethics are about doing what is expected from you as a school principal.  
Yes, CMs are justifiable if they expect us as principals to be ethical...*

*Remember we are seen as role models by the society... Also, we are building the society. You can't build the society if you are not ethical in your leadership. I would say ethical leadership is not for discussion in school principals... It is non-negotiable... Ethics are in-grown, and for some they have to be developed.*

Similarly, Mr Galaxy corroborated this and emphasised the notion of being policy driven as being ethical in exercising leadership as school principal. In his presentation, this how he expressed his thought:

*Yes, we have to be ethical in our leadership as school principals. In fact, in everything we do, we are guided by professional ethics which in turn illuminates our own beliefs. Therefore, in everything we do, we are bound to be ethical. Being ethical is to be policy-driven as a principal and not to be exclusively guided by your own thinking and belief. Being ethical brings professionalism in our leadership as school principals. In our leadership and management, we must be guided by the policies and procedures of the department (that is being ethical).*

Evidence from the participants supplied in the preceding *verbatim* quotes prove that the former regards ethics and ethical leadership as essential elements that must be possessed by school principals. Asked about ethical leadership values they enact in their leadership as school leaders, Mr Star echoed his experiences as shown below:

*As a principal, you should have a big heart (meaning caring). Also, have an honest and open mind; warm heart; and be responsible. Also, an ethical principal must be flexible in his leadership, and punctual in terms of meeting the deadlines as set by the department. Ethical school principals also go an extra mile in their leadership. These principals are also strict and apply the policy at the same time.*

Mr Sun also shared his sentiments on the ethical values that he embraces in his leadership as a school principal. His utterances were in support of those presented in the previous excerpts. This is how he put it:

*When you are a principal, you need to involve and inform other stakeholders about your decisions and action. It doesn't matter how small the decision you are taking. You just need to make it a norm to inform them. I can emphasise that as an ethical principal, you need to*

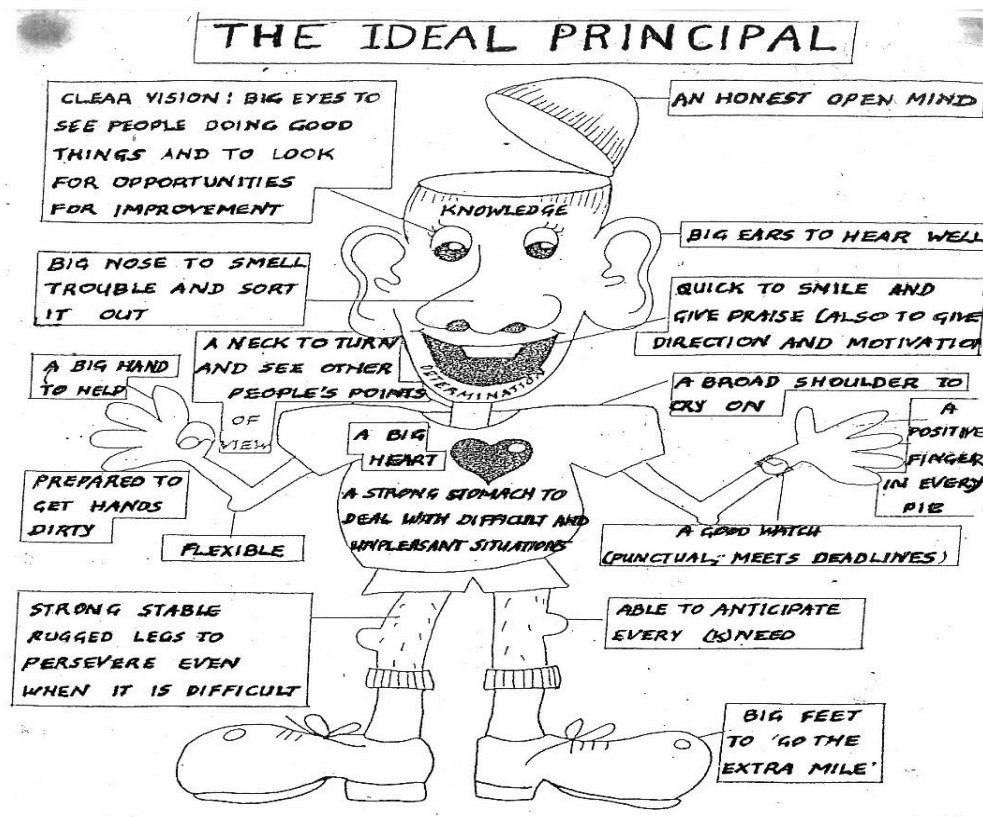
*be transparent... I would say, in the main, as a school principal you must be transparent, kind, loving and involve other stakeholders in your leadership.*

In sharing her experience on the ethical leadership values that she believes are the backbone in her leadership as a school principal, Mrs Sirius provided a practical experience of how she once practised transparency in her school. Her experience is reflected below:

*I believe that a principal must have self-control... Also, principals must be fair, transparent, and be accountable... For your information, when I had to buy my private car, I started by asking for the SGB meeting whereby we would look at the school's financial position and bank statements. After we had analysed these documents, I then told them that I was planning to buy a car. The reason I shared this information with them it's because I wanted to be transparent that the car would be out of my own sweat, and not from the school funds. After I had bought the car, I then called them again to review the school's account in order to prove to them that no money from the school was used to purchase my car.*

Findings from generated data reveal that the participants understood ethical leadership and embraced various ethical leadership values as cornerstones of their leadership. Among these values, transparency, caring, loving, accountability, honesty, self-control, kindness, openness, consultation, attending war rooms, stakeholder involvement, open mindness, responsibility, integrity and respect were mentioned by the participants. Other ethical values that were added to the layer included being compliant, policy driven, meeting deadlines, and punctuality, and these were mentioned by Mr Galaxy. In conclusion, Mr Star shared a document (cartoon) titled 'The Ideal Principal' as his conceptualisation of an ethical principal and the values that such school principals exude. This picture is shown as Figure 1 below:





**Figure 1:** The Ideal Principal supplied by Mr Star

Figure 1 above depicts Mr Star's conceptualisation of an ethical school principal. In support for his beliefs, he mentioned that an ethical principal must be honest and open minded (the head of the Ideal principal); must be visionary (eyes); a good listener (ears); be knowledgeable (the forehead); flexible (elbows); punctual and possess the ability to meet deadlines (watch on the wrist); caring (big heart); supportive to his/her staff (big hands); a shoulder to cry on; and perseverance (strong legs). According to him, the Ideal Principal symbolises most characteristics an ethical principal should possess.

## **ii. Learning about ethics and enhancing ethical leadership**

Since the findings from the previous theme suggest that school principals understood and embraced key values of ethical leadership in their practice as school leaders, this section seeks to ascertain how the participants learn about ethics and being ethical in their leadership. Also, it establishes how school principals enhanced ethical leadership principles in their schools as school leaders.

Findings from the participants suggested that, for some participants, ethics were not covered as part of the curriculum by the universities and colleges while they were training as educators, while others suggested otherwise. For example, among those who did not learn about ethics during their training years, Mrs Comet argued as shown below that:

*Ethics were not covered as part of the curriculum at the college. I can say, being God fearing has taught me a lot about being ethical as a person. I must emphasise this, I am a God-fearing woman. In all my actions I am conscious that I am representing God, as a result, I always try to please Him by doing what is right and expected from me.*

In harmony with the above sentiments, Mrs Sirius explicitly stated that ethics were not covered in the college curriculum as reflected below:

*While I was at the college, we did not learn about ethics. However, Teacher Development Sub-Directorate does provide workshops to educators upon invitation by schools.*

Contrary to the two preceding excerpts, Mrs Reeva confidently indicated that ethics were part of their training as trainee educators back then. This is how she explains:

*Yes, ethics were covered. From dress code to the way you talk, to the way you address somebody, all that was part of our training at the college.*

Her views were also supported by Mr Sun who even mentioned the module under which ethics were covered. His remarks are quoted as shown below:

*Yes, the scope on ethics was covered in the B.Ed. curriculum (principal as a manager).*

Interestingly, Mr Galaxy provided a detailed account of how ethics were covered in the curriculum during his days at the university. As a person who did BCom with Human Resources (HR) as his major before doing the PGCE (as shown in Section 5.2), he claimed with confidence as having studied ethics and being ethical in his conduct. His utterances are reflected below:

*Yes, at university I did HR (as earlier indicated). HR taught me about ethics and all the labour laws. All the policies that someone in the teaching profession is not exposed to, I did them at the university... I*

*know them very well... From Labour Laws to Basic Conditions of Employment, to EEA, I know all of them.*

Findings from these excerpts suggest that some participants were exposed to ethics during their training years as educators while others were not. Quite tellingly, only Mr Galaxy (having majored in HR) was well exposed to ethics. With others, one gets a sense that it was just a mere exposure to the concept. Furthermore, findings from the generated data indicate that school principals strive to ensure that ethical awareness and ethical conscious is part of their leadership. This is evident from utterances supplied by Mr Sun when highlighted the following:

*Each time during staff meetings especially on your remarks, you must take at least 10 to 15 minutes infusing ethics and human rights values as enshrined in the Bill of Rights.*

Utterances from the previous excerpt were also supported by Mrs Comet, who went on about mentioning, having had informal chats with her staff members on how to conduct themselves as reflected below:

*In our briefings and staff meetings, I always try to cultivate the seeds of love and caring for each other among the staff. Before we start the meeting, each educator must make it a point that each educator is present in those briefings, but it will be the responsibility of the neighbouring educator (educators that are sharing the same phase) to ensure attendance. In doing so, I try to cultivate the seed for loving and caring for each other. Also, I have informal chats with my educators on how to conduct themselves.*

Contrary to the two previous excerpts, Mrs Sirius mentioned the involvement of the Teacher Development Sub-Directorate within the Department of Education as also playing a role in providing ethical consciousness among the educators. This is how she voiced their involvement:

*With the assistance of Teacher Development, I have designed the codes of professional ethics for educators in the school. These codes cover issues like teaching time, attendance and absenteeism, use of cell phones, general educator conduct etc. I am the one who train educators in this school regarding these codes of professional ethics in the school.*

Mr Star, emphasised the involvement of teacher unions in providing ethical consciousness among educators. His beliefs are expressed below:

*I involve teacher unions to capacitate their members on codes of professional ethics. Also, copies of SACE codes of conduct are available at school and pasted in the office and in the staff room. With regards to the newly appointed educators, I delegate such roles to the DHs.*

Contrary to other participants who seem to focus on providing ethical consciousness to educators only within the vicinity of their schools, Mr Galaxy's approach seems to focus beyond the borders of his own school but targets all teacher unions at branch and regional level. This is evident from his utterances as presented below:

*I capacitate teacher unions members... I capacitate my site stewards [(both South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU) and National Teachers' Union (NATU))] and in turn, I share my knowledge with educators and other union members at branch level. In our engagement, I always emphasise professionalism as the pillar of our profession. I emphasise the notion of being policy driven and doing things as prescribed in the policy... Not only with our educators at school, but at branch level. For example, I know that SADTU has what is called Site Steward Meeting where different site stewards meet at branch level converge to discuss union matters. On those meetings, my Site Steward contributes immensely in discussions. In turn, the branch will share their inputs with the region.*

This section has provided evidence that despite the fact that school principals did not learn much about ethics during their initial training as educators, however, in their leadership practices as school principals, they prioritise enhancing ethical leadership values to their educators.

### **iii. Ethical leadership as a well preached gospel that is least practised**

Findings from the participants suggest that they all advocate for ethical leadership enactment as indicated in Section 5.3.1(i) of this chapter. However, evidence also suggests that in their

leadership as school principals, their actions did not always match their utterances in so far as ethical leadership enactment is concerned. For example, Mr Star highlighted the notion of bending the policy in his practices of care and sympathising with his educators. This is how he expressed himself:

*I am a very caring person and where necessary, I bend the policy [meaning disregarding the policy] in caring for my staff. For example, in terms of family responsibility leave (bereavement when an educator has lost the spouse) the policy is clear on the number of days to be taken (must not exceed five days in a cycle). In reality, those days are not enough to prepare for the funeral in the African context... Then as a principal you have no choice but to bend the policy so as to assist the educator concerned... Bending the policy is part of our leadership as school principals.*

Similarly, the views presented in the above excerpt were also supported by Mrs Comet who clarified how she implemented policy in her school as a principal:

*Don't get me wrong, I don't mean that I do not apply the policy. However, I don't apply the policy if it will destroy a person. If I see that the educator has committed an offence which warrants him/her to be dismissed, if possible, I do my level best not report that case and use my own discretion on how I can protect that educator... At times you need to disregard the policy.*

Proving that school principals sometimes can be less ethically conscious in their leadership as school leaders, Mrs Sirius shared her saga on how she ended up facing misconduct allegations due to her failure to audit educators' leave register. This is what she said:

*As I am talking to you, I am guilty of not auditing educators' leave register. I have discovered only last week that the educator in question has been absent for 52 days! As a result, 36 days has been exceeded by 26 days. My failure to audit the leave register has resulted in me missing such a dismissible offence by the educator (accumulated 52 days of absence) ... My failure to audit and report the educator in question to the CM has in turn put me in trouble. In the eyes of the law, I am now perceived as an accomplice to this act of misconduct who shielded and protected the educator to face disciplinary actions.*

In the same vein, Mr Galaxy, in his earlier conceptualisation of being ethical as a school principal had stated that:

*I would say being ethical is about being compliant with the policies of the department... It is about doing what is expected from you as prescribed by the policy.*

However, evidence suggests that he did not comply with the policies of the department when he was dealing with the educator who was always drunk on Mondays. In his presentation, there was no mention of written warnings issued to the educator; no mention of reporting to the CM; no mention of drastic measures taken against the educator; lastly, no mention of referring the educator to support programmes for rehabilitation. Mr Galaxy only stated that he had spoken with the educator several times as shown in the extract below:

*I had a female educator who would sleep on alcohol [meaning she would drink heavily] every Sundays. As a result, on Mondays she would be absent from duty or report late... I would talk to the educator politely as a form of 'firing warning shots'... Her behaviour subsequently landed to the attention of the SGB and parents. Some parents would complain to me about the teacher's alcohol abuse, and I would tell them that issues related to educator misconduct are my jurisdiction, as a result, I would tell them that I was dealing with that matter, but resolving it is a process.*

Interestingly, most participants, including Mr Galaxy, had indicated that the seriousness of the case determines that it should be reported to CM. However, the findings also suggest that he had failed to account for a case involving the educator who was abusing alcohol. In his own words, the educator ended up assaulting a Grade 1 learner and the parents opted to bypass him and went straight to the CM and South African Police Services (SAPS). Subsequently, he ended up dealing with the case heads on due to the pressure that was exerted by external stakeholders. In the end, he reported to the CM and filled in all the necessary documents for charging an educator. Despite being so eloquent and an advocate for ethical leadership and accountability, the evidence proves otherwise as shown below:

*I then told the educator that since the matter had been brought to the attention of SAPS and Department of Education, that I was left with no option other than to charge her for misconduct by filling in Annexure G for submission to the department.*

Drawing from these excerpts, ethical leadership enactment by some school principals is merely lip service. Evidence generated from participants suggests that these participants have a clear understanding of ethics and ethical leadership, however, in practice, they sometimes enacted unethical leadership. One may argue that sometimes, they did not practise what they preached. Another point to raise at this juncture is that none of the participants has indicated that she or he faced any dilemma in handling these staff issues. What has come through is that they chose to ignore departmental policies that govern their leadership and management in schools.

#### **iv. The benefits of ethical leadership in schools**

All the participants unanimously expressed the belief that ethical leadership is a springboard for educational leadership. Participants are of the view that ethical leadership benefits the school in various ways. For example, Mrs Reeva indicated how being ethical as a school principal is good for ones' health. This is how she explained herself:

*Being ethical makes you to be at peace with yourself and reduces the stress level... Being ethical as a principal also benefits everyone including the CMs and other officials because everyone (including them) will learn the correct way of doing things and develop trust in you... Everybody learns to do things the right way.*

Also, Mr Star in his presentation mentioned growth because of enacting ethical leadership. He shared his beliefs as reflected below:

*Being an ethical principal, benefits me as a school leader because I grow from strength to strength. Also, the school, the community; and other stakeholders in education develops trust in you as a principal if you are ethical.*

The above sentiments were also supported by Mr Sun as shown below:

*Being ethical as a principal increases enrolment; develops trust from parents and other stakeholders; it reduces late coming; it allows you to involve other stakeholders; and it results in school grading (next year this school will be upgraded from P3 to P4).*

Interestingly, Mrs Comet remarked that being ethical in her leadership had been a catalyst in removing racial tensions and political intolerance within the school community. This is how she explained:

*Being ethical in this school has created a harmonious environment between Black SGB members, parents, SMT (White), and educators (majority White). Upon my appointment as the first Black and a female principal, the school was fragmented and had previously failed to meet the quorums on meetings and Annual General Meetings (AGMs). Further, the school was more like a political battlefield with racial tensions being evident. Being driven by ethical values, all those challenges are now thing of the past. There is tolerance now in the school.*

To throw a spanner in the works, Mrs Sirius mentioned that due to her transparency in her leadership, the school had received sponsorship from large corporations who inject more than R200 000 in the school per annum. Her presentation summarised most points as elaborated below:

*Being ethical in my leadership has attracted these businesses to provide support that we require. As a result, the school has experienced numerous benefits from increased in learner enrolment; parental involvement; food security to our needy community; exposure; competing with private schools; improved school infrastructure; improved learner performance; regular trips, tours and excursions to our learners; and improved stakeholder involvement in education.*

Utterances from these participants indicate that ethical leadership enactment by school principal yielded remarkable benefits for the entire school. All participants are in agreement that ethical leadership can bring a desirable change in schools.

#### **v. Dilemmas faced by school principals in enacting ethical leadership in schools**

Postulations from the participants further suggest that in pursuit of enacting ethical leadership, they found themselves being caught in a dilemma because they had to choose between applying the policy (right action) and caring for the educator in question. The participants maintained that being caught in this dilemma is part of their leadership as school principals. For example, Mr Galaxy stated that the policies that he had to implement often contradicted his ethical values and contribute educator misconduct as shown below:



*Indeed, we are faced with dilemmas because being ethical can also collide with your own personal values. The moment you think about the repercussions of acting against the educator including reporting him/her to the CM and is subsequently dismissed for his/her misconduct, you are then caught in a deep dilemma... The dilemmas that we experience as school principals in a nutshell promotes educator misconduct because the latter's' maleficence ends up not being reported. This dilemma, in the main, is about balancing educator misconduct, codes of professional ethics, your personal values, and acting against the educator accused of misconduct.*

The above utterances were also shared by Mr Star who emphasised the point that the policies, sometimes, stand in conflict with his personal values as reflected below:

*The dilemmas that I always encounter is that the policy is always contradictory to my values. For example, the policy is silent about having a big heart [meaning caring], yet in the real school environment where we are interacting with human beings, you can't lead them without caring. As a result, I always wrestle and choose between my values and the policy.*

Furthermore, Mrs Reeva's views corroborated the previous excerpt by stressing the lack of clear-cut policies on educators' dress code versus her ethical values intensified her ethical dilemma as a school principal, as shown below:

*In pursuit of ethical leadership, you can't get it 100% because the constitution and other policies governing our profession can collide with our values; in my view, that's a big dilemma... More often, I find myself in the office questioning whether I should address that dress code, if I do, how? because the policies are not clear on dress codes by educators. I then find myself locked in that dilemma... A lack of clear-cut policies on educators' dress code creates a dilemma because on one side you'll be saying there is no dress code: while on the other hand as a principal, you'll be thinking about educators' codes of conduct. In turn, your principles and values will conflict with unclear and conflicting policies.*

Mrs Comet concurred with the other participants' views, as provided in the preceding excerpts regarding the dilemmas she faced. She further went on to share stories about how she dealt with such dilemmas in her leadership as a school principal. This is how she explained it:

*It is not easy to balance the two (the policy and your values). That is our dilemma as principals because most often the policy conflicts with my personal values, yet, I have to implement the policy as an employee of the department... In order to counter this dilemma, what I can say, and what works for me is that I am not a person who acts hastily. Furthermore, I try to strike the balance between the policy and my values.*

It is evident that school principals are caught in an intense dilemma that is caused by policy (some indicated it is unclear on certain issues) and their personal values. In pursuit of invisibly searching for doing the right thing, school principals find themselves locked in a dilemma. One principal (Mr Galaxy) further maintained that their own dilemma contributes to educator misconduct.

#### **vi. Selective enactment of a single ethical leadership value yields greater benefits**

Data generated from the participants revealed that a selective enactment of an ethical value which might be seen as insignificant at that time, may yet produce unpredictable benefits in the entire school environment. Participants narrated their stories about how their 'minor' ethical value yielded significant benefits for their schools. For example, some participants mentioned being parent-centred, honest, having integrity, and transparent as some of ethical values that impacted positively on the entire school environment. The participants' amazement was driven by the fact that they expressed these values naturally and with ease and did not foresee the benefits they would have on the schools' ethos. For them, executing these values was just a piece of cake, and subsequently, viewed them as 'minor' yet their impact was felt heavily in the entire school environment. Such submissions are shown below, with Mr Sun emphasising the notion of putting parents first in his leadership, and that such a practice has resulted in an increased learner enrolment:

*I have realised that being parent-centred or putting parents' first in your leadership is very important... On my arrival, I discovered that black parents were complaining about the ill treatment they were*

*getting from the school and believed that their needs were not prioritised... For me to prioritise the parents have resulted in learner enrolment skyrocketing from 485 to 747 in one year. Furthermore, 2024 applications for admission indicate that our enrolment might exceed 900 learners.*

Similarly, Mr Galaxy mentioned honesty as his fundamental value that has subsequently caught the attention of CMs who has since developed the tendency of delegating him as a Resource Person during the promotion interviews. This is how he narrated his story:

*Naturally, I am a person who is very honest. As such, my character has caught the attention of the CMs. Due to my honesty, CMs delegate me to schools as Resource Person or sometimes serves in the Interview Committee during interviews. In most cases, they tend to assign me to problematic schools and those with challenges.*

These sentiments were also shared by Mrs Comet who mentioned integrity as her strong point; as such, she has become a catalyst in removing racial tensions and political intolerance between the SGB, parents, SMT and educators as earlier shared in Section 5.3.1(iv) of this Chapter. This how she elaborated:

*I am a person who leads with integrity (i.e., leading with fairness; love; truthfulness and equal treatment to all stakeholders irrespective of colour, class, and race).*

Interestingly, being a school principal in a poverty-stricken rural community, Mrs Sirius demonstrated how transparency in her leadership has attracted reputable businesses, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Private Schools to adopt, partner, support, and inject monetary, human and physical resources into her school. This really caught me by surprise since the stakeholders that she mentioned are perceived to have a tendency of injecting their resources to Former Model C schools and those in urban areas. Her transparency has not only benefited the school, but the parents as well. This is what she said:

*I am mindful that our school is servicing impoverished community. To counter this, I always seek sponsors and donors to support the school. (With a broad smile) I am privileged to tell you that our school is sponsored by N3TC (who is our main sponsor); Trafalgar; Nelson Mandela Foundation; Fairfield Dairies; St Anne's Private School; and Michaelhouse Private School... As a result, in our school we have solar*

*panels; laptops; mobile classes; and food parcels that we receive from these sponsor... Nelson Mandela Foundation and Fairfield respectively supply food parcels and dairy products to parents... while N3TC and Trafalgar mainly provide monetary support for the day-to-day functioning of the school. As a result, N3TC does not contribute anything less than R200 000 p.a... Through my strong belief in transparency, these sponsors know very well that every cent will be well spent and accounted for.*

Through the excerpts, strong evidence exists to suggest that school principals in the study who enacted ethical leadership in their schools have more to gain and have nothing to lose. These utterances by these school principals prove without any reasonable doubt that being ethical is a sacrifice worth taking as it has serendipitous benefits. These words further suggest that in pursuit of being ethical, you do not have to do great things as a school principal, but a minor ethical value, tiny as a mustard seed, can be worthy enough to bring untold and unimaginable benefits into the school environment.

### **5.3.2 Sources of ethical malpractices by school principals**

This section seeks to establish the participating principals' perspectives on causes of unethical leadership practices as evidence supplied by Schwella (2013) remarks on South Africa producing several bad and unethical leaders. These remarks are further corroborated by several scholars including Serfontein and de Waal (2015) who maintain that South African schools are not safe from corruption and unethical leadership practice by school principals, while the South African Council for Educators (2020) reveals that 550 cases of educators' misconduct (including school principals) were resolved and finalised during the period 2019/2020. In view of these concerns, data generated from the participants revealed four dominant causes of unethical leadership by school principals. These are (i) Unethical leadership practices by school principals; (ii) Unrealistic time frames set by the Education Department on procurement of LTSM; (iii) Insufficient allocations, poor budgeting, and lack of capacity'; (iv) Easy route to the schools' purse. The four causes are discussed below.

**i. Unethical leadership practices by school principals**

Data generated from the participants point to a few unethical leadership practices by school principals as the cause of unethical conduct. For example, Mrs Comet mentioned ones' personality and ungodliness as some of the reasons as shown below:

*If you lack self-respect, it is very easy to conduct yourself unethically.  
Also, being self- centred contributes to that. Most importantly, I think  
those school principals don't fear God.*

In alignment with the previous excerpt, Mr Star added another dimension to the discussion as indicated below. This participant highlighted a lack of self-control and lack of self-discipline as contributory factors to the causes of unethical behaviour. He argued:

*I think its lack of self-control from principals and lack of discipline.*

On the other hand, I found it strange that Mrs Reeva was unsure of what might be the causes of unethical behaviours but ended up highlighting the issue of personal character as playing a big role in this problem. She said:

*I have no straight answer for that, but maybe its deceitful... I also think  
greed (because even those from well off schools with lucrative budgets  
and exorbitant school fees does it) ... Also, temptations, thinking that  
no one is watching you, and entitlement could be the cause.*

Mrs Sirius added another spanner in the works by remarking on some school principals' tendencies to undermine parents, and developing unprofessional relationships with SGB Treasurer as indicated below:

*It's because principals tend to undermine other stakeholders in  
education (especially SGB and parents) and develop an ego of knowing  
more than the latter... Other school principals have unhealthy and  
unprofessional friendship with certain members of the SGB e.g., you  
can find that the principal and the treasurer are inseparable and other  
members are treated as outsiders. Such relationship contributes to  
unethical conduct by school principals.*

The articulations in the previous excerpts provide a clear picture that a lot still needs to be done in order to bring ethical consciousness and awareness to school principals. Similar to the previous discussion as presented in Section 5.3.1 (vi), I believe that a minor unethical leadership value or practice can also have disproportional effects.

**ii. Unrealistic time frames set by the Education Department on procurement of Learning and Teaching Support Materials**

Among the six sampled participants, Mr Galaxy provided a detailed explanation of how school principals have learnt to cut corners to meet the department's deadlines on procurement of Learning and Teaching Support Materials (LTSM). Among all the participants, Mr Galaxy is the only one who pointed his finger at the department's handling of LTSM procurement processes as one of the causes of unethical leadership practices by school principals. This is how he narrated the whole saga:

*During the procurement of textbooks and stationery, school principals have to conclude the process which ideally must be done within two months but are directed to do that in one week. During this process, schools are expected to have LTSM committee to have chaired its meeting; do the stock tacking; identified the needs of the school; requested three quotations from three different suppliers; LTSM committee to meet again to select the cheapest supplier; and lastly, submit all the necessary documents to the department. Surely, this process cannot be completed within a week... This then results in school principals using one supplier who will do everything including supplying those required three quotations to schools. Those suppliers end up doing the job for school principals because of the unreasonable time frames set by the department on school principals... To this effect, school principals are forced by the department to cut corners...School principals will simply give one supplier their required stock, the supplier in turn will do the rest! In short, the department must be blamed with regards to procurement.*

Drawing from the above excerpt from Mr Galaxy, one can easily conclude that in this case, school principals are being pressured by the department's demands to find quicker ways of completing this task, and thus, end up being unethical. Failing to meet the deadline as directed by the department surely can result in disciplinary actions taken against the school principal. Also, the school will be at the receiving end should the LTSM not be delivered. Considering these remarks, one might suggest that the problem of unethical behaviours may be exacerbated by the department's unreasonable expectations and demands on the school principals.

### **iii. Insufficient allocations, poor budgeting, and lack of capacity**

Participants further blamed the department for insufficient allocations that are granted to the schools as another factor that leads to school principals acting improperly in relation to their leadership as school principals. Also, data generated from the participants highlights poor budgeting by schools as another cause. Such justifications were presented by Mr Star as shown below:

*Insufficient allocation from the department and lack of proper budgeting in terms of financial management cause school principals act unethically.*

These views were further aired by Mr Sun who lamented the problem of exorbitant operational costs in running the school *vis-à-vis* the Norms and Standards allocated to them. This what he claimed:

*Also, the operational costs for running the school are exorbitant and way exceed the allocation.*

Furthermore, Mr Galaxy supported these narratives by further emphasising the lack of capacity on the part of school principals to properly manage school finances. This is despite the challenges mentioned in the previous two narratives. This is how Mr Galaxy phrased his perceptions:

*It is because of insufficient allocations by the department and poor budgeting by schools... Secondly, school principals are not trained on financial management but only attend a one-day workshop which are normally run by interns or a departmental official who is not qualified on financial matters. I would say that the lack of capacity which in the main, is created by the gaps within the department... As soon as school principals identify the gaps in the system, they then develop the shortcut of counteracting the department's systematic weaknesses.*

These findings clearly suggest that school principals are not trained with regards to the management of public funds and more often than not they are subjected to insufficient allocations by the department. As unskilled as they are in financial management, school principals are expected to conduct budgeting for their schools, which requires specialised knowledge. Subsequently, ethical malpractices by school principals become inevitable.

#### iv. Easy route to the schools' purse

Findings from the data further revealed that school principals have learnt an easy way to school funds because of limited allocations to schools. Due to their financial muscle, school principals can emerge as saviours who will rescue a schools when it has run out of cash. However, saving the school comes at a huge cost as this practice will soon become a norm and school principals end up strolling freely to and from the schools' account as and when they feel like it. This is because as *ex officio* representatives of the HoD and accounting officers in finance committees, one would like to believe that school principals end up playing a consultative role by providing advice to the SGB on financial matters. Also, despite the finance officer and the treasurer being the key parties in financial matters, some school principals can wield their power over these two, simply because the latter is better informed than the former and the other members, including the SGB Chairperson. These beliefs were shared and supported by Mr Galaxy as indicated below:

*Shortage of funds in schools result in school principals using their own money (officially arranged with SGBs) to run schools and would be reimbursed once the department has deposited school's money in its account... Of course, once the money is deposited in the school's account, principals claim the money that is due to them. However, this behaviour allows school principals to have an easy route to the school's purse and soon learns that they have access to the school funds. This then becomes the cause of their unethical conduct in relation to school finances.*

Likewise, Mr Sun held similar views with regard to school principals as having easy access to the public purse. This is how he commented:

*At times, school principals end up using their personal money to run schools [due to limited allocation]. When they must recoup what is due to them, it becomes a problem because at times the department does not put the exact money that is allocated to schools... Sometimes the money is deposited in tranches. Now, that is very tempting to unfaithful and corrupt school principals... This then results in principals learning to compensate themselves [recovering what is legally due to them].*



Findings from Mr Galaxy and Mr Sun highlight that school principals are accustomed to bailing out schools for their day to day running costs since schools experience shortages of funds. These participants further mentioned that in doing this, school principals expect to recover what is due to them as soon as the school receives its allocation. However, these participants warn that this practice is an easy route to the schools account which results in school principals conducting themselves unethically.

### **5.3.3 Accountability in a complex school environment**

All the participants unanimously agreed that accountability in a complex school environment is a tricky endeavour, challenging and multi-layered. Notwithstanding these obstacles, all participants were consistent on the indispensability of accountability despite such expressed challenges. Subsequently, in elaborating on this broad theme, four sub-themes were developed. The sub-themes that emerged from the analysis included the following: (i) Accountability is sacrosanct notwithstanding its selective application; (ii) Reporting cases of misconduct to CM must be treated as a matter of urgency; (iii) Failed accountability can lead to the loss of trust from stakeholders; (iv) The dark side of ‘minor’ failed accountability and (v) Dynamic leadership is at the heart of a complex school in ensuring accountability. Participants’ narratives on these sub themes are presented below.

#### **i. Accountability is sacrosanct notwithstanding its selective application**

The findings suggest that all participating principals unanimously viewed accountability as central to educational leadership. The participants were of the view that all education stakeholders must be informed about everything that is happening in the school including cases of misconduct by educators. Such a narrative is evident in the submission by Mr Sun who argued that:

*Reporting is extremely important... You might think that the case is only known by you, only to find that you are deceiving yourself as some of the educators have informed the CM, District Director or even the MEC. You need to be quick on reporting.*

The views expressed in the above excerpt were also shared by Mr Star who stressed the importance of accounting for everything that happens in the school as a school principal. This is how he expressed himself:

*Starting with accountability... Reporting is vital in the sense that everything that happens in the school must be reported to the CM no matter how small it might present itself... In reporting, you can do that formally or informally, at the end ensure that the CM is aware of the incident.*

Similarly, in his presentation, Mr Galaxy went so far as to indicate that ensuring accountability in your leadership as a school principal is tantamount to being ethical. This is what he postulated:

*Yes, it is also important such that if I don't value accountability as a school principal, nobody would account to me and I won't be accounting to anyone. Indeed, as school principals we must account. Accountability goes together with being ethical... Being ethical in your leadership enhances accountability... No matter how small the case might be, you must report as a principal.*

In corroborating the justifications mentioned in these excerpts, Mrs Sirius shared a Logbook entry filled and signed by two CMs to whom she reports about poor attendance by a certain educator who had been logged by the school principal. Also, a letter informing the educator of his misconduct and the number of days of absence he had taken were also shared to corroborate and enhance the findings of the study. Figure 2 below shows a copy of the letter informing the educator of his alleged misconduct and a number of days' absence accumulated, while Figure 3 represent the Logbook entry by CMs. In these two supplied documents, educator's and CMs' particulars as well as emis number including school details have been blanked out to maintain confidentiality



# PRIMARY SCHOOL



EMIS Number:



P.O. Box 46

3260

17 September 2021

Primary School on 06 May 2021, was brought by the Dept of Education. Primary SGB WILL recommend placement after 12 months SGB will still recommend his absorption.

It is alleged that you were not at work for 5 days without reporting as from 14 – 20 September 2021. This happened during the Assessment period and the time table was already given to parents. This led the school to disrepute and the parents do not trust the school, we couldn't follow the given time table. Taking leave without reporting can lead to leave without pay and disciplinary steps taken against the teacher.

The 8 week rule on taking leave is not respected if you look at the history of leave you have taken. Kindly follow the Leave policy. Note the attached schedule of leave taken by you.

## RECORDS OF LEAVE TAKEN BY XXXXXXXXXX SINCE HE JOINED

DATE	DAY	TYPE OF LEAVE	REMARKS
18 May 2021	Tuesday	Sick Leave	No supporting document
02 June 2021	Wednesday	Sick Leave	No supporting document
25 June 2021	Friday	Sick Leave	Covid Injection - no supporting document
06 Sept 2021	Monday		After attending a Discipline workshop that took place on Saturday
14 Sept 2021	Tuesday	Unknown Reason	Unknown Reason / Not Reported
15 Sept 2021	Wednesday	Unknown Reason	Not Reported / Principal phoned with no success
16 Sept 2021	Thursday	Unknown Reason	Not Reported / Principal phoned without success
17 Sept 2021	Friday	Unknown Reason	Not Reported / Principal phoned without success
20 Sept 2021	Monday	Unknown Reason	Not Reported / Principal phoned without success

This letter serves as a record that you have met with SMT and discussed the matter. It was discussed that such behavior should be prohibited in future.

Date:

Date:

Date:

**Figure 2:** Letter informing the educator about his accumulated number of days' absence.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION		
LOG BOOK		
REGION: <u>Pietermaritzburg</u>	CIRCUIT: <u>XXXXXXXXXX</u>	SCHOOL: <u>XXXXXXXXXX</u>
DATE: <u>20/11/2021</u>	ENTRIES:	SIGNATURE:
	We, the undersigned Circuit Managers visited the school to support the Principal.	
	We also met with educator who has been attending the school very poorly.	
	359. We have counselled him about poor attendance and we also guided him about HRM Circular 15 of 2011.	
	He is not completing leave forms and with no attachments.	
	<u>XXXXXXXXXX</u>	<u>XXXXXXXXXX</u>
	<u>XXXXXXXXXX</u>	<u>XXXXXXXXXX</u>

**Figure 3:** Signed Log Book entry by Circuit Managers (CMs) corroborating that the school principal had reported educator's alleged misconduct

Figure 2 and Figure 3 provide strong evidence that the school principal did inform the CMs about cases relating to the educators' misconduct. This is because school principals view

accountability as an essential element of their leadership as presented in the earlier excerpts of this section. However, findings from the data further revealed that the participants were selective in terms of the cases reported to the CMs. The participants unequivocally stated that not all cases warrant reporting to the CMs. Such a suggestion is stated clearly in the words of Mrs Comet as shown below:

*Indeed, not all cases have to be reported to the CM. It all depends on the seriousness of the case... As a principal, you must deal with some cases yourself without involving the CM... Cases like educators' late coming, early departure, disrespectful and other petty behaviours, as a principal, you must deal with them heads on... Cases like sexual assault on a learner, examination irregularity and fraud must be reported... However, as a caring principal, sometimes, if I see that the educator has committed an offence which warrants him/ her to be dismissed, if possible, I do my level best to not report that case and use my own discretion on how I can protect that educator.*

Mr Star, also concurred with the above views as indicated below:

*It's true; not all cases that are brought to our attention as school principals must be reported to the CM... You cannot shield cases that warrant dismissal. What I am saying is, cases that are serious in nature, have to be reported to the CM, failing which, you as a principal will find yourself in deep trouble. On the other hand, imagine reporting to the CM that a teacher was sleeping on duty! Surely you can't, but you have the responsibility of correcting that behaviour as a principal.*

Mr Galaxy is also of the same belief that not all cases must be directed to the CM as reflected below:

*It is true, most cases of misconduct by educators are swept under the carpet. Not that school principals are proud of shielding cases of misconduct by educators, but in pursuit for inner peace and their own safety, they end up not reporting some cases to the CM.*

The evidence presented by the participants in this section suggests that school principals in the study understood the importance of accountability. However, a clear contradiction was also noted in their postulations. For example, the participants maintained that all cases must be reported to the CM, while on the other hand, they strongly suggested that not all cases must be

reported. Interestingly, Mrs Comet initially maintained that minor cases (like late coming and early departure) should not be reported to CMs but only cases of a serious nature must be reported. Surprisingly, she ended up saying that she did not report to the CM cases of misconduct by educators if she felt that reporting them would warrant a dismissal verdict (cases classified as serious misconduct) against the educator accused of misconduct. These contradictions clearly indicate the complexities of accountability. This then suggests that accountability is a complex endeavour, and, as a result, school principals implement selective approaches to accountability.

**ii. Reporting cases of misconduct to Circuit Managers must be treated as a matter of urgency**

In the previous themes, we have noted that in some instances, the participating principals were selective on issues to report to the Circuit Managers. Other breaches of ethical behaviour were not disclosed because of the possible repercussions for the educators concerned. Despite the selective approach to accountability and the subsequent contradictions displayed by the participants on accountability issues, the participants were also of the view that accountability must be prioritised and treated as a matter of urgency. Mr Galaxy supported this belief as indicated below:

*No matter how small the case might be, you must report as a school principal... You need to be quick in informing the CM.*

Following the same line of thinking, Mrs Sirius shared the sentiments expressed in the above excerpt. Below are her views on this serious issue:

*I can strongly emphasise that it is extremely important to report the matter to the CM no matter how small it might look at the time... As a school principal you must prioritise being accountable to all stakeholders including CM.*

Mr Sun, provided his response as shown below, emphasising that reporting should be done the same day (if possible) after the incident has happened. This view is in harmony with those of the two previous participants:

*Reporting is extremely important... You need to be quick on reporting. If possible, as a principal, you must report the very same day. If the*

*incident happened very late, you must prioritise it for the next morning.*

*Don't say no it's a minor thing.*

In his account, Mr Sun further emphasised that because of the web of stakeholders involved in his school, he did not have a uniform approach of reporting. This is how he explained himself:

*This school is in Ward 000<sup>3</sup>, but across the road, is another ward... To this effect, I have got about three Ward Councillors that are part of this school. All these Ward Councillors are also part of the Parents' WhatsApp group ... Now, delaying reporting cases in this school put the school in turmoil within a short space of time. I end up not having a uniform formula of reporting. I must be quick in reporting. In this school, it is the school environment that forces me to be quick in reporting cases.*

In alignment with the previous section, the participants are consistent on the importance of accountability and strongly believe that it should be prioritised. However, the contradiction that was noted in the preceding sections can never be overlooked. These contradictions clearly indicate that failed accountability has serious implications as shown in the ensuing two sections.

### **iii. Failed accountability can lead to loss of trust from stakeholders**

Evidence from participants reveals that failing to account may result in an erosion of trust from stakeholders. This was notable from a comment made by Mr Sun as indicated below:

*If you fail to account to these stakeholders [including Ward Councillors in Ward 000 mentioned in the excerpt in Section 5.3.3(ii)] as a school principal, you'll quickly lose control of the school, and nobody will trust you... The moment these stakeholders don't trust you, you'll soon be on your own and they won't be available when you need them.*

In a similar fashion, Mr Galaxy's utterances show how parents decided to bypass him and report one of his educators who had assaulted a Grade 1 learner and opted to report to the South African Police Services (SAPS) and the CM because he, as school principal had failed to take disciplinary measures against a certain educator after receiving numerous complaints from

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<sup>3</sup> A fictitious Ward created solely for this study

parents. School principals' narratives on this matter were earlier presented in the excerpt contained in Section 5.3.1(iii). The steps that were taken by parents suggest that they had lost trust in him as a school principal who could take disciplinary actions against his educators. This is what he said:

*The problem persisted (alcohol abuse) ... As a result, she was very harsh and ended up slapping a Grade 1 learner on the face... The matter was brought to my attention after the parents had opened the case with SAPS against the educator and subsequently reported the matter to the department.*

The above utterances suggest that parents had serious reservations about teachers who abused alcoholic beverages at the expense of their children's education, and that they were dissatisfied with the principal's lack of action in this regard. As a result, when the educator assaulted a Grade 1 learner, parents had lost faith in the principal's ability to handle such serious cases and felt that no actions would be taken by the school principal against the educator in question. Therefore, parents decided to bypass him and approach the education department directly. This is a clear indication that failure to account results in the loss of trust from stakeholders. On the flip side, Mrs Comet provided another perspective of failed accountability as exemplified by the Departmental Officials and teacher unions when they failed to act responsibly on the educator who had committed examination irregularities. Such behaviour resulted in her losing trust in these stakeholders as reflected below:

*The educator in question did not follow all the necessary processes of the examination. The educator in question recorded the assessment task without marking the task (project)... I then reported that case to the CM as well as Labour Sub Directorate and the case was opened against the educator. However, what did not sit well with me was that some members from Labour at District Office accused me of being too harsh on the educator and they felt that case was minor and should have been dealt with at school level... I was really disturbed by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and the teacher unions blaming me for being harsh and victimising the educator. I don't know whether they had forgotten that examination irregularity is a serious misconduct as ventilated in Section 17 of EEA.*

Drawing from these excerpts, it is evident that stakeholders lose trust should school principals fail to act accountably. These excerpts further emphasise the significance of both vertical and horizontal accountabilities. Quite tellingly, the findings from this section also suggest that even school principals lose trust in the services of District Officials, CMs and teachers unions in the event of their failure to act responsibly.

#### **iv. The dark side of ‘minor’ failed accountability**

The findings from the data suggest that even though the participants applied what I call a selective approach to accountability, as shown in Section 5.3.3 (i), they were conscious that a failed act of accountability (no matter how insignificant it might look at the time), has the potential of producing disproportionately negative consequences. Such evidence is notable from Mrs Sirius when she highlighted how she acted irresponsibly when she failed to audit the leave register; as such, she failed to detect a dismissible offence by the educator. This is what she said:

*My failure to audit the leave register has resulted in me missing such a dismissible offence (accumulated 52 days of absence) ... I have discovered only last week that the educator in question has been absent for 52 days! As a result, 36 days has been exceeded by 26 days...Just imagine, a minor thing (auditing leave register) has put my job as a principal on a dangerous position and might be charged by the HoD for misconduct.*

Drawing from the above excerpt, it is clear that auditing a leave register seems to be a minor and insignificant act. However, as trivial as it may look, it has proven to have the potential of making the school principal face disciplinary actions from the HoD and subsequently, to be dismissed. Similarly, Mr Galaxy shared his views about how not acting responsibly against the educator’s drinking habit (as earlier supplied in Section 5.3.1(iii)), subsequently resulted in the educator assaulting a Grade 1 learner; parents bypassing him and reporting the matter to the SAPS and the district office; and later turning the school into turmoil. This is how he explained the whole saga:

*... As a result, she was very harsh and ended up slapping a Grade 1 learner on the face. The matter was brought to my attention after the parents have open the case with SAPS against the educator and*



*subsequently, reported the matter to the department... The school was in a turmoil.*

It is clear that the school principal did not take the educator's drinking habit seriously upon receiving numerous complaints from parents. Unfortunately, his delayed accountability unfolded and had a domino effect, as numerous other and bigger problems emerged that could have been avoided had the matter be tackled head on earlier. Like the previous participant, his job was on the line as a result of his inability to act responsibly against an educator's drinking habits. Correspondingly, Mr Star narrated his ordeal about how his failure to report the learner that succumbed after being hit by a moving car on the last day of the term. According to him, he did not prioritise informing the CM because it was the last day of the term; it was on a public road and not within the vicinity of the school; lastly, the child was in the company of his uncle. Based on these reasons, he felt less pressurised to inform the CM. Also, he indicated that when he attended the funeral, everything was normal, and nobody accused the school of any wrongdoing. However, he indicated how things turned sour when the whole saga became a political campaign that was used by opposition parties for their 2021 Local Government Elections. This is how he presented the whole scenario:

*One opposition leader who was also employed by the local municipality, raised the issue in the municipal council meeting out of the blue. In his argument, he mentioned that the learner lost his life, and there was no support offered by the Ward Councillor, but only a sympathetic uncle carried the costs of the funeral. He further mentioned that they were hoping that the Ward Councillor would contribute as a representative of the local municipality... Unfortunately, my CM had to attend the same council meeting and met the story. He (CM) was hearing the story for the very first time after some months had passed since the incident happened. To make matters worse, he was hearing it from the municipal officials as I had not reported the matter to him. Unfortunately, when the CM was asked by the municipal officials about any knowledge about such case, he then responded by telling them that he had no knowledge of such case! He then phoned me enquiring about the case.... I told him that I took it for granted since everything happened after school, not in the school*

*premises, at the end of the term, and the school was not at fault... I had to write the incident report being ordered by the CM.*

No one could predict that an unfortunate event (like death of a learner that occurred in the manner like the one in the above excerpt) could ultimately become an electioneering ploy. To worsen the situation, the CM had no knowledge of such a misfortune, yet he had to account to the politicians. This is consistent with the two preceding excerpts proving that something perceived as an insignificant failed act of accountability, might ultimately yield greater and disproportionately negative results in the entire school environment. To this end, accountability by school principals can never be overemphasised.

#### **v. Dynamic leadership is at the heart of a complex school in ensuring accountability**

In pursuit of being ethical in their leadership and subsequently, meeting the demands posed by accountability pressures, the participants indicated that they were forced to be dynamic in their leadership and apply leadership that worked for them at a particular time. The findings from the semi-structured interviews further reveal that the participants were of the view that school principals will not succeed in their leadership if they depend on one single approach in their leadership. Such assertions were narrated by Mrs Reeva as shown below:

*At times you must change your leadership as a school principal... You cannot simply rely on one approach, but contexts determine the approach to use at that time... At times, you have to be confrontational (in a polite manner) ... Sometimes, I involve the SMT to deal with the issue at hand.*

Mr Star corroborated the views expressed in the above excerpt and indicated that he led his school, as influenced by the situation at hand. This is how he put it:

*My leadership changes from time to time. I am driven by the ideals of situational leadership in my practice as a school leader. For example, in as much as I am known as a caring principal, I can also be very rigid depending on the matter at hand. As a principal, you need to change colours, for example, in the eyes of the community and people, you must be something else which is different from what you really are behind closed doors.*

Within the same line of thinking Mr Sun, echoed these sentiments:

*In my leadership as a principal, I don't rely on one leadership approach. I strongly believe in using different leadership styles (e.g., democratic, and autocratic), depending on the situation at the time. In pursuit of ethical leadership, I believe in leadership that is flexible and adapt to the situation facing the school at that time.*

Similarly, Mrs Comet indicated how she had to change her leadership approach to tackle the issue of non-payment of school fees. This is how she explained herself:

*You need to change your leadership. For example, considering the challenges we faced with the parents regarding exemptions and non-payment of school fees, I have decided to organise the workshop on parenting and financial management for parents. Such workshops are organised by the school and professionals on those issues will be invited to capacitate parents... We recently had sleep overs where parents, educators, SGB, and learners spent the entire weekend at school.*

In the end, Mr Galaxy emphasised the importance of being ethical while applying different leadership approaches in the quest for meeting accountability pressures in his school. This is how he explained himself:

*In my leadership, I use different leadership approaches at different times. It depends on the context at that time. However, whatever approach that I adopt, I always ensure that I remain ethical in my leadership. I always infuse ethics in my approach because being ethical as a school principal enhances professionalism in schools. Also, it enhances accountability as educators are not followed to execute their responsibilities.*

Drawing from the excerpts presented above, it is clear that school principals leading schools in a complex school environment characterised by multiple stakeholder participation, need to be flexible in their leadership. Evidence suggests that being rigid and firmly rooted in one approach is a thing of the past, but in the main, a leadership approach appropriate at that time is contextual. To this end, evidence suggests that there is no blanket approach to educational leadership.

### **5.3.4 Stakeholder involvement in a complex school environment**

At the heart of this current study, is the interaction between school principals and other stakeholders in a complex school environment. Schools are said to be operating in a complex environment by virtue of having multiple stakeholders (like SGBs, parents, learners, educators, CMs, district officials etc.) interacting with each other in a non-linear and unpredictable manner with such interaction being the life and breath of the school (Johnson, 2009; Mbengue et al., 2018; Myende & Maifala, 2020; Oliver, 2010). Also, Fidan and Balci (2017) mention that such interconnectedness between these stakeholders cannot be comprehended in a linear fashion. As a result, data generated from participants reveal that school principals acknowledge the significance of various stakeholders in education notwithstanding the non-linearity effect it poses to schools. Participants further described their frustration in dealing with these multiple stakeholders as overwhelming despite further emphasising that the role of stakeholders in education is inevitable. To elaborate on the participants' narratives, a broad theme (stakeholder involvement in a complex school environment) was developed as indicated above. From this broad theme, two sub- themes (i) stakeholder involvement is central to ethical leadership in pursuit of accountability, as well as (ii) accounting to multiple stakeholders is overwhelming, were formulated. These sub-themes are presented with verbatim narratives from participants as shown in the ensuing sections.

#### **i. Stakeholder involvement is central to ethical leadership in pursuit of accountability**

All participants remarked on the importance of stakeholder involvement in their leadership of schools. Participants mentioned that despite accountability having its complexities, making it subsequently not easy to satisfy all stakeholders in education, they are of the view that stakeholder involvement is critical to educational leadership. Participants further mentioned that these stakeholders must be treated ethically in pursuit of accountability. Participants' views are indicated as shown in the ensuing sections with Mr Sun prioritising accounting to stakeholders as central to educational leadership:

*When you are a principal, you need to involve and inform other stakeholders about your decisions and actions. It doesn't matter how*

*small the decision you are taking. You just need to make it a norm to account to these stakeholders.*

In his response, Mr Sun further mentioned that in pursuit of being ethical, he even accounts to those stakeholders who might be deemed insignificant in educational leadership but have benefited the school. This is what he said:

*In this school, I engage with Taxi Drivers Associations that transport our learners to school... We are having a cordial relationship with them and now we don't have the problem of late coming, and the enrolment is picking up now... I involved Taxi Drivers to curb late coming. Often as principals, we don't communicate with Taxi Drivers, but believe you me, they play an important role in curbing late coming. As we speak, we don't have the problem of late coming.*

Evidence from Mr Sun further highlights how the importance of valuing Traditional Leaders and Politicians can benefit the school. In his presentation he mentioned not summoning these leaders to school but instead rather going to their respective places in case there was something worth discussing. This is what he alluded:

*I sacrifice my own leisure so that each individual stakeholder's needs are met. For example, if I have to meet with the Traditional Leaders and Politicians (Ward Councillors), I hardly invite them to school, but instead I am the one who would go to their place. Mind you, those people are very traditional and very sensitive to respect. If you summon them to school, they feel belittled ... Now inviting them to school might be interpreted as if I am superior to them. However, going to their places in turn cause them to understand that as a principal you recognise their leadership.*

The above verbatim quotations clearly suggest that no stakeholder in education should be viewed as less important than any other. These findings further emphasise that school principals being accountable to these stakeholders is central to educational leadership. In harmony with these assertions, Mr Galaxy mentioned that as an ethical leader, he does not look at the face of the individual stakeholder when he must account. This is what he narrated:

*I know that as principals we account to several stakeholders including interns and admin clerks (who occupies junior positions), however by virtue of being ethical in your leadership, you don't look at the 'face'*

*and position of the person you account to, you simply comply and follow the instructions.*

In agreement with the above, Mrs Comet mentioned having gone beyond the call of duty as an ethical school principal when she ended up organising a workshop in parenting for parents (parents as important stakeholders in education) to tackle the issue of exemptions and non-payment of school fees. This what she narrated:

*I have decided to organise the workshop on parenting and financial management for parents. Such workshops are organised by the school and professionals on those issues will be invited to capacitate parents. We recently had sleep overs where parents, educators, SGB, and learners spent the entire weekend at school. Such programmes are done with an intention of caring and satisfying the needs of different stakeholders in education.*

Findings from the data, as shown in the previous excerpts, clearly indicate that school principals are conscious on the significance of various stakeholders in education. In trying to account to these stakeholders, evidence further reveals that some school principals do more than is expected from them including organising parenting workshops and financial management workshops for parents.

## **ii. Accounting to multiple stakeholders is overwhelming**

The findings from the participating principals indicate that dealing with and accounting to multiple stakeholders in education and subsequently, meeting their needs is extremely difficult. In this regard, Mr Galaxy elaborated on the difficulties of accounting to too many stakeholders, and said:

*It is indeed overwhelming (meaning it is difficult to inform and account to all stakeholders in education, yet the policy dictates so). As school principals, we account to numerous stakeholders... All these stakeholders have a right to information on matters affecting the school. However, reporting to all stakeholders on matters affecting the school is not an easy exercise. Sometimes you miss informing some of the stakeholders.*

In the same vein, Mrs Reeva shared similar views and further emphasised the importance of sticking to her management plan in order to prioritise issues as indicated below:

*It is not easy to be accountable to all these stakeholders; however, I stick to the management plan and prioritise issues. Also, I involve my SMT to deal with issues and meet the needs of these stakeholders.*

Mrs Comet also aired the same views and further mentioned that these stakeholders have high expectations of school principals and they tend to forget that the principal is also human. Her views are indicated as shown below:

*It is overwhelming. To make things worse, all these stakeholders expect your cup as a school principal to be always full because they put you in an elevated position and view you as a superwoman. They don't realise that as a principal, you are also a human being. As a result, they don't realise at times, that I might be pouring from an empty cup [ meaning that as weak as you might be at that time, they expect you to be at your best].*

In a nutshell, the previous extracts from the interviews suggest that stakeholders expect school principals to be ethical in their leadership at all costs. Such expectation by these stakeholders puts further stress on school principals; hence, as human as they are, they in turn feel that accounting effectively to all stakeholders is not an easy exercise. In agreement with these narratives, Mrs Sirius expressed her views as shown below:

*It is extremely overwhelming because these stakeholders don't think that as school principals, we are also human. They believe we must always meet their demands. For instance, if a teacher can come and report that s/he will not be reporting for duty, s/he does not expect a no from you as a principal. Educators and other stakeholders always expect us as school principals to meet their demands.*

To paint a clearer picture of how being accountable to these stakeholders is overwhelming, Mr Star shared his beliefs and said:

*It is very hard to account to all these stakeholders... As a principal, you can't get it 100%. There is a lot of work that must be done by the principal daily. For example, if the school is underperforming, the principal must account to the CM and SGB; in case of burglary in the school, again principal has to account to the SGB, CM, parents,*

*Community Policing Forum (CPF), Ward Councillors; violence in school, principal has to account... I can give you a host of examples. Unfortunately, school principals do not get enough support from the CMs. Circuit Managers should be closer to schools so that principals do not feel overburdened... When will you get time to report to all these people? Surely, you'll end up missing some.*

This section provided a picture of how complex and overwhelming stakeholder involvement in education can be, given the pressure to account to all of these stakeholders. Participants in this study have explicitly expressed their frustrations at having to simultaneously account to the whole web of stakeholders.

## **5.4 Conclusion**

In this chapter, the findings that were developed from the analysis of qualitative data generated from six school principals were presented. In generating and presenting data in this present chapter, I was guided by the research questions, IP, the literature reviewed and the theoretical framework. The findings have painted a complex picture about ethical leadership. For instance, the chapter has shown how clearly the participating principals regard the concept of ethical leadership. However, the same principals have indicated that being an ethical leader is not an easy undertaking as there are complexities, dilemmas and contradicting demands involved. Nevertheless, the findings have made it clear that there is no substitute for ethical leadership practices in schools and communities and both schools and communities are affected by what happens in schools, especially what the school principals does in handling all the issues pertaining to the school. The next chapter presents a detailed discussion of the findings by drawing from current scholarship and the theories that were discussed in Chapter Two and Chapter Three, respectively.



## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS: MAPPING PATTERNS FROM THE DATA**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter constituted a descriptive analysis and presentation of findings from the participants. Furthermore, the reviewed documents in the preceding chapter were done in order to corroborate the findings. In the present chapter, the snippets from the descriptive analysis are viewed against the interpretive analysis as well as the theoretical analysis and the discussion of findings is done by providing an account of emerging themes from the participants and injecting literature that was reviewed and presented in Chapter Two. In this way, the discussion of findings is enhanced by linking each theme with existing scholarship around ethical leadership during times of accountability. Theories that were adopted as a framework for analysing ethical leadership practices of school principals are used to illuminate and enhance the discussion.

#### **6.2 Discussion of findings by mapping patterns from the data**

In this section, themes that emerged from the data are analysed in relation to the reviewed literature and the theoretical framework. Analysing data in this manner will assist in identifying similarities, as well as differences between the findings from the participants. Furthermore, ten themes emerged from the descriptive data generated from the participating principals. These ten themes are, (i) Leading schools in an acceptable manner as expected signifies ethical leadership; (ii) Leading through caring, justice and critique; (iii) Ethics and ethical leadership as acquired skills; (iv) Ethical leadership is beneficial and produces unpredicted gains; (v) The genesis of ethical turpitudes among school principals; (vi) School principals face ethical dilemmas; (vii) Accountability is the heartbeat of a complex school leadership in an environment with multiple stakeholders; (viii) School principals leading and accounting morally, contractually, and socially; (ix) Complexities and contradictions of accountability; (x) Fixed and rigid approaches to educational leadership are a thing of the past. These themes are discussed at length below:

### 6.2.1 Leading schools in an acceptable manner as expected signifies ethical leadership

Ethical leadership by school principals is believed to be the catalyst of educational leadership by several scholars including Indra and Kustati (2019) who emphasise its ability to influence school principals to realise the vision and mission of their schools. Also, the findings from data as presented in Section 5.3.1 (i) of Chapter Five indicated that school principals are of the view that ethical leadership is about doing things morally and in an acceptable manner as expected of them as school leaders. This was shared by Mrs Reeva when she indicated that: “*ethics are about doing what is expected from you as a school principal*”. Such postulations from school principals is consistent with the views of Ehrich et al. (2011) who describe the notion of being ethical as doing what you ought to do as a school leader. Analysing these narratives from the data, as well as literature, clearly suggest that ethical leadership should not be seen as some kind of a scary monster because it is about doing things (including leading schools) morally as expected. In essence, one can argue that ethical leadership is about doing things right and doing the right things.

Also, consistent with the findings as shown in the preceding paragraph, the participants in the present study mentioned being honest, having a big-heart, being caring, responsible, open-minded, policy-driven, punctual, compliant, strict, involved with stakeholders, transparent, kind, loving, accountable, parent-centred, fair, loving, showing integrity and truthfulness, as ethical leadership values that they infuse in their leadership as school principals. Most of these values were presented by Mr Star when he shared a document (Figure 1 of the current study). While some ethical leadership values seemed to be common to most participants, other values such as being policy-driven; compliant, strict, accountable, the involved with stakeholders, parent-centred and open-minded were least mentioned by the participants. What is evident with these least mentioned ethical values is that they were not mentioned by more than one participant, hence, they became uncommon, but are highly visible in the literature reviewed.

Consistent with the findings from the data as presented in the preceding paragraph, evidence from the literature suggests that being ethical as a school principal entails doing what you ought to do as a school leader (Ehrich et al., 2011). In harmony with this narrative, a study of Indonesian Islamic schools by Indra and Kustati (2019), viewed ethical leadership as a demonstration of respect for others, serving them, showing justice, displaying honesty, and

building community. Similarly, in the Iranian context, Esmaelzadeh et al. (2017) mention honesty, righteousness, justice, and trustworthiness as some of the elements of ethical leadership, while sincerity, reciprocity, democratic decision making, power sharing, respect, being sympathetic, gentleness and prudence, are mentioned in the Malaysian context as propounded by Vikaram et al. (2021). In Europe, (Greece, Great Britain, Germany, Italy, Spain and France), integrity, honesty, sincerity, altruism, ethical self-control and collaboration are also emphasised as ethical traits that are possessed by school principals in these countries (Papaloi et al., 2022). Also, Ghanem and Castelli (2019) identified accountability as another essential feature of ethical leadership that has to be practiced by school principals. A close comparison of the generated data and the literature from these countries, suggests that a similar understanding of ethical leadership exists despite the differences in the contexts.

Interestingly, evidence from the theories that constitute a theoretical framework also corroborates the findings about school principals' experiences of ethical leadership during times of accountability. For example, the lens of an ethic of care from the Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory states clearly that school principals who are inspired by this phenomenon put human relations first and embrace foregrounding values of love, respect, compassion, trust, loyalty, and sensitivity to all under their leadership (Gross & Shapiro, 2004; Ehrich et al., 2012). Furthermore, postulations by Myende et al. (2018) on Accountability Theory emphasise the need for school principals to be transparent (an ethical value) in their leadership as school leaders. This is because school principals are answerable to and have the responsibility of informing other stakeholders in education about matters affecting the school. Correspondingly, Freeman et al. (2010) argue that school principals have the responsibility of disseminating vital information to other stakeholders in education. In analysing the data, I have noted that school principals in the present study have shown a clear understanding of ethical leadership. However, evidence from the data suggests that some of the principals enacted unethical leadership in their leadership practices. Most of the participants mentioned disregarding the policy, and thus, sympathise with the educators who might be facing disciplinary actions, including dismissal. This can be seen from the utterances by Mrs Comet who stated, *"I don't apply the policy if it will destroy a person. If I see that the educator has committed an offence which warrants him/ her to be dismissed, if possible, I do my level best to not report that case and use my own discretion on how I can protect that educator... At times you need to disregard the policy"*. Such utterances conflict with the directives of the PAM Document as per the

Department of Basic Education (2022) which emphasises the mandate of the school principals in managing and leading schools in compliance with the applicable legislation, policies and regulations.

The views expressed in the paragraph above are also supported by Karen and Udemeh (2021) who accentuate the notion of ethical school principals being compliant and not disregarding policies in their leadership practices. However, school principals' tendencies to disregard policy provisions was noted from most participants' presentations despite them having shown a clear understanding of ethics. Therefore, the findings suggest that some participants consciously and improperly enacted leadership practices that were inconsistent with ethical leadership. Interestingly, their leadership behaviours were couched in an ethical leadership language of 'caring', and thus shielded those educators who might be facing disciplinary actions. Ironically, the participants mentioned sacrificing and divorcing their ethical obligations (being policy driven and compliance) in pursuit for another ethical behaviour (caring and sympathising for the educator). Disregarding and sacrificing their ethical responsibility as school leaders clearly constitutes unethical leadership and is a direct contravention of the PAM Document (Department of Basic Education, 2022) and other legislation governing the teaching profession and their responsibilities as school leaders.

Interestingly, similar findings were made in a multiple case study conducted by Dladla (2020) among six school principals and twelve PL1 educators in the Pinetown District, in KwaZulu-Natal Province, South Africa. The study found that school principals in that study had a clear understanding of ethics but improperly enacted ethical leadership as school leaders. Correspondingly, in the Eastern Cape, South Africa, a study that adopted both qualitative and quantitative designs was conducted by Ndlovu et al. (2020) using Chief Education Specialists (CESs), Deputy Chief Education Specialists (DCEs), Chief Directors, and District Directors as participants. The study found that ethical turpitude is entrenched within the entire provincial department of education. The study further indicated that there was deliberate disregard of the policies, rules, and regulations by the departmental officials. To this end, the study highlights an acute lack of ethical leadership to steer the department in the required direction and improve accountability within the department (Ndlovu et al., 2020). Drawing from these negative remarks, one can conclude that ethical lapses in some sectors of the South African education system is not only experienced by principals at school level but is also noted at district offices.

Furthermore, the findings of the current study are consistent with a number of studies that were conducted in Africa and highlight the prevalence of ethical lapses in schools in some African countries. For example, empirical evidence presented by Pansiri et al. (2021) indicates that ethical leadership is a major concern in African schools. Further, the article suggests that in media circles in Botswana, there are many stories of moral decay and the erosion of ethical leadership practices by school principals. Such damning evidence is also supported by the findings from Kenyan secondary schools which reveal that ethical malpractices were common among school leaders (Oduol, 2021). Also, correlational research conducted from a sample of 120 school principals drawn from a population of 275 by Karen and Udemeh (2021) in Rivers State in Nigeria, revealed that school principals lacked integrity and encouraged examination irregularities. The study further mentioned that school principals' behaviours in Nigeria did not reflect school values; neither were their decisions based on a statutory and legal framework. In the Kingdom of Eswatini, Myende et al. (2020) comments that at least five school principals were dismissed annually for charges against them due to misappropriation of school funds. Likewise, Mwela and Mulenga-Hagane (2020) remark on several reported cases of unprofessional conduct against Zambian educators, including school principals on the basis of their ethical malpractices. The findings from the current study, conducted in South Africa, as well as others depicted in the African literature, clearly shows that ethical leadership is a big challenge among African school principals.

Contrary to the findings from data generated from participants, local and African literature, evidence from international studies reveals that school principals in some countries do not only theorise ethical leadership but put it into practice in their leadership at schools. Putting theory into practice on ethical leadership by some school principal in Jordan, Malaysia, and certain European countries was discussed in Section 2.2 of Section Two of this study (Aljbour, 2020; Papaloi et al., 2022; Vikaram et al., 2020). The reviewed literature highlighted the practice of ethical leadership by school principals in those countries as very high. Consistent with the Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory (ethic of justice to be precise) and the Stakeholder Theory, disregarding the policy (as indicated by some school principals in the current study) is unethical. In a complex school environment characterised by multiple stakeholders interacting with each other, school principals have a moral, contractual, and professional accountability to meet the needs and interests of these stakeholders by exercising a great deal of fairness,

compliance, professionalism, transparency, honesty and trustworthiness (Asiyai, 2015; Dwangu & Mahlangu, 2021; Eriksen, 2021; Harrison et al., 2015). Also, as warned by several protagonists of Chaos Theory including Akmansoy (2014); Fahim and Talabari (2014); and Lorenz (1993), disregarding the policy by a school principal may one day backfire and ultimately produce an unpredicted negative outcome disproportionate to its input, in the entire school environment.

### **6.2.2 Leading through caring, justice and critique**

One of the tenets of ethical leadership is leadership that is underpinned by dimensions of care, justice and critique. The findings of this study suggest that the participants considered these dimensions of ethical leadership as the cornerstone of their leadership. Interestingly, these three tenets dominated Section 3.2.1 of Chapter Three in the current study. Evidence from the participants in this study suggests that all the participating principals demonstrated a caring attitude for their teaching staff as part of their leadership. Amongst the participants that foregrounded this dimension, two were female and one was a male. In their presentations, these participants highlighted putting themselves in the shoes of an educator who was accused of misconduct should s/he be found guilty and subsequently, dismissed. These three participants unequivocally stated that they are very caring in their leadership as can be seen from Mr Star who is quoted saying: *“I am too caring towards my educators, and I don’t want to see any of them suffering”*. During the process of data generation, these three participants emphasised that their leadership was mainly dominated by caring for the educators they lead. Such school principals were earlier mentioned in Section 3.2.1 of Chapter Three, and regarded as teleologist because in their leadership, they are strongly driven by caring for those under their leadership, and they carefully consider the consequences of their action before taking a decision (Hunt & Vitell, 2006; Tyler, 2014).

With the remaining three participants, a caring character was deduced through intense analysis of their transcriptions even though they did not utter a word of being caring in their leadership. For example, Mrs Comet indicated that: *“Inasmuch we had differences, but I would visit him while he was hospitalised even though none of my educators bothered themselves to pay him a visit”*. Paying a visit to the hospital to visit a male educator who was very toxic and who undermined the participant’s authority as a female principal, clearly suggests that this principal

is driven by the ethic of care in her leadership as a school principal. The participant narrated at length how she was undermined by this male educator who literally mentioned that he does not take orders from a woman and was very toxic in the process. However, being driven by the ideals of caring leadership, she ensured that the necessary support was offered to the same educator when he was hospitalised.

In line with the narratives submitted in the preceding paragraphs on care, Berges- Puyo (2022) mentions that school principals must lead and value those under their leadership and other stakeholders in education with care, dignity, respect, as well as by putting their interest first. Similarly, Ehrich et al. (2015) emphasise that caring is the most important element in school with the school principal being compassionate and empathic to those under his/her leadership. Similarly, care was elaborated in detail in Section 3.2.1 of Chapter Three as another lens of the Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory. The ethic of care as the lens that was used in the Theoretical Framework indicated that school principals who embrace this idea champion dignity and the worth of those under their leadership (Ehrich et al., 2015). Other aspects of the ethic of care that relate to this section were discussed on the fourth paragraph of the preceding theme.

Furthermore, the findings of this study indicated that the participating school principals were conscious of their obligation to protect human rights for those under their leadership. The current study has also discovered that school principals sometimes put their bodies on the line in pursuit of protecting the human rights of learners and educators under their leadership. Such evidence was witnessed with Mr Sun, who is quoted as saying: *“Despite the threats, I reported the matter to the CM. Furthermore, criminal charges were laid against the Safety Officer by SAPS”*. The school principal elaborated on how he fought to protect against human rights violations and restoring dignity of one of his students after she was allegedly raped by the School’s Safety Officer inside the school premises. Such a presentation is not an isolated incident as Mrs Reeva further explained how she dealt with one of her educators who was defrauding parents by issuing fraudulent letters requesting payment of school fees. This is how Mrs Reeva explained her case: *“I collected all the evidence, followed all due processes including telling her about her rights and representation and reported the matter to the CM”*. These excerpts provide strong evidence that school principals sometimes exposed themselves to danger and risked their own lives in pursuit of protecting the human rights of the most vulnerable and those under their care. Quite tellingly, such responsibility by school principals

to protect against human rights violation is what was earlier discussed in Section 3.2.1 of Chapter Three as an ethic of justice (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016).

Evidence from participants presented in the preceding paragraph are in alignment with findings from the literature and Theoretical Framework. For example, Berges- Puyo (2022) and Ehrich et al. (2015), suggest that in schools where care is at the heart of school leadership, due processes of high standards are maintained, with school principals striving to protect the human rights of those under their leadership and other stakeholders in education. Protecting the human rights of other stakeholders in education including learners, educators and parents by the school principal entails the ethic of justice (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016). In pursuit of an ethic of justice, such school principals ensure that decision making is shared and is democratic, and the overall culture of collaboration among all stakeholders is evident (Klenowski & Ehrich, 2016). Consistent with the ethic of justice as propounded in the Theoretical Framework (Section 3.2.1 of Chapter Three), ethical school principals ensure that standard, due process is maintained with the principal striving to protect the human rights of those under his/ her leadership and equal treatment for them is pursued (Klenowski & Ehrich, 2016; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016).

Additionally, the practice of ethical leadership through the ethic of critique existed. The findings reveal that some school principals did not shy away from challenging and critiquing the *status quo*, the policies, actions, and the practices of the Department that they felt were tantamount to abuse, violation of human rights, unjust, and exploitative. From the sample of six participants, three (two females and one male) proved to be vocal and critical of Departmental malpractices. From these participants, one was a male principal of a school located in a township while the remaining two were female principals of schools, one located in an urban area (Former Model C) and the other one in a semi-urban area. Their perceptions are presented in the ensuing paragraphs.

Mrs Reeva, the female principal of a school in a semi- urban area elaborated on how she questioned and challenged the CM after school principals were directed to fill the Paymaster forms despite the fact that educators were then receiving their salary advice through their respective e-mails. This is how she explained herself: “... *I subsequently WhatsApp my CM questioning about the logic behind us as school principals signing the paymaster form... Guess what, she did not answer!*”. Similarly, Mrs Comet, the female principal of a Former Model C



school in an urban area questioned the attitude of the departmental officials, as well as teacher union officials after she was accused of being too harsh after she had instituted tough disciplinary actions against an educator who had committed examination irregularities. The participant mentioned that she was blamed by the departmental officials after she had referred the matter to them as mandated by law (Department of Basic Education, 2015, 2022; Department of Education, 1998; Republic of South Africa, 1996b). This is how Mrs Comet stated her dissatisfaction: *“I was really disturbed by the department and the teacher unions blaming me for being harsh and victimising the educator. I don’t know whether they had forgotten that examination irregularity is a serious misconduct in terms of Section 17 of Employment of Educators Act”*. This extract from the interviews is important, and thus, should not be taken for granted as one may argue that somehow it raises a curtain for someone who is unaware of how educators’ cases of misconduct are dealt with at some district offices. In this extract, the principal is very critical of the way these officials handled the case. In her own words, she felt that their approach was not in the interests of justice and would in turn, perpetuate educator misconduct and school principals would be discouraged from acting against educators’ misconduct.

Experiences expressed by the participants in the paragraph above were also shared by Mr Galaxy, who questioned the processes and the time frames for procuring LTSM as directed by the Department. This participant believed that it forced school principals to abandon their ethical leadership and adopt unethical tendencies as they were forced by circumstances to cut corners in the procurement processes. This is how Mr Galaxy expressed his thoughts: *“During procurement of textbooks and stationery, school principals have to conclude the process which ideally must be done within two months, but are directed to do that in one week... In short, the department has to be blamed with regards to procurement”*. The extracts from the interviews clearly portray a vivid picture that school principals infused care and justice into their leadership practices, congruent with the ethics of care and justice as expressed in the literature and Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory.

Consistent with the findings from data generated from participants, the reviewed literature indicates that school principals are also critical in their leadership of schools which aligns with the ethic of critique (Klenowski & Ehrich, 2016; Mathur & Corley, 2014). Furthermore, in pursuit of justice in their schools, such school principals challenge the *status quo* by asking

why things are the way they are (Berges- Puyo, 2022). Such behaviour is regarded by several scholars including Berges- Puyo (2022) and Perry (2018) as exemplifying an ethic of critique. The ethic of critique allows school principals to reflect on current policies and departmental practices to uncover injustices and exploitation that is embedded in social structure (Berges- Puyo, 2022; Mathur & Corley, 2014). It further allows school principals to challenge the departmental policies, practices, and actions to create a caring, just and a fairer educational environment (Berges- Puyo, 2022; Klenowski & Ehrich, 2016; Mathur & Corley, 2014; Perry, 2018).

In line with the ethic of critique (another wing of the Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory), school principals reflect on the departmental policies, circulars, practices, and actions in order to uncover the injustices and exploitation embedded in the social structure (Berges- Puyo, 2022; Ehrich et al, 2015). Challenging the status quo is a dominant feature of the ethic of critique (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016). Also, consistent with Accountability Theory, education is perceived as a human rights issue as enshrined in the South African constitution, and as such, school principals have a constitutional responsibility to ensure that schools are functional and are led ethically (Department of Education, 2001; Republic of South Africa, 1996a). As earlier submitted, being ethical in your leadership also entails the ethics of care, justice, and critique (Berges- Puyo, 2022; Berkovich & Eyal, 2020; Klenowski & Ehrich, 2016; Mathur & Corley, 2014; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016). By and large, for school principals to be caring, just and critical of the policies, actions, decisions, and practices of the Department to identify abuse, violation of human right and exploitation, as hidden within the hierarchy, is central to the Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory and the Accountability Theory (Department of Education, 2001; Gross & Shapiro, 2004; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016). Both theories further emphasise that school principals in their leadership as school leaders have the responsibility of advancing the nation by ensuring a fair and a just school environment (Department of Education, 2001). Further, the findings are consistent with some elements of Stakeholder Theory, when challenging the *status quo* and critiquing departmental policies, circulars, actions, processes, and decisions, school principals must do so professionally, justly, and with fairness (Harrison et al., 2015). By school principals displaying such behaviours, despite the complaints they might have as imposed by the department's policies and processes, they can produce a significant outcome in the department's processes as postulated in the Chaos Theory. This belief is supported by Ahmed (2014) and Akmansoy and Kartal (2014) who caution us against

a simple enactment of ethical values (which can be easily overlooked) and argue that it is also about having the ability to bring the required change in an unpredictable manner. To this end, school principals' caring, justness, and critique can in turn result in required changes in the entire school environment.

### **6.2.3 Ethics and ethical leadership as acquired skills**

This study found that school principals were either minimally exposed or not trained at all in ethics except for one participant who remarked that he received extensive education with regards to ethics while he was still a university student. From the sampled participants, three school principals indicated that ethics were not part of their training during their time at universities. Their views can be seen in the snippet from Mrs Comet as reflected: *"No, ethics were not covered as part of the curriculum"*. On the other hand, two school principals indicated that they were exposed to ethics, as stated by Mr Sun as follows: *"The scope on ethics was covered in the B.Ed. curriculum (principal as a manager)"*. Lastly, Mr Galaxy indicated he had received intense education on ethics while he was still a university student. What makes this participant provide a unique justification is that during his initial training at the university, he did a B Com with HR and Supply Chain as his majors. In presenting his remarks, this is what he said: *"At university I did HR as earlier indicated. HR taught me about ethics and all the labour laws"*. By and large, evidence from participants provided an indication that participants are not properly trained on ethics and ethical leadership.

The evidence provided above is supported by Bowen et al. (2006) and Louw (2015) who assert that there is limited coverage of ethics in university training coursework especially in educational leadership. These scholars reveal that in other fields (business, medicine, and human services) students are exposed to ethics even though the scope is about two to three percent of the entire qualification. By and large, such narratives from the data are consistent with what Berkovich and Eyal (2020) suggest about a lack of ethics in education being common to many school principals. Evidence from the literature also remarks on the minimal coverage of ethical issues at the universities. Such a revelation was noted by Bowen et al. (2006) who mentioned that students preparing to enter business, medical, and human services are exposed to ethics in their university coursework. Further, these scholars mention that educational leadership is lagging behind with regards to infusing ethics into institutions of higher learning

training programmes, relative to other fields. These remarks were further supported by Louw (2015) who mentioned that ethics courses are generally one semester long and counted between two and three percent of the entire qualification in South African business schools. Furthermore, despite minimal training on ethics and ethical leadership in universities, a huge gap exists in the recorded literature with regards to ethical leadership in schools during times of accountability. This is according to Cheteni and Shindika (2017) who remark that most studies conducted in the USA and in Africa on ethical leadership focus on the private sector and neglect the public sector (including schools) despite the prevalence of ethical lapses in public institutions. The shortage of empirical research on ethical leadership in schools suggest that a lot still needs to be done in this regard.

Findings from data generated from participants further indicate that school principals are conscious of and unanimous about ethical leadership being enhanced through interaction. From the sample of six participants, three participants indicated they rely on their personality and have since taken it upon themselves to enhance their ethical conduct in their schools. With regards to the other three, they indicated they rely on the department and the unions to achieve this task. Interestingly enough, schools from the same context seem to have adopted the same approach in enhancing ethical leadership among educators. For example, two school principals from semi-urban areas and one from a Former Model C school which is located in an urban area mentioned being exemplary and infusing ethics into their briefings as a catalyst for enhancing ethical values among their educators. This can be seen as remarked by Mrs Comet (a principal of a Former Model C school in an urban area) as indicated: *“Educators see on how I conduct myself as principal, and the respect I give them. I also listen to them and in turn they listen to me”*. Following the same line of thinking, Mr Sun (a male principal of a school in a semi-urban area) alluded to: *“Each time during staff meetings especially on your remarks, you must take at least 10 to 15 minutes infusing ethics and human rights values as enshrined in the Bill of Rights”*. These two snippets are obtained from schools in an urban area and a semi-urban area. It took me by surprise that schools within the same context or similar contexts applied similar approaches in enhancing ethical leadership. The participants’ approach in semi-urban and an urban contexts perfectly corroborates the literature, especially Brown and Trevino (2006) and Ogunfowora (2014) who postulate that ethical school principals conduct themselves morally while actively communicating ethical standards as expected from those under their leadership.

Contrary to the findings from urban and semi-urban contexts, school principals in township and rural schools seem to rely on teacher unions and the Department to infuse an ethical culture among educators. Such remarks are mentioned by Mr Star who stated as follows: *“I involve the unions to capacitate their members on codes of professional ethics”*. Similarly, Mrs Sirius noted: *“With the assistance of Teacher Development, I have designed the codes of professional ethics for educators in the school”*. While relying on teacher unions, Mr Galaxy, from a township school strongly believe in capacitating the unions (Site Stewards) so that they in turn can develop their members about ethical conduct. Inasmuch as the participant believes in involving the unions, however capacitating them was only peculiar to his case. This is how he explained himself: *“I capacitate the teacher unions. I capacitate my site stewards (both SADTU and NATU) and in turn share my knowledge with educators and other teacher union members at branch level”*. Again, I was taken aback to discover the contextual impact in how school principals enhance ethical leadership in their schools. Involving other stakeholders in enhancing ethical leadership by school principals is in alignment with the reviewed literature in particular Khoza (2011) who remarks that it is yielding organisational success, while Mangena (2012) views justice residing within the community.

In alignment with the data, researchers including Berkovich and Eyal (2020); Brown and Trevino (2006); Den Hartog (2015); Guo et al. (2023); Mayer et al. (2013) and Ogunfowora (2014) agree on ethics and ethical leadership being learnt by people socially interacting with each other. Consistent with these narratives, Ndlovu et al. (2020) emphasise that training on ethics is essential in ensuring that officials (including school principals) act ethically and accountably as educational leaders. Learning acquired through people socially interacting with each other is rooted in Social Learning Theory as developed by Bandura (1977), *see*, (Brown & Trevino, 2006; Den Hartog, 2015; Den Hartog & Belschak, 2012). As elaborated by Den Hartog (2015) and Mayer et al. (2013) in relation to the current study, school principals as ethical leaders are perceived to have a strong influence on ethical standards and as a result, educators, learners, SGB, parents, and other stakeholders see them as role models of the right ethical behaviour. Subsequently, those under the leadership of such school principals exemplify ethics through imitation (Mayer et al., 2013). This thinking clearly suggests that school principals as leaders are not only expected to excel in executing their duties as prescribed by PAM in Department of Basic Education (2022), but should also be conscious that their conduct

must be beyond reproach. To this end, school principals are bound to be ethical in their leadership. This then suggests that school principals who are ethical in their leadership in turn bring about desired changes in the entire school environment by virtue of their ethical conduct being imitated by those under their leadership.

Consistent with the data, evidence from literature declares that ethical school principals conduct themselves morally while actively communicating ethical standards, ethics, and values as expected from those under their leadership (Brown & Trevino, 2006; Ndlovu et al., 2020; Ogunfowora, 2014). For example, evidence from Chinese schools as studied by Guo et al. (2023) emphasise that ethical school principals provide training programmes in the form of seminars and workshops to enhance ethical work behaviour among their educators. In addition, Ogunfowora (2014) emphasises that such school principals also establish systems of reinforcement to uphold these ethical standards, using rewards and punishment. Subsequently, through their actions and non-compromising attitude towards ethical compliance, educators end up perceiving such school principals as credible sources of ethical behaviour that are worthy of emulation. Drawing from these arguments, it is evident that being ethical, surpasses lip service. It thus requires school principals to be conscious that indeed ‘people are watching more than listening’. To this end, ethical school principals ‘walk the talk’ because they are embedded with ethical values like integrity, honesty, benevolence, compassion, fairness, and professionalism (Ogunfowora, 2014).

In line with the ethic of profession as found under Section 3.2.1 (Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory) and the Chaos Theory presented in Section 3.2.2, data and literature suggest that school principals are conscious of and strive to enhance ethical leadership in their leadership of schools (Barker, 1995; Shapiro & Hassinger, 2007; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001). This is evident as school principals ensure ethical awareness to those under their leadership either by being exemplary, exemplifying ethics, and involving unions as well as departmental officials through training (Guo et al., 2023; Ndlovu et al., 2020). According to Shapiro and Gross (2016), in the ethic of profession, school principals organise themselves and formulate their own professional and personal codes of ethics. To achieve this endeavour, school principals are conscious that a simple ethical awareness and training on educators can have a far-reaching impact, disproportionate to the input in the entire school environment (Daljit, 2009; Mehta, 2019; Trivedi, 2021). Chaos Theory also postulates that in a complex school environment,

school principals make sense of patterns of behaviour (for example, unethical conduct by educators) and bring order (by being exemplary, articulating ethical values, and involving other stakeholders through trainings) to direct change and achieve desired ethical behaviour (Van Zyl et al., 2020). As propounded by Mbengue et al. (2018) and Rickles et al. (2007), school principals' reliance on departmental officials and teacher unions signifies complexity where interaction between various stakeholders is evident in a school environment with these stakeholders working together to enhance ethical leadership and bringing ethical awareness to educators. Interactions between various stakeholders in education to bring positive change (enhance ethical leadership in relation to the present study) in a school environment is what was earlier mentioned by Ahmed (2014) as *strange attractor* (another feature of Chaos Theory). To this effect, I encourage school principals not to take their interventions to enhance ethical leadership (exemplary, articulating ethical values, and involving other stakeholders) lightly as each approach is well capable of producing greater results in the long run by virtue of being sensitive to initial conditions or due to the Butterfly Effect (Fahim & Talabari, 2014). This is against a backdrop that Chaos Theory nullifies the drop in the ocean narrative.

#### **6.2.4 Ethical leadership is beneficial and produces unpredictable gains**

The findings from the participating school principals suggest that they regarded ethical leadership as beneficial if schools are to be successful. The participants were unanimous in their position that school principals' enactment of ethical leadership practices has the potential to produce unpredictable outcomes. In their submissions, it was evident that some benefits were common amongst them all, while others were peculiar to the contexts within which their respective schools operated. What the findings have shown is that school principals in the study held high regard for ethical leadership behaviours and they expressed a strong belief that it is a cornerstone of educational leadership as it enhances professionalism and accountability. These narratives were witnessed in Mr Galaxy's conversation when he stated: "*Ethical leadership enhances professionalism in schools. Also, it enhances accountability as educators are not followed to execute their duties*".

Highlighting ethical leadership *vis-à-vis* professionalism and accountability was elaborated by only one male participant who led a township school. While the notion of professionalism and accountability was mentioned by just one participant, there is another benefit of ethical

leadership which was peculiar to Mrs Comet. This point did not arise either in the literature that was reviewed or from other participants. In her interview, Mrs Comet indicated that ethical leadership had become a catalyst for social cohesion and had brought about tolerance between parents, SGBs, community members, and educators from different political background and races. Such evidence can be seen when she stated: *“Being ethical in this school has created a harmonious environment between Black SGB members, parents, SMT (White), and educators (majority White)”*. This position was unique to Mrs Comet who led a Former Model C school in an urban area. I must emphasise that the area where the school is located was in the past (before South Africa obtained its democracy in 1994), strictly reserved for Afrikaans speaking Whites. Similarly, Mrs Reeva who was leading a school in a semi-urban area, voiced another unique benefit of ethical leadership. In justifying her argument, she described ethical leadership as being good for her health; she stated, *“Being ethical makes you to be at peace with yourself and reduces stress level”*. Besides ethical leadership contributing to better health, this type of leadership is believed to contribute to poverty alleviation. For instance, Mrs Sirius, another female principal explained how ethical leadership contributed to poverty alleviation and stated: *“Being ethical has allowed school to collaborate with private businesses who supplied food parcels in ensuring food security to destitute community members”*. These stories are serendipitous benefits of ethical leadership that this study discovered. However, the other benefits that cut across the cases were also mentioned are indicated in the ensuing paragraph.

My conversations with the participants taught me that ethical leadership should not be taken lightly as all the participants expressed strong views about the phenomenon, particularly, due to its numerous benefits. During data analysis, I was surprised about the way their shared stories seemed like rehearsed after a brainstorming exercise. I knew that there was no way that these participants could have colluded in articulating their stories. Nevertheless, their articulation was extraordinarily similar. For example, participants mentioned issues like learner enrolment, academic achievement, parental involvement, as well as others, as benefits of ethical leadership. For instance, Mrs Sirius stated that *“The school has experienced numerous benefits from increased in learner enrolment, parental involvement, improved school infrastructure, improved learner performance and improved stakeholder involvement in our school”*. Similarly, Mr Sun added trust as another benefit of being ethical as a school principal. This is how he explained this issue, *“Ethical leadership develops trust from parents and other stakeholders; reduces late coming; and results in school grading (next year this school will be*



*upgraded from P3 to P4*). Drawing from these excerpts, it has become evident that enactment of ethical leadership by school principals yields numerous benefits irrespective of the context and some of these benefits are corroborated by the literature.

Various scholars share similar views to those of the participants in this study when describing multiple benefits of ethical leadership for the school environment. Many scholars are consistent in expressing positive contribution of ethical leadership in the schools, businesses, and other organisations (Ahmad et al., 2017; Al- Omari & Algaseem, 2020; Aljbour, 2020; Cheteni & Shindika, 2017; Den Hartog, 2015; Wang et al., 2021). Drawing from empirical evidence and literature, one can conclude that ethical leadership can be a panacea for dealing with chronic school dysfunctionality and immorality. This is against the backdrop of the excerpt depicted in the introduction in Section 1.1 where Mohale (2018) cautions us that the absence of ethical leadership has resulted in the collapse of large businesses, Schools of Education, and public institutions both locally and globally.

The study's findings further indicate that ethical leadership encourages moral behaviour among educators, reduces work deviance and counterproductive behaviour. These findings are in harmony with the findings from some schools in the USA where better employee performance, positive organisational citizenship behaviours, increased employee commitment and job satisfaction, as well as positive outcomes within the school were listed as some of the benefits of ethical leadership (Sam, 2020). Also, other benefits of ethical leadership that are recorded in the literature include its being viewed as an important pillar for successful organisational operations, particularly in countries where relatively higher cases of corruption are recorded (Conrad, 2013). It resulted in: the reduction in employee absenteeism and misconduct (Cheteni & Shindika, 2017); improving ethical decision making, and building trust in a leader (Vikaram et al., 2020; Vikaram et al., 2021); allowing school principals to balance their management responsibilities with their leadership (Vikaram et al., 2020); helping to build and strengthen the school. Therefore, ethical leadership is an important factor in school principals' realising the vision and mission of the school (Indra & Kustati, 2019; Mthiyane & Mudadigwa, 2021), and improvement in educators' ethical work behaviour (Guo et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2021). These narratives show that schools that are led by principals who are inspired by ethical leadership have much to gain and least to lose.

The findings of the study have revealed that a simple enactment of ethical leadership by school principals (often overlooked by others) can yield greater benefits, which can be disproportionate to the inputs in the entire school environment (Akmansoy & Kartal, 2014). Such a finding is consistent with the key tenets of Chaos Theory that were discussed in Chapter Three. The metaphor of greater benefits that include serendipity epitomises the notion of the Butterfly Effects as explained by numerous scholars (Fahim & Talabari, 2014; Lorenz, 1993; Trivedi, 2021). The findings of this study also indicated that the participants had infused ethical leadership values (for example, care, transparency, parent-centred, honesty and so forth) into their leadership. As indicated in the previous paragraphs, when the participants infused ethical leadership principles into their practices, they did not necessarily predict or anticipate that their actions might have greater benefits in future. The participants mentioned that, at the time when they stood by their beliefs on these ethical values, they did not envisage that it could ultimately yield so many benefits in the entire school environment. In a nutshell, I would say that the participants did not envisage that the harvest would be way greater than the seed planted. In their leadership, the participants had planted the seed of transparency, but subsequently, they reaped various harvests in the form of funding and trust from stakeholders; they had planted the seed of parent-centredness, they in turn, harvested increased learner enrolment and school grading; they had planted the seed of honesty, but ended up harvesting trust of the district officials to solve disputes and other HR related issues during the appointment of school principals in the district. Lastly, the participants had planted the seed of integrity, but ended up reaping social cohesion and the spirit of tolerance between Blacks and Whites, including political parties with diverse ideologies. These narratives clearly show that ethical leadership is beneficial and produces unimaginable gains in the entire school environment.

#### **6.2.5 The genesis of ethical turpitudes among school principals**

The findings have shown somewhat contradicting narratives around issues of ethics and ethical leadership. For instance, on one hand, they demonstrated a clear understanding of what ethical leadership is about and what its benefits are. However, on the other, they persisted with leadership practices that are incongruent with ethical leadership. The participants in this study provided various reasons for what they believed are the root causes of ethical lacuna among school principals. From their verbal presentations, it became evident that in the main, some blamed the Department of Education for having contributed to the school principals' ethical

turpitudes while others blamed school principals' personalities. The role of the Department of Education in fostering unethical behaviours was noted in my conversations with three participants who highlighted insufficient allocations, the lack of capacity, poor budgeting, unreasonable time frames set by the Department for the procurement forms submissions, and the view that school principals were improperly remunerated as being the main causes of ethical lapses. Such narratives can be seen in Mr Galaxy's words *"It is because of insufficient allocations by the Department and poor budgeting by schools that cause principals to conduct themselves unethically... I would say also lack of capacity on financial management by principals... Also, unreasonable time frames by the Department on procurement of LTSM"*. Analysing this excerpt, one can easily conclude that the Education Department, to some extent, has created conditions that contribute to ethical challenges as experienced by school principals. These findings are in alignment with Ndlovu et al. (2020) who discovered that ethical lapses are entrenched in the Eastern Cape Department of Education.

In contrast to the revelations presented in the previous paragraph, some participants looked inwards, and argued that ones' personal character can be viewed as the genesis of unethical leadership by school principals. In essence, these participating school principals blamed themselves as personally liable for their own unethical conduct. Such evidence was noted from Mrs Comet, who even blamed ungodliness and a person's personality as the cause of ethical turpitudes, and stated, *"... if you lack self-respect, it is very easy to conduct yourself unethically. Also, being self-centred contributes to that. Most importantly, I think they don't fear God"*. In the same vein, Mrs Sirius, concurred with the above-mentioned narrative, saying, *"I think its lack of self-control and lack of discipline from principals"*. Mrs Reeva highlighted deceitful and other personalities issues as causes, saying, *"...maybe its deceitful... I also think greed (because even those from well off schools with lucrative budgets and exorbitant school fees does it... Also, temptations (thinking that no one is watching you) and entitlement"*. To sum up this argument, I also draw from another participant, Mrs Sirius who remarked on unprofessional conduct by some school principals who even undermined other stakeholders (SGBs in particular) as yet another cause of ethical lapses. This is what Mrs Sirius said: *"... it's because principals tend to undermine other stake holders in education (especially SGB and parents) and develop an ego of knowing more than the former... Other school principals have unhealthy and unprofessional friendship with certain members of the SGB"*. The above excerpts suggest that school principals should strive to demonstrate professional behaviour

towards other stakeholders. The challenges identified by these participants are consistent with current scholarship on this topic (Wango & Gatere, 2016).

It is evident that the causes of ethical turpitudes among school principals can be divided into two categories. The first cause emanates from external pressures, (provincial Education Department), while the other causes emanate from internal, personal peculiarities of the school principals. In other words, one finger points towards the Department as the culprit as it promotes unethical practices by creating conditions that are amenable to unscrupulous conducts. The other fingers point towards school principals' personalities to be blamed for such failure. Remarkably, these findings from the data are also noted in the international and national literature. For, example, in Section 2.3 of the literature review chapter, it was mentioned that ethical lapses are notable among school principals in the USA, the UK, Türkiye, Ireland, China, Malaysia, Jordan, Iran, Chile, Kenya, Zambia, Uganda, Botswana, Kingdom of Eswatini, as well as South Africa (Al- Omari & Algaseem, 2020; Alishahi et al., 2021; Cuellar & Giles, 2011; DeMatthews & Serafini, 2021; Katranci et al., 2015; Mthiyane & Mudadigwa, 2021; Mugizi et al., 2019; Mwela & Mulenga- Hagane, 2020; Myende et al., 2020; Oduol, 2021; Pansiri et al., 2021; Snow et al., 2021; Somantri & Sardin, 2017; Vikaram et al., 2020; Wango & Gatere, 2016). These findings portray a picture that suggests that ethical turpitude by school principals is a global phenomenon and is not unique to the school principals who participated in the current study. Despite its prevalence and the damning effects on educational leadership, Cheteni and Shindika (2017) warn about the dearth of ethical leadership literature in the USA and African contexts, as most studies in these continents focus on the private sector rather than on the public sector (including schools). Consequently, studies that investigate the causes of ethical turpitudes by school principals are extremely scarce. Research articles by Mthiyane and Mudadigwa (2021); Oduol (2021); and Wango and Gatere (2016) are a few notable studies that unpack causes of ethical lapses in educational leadership. In Italy, a study by Belle and Cantarelli (2017) investigated the phenomenon in public administration research and not in educational leadership.

Notwithstanding this shortage, the existing body of literature on causes of ethical lapses among school principals seems to be consistent on this phenomenon. For example, in Gauteng Province, South Africa, materialism, school principals living beyond their means, indulgence (principals abusing school funds for their personal gains), lack of policy implementation, and

lack of proper school structures are mentioned as some of the causes of unethical conduct by school principals (Mthiyane & Mudadigwa, 2021). In addition, Ndlovu et al. (2020) highlight that ethical lapses are entrenched within the Department of Education in the Eastern Cape (South Africa) due to an inappropriate work ethos, including subversion and substandardisation in the day-to-day operations of the department. The study further remarked that ethical challenges were evident both in the organisational and individual level in the Eastern Cape's Department of Education. Furthermore, a survey study conducted with 200 principals in secondary schools and another 200 head teachers at primary schools in Kenya, found deception as the common cause that leads to fraud and loss of cash among school principals and leaders in the central office (Wango & Gatere, 2016). In Italy, Belle and Cantarelli (2017), highlight social influences, egocentrism, self-justification, exposure to incremental dishonesty, loss aversion, challenging performance goals, as well as time pressures as the causes of ethical lapses among leaders.

To sum up, empirical evidence from the data and literature reflecting the root causes of ethical turpitudes by school principals are an indication that school principals sometimes reflect unethical values in their leadership as school principals. Leading schools unethically is contrary to the ideals of professionalism and the key tenets of the Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory, Accountability Theory, as well as Stakeholder Theory. For example, the Multiple Ethical Paradigm is believed to be an essential framework for building ethical schools and developing ethical school leaders (Starrat, 1994). Also, it is contrary to tenets of Accountability Theory which emphasises professional conduct by school principals and taking full responsibility and being accountable for their actions (Department of Education, 2001; Mansouri & Rowney, 2014; Sambo & Kanyane, 2020). This study found that some school principals accused the provincial Department of Education of their own ethical misconduct. Such accusations towards the Department are an indication that some school principals are prepared to shift the blame and do not want to take responsibility and be accountable for their actions as described by Accountability Theory. Similarly, Stakeholder Theory suggests that school principals should maintain a professional relationship with other stakeholders in education and treat the latter ethically (Harrison et al., 2015). Inconsistent with the Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory and Stakeholder Theory, the findings of the current study elaborated why school principals conduct themselves unethically. The participants' submissions portray a vivid picture that some school principals demonstrated unethical values and subsequently, enacted unethical leadership in

their schools, which is contrary to the principles of the Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory and Stakeholder Theory.

#### **6.2.6 School principals face ethical dilemmas**

There is an old saying which tells us that “Life is full of dilemmas but it’s how we choose to handle them that defines who we are”. My analysis of the descriptive data seems to confirm this saying with regards to ethical leadership. In adopting the same principle, one can say ethical leadership is full of dilemmas, but it is how we handle them as school leaders that defines who we are in terms of ethical behaviour commitments. Consistent with this narrative, the findings suggest that school principals in this study encountered dilemmas in their leadership practices. Most often, the participants remarked that dilemmas were part and parcel of their roles as school leaders. This was narrated by Mr Star, a male school principal of a township school when he stated: “*The dilemma that I always encounter is that the policy is always contradictory to my values*”. This participant further mentioned that in his leadership, he often found himself having to choose between the policy and his personal values especially when he had to deal with educators’ misconduct. He mentioned that, in some instances, he ended up deliberating the best alternatives to pursue (which in the main is the essence of dilemmas) (Fransson & Grannas, 2013; Yin et al., 2014). Evidence provided in the above extract from the interview is supported by findings from a Michigan (USA) study of under resourced schools that also suggested that school principals experienced dilemmas that are related to educational policy issues (Kim & Lowery, 2021).

Similarly, Mrs Comet, a school principal of a Former Model C school commented on the difficulty she always encountered when she had to strike a balance between the policy and her personal values. She further stated that trying to strike that balance was a dilemma on its own. She mentioned that such difficulty was caused by the fact that the two were hardly ever in agreement. Relative to this female school principal, I regard this disagreement as the battle of the mind and the heart creating dilemmas for school principals’ leadership and decision making. This is how Mrs Comet narrated the story: “*Our dilemmas as principals are that most often the policy is in conflict with my personal values, yet I have to implement it as an employee of the Department*”. In her submission, she stated that being ethical as a school principal comes

at a high cost because choosing one over the other is not an easy exercise. She was of the view that such a situation created a big dilemma.

Moreover, sharing similar sentiments, Mrs Reeva, a female principal of a semi-urban school indicated that being an ethical leader as a school principal was prone to dilemmas. She mentioned that no matter how conscious one is about being ethical in her leadership, however, she will never get it 100%. She concurred with the previous participants on the issue of policy sometimes colliding with her personal values; as a result, yielding huge dilemmas when she had to lead the school ethically, including handling educators' misconduct. Furthermore, she went even further to blame the *status quo* on what she perceived to be a lack of clear-cut policies on some issues, and sometimes, conflicting policy messages by the Department causing more dilemmas for their leadership as school principals. This is what Mrs Reeva stated: *"Also a lack of clear-cut policies on ethics because on one side you'll be saying there is no dress code, while on the other hand as a principal you'll be thinking about educators' codes of conduct. Dilemma is thus inevitable for principals"*. In her presentation, she specifically emphasised being a firm believer in being professionally dressed as an educator. She then mentioned the dilemma she normally faced when she had to reprimand an educator who had dressed herself improperly (in her view) because there is no clear-cut policy that specifically addresses issues of dress code for educators; as a result, she would find herself having an internal mental wrestle on whether to reprimand the educator or not.

Drawing from Section 6.2.1 and Section 6.2.2 of this chapter, the participants unanimously appeared to be caring in their leadership as school principals. The findings from the participants also revealed that caring for an educator who has committed an act of misconduct put them in an intense ethical dilemma. The participants mentioned that they found themselves in such dilemmas because in the process they found themselves having to choose between applying the policy (reporting the matter to the CM) or sweeping the matter under the carpet. In essence, all the participants remarked on caring for an educator who is accused of misconduct versus policy implementation as a disciplinary measure as the main ethical dilemma they encountered in their leadership as school principals. In the end, the participants found themselves having to choose the best alternative between the two. The participants lamented the difficulties relating to having to choose between two ethical values (i.e. caring for the staff members and protecting them from legal action on one hand, and complying with policy prescripts on the other), and

hand them over to face the consequences for their misconduct cases. Hence, the emergence of this ethical dilemma. This entails choosing valid ethical behaviour over another valid ethical behaviour. It should be kept in mind that caring is a right thing, on the one hand, and complying with policy is another right thing!

Having dealt with the voices of the participants as mentioned in the previous paragraphs, it is worth noting that these complex issues are recorded in the literature. For instance, Fransson and Grannas (2013) opine that dilemmas are ever present in peoples' living spaces including educational leadership. Interestingly, other pieces of literature reviewed resonate with the earlier findings from the participants on ethical dilemmas faced by school principals in their leadership. Within the same line of thinking, Scager et al. (2017) and Walton and Rusznyak (2019) proclaim that the very nature of educational leadership takes some form of a dilemma and assumes contradictory and paradoxical positions. As a result, school principals are bound to be ethical and also unethical and have to balance competing demands and a variety of interests from various stakeholders in their leadership. Painting a picture of the character of dilemmas that are experienced by school principals, Arar and Saiti (2022), allude to the point that some of these dilemmas have clear legislation and guidelines whereas others are characterised by uncertainty about how school principals should handle them. This indicates a clear alignment with the findings as discussed in the earlier paragraphs, in particular with an excerpt where Mrs Reeva highlighted the lack of a clear-cut policy contributing to their dilemmas.

Furthermore, concurring with the current findings, the literature provides empirical evidence on dilemmas encountered by school principals on a daily basis in their leadership as school leaders. For example, evidence supplied by Arar and Saiti (2022) reveals that school principals' dilemmas are related to day-to-day operations of the school relative to educators' attitudes about the behaviour of their students. In dealing with these dilemmas, school principals have to choose the right option to pursue. Also, the findings from a study conducted in the USA in under resourced rural schools in Michigan indicated that school principals faced dilemmas that are related to educational policy issues (Kim & Lowery, 2021). In Israel, a study conducted from 30 mid-level school leaders from different districts concluded that school principals experienced ethical dilemmas from recurring tensions in caring for students and educators under their leadership, on one hand, and the need to follow formal rules, regulations, and



professional standards, on the other (Iftach & Shapira- Lishchinsky, 2023). As emphasised by Arar and Saiti (2022), some of these dilemmas have clear legislation and guidelines, whereas others are characterised by uncertainty about how school principals should handle them.

In addition, this study has uncovered and noted that there is perfect agreement between the findings and the current literature with regards to dilemmas encountered by school principals in pursuit of enacting ethical leadership. The study discovered that these dilemmas are experienced by school principals whether they are in rural Michigan, Israel or even in the uMgungundlovu District, South Africa. The findings of the current study suggest that the prevalence of such dilemmas is not peculiar to certain contexts, but instead, they cut across contexts irrespective of geographical location and socio-economic contexts. This discovery affirms that framing the current study within Chaos Theory was appropriate because this theory is characterised by non-linear behaviour in a school as it is a complex environment (Phuthi, 2016). According to Van Zyl et al. (2020), such non-linearity results in unpredictability, uncertainty and a volatile school environment which is prone to dilemmas. It is against this background that participants in this study on several occasions remarked on the dilemmas they encountered in pursuit of ethical leadership enactment in their schools. Consequently, school principals find themselves having to choose from a set of conflicting ideas. As postulated by Fahim & Talabari (2014), such unpredictability and complexity ultimately results in fractals (never ending pattern that are infinitely complicated) in a chaotic school environment. Fractals (another characteristics of Chaos Theory) suggest that dilemmas in a chaotic school environment will be ever present; as a result, school principals must learn to lead schools ethically. By and large, dilemmas are at the heart of chaotic school environments, characterised by complex stakeholders regularly interacting with each other. To this end Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory becomes crucial since it provides a powerful instrument in outlining the central considerations school principals should take into account when dealing with ethical dilemmatic situations (Berkovich & Eyal, 2020, 2021; Caldwell et al. 2007).

### **6.2.7 Accountability is the heartbeat of a complex school leadership in an environment with multiple stakeholders**

The analysis of the descriptive data suggests that the participants viewed accountability as central to their leadership in a complex school environment with multiple stakeholders

interacting with each other. Evidence further suggests that school principals shared a common conceptualisation of accountability which, in the main, is about reporting, answerability, explaining and informing relevant stakeholders about the matters affecting the school. Such thinking can be seen from the submissions from Mrs Sirius, a female principal of a rural school who stated: “...also, you must be fair, transparent, and be accountable whereby as a principal you constantly report to relevant stakeholders of your actions.” Concurring with the views expressed above by this participant, Mr Star, a male principal of a township school provided a justification which mainly associated accountability with financial management. In his description, this is what he said: “Accountability, is about being able to say for what and how the money was used”. Similarly, the views expressed by Mr Star were also shared by Mr Sun another male principal of a semi-urban area who emphasised the importance of enacting accountability in exercising leadership in schools, and he said: “You just need to make it a norm to inform and account to each of these stakeholders in your leadership as a principal...It doesn’t matter how small the decision you are taking, just report”. Again, the above-mentioned views find resonance with those of Mr Galaxy another male principal of another township school who related accountability to being ethical. He argued: “Accountability goes together with being ethical because ethical leaders have got nothing to hide in their leadership and are compliant”. All these excerpts from the interviews with school principals clearly paint a picture that educational leadership in a complex school environment is about accountability. They also suggest that one is unthinkable without the other. That is, one cannot talk about leading ethically when one does not account fully to all relevant stakeholders. These excerpts indicate that school principals who participated in this study were conscious that at the heart of their leadership is accountability. While that is what they expressed, there are also reports elsewhere in this thesis where some of their accounts are questioned.

The findings discussed in the paragraph above resonate with evidence from the literature which reveals that accountability is a *sine qua non* for educational leadership in a complex school environment (Ingersoll & Collins, 2017). Such a belief is supported by various scholars such as Mansouri and Rowney (2014) who describe accountability as an umbrella concept that covers other concepts like transparency, equity, efficiency, responsiveness, responsibility, and integrity. Moreover, the Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy as per Department of Education (2001) regards accountability as the seventh fundamental value among the given ten (viz. democracy, social justice and equity, non-racism, and non-sexism, ubuntu, open society,

the rule of law, respect, and reconciliation) that are enshrined in the South African constitution, relevant to education. According to Ingersoll and Collins (2017), accountability in schools is a necessity as stakeholders in education have a right to be concerned with school principals' actions, decisions, and inactions. To this effect, school principals should be answerable and be able to give account of their actions to these stakeholders (Baroutsis, 2016). This scholar further mentions that giving account implies that school principals must be able to explain their decisions, actions, and inactions by clarifying what may have remained unclear. In view of these narratives, one cannot imagine a complex school environment characterised by multiple stakeholders interacting with each other, serving without accountability. One may argue that educational leadership in a complex school environment is about accountability.

Interestingly, evidence from data (last excerpt in the preceding paragraph) remarking on accountability as being about compliance, is supported by Ehren et al. (2020) who confirms that school principals are to be held accountable for adherence to the policy such as the PAM document, the SASA, the Policy on the South African Standards for Principalship, and other regulations guiding their professional roles as school leaders. Complying with these policies is what was earlier mentioned in Section 2.8 of Chapter Two as contractual accountability because school principals enter a binding contract with the employer on their initial employment, and on the terms of conditions of employment (Department of Basic Education, 2015, 2022; Maile, 2002; Republic of South Africa, 1996b). Further, in complying, school principals are held accountable by various stakeholders (including peers, CMs, and SGBs) for their decisions, actions and inactions; this results in what is called professional accountability (Ehren et al., 2020; Maphosa et al., 2012). This again, is in line with the participants' voices as expressed in the previous paragraph, where Mr Sun in particular, emphasised that he made it a norm to account to all these stakeholders.

The findings have also indicated that the expectations and need to interact with so many stakeholders are not without difficulties and challenges. In pursuit of enacting accountability, the participants identified some challenges that they encountered as they tried to meet the needs and demands of multiple stakeholders. The participants unequivocally lamented the numerous stakeholders (primary and secondary) that they interacted with on a daily basis and argued that such an expectation posed the main challenge for them and the reasons for which they had to account. All the participants unambiguously stated that interacting with these stakeholders was

challenging and overwhelming in their leadership experiences. However, whether challenging or not, the participants were conscious that the breath and life of their schools lies in them as school principals accounting to these stakeholders', although at times, they are being held accountable even for issues that they regard as petty. What follows next are examples of what they perceived to be challenges as they pursued their accountability drive.

Speaking about challenges in the pursuit of accountability, Mr Galaxy, a principal of a school located in a township had this to say: *"Accountability has got its own challenges... At times we account for things we shouldn't be accounting for... Sometimes you can see that what I was asked to account for was just a waste of time"*. Echoing similar sentiments, Mr Star a principal of a school located in a township stated that he did not believe that as school principals they could enact accountability to the satisfaction of each individual stakeholder involved in education. In his submission, Mr Star further listed stakeholders that school principals accounted to in their leadership and argued: *"I don't think as principal you can account fully to each individual stakeholder... Mind you, we are accountable to the CMs; Subject Advisors; SGBs and parents; Traditional Leaders; Community Policing Forums (CPFs); SMT and educators; Taxi Drivers Associations and so forth. To each of these stakeholders, we account for different things"*. This explanation was further expanded by Mr Galaxy, another school principal who ironically stated that they account even to junior staff members: *"...(laughing) I know that as principals we account to a number of stakeholders including interns and admin clerks"*. Analysing these excerpts from the participants, I got a sense that some school principals had nightmares about the demands of multiple accountabilities to multiple stakeholders. These participants vehemently stated that accounting to numerous stakeholders was challenging and proved to be an uphill endeavour to execute. To sum up this argument, Mrs Comet, a female principal from a Former Model C school in an urban area, cautioned that some of these stakeholders elevated school principals to impossibly high positions, and sometimes, forgot that principals are human beings and have limitations; they can do just as much as it is humanly possible. In her interview, she mentioned that such behaviour further intensifies their accountability dilemma in relation to these stakeholders. This is how Mrs Comet narrated her frustration: *"To make things worse is that all these stakeholders expect your cup as a principal to be always full. They don't realise that as a principal you are also human"*. What we can draw from these narratives is that even though accountability is central to educational leadership with school principal reporting to relevant stakeholders on

educational matters, when these stakeholders expect too much from school principals, such expectations posed challenges and frustrated school principals given the various demands placed on them.

Remarkably, literature is consistent with the findings from data in the preceding paragraph. For example, in Section 2.8 of Chapter Two, it is revealed that school principals bear multiple accountabilities and further execute accountability vertically, horizontally, and diagonally (Hu, 2017; Reddick et al., 2020; Schillemans et al., 2022). Accounting to the CMs, the provincial Head of Department and other departmental officials represent vertical accountability, whereas, accounting to the School Management Teams (SMT), educators and SGBs, represent horizontal accountability. Lastly, accounting to Taxi Drivers Associations, Traditional Leaders, Ward Councillors, as well as CPFs indicates a hybrid or diagonal accountability (Baroutsis, 2016; Reddick et al., 2020). In enacting hybrid accountability, Baroutsis (2016) remarks that school principals also account to the media for their actions, decisions, performance, and inactions. Such a web of stakeholder interacting with a school principal in a school environment ultimately makes accountability a complex exercise to execute. This is in line with Joannides (2012); Messner (2009); and Sinclair (1995) who emphasise that accountability is a complex, abstract and elusive concept. Likewise, Hu (2017) mentions that even the developed states (including China) fail to meet accountability standards effectively because of its complexity and elusiveness. This suggests that the difficulty of meeting accountability demands from individual stakeholder by school principals is not peculiar to them but it is a common phenomenon wherever there is multiple stakeholder interaction.

Despite accountability having to be executed vertically, horizontally, or even in a hybrid approach (as indicated in the previous paragraph), which ultimately makes it a complex exercise, evidence from the findings indicates that the participants were conscious of the significance of accountability in educational leadership. The participants emphasised doing their utmost to meet the web of accountability demands. The participants were of the view that failure to account to relevant stakeholders as a school principal has serious implications. These participants also identified the negative effects of failed accountability in educational leadership. Among these negative effects the loss of trust from stakeholders was mentioned by three participants; they regarded it as another disadvantage of failed accountability. This is how Mr Sun put it: *“If you fail to account to these stakeholders as a school principal, you’ll quickly*

*lose control of the school, and nobody will trust you*". Drawing from the above excerpt, one can conclude that enacting accountability improves trust from various stakeholders. Therefore, failed accountability by school principal reproduces a number of shortfalls in a complex school environment including school principals having to face disciplinary actions and perpetuating misbehaviour by educators. This can put the school principal and the school in an unpredictable and tenuous situation.

These findings expressed in this section are consistent with Accountability Theory as discussed in Section 3.2.3 of Chapter Three. In line with findings from the participants and evidence from literature, Accountability Theory emphasises that school principals have to take full responsibility for their actions, decisions, and even inactions (Lerner & Tetlock, 1999). In addition, Accountability Theory cautions and reminds school principals about being answerable and that they must be able to give account and provide justifications for their decisions, actions, as well as overall school performance to various stakeholders (Myende et al., 2018; Ogina & Ramare, 2019). Accounting to these numerous stakeholders (the SGBs, the CMs, parents, learners, the SMTs, Traditional Leaders, businesses, Taxi Drivers Associations, and so forth), school principal have multiple stakeholders to whom they must account. Such a view is shared by various scholars (Hall et al., 2007). I believe that multiple accountabilities ultimately result in accountability that is non-linear by virtue of its being executed vertically, horizontally, and in a hybrid format (Hu, 2017; Reddick et al., 2020; Schillemans et al., 2022). It is against this backdrop that accountability becomes complex, difficult and, sometimes an elusive task to execute. Despite all the challenges, complexities and difficulties, the findings suggest that school principals as leaders, are responsible and are held accountable for everything that happens in schools (Department of Basic Education, 2015, 2022; Republic of South Africa, 1996b).

To sum up, some of the characteristics of Chaos Theory discussed in Section 3.2.2 of Chapter Three were complexity and strange attractors (Ahmed, 2014; Barker, 1995; Rickles et al., 2007). These scholars maintain that in a chaotic school environment, complexity and strange attractors entail the interactions between multiple stakeholders yielding unpredictable results. Such interaction is what was also discussed under Stakeholder Theory as the interaction happening between primary and secondary stakeholders resulting in multiple accountabilities toward school principals as presented in the Accountability Theory (Harrison et al., 2015; Hu,

2017; Mashau et al., 2014; Paine & McCann, 2016; Schillemans et al., 2022). To this effect, school principals have a legal obligation to acknowledge and account to these stakeholders as mandated by the PAM document as per the Department of Basic Education (2022) which clarifies that such accountability is a core responsibility of the principal. Following the same line of thinking, Chaos Theory further explains that school principals must value accounting to each of these individual stakeholders (even those who might be viewed as insignificant, like a Taxi Drivers Association and Traditional Leaders as mentioned by one participant) in a complex school environment (Akmansoy & Kartal, 2014; Barker, 1995). Notwithstanding the difficulty of accounting to the satisfaction of each individual stakeholder, school principals should be conscious that acknowledging each stakeholder has the potential of yielding greater than expected results in the entire school environment.

#### **6.2.8 School principals leading and accounting morally, contractually and socially**

The findings from the data revealed that school principals who participated in this study viewed accountability as an essential element of their leadership as school leaders, despite them not fully complying to its ethos. This is drawn from the interviews provided by the participants suggesting that they are selective when reporting cases of educators' misconduct to the CMs. The participants were all in agreement on this important issue. For instance, Mr Sun, a township male principal stated that: *"Not all cases that are brought to our attention as school principals must be reported to the CM"*. Evidence presented by the participants further revealed that even serious cases that warranted dismissal of the alleged perpetrators were sometimes not reported to the CMs. For example, Mrs Comet, a female school principal of a Former Model C school shared how she protected (by not informing the CM of an alleged misconduct) an educator who was still using corporal punishment on the learners. In her submission, Mrs Comet stated: *"I had the teacher who used corporal punishment on the learner... We ended up reaching the common ground that the matter would be settled outside of school. To that effect, the case was solved amicable and was not reported to the CM"*. Analysing these two extracts provides a clear indication that the participating school principals seemed to lack moral accountability in doing what is morally acceptable in terms of reporting cases of misconduct by educators to the CMs. This narrative is supported by the fact that the participants had unequivocally stated that not all cases warranted the CMs attention; it is only serious cases that needed to be reported. However, the reality was found to be quite different from the participants' articulated position.

The participants indicated that they swept some teachers' cases under the carpet as the words of Mr Galaxy, a male principal of a township school illustrates this point: "*It is true, most cases of misconduct by educators are swept under the carpet*". Evidence from these excerpts clearly suggests that moral accountability is still a challenge for some of the school principals. In their own words, the participants indicated that they did not fully comply with the principles of moral accountability.

The reviewed literature, presented in Section 2.8 of Chapter Two highlights the notion of moral accountability as entailing school principals executing their roles and responsibilities to the best of their abilities (Maile, 2002; Maphosa et al., 2012). These scholars further emphasise that moral accountability means that school principals must do what is morally acceptable in terms of leading schools. In moral accountability, school principals are expected to execute their roles and responsibilities (including reporting to the CMs educators' misconduct as it is the case in the current study) to the best of their abilities (Maile, 2002; Maphosa et al., 2012). As a result, shielding and/or not reporting some cases of educators' misconduct to the CMs contradicts the key principles of moral accountability. Evidence from the excerpts of the interviews with the participating principals suggests that these participants' commitment to moral accountability was compromised. This is because they did not fully commit to upholding moral accountability, but instead, they were selective in the issues to account for to the CMs, irrespective of the gravity of the cases involved.

The scenario depicted in the paragraph above runs against a backdrop of the fact that in moral accountability, school principals are expected to execute their roles and responsibilities to the best of their abilities, including being transparent in their leadership (Maphosa et al., 2012). Such thinking is also supported by a few scholars including Maile (2002); Mansouri and Rowney (2014); Maphosa et al. (2012); and the Department of Education (2001) which emphasises that school principals are accountable for everything that is happening in schools. This includes *inter alia*, academic performance, management of schools in compliance with applicable legislations and PAM document, teaching extra and co-curricular activities, linking the school with the district office, preserving the vision of the school and administrative activities (Bhengu & Myende, 2016; Copland, 2003; Department of Basic Education, 2022; Iachini et al., 2016). To this effect, I believe that in their leadership, school principals are bound to be ethical and must have a drive to do what is morally acceptable.



Furthermore, in failing to execute moral accountability (as stated in the preceding paragraphs), school principals had to disregard the policy in instances where policies did not suite their desires. The participants stated that sometimes, they bent government policy in their leadership as a way of concealing their educators' alleged cases of possible misconduct. Bending government policy refers to a situation where policy implementers intentionally do not comply with the policy. Evidence of this can be seen in the testimony of Mr Star, a male principal of a township school who said: *"...as a principal you have no choice but to bend the policy so as to assist the educator concerned... I must say, to bend the policy is part of our leadership as school principals"*. Arguing along the same lines, Mrs Comet, a female school principal of a Former Model C school remarked as follows: *"I had to disregard the policy in caring for the educator... I knew that should the matter is brought to the attention of the CM; the educator would be dismissed"*. Interestingly, I believe that failing to achieve moral accountability by school principals (as discussed in the previous paragraph) subsequently results in their failure to achieve contractual accountability. I am of the view that the two are connected. That is the reason why the participants in this study failed to fully commit to and maintain moral accountability and subsequently, failed to achieve contractual accountability.

Interestingly, these findings are consistent with what I found in the literature on school principals' failure to report to the CMs about educators' misconduct as a clear violation of applicable legislation like the Policy on the South African Standard for Principalship (Department of Basic Education, 2015); PAM document (Department of Basic Education, 2022); the South African Schools Act (Republic of South Africa, 1996b); the Employment of Educators Act (Department of Education, 1998); the South African Council for Educators (South African Council for Educators, 2000); and the Labour Relations Act (Republic of South Africa, 1995). For example, Section 10 of the South African Schools Act (SASA) clearly states that inflicting corporal punishment is a dismissible offence and should be brought to the attention of the CM (Department of Education, 1998; Republic of South Africa, 1996b). Therefore, the school principals' inability to report and inform the CMs about such cases of misconduct by educators suggests a complete violation of this legislation and entails a lack of contractual accountability (Maphosa et al., 2012).

In contractual accountability, school principals enter into a legally binding contract with the employer (provincial Department of Education) that they will comply with the applicable legislation guiding their leadership (Maile, 2002; Maphosa et al., 2012). In essence, contractual accountability is about school principals complying with the content and spirit of the policies and legislation of the Department. However, in their own voices, some participants clearly stated that they sometimes bent and/or disregarded policy in their leadership. Bending and/or disregarding the policy entails non-compliance with the prescribed legislation. Moreover, school principals must fully comply with the applicable legislation (including the PAM document, the SASA, EEA, the South African Constitution (RSA, 1996a), the LRA, RSA, 1998 and so forth), in their leadership as school leaders. The notion of compliance with the applicable legislation is very important because during their appointment as school leaders, school principals enter a legally binding contract with the employer (DBE), and on the specified terms and conditions of employment (Maile, 2002). According to the South African Schools Act contained in Republic of South Africa (1996b) school principals are mandated to comply with all the requirements as prescribed in the PAM document and South African Standards for Principalship (Department of Basic Education, 2015, 2022). Entering this legally binding contract between the employer and school principals, entails contractual accountability (Maile, 2002; Maphosa et al., 2012).

The previous paragraphs have gone into detail about how school leaders in this study lead through moral accountability and contractual accountability. In this part of the discussion, I now turn to social accountability. Evidence from the findings indicates that four participating principals comprising two males and two females were conscious about their schools' role in the society. This forms part of awareness about social accountability. These schools were from diverse contexts. For example, one was a rural school; another one was from a township school; another one from a semi-urban area; and the last one was a Former Model C school. With regards to the remaining two participants, their presentations lacked evidence of enacting social accountability since there was no mention of the phenomenon in their interviews. With the exception of a female school principal leading a Former Model C school, the findings from the other three participants, showed that they were either recipients of donations from businesses and other stakeholder or they involved these stakeholders (like Taxi Drivers, Traditional Leaders, CPFs, and Ward Councillors) in their leadership as school leaders. Surprisingly, in the Former Model C school, evidence from the findings suggests that the school also gives

back to the community. This was noted in the presentation by Mrs Comet, the school principal, when she mentioned that they had planned to paint and clean the local Police Station. According to her, they viewed their actions as a token of appreciation for the Station Commander and his team for the role they played in curbing crime in their area. She further mentioned that their school was not affected during the July 2021 uprising which resulted in looting and burning of businesses mainly in the KZN Midlands, Durban, and certain parts of Gauteng. This is what Mrs Comet said on this matter: *“I have organised schools that are under the jurisdiction of our police station to undertake the cleaning and its painting... This is the least we could do as schools as a token of appreciation to the women and men in blue (Police Officers) for protecting us”*. The notion and collaboration processes between one school and other entities such as the business sector and other NGOs forms the essence of social accountability.

The findings from Chapter Five suggest that most school principals in this study embraced social accountability in their leadership. As a result, reciprocation occurred whereby their schools received funding and donations from the business sector, and received various kinds of support from Traditional Leaders, Ward Councillors, and Taxi Drivers. These findings on social accountability as outlined in the previous paragraph are consistent with the literature, indicating that school principals have a critical role to play in the society, and that they must establish positive relationships with different community structures including sister departments (like Social Development, Home Affairs, Health, SAPS, and so forth), and also with local municipalities, the business sector, traditional leaders; taxi organisations; NGOs, and universities in order to enhance community development projects and positive social relations (Maphosa et al., 2012; Myende, 2018, 2019). According to Maphosa et al. (2012), this community involvement by school principals is called social accountability. In relation to the current study, evidence indicates that four of the six participating school principals were actively engaged in social accountability principles because they valued it and saw it as a catalyst for their leadership.

Presentations made by various participants are consistent with some elements of the Theoretical Framework underpinning this study. For example, in Accountability Theory as discussed in Section 3.2.3 of Chapter Three, it was emphasised that school principals must take full responsibility for their actions, decisions, and even educators’ misconduct cases or they

must do what is morally acceptable (moral accountability) in their leadership as school leaders, such as informing the CM about the educators' misconduct cases (Lerner & Tetlock, 1999). In addition, Accountability Theory cautions and reminds school principals about being answerable and that they must be able to give account and provide justifications for their decisions, actions, as well as school performance to various stakeholders (Myende et al., 2018; Ogina & Ramare, 2019). It is within this context that I argue that a selective approach to accountability on educators' cases of misconduct runs against the principles of Accountability Theory.

Correspondingly, Stakeholder Theory stresses that CMs as primary stakeholders in education have a right to obtain information on educators' behaviours including cases of misconduct (Freeman et al., 2010; Freeman et al., 2020; Putra & Suryanawa, 2022). As a result, school principals have a contractual obligation to comply with applicable legislation on educators' misconduct cases. Such thinking clearly suggests that school principals as *ex officio* members of SGBs (school governance) and as professional leaders, are mandated by legislation regulating the teaching profession to account regularly and comply (contractual accountability) with the requirements to report any unethical conduct to the relevant stakeholders in education. These stakeholders can be primary or secondary (sometimes called internal and external stakeholders) in education as earlier discussed in Section 3.2.4 of Chapter Three (Harrison et al., 2015; Mashau et al., 2014; Paine & McCann, 2016). Accounting, particularly to external stakeholders by school principals, indicates social accountability. Forming positive relationships with these external stakeholders revealed that different schools in the study enjoyed different forms of benefit. What is of critical importance is to acknowledge that school principals have a legal obligation to value and account to these stakeholders as mandated by the PAM document (Department of Basic Education, 2022) which clarifies that such accountability is a core responsibility of the principal. Within the same line of thinking, Chaos Theory holds that school principals must value accounting to each of these individual stakeholders (even those that might be viewed as insignificant, like Taxi Drivers and Traditional Leaders as mentioned by one participant) in a complex school environment (Akmansoy & Kartal, 2014; Barker, 1995).

### 6.2.9 Complexities and contradictions to accountability

The findings have suggested that the participating principals had acquired a decent understanding of ethical leadership and they demonstrated that they valued this kind of leadership for various reasons. However, the findings have also indicated that there are grey areas with regards to school principals accounting to various stakeholders in education (the CMs) regarding case of potential misconduct by educators concerned. These complexities resulted in some participants contradicting themselves when they had to share their accountability experiences as school leaders. These participants contradicted themselves when they had to explain how they reported their educators' cases of misconduct to the CMs and the nature of the cases that they felt they had to account for. The participants were unequivocal that all cases must be reported to the CMs. However, the same participants also contradicted themselves when they repeatedly stated that not all cases of misconduct must be reported to the CMs. Such contradiction can be seen as stated by Mr Star, a male principal of a township school who explained his position thus, *"Reporting is vital in the sense that everything that happens in the school must be reported to the CM no matter how small it might present itself"*. Contrary to this extract from the interviews, the same school principal stated: *"Not all cases that are brought to our attention as school principals must be reported to the CM"* [Mr Star]. Such a contradiction was not noted from this school principal only, but it was also noted from Mr Galaxy, a male principal from another township school who argued that: *"... accountability is very important, no matter how small the case might be; you have to report to the CM"*. Like his earlier counterpart, he also contradicted himself as follows: *"It is true, most cases of misconduct by educators are swept under the carpet [meaning are not reported to the CM] by principals"* [Mr Galaxy].

To further give a clearer picture of the cases to be reported to the CM, Mrs Comet, a female school principal of a Former Model C school distinguished between cases that warranted the CMs' attention and those that did not. This is contrary to the earlier presentations by two principals of township schools who did not provide distinctions between cases to be reported to the CMs. In her presentation, Mrs Comet had this to say: *"Not all cases have to be reported to the CM. It all depends on the seriousness of the case"*. In her presentation, Mrs Comet further emphasised that she believed that cases of serious misconduct must be reported to the CM, whereas less serious cases did not. However, a contradiction was also evident in her

presentation because earlier in her presentation, she had shared that she had failed to report to the CM one of her educators who was still inflicting corporal punishment on the learners against national government policy. Mrs Comet mentioned that the case was reported to her by parents. In sympathising with the educator, she ended up not informing the CM but instead, she arranged for an amicable solution to be reached between the two parties (parent and an educator) after her intervention. This is what she accentuated: *“I had the teacher who used corporal punishment on the learner... We ended up reaching the common ground that the matter would be settled outside of school. To that effect, the case was solved amicable and was not reported to the CM”*. The use of corporal punishment with learners is a serious misconduct as per Section 10 of the South African Schools Act (Republic of South Africa, 1996b). Therefore, the school principal’s failure to inform the CM about such a dismissible offence provides a clear contradiction of her earlier assertion on cases of serious misconduct that warrant the CM’s attention.

Consistent with the findings of this study, a huge body of literature advocates for accountability despite the latter having its own flaws. After intensive review of the literature, I discovered that most studies that are in favour of accountability portray it as an essential element of educational leadership. Consistent with these assertions, Bovens (2007) remarks that accountability is a golden concept that no one can go against. As such, several articles emphasise that school principals should make it a norm to account regularly to relevant stakeholders in education. Analysing these arguments for accountability, one can end up believing that accountability is perfect, simple, and linear in execution. However, some scholars including Hu (2017); Joannides, 2012; Messner, 2009; Sinclair (1995); as well as West et al. (2011), believe that accountability is far from being straight forward, and is non-linear, complex, abstract and an elusive concept. Presentations from Mansouri and Rowney (2014) obtained from twenty (nine females and eleven males) Canadian medical professionals, suggest that accountability is largely undefined in theory, hard to implement and assess in practice; as such, the concept continues to pose dilemmas. These scholars’ further postulate that numerous definitions underpin accountability, resulting in confusion about what it means, how to implement it, how to enforce it, and how to assess its impact (Mansouri & Rowney, 2014). In China, Hu (2017) shares similar sentiments, indicating that Chinese Public Officials have accountability challenges in terms of theory and practice.

In addition, there is also evidence from narratives in Israel, generated from five Arab Bedouin schools (where 179 teachers and five principals participated in the study), which suggested that accountability was even more challenging in educational leadership because the concept was adopted from the lexicon of business. As a result, clarity on who must account, to whom, and how, is not clear (Mizel, 2009). Therefore, drawing from these presentations, despite accountability being painted as a golden concept that is championed as the panacea to enhance school functionality, effectiveness and improvement, it is evident that there are some grey areas regarding this concept. I believe that such complexities may result in confusion and contradictions among school principals about when they must account to various stakeholders in education, as shown by the participants in the previous paragraph. To this end, the reviewed literature perfectly resonates with the findings on the complexities of accountability in educational leadership.

To sum up, evidence from the findings as extracted from the excerpts in this section, is corroborated by literature which characterises accountability as abstract, elusive, complex, contradictory, ambiguous, confusing, and theoretical. Drawing from such thinking, Mansouri and Rowney (2014) maintain that accountability is hard to implement even with Canadian medical professionals. Similarly, Hu (2017) remarks that accountability is a challenge also for Chinese Public Officials. Such narratives are further supported in Israel through Mizel's (2009) reflections on the complexities faced by school principals in executing accountability. This provides strong evidence that complexities and contradictions with regard to accountability are not only prevalent in educational leadership as discovered in the findings, but that these issues are common to other fields and contexts as the literature suggests. Remarkably, in the current study, all the participants presented contradictory narratives and practices regarding accountability.

Since the current study is framed by Chaos Theory, it was interesting to note that such contradictions and confusions as shared by school principals were also hypothesised in the theory. The participants presented conflicting statements about accountability in line with Chaos Theory. This is against the backdrop provided by Lorenz (1993) who characterises chaos as a complete lack of form and absence of some kind of order. This is because chaos is characterised by non-linearity and aperiodic behaviour signifying that the results cannot be predicted relative to the input (Fahim & Talabari, 2014; Rickles et al., 2007). In relation to the

current study, no one could predict how the participants would report cases of misconduct to CMs in future, should they find themselves in the same predicaments. Remarkably, evidence also suggests that even the participants themselves were uncertain as to how they could approach such difficulties should they find themselves faced with the same problems. For example, Mr Star mentioned that he will cross that bridge when he reaches it. As a result, the participants ended up contradicting themselves in their utterances about accountability. According to Mbengue et al. (2018), these confusions and contradictions of the participants were results of chaos that was characterised by numerous indefinable and unknowable ways of accounting to the CM. To this effect, school principals' approaches to reporting educators' misconduct to the CMs can never be extrapolated because their accountability does not follow a predictable course (Mbengue et al., 2018; Rickles et al., 2007). At the heart of the present theme, is the non-linearity and aperiodic character of Chaos Theory, resulting in complexities, confusions, unpredictability, and contradictions for school principals reporting cases of misconduct to CMs (Fahim & Talabari, 2014; Mbengue et al., 2018; Rickles et al., 2007).

#### **6.2.10 Fixed and rigid approaches to educational leadership are a thing of the past**

The findings from all the participating school principals suggest that their leadership was dynamic rather than fixed and rigid, to meet the demands of accountability to multiple stakeholders. School principals explicitly stated that they were forced to adapt their leadership to the changing operational environments. Interestingly, such leadership behaviour was not limited to just one contextual environment, but was applicable to all participants, irrespective of whether the school was in a rural setting, a township, a semi-urban environment or Former Model C school. For instance, Mr Star, who was a male principal of a township school expressed his views as follows: *“my leadership changes from time to time. I am driven by the ideals of situational leadership in my practice as a school leader”*. Elaborating on the narrative expressed above, Mr Star mentioned that his leadership was not driven by any specific leadership approach. Instead, he argued that it was the situation at hand that influenced the leadership approach he had to adopt at any given time.

A similar narrative was expressed by Mrs Reeve who was a female participant and said: *“... at times you must change your leadership approach... You cannot simply rely on one approach, but the context determines the approach to use at that time”*. These excerpts are an indication



that accountability pressures as exerted by multiple stakeholders in education has resulted in school principals having to change and adapt the way they lead their schools. This idea is supported by Creemers et al. (2013) who remarks on dynamic models as being built on assumptions that school principals' leadership is a dynamic process that is constantly adapting to the ever-changing needs, accountabilities, demands, and opportunities.

In support of enacting a dynamic leadership approach, participants further highlighted the gains they had received as schools as a result of their fluidity and flexibility in leadership. Some participants mentioned that being dynamic school leaders kept them on their toes and always contemplating new ideas and strategies for meeting accountability demands as exerted by multiple stakeholders in education. Mr Sun, a male principal of a school located in a semi-urban area stated how he learned to change his leadership and how he collaborated, for instance, with taxi drivers, Ward Councillors, and Traditional Leaders to address issues of late coming in the school. He further indicated that due to the collaboration between himself and these stakeholders, learners' enrolment had increased exponentially and that the school was due for upgrading from being a P3 to a P4 school. He further indicated that initially, he did not plan to collaborate with these stakeholders, but it was the context that dictated so. Similarly, Mrs Comet, a female principal of a Former Model C school shared how she had to change her leadership approach to tackle chronic non-payment of school fees. In her presentation, she indicated she had to organise a financial workshop, saying that: *"I have decided to organise the workshop on parenting and financial management for parents"*. As a result, Mrs Comet remarked that change is notable with regards to payment of school fees by parents because of her changing her leadership approach.

Furthermore, in enhancing ethical leadership as indicated in Section 5.3.1(ii) of Chapter Five, two participants from township schools mentioned that they involved teacher unions to capacitate their members on the educators' codes of professional ethics. These participants indicated that they had learned to change to this approach to meet accountability pressures. They further indicated that they had realised that teacher unions were key stakeholders to collaborate with to minimise educator cases of misconduct. Such evidence can be seen in the interview extract by Mr Star who stated: *"I involve the teacher unions to capacitate their members on codes of professional ethics"*. I must emphasise that these participants remarked that they saw the necessity of adapting their traditional leadership approach and collaborating

with teacher unions because they had observed that some educators committed acts of misconduct believing that the teacher unions would protect them against punitive measures taken by the Department.

Changing their leadership approach to ensure that schools were ethically led whilst also meeting accountability demands as expressed by various stakeholders in education indicates that such school principals are dynamic leaders who enact dynamic leadership in their schools (Goldring & Rallis, 1993; Jensen & Lund, 2014; Kelly, 2022). Similarly, Edwards et al. (2023) believe that such school principals do not necessarily follow the particular leadership approach but rather use core values as a guide in their leadership. Consistent with Bhengu and Myende's findings (2016), these participants confirmed that switching from their traditional leadership to collaborating with teacher unions in reducing educator misconduct worked in their contexts. Drawing from the narratives of these participants, it is clear that school principals need to embrace dynamic leadership if they want to cope in a dynamic school environment that is characterised by complex stakeholder involvement. As a result, fixed and rigid approaches to educational leadership are a thing of the past.

Despite the paucity of studies on how dynamics manifest in educational settings including schools as postulated by Jappinen (2017), the limited body of literature available on the phenomenon is consistently indicating that schools are confronted by societal, cultural, technological, economic and political change (Afzal et al., 2018; Collyer, 2016; Creemers & Kyriakides, 2010; Creemers et al., 2013; Fullan, 2016; Jappinen, 2017). These scholars' views are consistent with the findings of the present study. Literature suggests that these external changes often result in inter-organisational change and denote a dynamic school environment (Goldring & Rallis, 1993; Jackson, 2000; Jappinen, 2017). If the context under which the school operates is so dynamic with complex multiple stakeholders interacting with each other, school principals are thus bound to enact dynamic leadership (Kelly, 2022). According to Kelly (2022), dynamic leadership refers to the practice of switching from traditional reflective practices of leadership (like planning, deciding, inspiring, and motivating) to high reliability implementation as a manager (such as auditing, overseeing, remediating, changing, monitoring, and rewarding). In essence, I believe that dynamic leadership emphasises that school principals must change their leadership approaches to cope with the ever-changing demands, needs and accountabilities as exerted by multiple stakeholders interacting with each

other in schools. Such thinking is corroborated by Bhengu and Myende (2016) who are of the view that school leadership practices in a dynamic school are not fixed, but are fluid, and evolving where leadership is not about compliance, but is about school principal's ability to identify what works in their context. Such school principals manage to cope against these challenges by virtue of being dynamic leaders who are characterised by positive attitudes and are full of energy and new ideas (Kelly, 2022). As stated by Jensen and Lund (2014), dynamic school principals are accountable to educators, SGBs, SMTs, CMs, parents, and other stakeholders in education and collaborate with them for school effectiveness and improvement. This reflects the belief that dynamic school principals perceive leadership as a collective or a shared endeavour (Goldring & Rallis, 1993; Jensen & Lund, 2014; Kelly, 2022).

Evidence from the findings indicating that school principals were forced to change their leadership in the present study to cope with complex stakeholders involved in education is consistent with Chaos Theory. As discussed in Section 3.2.2 of Chapter Three, Chaos Theory is a theory of change that seeks to explain how a phenomenon (ethical leadership in the present study) changes over time (Daljit, 2009; Trivedi, 2021; Van Zyl et al., 2020; Williams, 1997). As previously mentioned, schools are confronted with change (internal and external) which in turn, results in inter-organisational change (Afzal et al., 2018; Creemers et al., 2013; Fullan, 2016). According to Daljit (2009), these changes are called perturbations (another characteristic of Chaos Theory) by virtue of being forceful in a school environment and they can result in a sudden shift to a new state. In relation to the current study, school principals were pressured to change (perturbation) their leadership (for example, either by organising financial workshops for parents; collaborating with taxi drivers to curb late coming; or collaborating with teacher unions to reduce educator misconduct) to enhance ethical behaviour in their schools. For school principals to change their leadership was not out of their own will; however, it was influenced by strange attractors (multiple stakeholders interacting with each other in a school environment resulting in a forced change in school principals' leadership approach) (Ahmed, 2014). In aligning with Chaos Theory, the participants remarked that a slight change in their leadership led to parents complying with the payment of school fees, reducing late coming, and minimising cases of educators' misconduct (Trivedi, 2021).

### 6.3 Conclusion

The findings from the current study provide a strong indication that the participants who participated in the study held ethical leadership in high regard as a springboard for educational leadership during times of accountability. The study further found that the participants had a clear understanding of ethical leadership and, subsequently, had to lead their schools with care, justice, and critique while some of them continued to lead their schools unethically, contrary to their understanding. The participants vehemently emphasised the significance of ethics and ethical leadership in educational leadership. These participants viewed leading schools ethically as not just being limited to compliance, but as being about honesty, fairness, policy-driven, integrity and transparency. The participants expressed a strong belief in their leadership as school leaders; that they are expected, on a daily basis, to infuse these ethical values (and others as mentioned in Section 6.2.1 of this chapter). This was meant to enhance accountability in their respective schools; hence, they believed that ethical leadership was the basis of educational leadership.

The findings further identified numerous benefits of enacting ethical leadership by school principals. These benefits included, but were not limited to, social cohesion and tolerance between Blacks and Whites; making one to be at peace with him/herself, and good for ones' health; principals' deployment to districts to solve HR related matters; increased learner enrolment and school grading and ultimately, gaining trust from other stakeholders in their schools specifically, and education generally. Interestingly, and in line with the Butterfly Effect of Chaos Theory, the participants mentioned that in their leadership, they enacted basic ethical leadership values (like transparency; honesty; care and so forth), and in turn, their schools managed to acquire some of these benefits. The participants mentioned that some people would regard these ethical leadership values as insignificant and which could be taken lightly. In line with this thinking, and against this background some scholars including Akmansoy and Kartal (2014); Daljit (2009); Sarigoz (2022) and Trivedi (2021), regard these ethical leadership values as tiny, small, or trivial because they are easily overlooked, yet they can bring unexpected results into the entire school environment. For these scholars, to view these ethical leadership values as tiny, small, or trivial is not in relation to their actual weight or size; however, it is based on the idea that due to their simplicity in character and in execution, they can be easily overlooked in relation to school effectiveness, improvement and educational leadership. In this

study, words like minor, tiny, small, trivial, and insignificant were used interchangeably to signify that a simple ethical leadership value which can be easily overlooked in educational leadership may yet produce greater than expected results.

Except for Mr Galaxy who had B Com degree and had taken HR and Supply Chain as his major courses, other participants indicated that they had received no training on ethics and ethical leadership during their days at universities. Others indicated that they had received just an exposure to some rudimentary training on ethics and ethical leadership issues. Regarding the issue of accountability, the findings suggest that the participating principals believed that accountability is at the heart of educational leadership in an environment with multiple stakeholders interacting with one another. The findings have also discovered various complexities, dynamics and dilemmas regarding accountability. Because of these, the participants contradicted themselves when sharing their leadership experiences of accountability. Such contradictions indicated that there existed some grey areas where accountability is concerned. Therefore, the findings suggest that exercising accountability posed challenges for the school principals, particularly when they had to report cases of misconduct by educators.

The ensuing chapter will present conclusions that are drawn from the findings that were presented and discussed in Chapter Five and Chapter Six, respectively. The next chapter begins with a synthesis of the thesis and then moves on to present and discuss the conclusions, and by so doing, the chapter seeks to indicate the extent to which the research questions have been addressed. A model that emerges from the analyses (both descriptive and analytic analysis) is outlined and contextualised. As can be expected, some implications and/or recommendations are made for various stakeholders.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' ETHICAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES: SYNTHESIS, CONCLUSIONS RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE**

#### **7.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter presented a detailed discussion of the findings, drawing from the findings that were presented in the previous chapter where initial findings were presented without any deeper analysis. Therefore, drawing from the discussion of findings made in Chapter Six, this chapter provides conclusions that can be drawn from the discussion of the findings. The purpose of the chapter is fourfold. Firstly, the chapter provides a synthesis of the entire thesis, looking at the layout of each chapter and its content. Secondly, the chapter provides conclusions, and in doing this, the research questions that guided this study are used as headings to organise the discussion. Thirdly, these conclusions gradually lead to an emerging model that attempts to explain how ethical leadership, as experienced and enacted by the six participants, can be enhanced. Lastly, the chapter concludes by making some recommendations for practice and for future research as well as its contribution to knowledge.

#### **7.2 Research questions restated**

The study was driven by four research questions as stated below. I must also mention that in presenting and discussing the conclusions of this study I use these research questions as headings to structure the discussion. The research questions are as follows:

- What are the school principals' experiences of ethical leadership during times of accountability?
- What are the views of the school principals regarding the causes of unethical leadership in schools during times of accountability?
- How do school principals enhance ethical leadership during times of accountability considering the complexities, dilemmas, and dynamics associated with the school as an open organisation?

- Why do school principals enact ethical leadership during times of accountability the way they do?

### **7.3 Synthesis of the study**

The purpose of this study was to explore and understand school principals' experiences and practices of ethical leadership during the times of accountability. The times of accountability were outlined as was the importance of accountability, particularly in relation to ethical leadership practice. Secondly, the study explored the views of school principals on what they regarded as the causes of unethical leadership in schools during times of accountability. Thirdly, the purpose was to understand how school principals enhance ethical leadership during times of accountability considering the complexities, dilemmas and dynamics associated with schools as open organisations. Lastly, it attempted to solicit why school principals enact ethical leadership the way they do during times of accountability. All these issues were discussed in Chapter One. Conducting this study was informed by the narrative that I presented in the statement of the problem (Section 1.3 of Chapter One) where I suggest that during times of increased accountability, some school principals enact unethical leadership by failing to report educators accused of misconduct to relevant stakeholders including CMs and other departmental officials.

Having presented the setting of the study, the second chapter provides a broader landscape of the problem by reviewing literature on ethical leadership during times of accountability as experienced and practised in different parts of the world. This review of literature provides a platform that enables the analysis of generated data from the six school principals who are in different socio-economic and geographical contexts of the country. The four theories (Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory, Chaos Theory, Accountability Theory, and Stakeholder Theory) constituting a theoretical framework are discussed in Chapter Three and this framework provides yet another layer of analytic tools that facilitate a better and more complete picture about ethical leadership and associated accountability issues. Issues of research methodology are discussed in the fourth chapter before the findings are presented in Chapter Five. The findings are analysed in two phases, with Chapter Five being the first phase where descriptive analysis is done without discussion or infusion of the literature. This is done in Chapter Six where the analysis of the findings is related to a broader field of study, by indicating what other

scholars have found in different contexts. Chapter Seven concludes the thesis by providing conclusions that are drawn from the findings that were presented and discussed in Chapter Five and Chapter Six respectively. Recommendations or implications of the conclusions for various stakeholders are presented in this chapter.

## **7.4 Presentation of conclusions**

This section presents the conclusions of this study by firstly taking a relook at the findings of the study as presented and discussed in Chapter Five and Chapter Six respectively, and assessing the extent to which such findings are responding to the research questions that were posed in Chapter One. This also helps to establish the extent to which the conclusions of the study make contributions to the existing debates on school principals' experiences of ethical leadership during the times of accountability. As indicated in the sections above, the conclusions of the study are presented by using the four research questions as headings to structure the discussion. These conclusions are presented and discussed below.

### **7.4.1 What are the school principals' experiences of ethical leadership during times of accountability?**

Findings from the study have indicated that school principals have a clear understanding of ethics and ethical leadership, and that they demonstrated a strong belief that the two are at the heart of educational leadership. School principals unanimously stated that ethics entails doing what they ought to do in their leadership as school leaders. As stated in Section 6.2.1 of Chapter Six, school principals elaborated in detail what they considered to be ethical values that they believe ethical school principals should embrace in their leadership. In their presentations, I noticed that they clarified the concept of ethical leadership which, in turn created an impression that being ethical entails sticking to the basics in your leadership as a school leader. In analysing data on school principals' experiences of ethical leadership, I would say that dual findings emerged. Firstly, four out of six participants in the study indicated that despite displaying a clear understanding of ethical leadership, their leadership as school leaders was not consistent with their understanding of ethical leadership. In other words, there are many instances where their leadership practices can be associated with unethical leadership. The other two school principals indicated that their leadership was consistent with the tenets of ethical leadership. In



short, their leadership was aligned with their demonstrated understanding of what constitutes ethical leadership. In other words, I can conclude that in their leadership practices, they insisted that their decisions should foreground the basic principles that are outlined in various policy documents and guidelines such as the PAM document, the South African Schools Act, the South African Constitution, Policy on the South African Standard for Principalship and the Employment of Educators Act.

With regard to the four principals, who opted to lead in ways that contradict ethical leadership practices, the thesis concludes that these principals had a clear understanding of what ethical leadership entails. However, the same principals deliberately chose to follow paths that contradicted their understanding of what they should do. In their own words, these participants unequivocally stated that they disregarded policy provisions in their quest to show a caring attitude towards their teaching staff who might have violated the codes of professional ethics. I should also hasten to say that the issue of dilemmas was always at play when these participants chose the path that is incongruent with ethical leadership. Therefore, this thesis is not passing judgement on these participants as it is not the mandate of the study to do that; nonetheless, the study can highlight that the route they chose to take does not always align with ethical leadership practices.

It is interesting to note also that disregarding policy provisions in caring for an educator who is accused of misconduct perfectly resonates with Section 1.3 of Chapter One (Statement of the problem) where it was mentioned that during the times of accountability, some school principals enact unethical leadership by failing to report educators' cases of misconduct to relevant stakeholders, including the CMs. Further, this conclusion corroborates what is stated in Section 1.4 of Chapter One, where it was mentioned how Mr Bystander would sweep cases of misconduct by educators under the carpet by deciding to not inform the CM. Also, in the same section, it was stated how as a school principal, I battled to report to the CM and take drastic measures against an educator who was undermining the authority of the Departmental Head. To this end, the conclusions from this study indicate that failing to account to the CMs on educators' cases of misconduct by school principals and further shielding them is a common practice among some school principals locally and internationally. This study has found that this phenomenon is not only common in South Africa but is also notable in other African countries including Botswana, Kenya, Nigeria, The Kingdom of Eswatini, Uganda, and Zambia

where it was noted that school principals in these countries also enacted unethical leadership as school principals despite having a clear understanding of the phenomenon. The findings from these African countries are contrary to the findings from Jordan, Malaysia, and most European countries including Greece, Great Britain, Germany, Italy, and Spain where the literature indicates that school principals in these countries enact ethical leadership in their leadership of schools.

As indicated at the beginning of Section 7.4.1 of this chapter, the study has also found that some of the school principals in the study managed to insist on ethical leadership. The study found that these school principals are compliant, transparent, accountable, caring, involve other stakeholders in education, are honest and take drastic actions against educators' misconduct. At the core of their leadership, the study also found that all school principals are caring in their leadership including those who enacted unethical leadership. Such care (an ethical value) puts school principals in an intense dilemma especially when they had to institute disciplinary measures against educators (including reporting to the CM such misconduct). Also, as presented in Section 6.2.2 of Chapter Six, in caring for educators under their leadership, sometimes school principals challenged the actions, practices and decisions of the department when they believed the latter's behaviour was tantamount to abuse towards the educators under their leadership. In short, this thesis concludes that in practising ethical leadership in the studied schools, there are complexities and dilemmas that tend to dominate the entire theatre of leadership and decision-making processes. Looking at these challenges from the perspectives of an interpretive research paradigm, one can agree that the participating principals faced huge challenges that complicated their decision-making processes, and that from their perspectives, making a difficult decision and, in some instances, choosing to ignore policy provisions is no mean feat, and therefore, one has to understand their predicaments.

In addressing the accountability dilemma presented in Section 1.4 of Chapter One, (Rationale of the study), the study has found that school principals viewed accountability as the main nerve of educational leadership in a complex school environment. However, the study also found that despite its importance in a complex school environment, school principals opined that accountability is a non-linear phenomenon. As a result, they vehemently postulated that there are some grey areas which underpin its form. Subsequently, evidence of contradiction was noted from school principals' execution of the concept. Such contradictions provided a

clear indication that accountability is complex, abstract, elusive and there are sometimes problematic executions of accountability which contradict the notion of ethical leadership. To this end, the study concludes that, due to these complexities, some school principals do not comply to the ideals of moral and contractual accountability. They do this by being selective in cases of educator misconduct that warrants reporting to the CM.

To sum up, this study has found that the nexus between ethical behaviour and accountability, for some school principals, remains elusive. To this end, the thesis concludes that ethical leadership and accountability for some school principals remain no more than pie in the sky; in some instances, the two are a well-preached gospel that is hardly practised. This is against the backdrop of a lack of alignment between the clarity of understanding the phenomenon and the practice in executing ethical leadership during times of accountability. This study found that some school principals' clear understanding of ethical behaviour and accountability fall short in practice. In line with the Stakeholder Theory principles, disregarding policy (as mentioned by some participants in the study) by the school principal is unethical. The findings of this study are adding to the existing knowledge that has been highlighted in the sources consulted as part of this research (Asiyai, 2015; Dwangu & Mahlangu, 2021; Eriksen, 2021; Harrison et al., 2015; Mestry, 2004). The conclusion of this study and the literature cited concur that in a complex school environment characterised by multiple stakeholders interacting with each other, school principals have a moral, contractual, and professional accountability to meet the needs and interests of various stakeholders by exercising a great deal of fairness, compliance, professionalism, transparency, honesty and trustworthiness.

Interestingly, as explained in the Theoretical Framework (Chapter 3) of the present study, school principals' clear understanding and enactment of ethical leadership aligns with the tenets of the theories underpinning the present study. For example, remarks by Ehrich et al. (2012) and Gross and Shapiro (2004) highlight that school principals put human relations first and embrace the foregrounding of love, respect, compassion, trust, loyalty, and sensitivity to all under their leadership, as suggested in the Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory. Quite tellingly, these ethical values were mentioned throughout this thesis as the values that findings from data and from literature had supplied. Furthermore, postulations by Myende et al. (2018) remark that Accountability Theory emphasises that school principals should be transparent (an ethical value) in their leadership as school leaders by virtue of being answerable to, and having

the responsibility of informing other stakeholders in education about the matters affecting the school. Correspondingly, Freeman et al. (2010) highlight that school principals have a responsibility of disseminating vital information to other stakeholders in education as prescribed by the Stakeholder Theory. Furthermore, in line with Stakeholder Theory principles, school principals as ethical leaders have a responsibility to treat other stakeholders in education with fairness, transparency, honesty, and trustworthiness (Harrison et al., 2015).

#### **7.4.2 What are the views of the school principals regarding the causes of unethical leadership in schools during times of accountability?**

This section focuses on the thesis' conclusions regarding what the participating principals regarded as the causes of unethical leadership in their schools. This conclusion is not based on unfounded assumptions about the existence of unethical leadership behaviours by some school principals. This issue was dealt with in some detail in Section 1.3 of Chapter One (Statement of the problem) of this study where, it was indicated that during times of burgeoning accountability, some school principals enact unethical leadership, for instance, by failing to report to the CM educators' alleged cases of misconduct. Based on the findings presented and discussed in Chapter Five and Chapter Six respectively, there are three broad conclusions that can be made. The issues of contradictions and dilemmas are embedded in all three conclusions being made. The first conclusion is that the participants exhibited unethical leadership conduct because of the pressures that were brought to bear on them by their CMs at the district office. These Departmental officials gave principals incredibly short time frames for them to submit requisition forms. Following due processes would invariably exclude their schools from acquiring the learning and teaching support materials (LTSM). Again here, the dilemma is huge. School principals had to choose between following all the procurement procedures and missing out of getting the LTSM, or cutting the corners, and not following all the required protocols to get the LTSM for the learners and teachers. In all instances, the findings suggest that they chose the latter (not following all the necessary procedures). In view of these pressures exerted by the CMs, school principals in the study maintained that they ended up cutting corners (acting unethically).

The second aspect that contributed to the principals exercising unethical leadership behaviours was when they protected their teaching staff by not disclosing and reporting their

misdeemeanours to the CMs. As part of their accountability responsibilities, the findings have shown that all the participants demonstrated acute awareness of the responsibility to report all incidences of possible misconduct by their staff members. However, in the name of exercising an ethic of care, some school principals chose not to report such cases to the CMs. The findings have also indicated that the principals reserved the right to decide on what they considered to be minor cases that do not deserve to be reported to the CMs, and which ones were of a serious nature that should be reported without fail. However, some school principals tended to overlook and ignore some of the seriousness of their own unethical conduct (their failure to report) to the CMs, the SGB, and other departmental officials with regard to the alleged educators' cases of misconduct. What aggravated the situation even more is the fact that after they had decided not to report some of these serious cases to the officials of the Department, they also did not take any action against such educators suspected of involvement in serious misconduct cases. The issue of dilemmas seems to cut across all their leadership practices. I say this because even in these cases, school principals had to always consider what was the best option to take, and in many instances, when the cases involved their teaching staff, they tended to conceal the cases from the relevant stakeholders such as CMs, and SGBs. It is evident that what was found in the study confirms what had been highlighted in the statement of the problem, where it was suggested that during times of accountability, failure to report constitutes failed accountability.

The third causes of unethical leadership practices can be described as 'intrapersonal'; it is located within the leader's personality. One of the findings of this study is that some school principals pointed a finger at personality as the root cause of school principals' ethical turpitudes. Some participants mentioned things like ungodliness, deceit, entitlement, greed, and school principals' undermining other stakeholders in education and SGB members as another cause of ethical turpitudes by school principals. In essence, the participants identified an individuals' character as the root cause of ethical lapses among some school principals. The participants highlighted values like self-control, honesty, integrity, trustworthiness, self-discipline, faithfulness, prudence, godliness, truthfulness, and transparency as ethical values that should be at the heart of every school principal's practice. The study concludes that the absence of these ethical values subsequently resulted in unethical leadership by school principals. Mrs Reeva unequivocally stated that school principals are accountable for their ethical lapses and should refrain from shifting the blame towards the department. In her argument, she suggested that the Department does not send any school principal to misuse

school funds, nor does it force any school principal to fail to comply with appropriate legislations governing the teaching profession including the PAM document, the South African Constitution, and the South African Schools Act. Taking such an accountable stance this principal reminds me of how Dr Nelson Mandela (first democratically elected president of South Africa) once stated that changing the world is all in our hands (Harris, 2011). Loosely translated and relative to this study, it simply means that we are all accountable for our actions. To this effect, school principals are personally accountable for their own ethical lapses as stated by these principals.

To sum up, evidence from this study has unearthed some of the root causes of ethical turpitudes by school principals, from their perspectives. These findings are an indication that some school principals sometimes exhibit unethical values in their leadership as school principals. Leading schools unethically is contrary to the ideals of the Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory, Accountability Theory, as well as Stakeholder Theory. For example, Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory advocates for school principals to act according to what is right and to be compliant with policy (Gross & Shapiro, 2004; Kutsyruba & Walker, 2013). Correspondingly, Accountability Theory emphasises professional conduct by school principals implying taking full responsibility and being accountable for their actions (Department of Education, 2001; Mansouri & Rowney, 2014; Sambo & Kanyane, 2020). To this end, this study found that some school principals tended to label the provincial Department of Education as the source of their own ethical turpitudes. Such accusations against the provincial Department of Education can be viewed with some scepticism as some school principals could be shifting the blame and failing to take responsibility or be accountable for their actions as directed by Accountability Theory. Having said that, I do not want to discount genuine concerns expressed by the participants regarding some of the tendencies of the provincial Department of Education. A case in point is where incredibly unreasonable time frames would be given to the school principals instead of giving them sufficient time to follow all the necessary procedures in acquiring LTSM materials, for example. In short, one conclusion to be made here is that the causes of unethical leadership in schools in this study are complex, full of contradictions and dilemmas that cannot be overlooked.

### **7.4.3 How do school principals enhance ethical leadership during times of accountability considering the complexities, dilemmas, and dynamics associated with the school as an open organisation?**

The findings of the study suggest that school principals did not receive any training or exposure to ethics or ethical leadership during their initial training as educators at various universities. Only one participant happened to have studied a Bachelor of Commerce (B. Com) degree, and as part of his course package, he specialised in Human Relations (HR) and Supply Chain Management. Because of that, he was au fait with the issues of ethics. However, at the beginning of this thesis, it was highlighted that issues of ethical leadership during times of accountability, amidst the complexities of these days is important. As earlier stated in Section 2.5 of Chapter Two, literature has strongly emphasised that ethical leadership is critical and is a universal concept that is championed across the spectrum since it is advocated by all professions. Because of that, it should be a prerequisite for people to enter into educational leadership.

Because of its importance for educational leaders, and the glaring gap in terms of its provision, it may be a safe assumption to make that this is why the South African government embarked on a few interventions that were intended to cultivate an ethical culture and awareness among school principals. Some of these interventions were discussed in Section 1.5 of Chapter One as part of the significance of the study. Such interventions included the establishments of the Public Service Commission (PSC) in 1996 which had a mandate to promote high standards of professional ethics in the public sector by publishing the Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy in 2001, which intended to enhance ethical leadership and encourage school principals to infuse ethics and accountability into their leadership; the introduction of the Batho Pele principles in 2005 which aimed at improving integrity and ethical awareness within public administration through stricter monitoring; as well as the gazetting of the Policy on the South African Standard for Principalship in 2016 which was also intended to cultivate ethics and accountability among school principals (Cheteni & Shindika, 2017; Department of Basic Education, 2015; Department of Education, 2001; Public Service Commission, 2010).

The findings of this study suggest that some school principals are conscious that ethical awareness is their responsibility as school leaders and this is enhanced through human

interaction. To achieve this endeavour, the study has found that some school principals believed in being exemplary and had taken it upon themselves to enhance ethical leadership in their schools. These school principals mentioned that they conduct themselves ethically and further communicate the ethical standards expected from educators under their leadership. Furthermore, school principals that participated in current study vehemently indicated that the dilemmas that dominated their leadership terrain forced them to be dynamic and not rely on one leadership approach. Unfortunately, the findings have not shown any serious engagement with activities that are meant to enhance ethical leadership during times of accountability considering the complexities, dilemmas and dynamics associated with the school as an open organisation. On the contrary, the study has found that some school principals relied heavily on teacher unions, the DBE and other secondary stakeholders to assist enhance ethical leadership among educators. Such findings are not peculiar to this study. Mbengue et al. (2018), as well as Rickles et al. (2007), argue that school principals' reliance on departmental officials and teacher unions signifies complexity where interactions between various stakeholders is evident in a school environment with these stakeholders working together to enhance ethical leadership and bringing ethical awareness to educators. Interactions between various stakeholders in education to bring positive change (enhance ethical leadership in relation to the present study) in a school environment is what was earlier mentioned by Ahmed (2014) as a strange attractor (another feature of Chaos Theory). To this effect, I encourage school principals to take seriously their interventions to enhance ethical leadership (exemplary, articulating ethical values, and involving other stakeholders), as each approach is quite capable of producing greater results in the long run by virtue of being sensitive to initial conditions or due to the Butterfly Effect (Fahim & Talabari, 2014). This is against the backdrop that suggests Chaos Theory nullifies the drop in the ocean narrative.

Nevertheless, there is evidence that some participants established some collaboration with secondary stakeholders like Taxi Drivers Associations, Traditional Leaders, and Ward Councillors to enhance effective teaching and learning in schools. As the findings have indicated, some of these collaborations occurred in a serendipitous manner, where school principals displayed respect and ethical behaviours which ultimately inspired some of these stakeholders to reciprocate and show support for the schools. Clearly, I cannot say with confidence that any participating school principal actively worked towards enhancing ethical leadership in ways that addressed existing complexities and dilemmas facing school principals.



Instead, we have seen in the findings and conclusions expressed in the previous sections how these participants deviated from ethical norms when faced with serious dilemmas in schools. As indicated earlier, the narratives expressed above should not suggest that the participants were clueless about issues of ethical leadership. On the contrary, the findings have clearly shown that all of them had a clear understanding of what ethical leadership is about. The findings of the current study suggest that the school principals in this study were conscious of, and strove to enhance ethical leadership in their leadership.

My conclusion on this important theme of enhancing ethical leadership, is that there is the potential for the school principals in the study to do this as they have the basic foundations in terms of understanding the concept and the actual practice of ethical leadership, however, feeble it might be. As part of my conclusion to this section, I note that that enacting ethical leadership in a complex school environment with multiple stakeholders interacting with each other poses a lot of dilemmas for school principals as school leaders. School principals in the current study stated that such dilemmas were most common when they had to ensure accountability to their CMs regarding educators who were accused of misconduct.

#### **7.4.4 Why do school principals enact ethical leadership during times of accountability, the way they do?**

The findings suggest that all school principals in the study demonstrated a clear understanding of ethical behaviour and accountability, and they also understood the benefits of behaving ethically. However, sometimes, some of them tended to fall short in terms of their ethical leadership practices. All the participating principals narrated their lived experiences of how ethical leadership enactment during these times of burgeoning accountability, one way or the other, had benefited their schools. School principals' support of ethical leadership practices provided a clear indication that they were conscious that it is central to educational leadership. The study found that school principals embrace ethical leadership because they are of the strong view that it yields many benefits for the entire school environment. These findings confirm what was expressed earlier in Section 1.2 of Chapter One (Background of the study), that school principals that enact ethical leadership in their leadership have much to gain. Hence, there is alignment between the findings on the issue of enactment of ethical leadership and its benefits for the entire school environment.

The mandate of this theme is to provide clear justification of why the participating school principals enacted ethical leadership the way they do. In so doing, I must provide, in the first place, a clear explanation about how they enact ethical leadership before I can argue about the justification of why they do so. The findings have consistently pointed to the complexities, contradictions and dilemmas that characterise their leadership practices. For instance, in presenting their reasoning for the leadership they exercised, it was interesting to note that some school principals submitted reasons that were not mentioned in the literature, that were only peculiar to their contexts as reflected in Section 6.2.4 of Chapter Six. For example, some school principals characterised ethical leadership as enhancing professionalism and accountability; that ethical leadership is a catalyst for tolerance and social cohesion; that it ensured food security for the needy; and described ethical leadership as being good for ones' health as it reduces stress levels and makes one to be at peace with oneself. These were some of the benefits that were peculiar to some cases and were not mentioned elsewhere in literature that was consulted. On the other hand, school principals also submitted other benefits that cut across cases, and these were also noted in the literature. These benefits included increased learner enrolment; improved trust from stakeholders; improved school infrastructure; improved learner performance; improved stakeholder involvement; reduction in late coming; and improved school grading.

Asked about how they enacted ethical leadership in their school and subsequently, reaped the benefits stated in the previous paragraph, I was taken aback when school principals indicated that they had enacted simple ethical values such as transparency, honesty, and integrity with ease, without anticipating that their actions would ultimately produce greater than expected results for the entire school environment by producing the benefits stated in the preceding paragraph. For school principals, it was not a big deal to enact these ethical values because they felt that they were doing what they ought to do. Some school principals further stated that they had learnt these values from their parents as parents had been part of their upbringing. For example, Mrs Sirius, a female school principal, stated that she learnt from her mother the importance of self-control. As such, infusing this value into her leadership as a school principal was not something out of the ordinary. To this effect, some school principals went as far as referring to these ethical values as tiny, trivial, or even minor. For school principals to 'minimise' these values was not about belittling them, or about their insignificance; their tiny

weight; or even their small size, but instead, it was an indication of the simplicity, embedded in their conceptualisation of these values. This is against a backdrop of participants clearly stating that some people might easily overlook and take for granted the importance of embracing these ethical values in their leadership, yet they are central in educational leadership during times of accountability in a complex school environment.

Therefore, to come back to the main issue of this section, I can conclude that enacting ethical leadership by the participating school principals was to them, like leading a normal life, like being a fish in the water. This means that they did not have to think seriously and critically about what ethical leadership really was, in terms of its scholarly conceptualisation, but had to exercise care, kindness, compassion, love, honesty, and support for their teaching staff and the learners. This is what has emerged from the findings. Perhaps, this can also explain why, in some instances, they tended to ignore policy provisions when faced with a dilemma of either observing government policy or demonstrating care and support for their staff members. These conclusions are consistent with Chaos Theory, which holds that a simple enactment of ethical leadership by school principals (which often might be overlooked by others), can yield greater benefits which may be disproportional to the input in the entire school environment (Akmansoy & Kartal, 2014). Such belief further resonates with Fahim and Talabari (2014); Gleick (1987b); Lorenz (1993); and Trivedi (2021) who describe such activity as sensitive to initial conditions or the Butterfly Effect.

In relation to the current study, the participants indicated that they had infused ethical leadership values (*for example*, care, transparency, parent-centredness, honesty, and so forth) in their leadership as school leaders unconsciously and without anticipating that their actions might have greater benefits in future. Participants further mentioned that at the time when they were standing by their beliefs on these ethical values, they did not envisage that it could ultimately yield so many benefits for the entire school environment. As earlier elaborated in Section 6.2.4 of Chapter Six, I repeat that participants did not envisage that the harvest would be way greater than the seed planted. In their leadership as school principals, the participants had planted the seed of transparency but subsequently, reaped the harvest of funding and trust from stakeholders; they had planted the seed of a parent-centred approach to leading schools, they in turn, reaped the harvest of increased learner enrolment and school grading; they had planted the seed of honesty, but instead, ended up reaping the harvest of being entrusted by

district officials to solve disputes and HR related issues during the appointment of school principals in the district; lastly, the participants had planted the seed of integrity, but ended up reaping social cohesion and tolerance between Blacks and Whites including political parties with diverse ideologies. These narratives clearly show that ethical leadership is beneficial and produces unimaginable gains for the entire school environment.

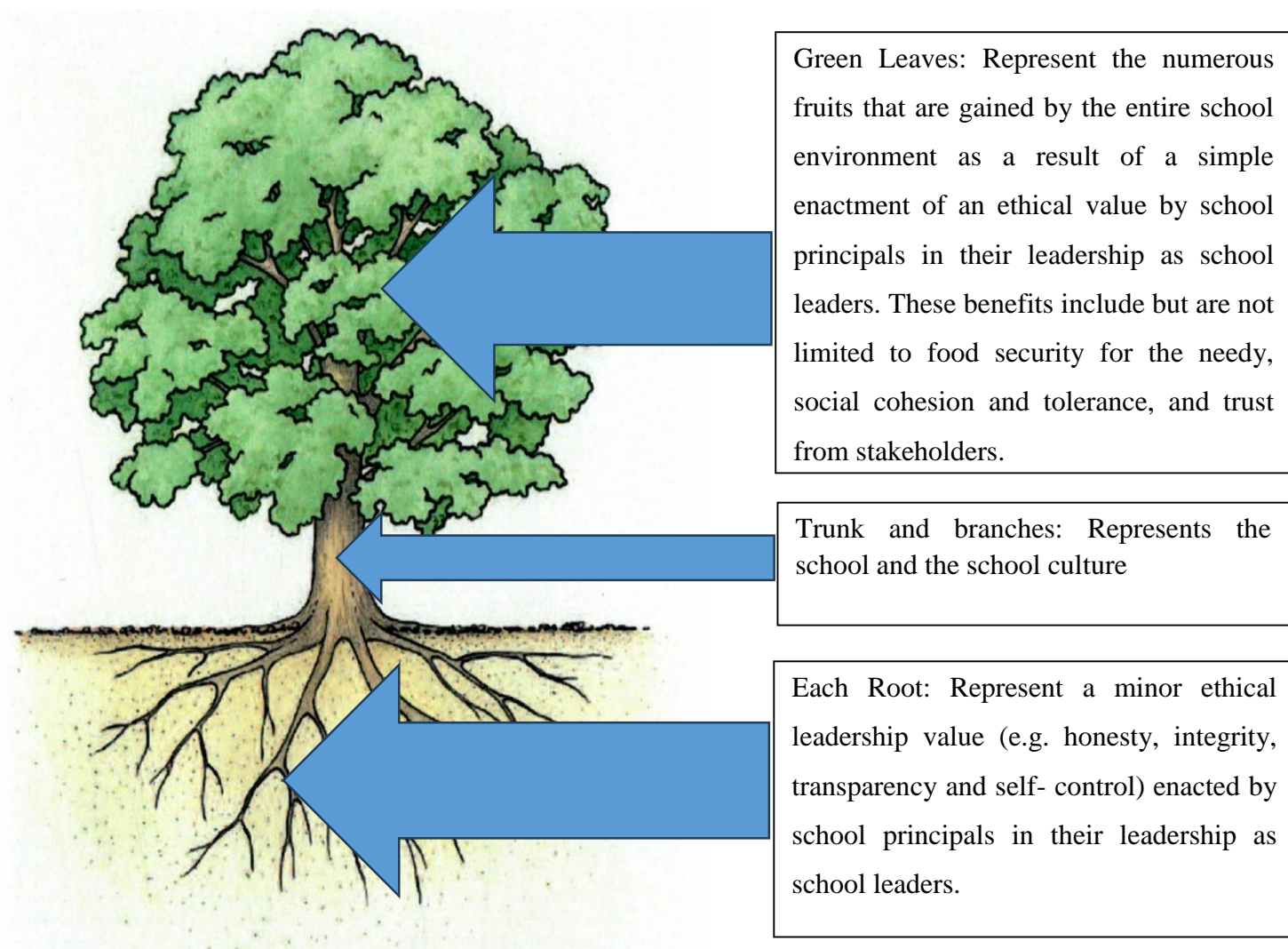
In conclusion, the findings as presented in the preceding paragraphs, as well as Section 3.2.2 of Chapter Three, which reveals school principals embracing a simple and tiny ethical value has resulted in the birth of an ethical leadership model that is conceptualised as a tree model, as discussed in Section 7.5 of this chapter. Developing this model was crucial since it emphasised the importance of enacting ethical leadership in schools by school principals. Furthermore, as earlier stated in the significance of the study (Section 1.5 of Chapter One), the findings provided in the preceding paragraphs, and development of this model will provide school principals with a conceptual tool to understand the importance of enacting ethical leadership in during times of accountability. As the current study is framed by the Butterfly Effect of Chaos Theory, the model will further awaken school principals to pay attention to details and be sensitive to simple and tiny ethical issues as that have the potential to produce significant results that may be disproportionate to the inputs made. The model will thus contribute immensely in enhancing ethical leadership in schools by school principals.

### **7.5 Emerging model to explain and enhance the understanding of school principals' experiences of ethical leadership during times of accountability**

The model that I present and discuss here is a result of a combination of a theoretical engagement with the literature and what the participants enacted in their leadership as school leaders. The model also draws from the participants' declared understandings about what constitutes ethical leadership and what its benefits are. This study has found that in pursuit of ethical leadership and enhancing an ethical culture in their schools, participating school principals made attempts to inculcate simple ethical values in their leadership, and in turn, they reaped more and better-quality fruits than they could have anticipated. The study's findings have highlighted that some school principals have achieved greater things in their leadership than they had imagined. Some of the lessons learnt from these findings were that by paying attention to their tiny ethical values, some domino effects can result, and these will impact on

the entire school environment. This has implications for what can be recommended from these findings. Although I did not use any text in the Bible as a framework for analysis, issues of ethics will always touch on spiritual dimensions of life on earth. Therefore, what can be learned from the emerging model reminds me of a book from the Christian Bible; to be precise, in the book of Matthew 17:20 where the Lord Jesus Christ remarks that even the smallest amount of faith (tiny as a mustard seed) can have the biggest impact in the life of a believer. The Butterfly Effect of Chaos Theory shares similar sentiments as the book of Matthew and captures the essence of the leadership practices of some of the participants in the study.

As previously explained in Section 6.2.4 of Chapter Six and Section 7.4.4 of Chapter Seven, school principals did not envisage that the harvest would be way greater than the seed they had planted through their leadership. In their leadership as school leaders, participating school principals had planted a ‘mere’ seed of transparency, but subsequently, reaped the harvest of funding and trust from various stakeholders; they had planted a simply seed of a parent-centred approach, they in turn, reaped the harvest of increased learner enrolment and school grading; and they had planted the tiny seed of honesty, but instead, ended up reaping the harvest of being entrusted by district officials to solve disputes and HR related issues during the appointment of school principals in the district; lastly, participants had planted the seed of integrity, but, ended up reaping social cohesion and tolerance between Blacks and Whites including political parties with diverse ideologies. These benefits of tiny ethical leadership values are discussed in Figure 4 below using an emerging tree model.



**Figure 4:** Emerging model of a simple ethical leadership value in the entire school environment

In Figure 4 above, the metaphor of a tree is used to illustrate school principals' experiences of utilising simple ethical leadership values in their leadership. Each root in Figure 4 above represents an ethical leadership value that is enacted by school principals in their leadership. These ethical leadership values include, but not limited to transparency, responsibility; honesty; integrity; parent-centredness; accountability; self-control; discipline; compliance; prudence; godliness; faithfulness; punctuality; care; warm-heartedness; policy-driven principles; stakeholder involvement including those that might be deemed unimportant e.g. Taxi Drivers Association and Traditional Leaders; fairness; kindness; love; consultation; attending war rooms; meeting deadlines; openness; going an extra mile; perseverance; compassion; and being a good listener. Interestingly, these ethical values are internal traits that are possessed by an ethical school principal; hence, they are underground and represented by

the roots. They entail the ethical seed that is planted by school principals in their leadership corner. To some, these ethical leadership values might look insignificant and have little impact at that time; however, this study has found that in the long run they produce far greater results than the seed that was planted.

Quite tellingly, Lantini et al. (2020) point out that the root system makes up to 65% of a tree's total biomass and they are thus extremely crucial in a tree's life. If the roots represent ethical values, it thus requires no rocket science to conclude that ethics should make up 65% of the entire school environment relative to this study. In support of this narrative, it is claimed that roots supply water and minerals from the soil to the tree and thus, play an important role in carbohydrate storage and physically anchoring the tree on the ground (Day et al., 2010; Lantini et al., 2020). To this effect, research on plant science makes serious comments about the fact that the death and life of a tree is dependent on its roots. Consistent with this belief, Lantini et al. (2020) highlight that a fungal infection of the roots is among the main causes of tree diseases. These scholars further remark that the tree's state of health is extremely dependant on its root system. Against this backdrop and relative to the current study, one can argue that ethical leadership is the heartbeat of educational leadership such that the life and collapse of schools is dependent on school principals' enactment of ethical leadership or the lack thereof.

The trunk and branches of the tree in Figure 4 represents the school. These two are visible and are on the surface. They represent the school's structure. Lastly, the green leaves in Figure 4, represent the ripe fruits that are gained by the school because of a school principal who had enacted simple/basic ethical leadership values. These fruits take time to ripen and to be enjoyed by different people from all walks of life, including birds, wild animals, bees, and insects. In relation to the current study, these fruits were mentioned by the participants and, they included the benefits that the entire school environment gained because of a simple ethical leadership value that was enacted by school principal. This was discussed at length in Section 6.2.4 of Chapter Six and Section 7.4.4 of Chapter Seven where this study found that school principals that participated in this study planted a tiny ethical value without envisaging that the harvest would be far greater than the seed planted. Remarkably, this is a perfect indication of the Butterfly Effect of the Chaos Theory in the entire school environment. To this end, I would say, in educational leadership, small things matter the most.

## **7.6 Recommendations**

This section presents the recommendations which are based on the findings of the current study in enhancing ethical leadership in schools by school principals. This section takes off by addressing the recommendations for practice and then touches down with the recommendations for future research. These two are presented as indicated in the ensuing section:

### **7.6.1 Recommendations for practice**

The study's findings have emphasised that for school principals to achieve great things in their leadership, they need to pay attention to their tiny ethical values, because the latter can have a domino effect in the entire school environment. Therefore, the following recommendation is based on the finding that, while all the school principals in the study demonstrated a clear understanding of ethical leadership and what its benefits are, leadership practices for some of them, were sometimes, not consistent with their leadership beliefs.

There are five recommendations that this study makes. The first is that, based on the conclusions drawn from the findings, it is evident that school principals understand the importance of ethical leadership. Therefore, it is recommended that they invest more effort in inculcating ethical leadership values, and make them enshrined in various documents that guide their leadership and management practices. Secondly, school principals have shown that they are aware of the benefits of being ethical. It is therefore recommended that they need to take advantage of their demonstrated basic, simple individual ethical values they have at their disposal. These include honesty, integrity, transparency, accountability and being compliant with policy expectations. These fundamental values can produce greater benefits in the entire school environment.

The third recommendation has to do with the fact that only one of six participants had exposure to any kind of training in ethics, and that was quite accidental. Therefore, it is recommended that school principals who participated in this study should put pressure on their Circuit Managers to organise a course on ethics and ethical leadership. Fourthly, and closely related to the third recommendation, school principals also need to put pressure on their employer (provincial Department of Education), the South African Council for Educators (SACE) and



their respective teacher unions to continuously provide capacity building to educators, including school principals, on ethics and ethical leadership. It is surprising that the participants demonstrated awareness of what SACE, for example, should do for them in terms of capacity building, but there is no evidence that they put pressure on these institutions to provide support for them. Yet, when these school principals breach the code of ethics, they will not be spared on the basis that they were not aware of the gravity of the case or challenges. The last recommendation has to do with the timelines that the education department gives them to finalise procurement processes for LTSM. The findings have clearly shown that unfair deadlines were set for the participants to complete this task. I am conscious of the fact that officials of the Education Department did not participate in this study. Therefore, there was no way I could verify the stories from the participants. In that context, the recommendation that this study can make is the need for these participants to mobilise other principals in the circuit or district to confront their Circuit Managers and ask them to act in ways that do not expose the principals to the risks of not following due processes in terms of procurement.

#### **7.6.2 Recommendations for future research**

The study was conducted in one education district in KZN and only six school principals participated in the study. Given that in South Africa there are nine provinces with 81 education districts, with thousands and thousands of school principals, sampling these six school principals from the entire population in the country was like a drop in the ocean (Mkhongi & Musakwa, 2020; Motala et al., 2015). Of particular importance, in the uMgungundlovu District (in the KZN province where the study was conducted), there are twelve education districts with a total of 489 schools. Given the size of this study and the fact that studies that impact on the systems are always large, I recommend that a bigger study on school principals' experiences of ethical leadership during times of accountability to be conducted. Furthermore, for reasons I have expressed in terms of system-wide research, I recommend that a mixed method study that will include both statistical data on the phenomenon and semi-structured interviews, should be conducted. The issues addressed by this study are fundamentally significant and the current study, just scratched the surface.

## **7.7 Contribution to knowledge**

The purpose of this study was to explore and understand school principals' experiences and practices of ethical leadership during the times of accountability. The times of accountability were outlined as well as the importance of accountability, particularly in relation to ethical leadership practices. Secondly, the study also aimed at exploring the views of school principals on what they regarded as the causes of unethical leadership in schools during times of accountability. Thirdly, the aim was to understand how school principals enhance ethical leadership during times of accountability considering the complexities, dilemmas and dynamics associated with school as an open organisation. Lastly, there was an attempt to solicit why school principals enact ethical leadership the way they do during times of accountability. This section advances the discourse from the contribution of this study to the already existing body of knowledge as presented in the ensuing section.

### **7.7.1 Contribution to the benefits of ethical leadership literature in a complex school environment**

This thesis has produced quite a few reasons why school principals enact ethical leadership the way they do. Consequently, some benefits of enacting ethical leadership that were peculiar to this study and were not mentioned anywhere in the literature that was consulted emerged. These benefits were discussed in Section 5.3.1 (iv), Section 6.2.4, and Section 7.4.4 of the present study. In their own voices, school principals mentioned ethical leadership enhancing professionalism and accountability; ethical leadership as a catalyst for tolerance and social cohesion; ethical leadership ensuring food security for the needy; and ethical leadership as being good for ones' health and reducing stress levels and making one to be at peace with oneself.

### **7.7.2 Contribution to practice**

The present study has found that in pursuit of enacting ethical leadership, school principals did not have to think seriously and critically about what ethical leadership really is, in terms of its scholarly conceptualisation, but had to exercise minor ethical leadership values like care,

kindness, compassion, love, honesty, respect, compliance, and support to their teaching staff and the learners (Edwards et al. 2023; Ehrich et al. 2011; Somatri & Sardin, 2017). For school principals, it was not a big deal to enact these ethical values because they felt that they were doing what they ought to do (Brown & Trevino, 2006). As I had earlier indicated, for them enacting ethical leadership was like leading a normal life, like fish in the water, because they were exercising the values that were raised with from their childhood. This then suggest that in quest of being ethical in your leadership as a school principal, you don't have to do much, but be true to yourself. I believe that leading schools in this manner can assist school principals to manage the complexities and contradictions that were noted from the finding from participants as presented in Section 5.3.1 (iii) and Section 6.2.9 of the present study. In these two sections, complexities and contradictions dominated both ethical leadership and accountability. This thesis found that these contradictions paralyse school principals' ethical leadership and accountability. Doing what you ought to do as a school principal can assist in mitigating such conundrums. In leading schools the way they ought to do, school principals must balance the ethics of care, justice, critique, and profession (Gross & Shapiro, 2004; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016; Starrat, 1994).

As propounded by Fransson and Grannas (2013) dilemmas are ever present in peoples living spaces, and following the same line of thinking, I am not suggesting that these contradictions will be out of school principals' leadership equations completely, but doing what you ought to do; being true to yourself; and balancing ethics of care, justice, critique, and profession can assist in managing these complexities and contradictions.

### **7.7.3 Methodological contribution**

This study used a qualitative design, interpretive paradigm, and a multiple case study methodology. Additionally, generated data was crystallised through the usage of semi-structured interviews in conjunction with documents reviews (Cohen et al., 2011; Ellingson, 2014; Khan, 2014; Posla, 2013). These approaches were discussed in detail in Chapter Four as well as the rationale and the benefits embedded in each chosen aspect of the methodology. Generating qualitative data from six school principals through semi-structured interviews resulted in the voluminous data that I had to analyse. Furthermore, I found myself being inundated with a number of documents that I had to review. Remarkably, from these

documents, some were irrelevant and outdated while others were fit for purpose. The documents that were requested for review are clearly stated in Section 4.7.2 of the current study.

Quite tellingly, and unique to this study, to analyse data obtained from documents I developed the Document Review Schedule (DRS) as presented in Table 2 of Section 4.7.2 of the current study. Developing the DRS was crucial in this multiple case study because it increased standardisation of data during data analysis. This was vital as Miles and Huberman (1994) warn about the difficulty of developing a good cross-case analysis, yet it is essential in deepening an understanding and explanation of the phenomenon. Furthermore, I developed the Meta Matrix Analysis Tool following the guidelines provided by Miles and Huberman (1994) in order to identify the themes that cut across cases as well as those that are peculiar to each case. The Meta Matrix Analysis Tool is found in Table 3 under Section 4.8 of the present study. This tool was developed in order to draw comparisons, similarities and differences in the data generated from participants through field notes, voice recordings, and the documents. Additionally, the development of the meta matrix was guided by the research questions, the theoretical framework underpinning the present study, as well as the field questions.

#### **7.7.4 Theoretical contribution**

This study was underpinned by four theories namely: Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory, Chaos Theory, Accountability Theory, and the Stakeholder Theory. The combination of these theories and concepts from the theoretical lens perspectives enhanced my comprehension of how participants conceptualised their experiences of ethical leadership during times of accountability by taking into account the complexities, dilemmas and dynamics. These theories were discussed in detail from Section 3.2.1- Section 3.2.4 of the present study. As mentioned elsewhere in this thesis, Chaos Theory (Section 3.2.2) was adopted to frame the study. Chaos Theory was adopted as the framework in this study because of its ability to awaken school principals recognition that a trivial action, decision, or an ethical leadership practice (like accountability, transparency, honesty, and even punctuality) which can be easily overlooked by some school principal can have a significant impact on the entire school environment (Akmansoy & Kartal, 2014). This was discussed in detail in Section 6.2.4 and Section 7.4.4 of this thesis. Framing this study with the Butterfly Effect from Chaos Theory and showing how

school principals who participated in this study embraced a simple and tiny ethical value and in turn the school gained greater benefits, disproportionate to the input resulted in the birth of the tree model that was presented in Section 7.5 of the study. The tree model will provide school principals with a conceptual tool to understand the importance of enacting ethical leadership during times of accountability. The model will further awaken school principals to pay attention to details and be sensitive to simple and tiny ethical issues as they can have the potential to produce significant results that may be disproportionate to the inputs made.

## **7.8 Conclusion**

The previous chapter presented the findings of the study that emerged from the presentation of data. This chapter provides the conclusion to the study. The purpose of the chapter was fourfold. Firstly, the chapter summarised the thesis by looking at the layout of each chapter and restating the research questions. Secondly, the chapter provided a synthesis of the findings as guided by each research question and it explaining how they were answered. Thirdly, the emerging model that enhances ethical leadership was discussed in this chapter. Lastly, recommendations for practice and for future research, as well as the study's contribution to knowledge concluded the chapter.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Request for permission to conduct research

P O BOX 161

Wartburg

3233

21/02/2023

Ms P Duma

KwaZulu Natal Department of Education

247 Burger Street

Office 318, Anton Lembede Building

Pietermaritzburg

3201

### REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH FOR A PhD STUDY IN SIX SCHOOLS IN UMGUNGUNDLOVU DISTRICT

Dear Ms Duma

My name is Celumusa Hlongwane, and I am a PhD student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) School of Education in Pietermaritzburg Campus. I wish to conduct research for my Doctoral Thesis titled **School principals' experiences of ethical leadership during times of accountability: Complexities, Dilemmas, and Dynamics**. This project will be conducted under the supervision of Prof TT Bhengu who is an Academic Leader at the School of Education at UKZN.

I am hereby seeking your consent to conduct semi- structured interviews with six (6) school principals in the uMgungundlovu District. Also, in order to enrich the study log book entries, SGB minutes, submission records to circuit managers, educators' disciplinary records, meeting agendas, as well as school visit tool by CM and other departmental officials will be analysed to supplement and corroborate interview findings. The six schools that are purposively selected

are [REDACTED] Secondary School, [REDACTED] Primary School, [REDACTED] Primary School, [REDACTED] Primary School, [REDACTED] Primary School, and [REDACTED] Secondary School.

Attached to this covering letter, find the filled application form stating the background; objectives of the study; research questions; methodology including sampling procedures; study's contribution to education, health, safety, and welfare of learners and education system as a whole; research instruments; procedures for obtaining informed consent; procedures for maintaining confidentiality; additional support available to participants; research timeline; and declaration.

Upon completion of the study, I undertake to provide the Department of Education with full research report.

Should you require further information regarding this proposed application, the contact details given below can be contacted:

Name and contact details	Name and contact details	Name and contact details
Celumusa Hlongwane (Researcher) Cell: 083 712 5522 or 082 892 4922 Email: <a href="mailto:hlongscb10@gmail.com">hlongscb10@gmail.com</a> or 219090967@stu.ukzn.ac.za	Prof TT Bhengu (Supervisor) UKZN School of Education Ellen Khuzwayo Building Edgewood Campus Tel: (031) 260 3524 Cell: 083 947 5321 Email: bhengutt@ukzn.ac.za	Human and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) Govani Mbeki Centre, UKZN Westville Campus Tel: (031) 260 7291 Fax: (031) 260 2384 Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Yours sincerely

Celumusa Bethuel Hlongwane (Mr.)

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## Appendix B: Gatekeeper permission for school principals

P.O Box 161  
Wartburg  
3233  
083 712 5522  
09/03/2023

The Principal

-----

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Dear Sir/ Madam

### PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

I am Celumusa Bethuel Hlongwane a PhD (Educational Leadership, Management and Policy) student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Your school has been identified as one of the schools that can contribute in data generation towards my research study. You are hereby notified that permission from KwaZulu-Natal Department of Basic Education to conduct research at your school has also been granted (copy attached). The topic of my study is: **School principals' experiences of ethical leadership during times of accountability: Complexities, Dilemmas, and Dynamics.**

The study is intended to unearth school principals' experiences of ethical leadership during times of accountability. Given that schools have become more unpredictable, complex, dynamic and fluid in nature, school principals are thus bound to encounter multiple dilemmas in pursuit of enacting ethical leadership in the hey days of burgeoning accountability. The study is also intended at uncovering the causes of unethical leadership practices by school principals in their practice as school leaders as empirical evidence from DeMatthews and Serafini (2021); Mthiyane and Mudadigwa (2021); Pansiri et al. (2021); Snow et al. (2021); Somantri and Sardin (2017); and Vikaram et al. (2020) suggest that school principals sometimes enact unethical leadership in their practice as school leaders. The study further seeks to solicit on

how do school principals enact ethical leadership practices in a complex school environment characterised by multiple stakeholder participation. Of particular important, the study also seeks to understand why school principals enact ethical leadership in a particular way during times of accountability. Given these postulations, the study is significant in educational leadership. You are thus purposively selected to participate in this research project since your experience, knowledge and track record as a school principal proves that you can contribute in expanding the knowledge related to ethical leadership during times of accountability.

Framed with the Butterfly Effect of the Chaos theory, the study further seeks to explore on how school principals' minor ethical leadership practices (like honesty, transparency, responsibility, fairness etc.) can have a significant impact in the entire school environment and vice versa. The study will thus caution school principals that that a trivial action, decision, or even a leadership practice by the school principal can have a significant impact on the entire school environment. As a result, such a 'trivial' ethical leadership practice by the school principal can bring a significant change which was unpredicted in the entire school environment. In this study, the chaos theory will thus enable school principal to be ethical conscious and uphold high regards for ethical leadership practices while being mindful that a slight enactment on each of these values can have untold impact on the school environment and intensify accountability to relevant stakeholders. Also, school principals' understanding of the chaos theory enables them to be responsive to minor changes and their impact on the entire school environment (Musselwhite & Herath, 2007). This in turn can help such school principals in creating minor changes in their action, decisions, and leadership approaches knowing very well that their small change will make a greater positive change in the school.

To this end, your permission is hereby requested to conduct *semi – structured interviews* with you as a seasoned school principal. The length of the interviews will not exceed 80 minutes and will be recorded using a smart phone or a voice recorder. Furthermore, to enhance this study, certain documents will be reviewed in this multiple case study vis-à-vis to the school principals' enacting ethical leadership during times of accountability. Documents that will be reviewed include *log book entries; SGB minutes; educators' disciplinary records; records of submission to the circuit manager; meeting agendas; as well as school visit tool by the circuit manager and other departmental officials*. These documents should not be older than three years and copies will be requested at the end of the interview. Of particular important your

identity will be protected since pseudonyms will be used to disguise your identity. Also, school's name will be erased on the reviewed documents.

Data generated from this study will be used to write a research report for my thesis and an electronic copy will be widely available as a PhD Theses are put in the University of KwaZulu-Natal Research Space database. Information regarding your personal details and school's particulars will be kept confidential and will only be known by the researcher and the supervisor. In ensuring confidentiality, the following will be strictly adhered to:

- Your identity will not be divulged during and after the study has been concluded.
- Pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity and the school.
- Interviews will be audio recorder using a smart phone or a voice recorder.
- Your participation is voluntary.
- Your responses will be treated with strict confidentiality.
- You will have access to all transcript and have a right to change, revise, and review (member checking).
- Copies of the reviewed documents will be requested and school particulars be erased.
- No financial benefits you will accrue due to your participation in the study.
- An electronic copy of the thesis will be sent to you once the study is concluded.
- Interviews will be scheduled at your convenient time.
- Copies/ evidence of reported cases by the principal to the CM viz. *log book entries; SGB minutes; educators' disciplinary records; records of submission to the circuit manager; meeting agendas; as well as school visit tool by the circuit manager and other departmental officials* will be requested with the school's name being erased.

Please read through this information sheet and then append your signature on the Declaration of Consent form supplied. Further queries concerning this research can be forwarded to:

Prof TT Bhengu (Supervisor)

UKZN School of Education

Ellen Khuzwayo Building

Edgewood Campus

Tel: (031) 260 3524

Cell: 083 947 5321

Email: bhengutt@ukzn.ac.za

Or

Human and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC)

Govani Mbeki Centre,

UKZN Westville Campus

Tel: (031) 260 7291

Fax: (031) 260 2384

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Thank you

Celumusa Hlongwane (Mr)

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## Appendix C: Participants' Informed Consent

### Declaration for Participants

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (full name of the participant) hereby confirm that I have fully read the content and the conditions contained in PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH on the PhD study to be conducted by Celumusa Hlongwane. To this effect, I *agree/ do not agree* (circle the appropriate one) to participate in the study.

Furthermore, I am aware that:

- My identity will not be divulged during and after the study has been concluded.
- Pseudonyms will be used to protect my identity and the school.
- Interviews will be audio recorder using a smart phone or a voice recorder.
- My participation is voluntary.
- My responses will be treated with strict confidentiality.
- I will have access to all transcript and have a right to change, revise, and review transcripts (member checking).
- Copies of the reviewed documents will be requested and school particulars be erased.
- No financial benefits I will accrue due to my participation in the study.
- An electronic copy of the thesis will be sent to you once the study is concluded.
- Interviews will be scheduled at your convenient time.
- Copies/ evidence of reported cases by the principal to the CM viz. *log book entries; SGB minutes; educators' disciplinary records; records of submission to the circuit manager; meeting agendas; as well as school visit tool by the circuit manager and other departmental officials* will be requested with the school's name being erased.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D: Interview Protocol

Participant's Name: ----- Date: -----

### Interview Schedule for School Principals

1. Brief explanation of the purpose, rationale, significance, confidentiality of the processes and the expectation, as well as the use of the voice recorder.
2. Questions from participant (if any).
3. Consent form completion and collection.

### Research Questions

- 7 What are the school principals' experiences of ethical leadership during times of accountability?
- 8 What are the views of the school principals regarding the causes of unethical leadership in schools during times of accountability?
- 9 Why do school principals enact ethical leadership in a particular way during times of accountability?
- 10 How do school principals enhance ethical leadership during times of accountability considering the complexities, dilemmas, and dynamics associated with the school as an open organisation?

### Biographical questions (background)

1. Briefly tell me some information about yourself personally and professionally. (probe)  
What qualifications do you hold? (further probe) What teaching experience do you have?

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2. How long have you been working in this school? (probe) And how long have you been holding your position? (further probe) How would you describe your experiences immediately after obtaining the principal position?

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**Questions addressing the research questions and the theoretical framework**

1. Often people including District Directors, DOE Officials and CMs emphasise the importance of ethical leadership and accountability by school principals, do you concur with this belief? (probe) Briefly, what is your understanding about ethics? (probe) Ethical leadership in schools? (further probe) And accountability? (further probe) Would you then say ethics, ethical leadership and accountability are significant/ insignificant in educational leadership?

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2. Would you mind sharing some of the important ethical values that you believe an ethical school principal should possess? (probe) How then do we come to the generalisation that a certain leader/ school principal is ethical?

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3. What are some of the ethical leadership practices/ values that you enact in your practice as a school principal in order to ensure that accountability is maintained in your school? (probe) How do practicing these ethical practices ensure accountability?

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4. Sadly, reports from literature, the media, and SACE indicate that some educators including school principals conduct themselves unethically. Did you as a school principal had a case/ cases whereby one of your educators improperly conducted

himself/ herself which warranted you to report such act of misconduct to the CM?  
(probe) If yes, without giving names, would you please share your experiences with us/  
How did it happened? (probe) How was the matter reported to the CM?

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5. Also, some school principals as educators commit the acts of misconduct in their practice as school leaders (as evidence from the media, SACE, and literature suggests). What do you think are the causes of unethical practices by those school principals? Elaborate your views.

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6. Considering a number of stakeholders (like SGB, educators, SMT, CMs, learners, parents etc.) that are involved in education which ultimately intensify accountability pressures for school principals, don't you think that sometimes school principals are tempted to act unethically in their leadership? (probe) If so, how?

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7. Bhengu and Myende (2016) *are of the view that school leadership practices are not fixed, but are fluid, and evolving where leadership is not about compliance, but is about the school principal's ability to identify what works in his/ her school.* In light of this



statement, what do you think are the benefits of enacting ethical leadership in a particular way in schools considering the complex nature and multiple stakeholder participation in modern day school by school principals? Put more simply, why do you think school principals should enact ethical leadership in a particular way in their practice as school leaders in a challenging school environment?

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8. Is it not overwhelming for you as a school principal to be accountable to so many role players in education? (probe) How do you ensure accountability (reporting) to all stakeholders (including CM as your immediate senior) is maintained in particular if the case involves educators' misconduct?

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9. Don't you think that reporting to numerous role players in education leaves school principals in accountability dilemma? Please justify your postulations.

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10. Is there something you can advise us on / caution us on the importance of reporting/ not reporting to relevant body (e.g., CM or SGB) any unethical practices by educators no matter how minor the action might look? (probe) Without giving names, you can share your experience that almost ran out of proportion/ ran out of proportion due to your failure to report to the CM.

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11. In your experience as a school principal, can you recall of a single event (*if any*) that proved to you that driven by ethical value like honesty, truthfulness, transparency, fairness, responsibility, or even punctuality is beneficial and can bring an unpredicted change in the entire school environment. (probe) What prompted you to be inspired by that value at that time? (probe) How did it happened? (probe) How did in turn bring an unpredicted change in the school environment?

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12. Given that as a principal you are accountable to various stakeholders in education with different demands, if I may ask, how do you satisfy this web of stakeholders? (probe) How do you cope? (probe) Do you sometimes have to change your leadership approaches?

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13. As a school principal, can you recall on trainings and workshops for educators including school principals organised by DBE, SACE, and Organised Labour on ethics and Educators' Codes of Professional Ethics? (probe) during your initial teacher training, was the ethics and ethical leadership covered in the University or College curriculum?

(further probe), if not how did you learn about ethics in education and ethical leadership?

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14. How then do you infuse ethics in your leadership? (probe) How do you cultivate the ethical culture among different role players in education? (probe) subsequently, what suggestions would you provide to other principals who want to infuse ethics in their leadership considering the dilemmas and dynamics associated with leading schools as complex organisations.

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15. Is there something that you wish to share that I may not have asked you? In case there is, kindly share with us.

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Thank you very much for your participation and spending time with me in this interview. I am humbled as I am mindful that you should have used this time for other things that are utmost important.

## Appendix E: Permission to conduct research by DBE



### KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE

EDUCATION  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

#### OFFICE OF THE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

Private Bag X9137, PIETERMARITZBURG, 3200  
Anton Lembede Building, 247 Burger Street, Pietermaritzburg, 3201  
Tel: 033 392 1063

Email: Phindile.duma@kzndoe.gov.za

Enquiries: Phindile Duma

Ref.:2/4/8/24

Mr CB Hlongwane  
PO Box 161  
WARTBURG  
3233

Dear Mr Hlongwane

#### PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DōE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: "SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' EXPERIENCES OF ETHICAL LEADERSHIP DURING TIMES OF ACCOUNTABILITY: COMPLEXITIES, DILEMMAS AND DYNAMICS", in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the Intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from 20 February 2023 to 31 January 2026.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Miss Phindile Duma at the contact numbers above.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report/dissertation/thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.

UMGUNGUNDLOVU DISTRICT

Mr GN Ngcobo  
Head of Department: Education  
Date: 23 February 2023

GROWING KWAZULU-NATAL TOGETHER

## Appendix F: Turnitin Report

Feedback Studio — Mozilla Firefox

https://ev.turnitin.com/app/carta/en\_us/?o=2180870397&u=1025070112&s=1&lang=en\_us

feedback studio CELUMUSA HLONGWANE Complete thesis First draft -- /0 6 of 16

**Match Overview**

**9%**

**Celumusa Bethuele Hlongwana**

**CHAPTER ONE**

**ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY**

**1.1 Introduction**

*Ethical leadership is the missing link in decision making and has resulted in the collapse of large businesses, State Owned Enterprises (SOEs), and public institutions, both locally and globally- Professor Bonang Mohale (Mohale, 2018).*

This statement proves beyond reasonable doubt that school principals need to embrace ethical leadership in their practice as school leaders if they have to curb and remedy the chronic dysfunctionality and leadership crisis that characterises some schools. Ethical leadership is at the heart of the schools' functionality as decisions are influenced and shaped by ethics (Robbins

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