

Exploring Working Relationships between Union Representatives and School Management Teams in the Rural Public Schools of South Africa: Implications for School Management

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ABSTRACT The present study seeks to explore the working relationship between members of school management teams (SMT) and union representatives in four rural public junior secondary schools in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. The study was conducted through a qualitative research methodology, which entailed the use of a case study design in four selected junior secondary schools. This was done through the use of focus group interviews. Two sets of questions were posed to two interview schedules whereupon participants were required to provide responses. Eleven SMT members and 7 union representatives took part in the study. Separate focus group interviews were conducted according to SMT groups and union representative groups in each school. The findings highlighted the role that SMT members and union representatives played jointly or separately in ensuring the smooth running of their school, as well as in addressing tensions between staff and management and amongst the staff members to enhance effective work in each school. The findings include issues of bias amongst SMT members against some union representatives or members of their unions; the role of the SMT members in consultation processes towards improving working relationship with union members on matters of mutual interest. The study also showed that there was a need for managers of schools and union representatives to know, interpret, understand and implement labor-related legislations in the same way to ensure consistency and stability in their schools. Recommendations to improve the relationship between the school management teams and the union representatives were made.