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# **Difficult dilemmas: How are they resolved by secondary school middle managers?**

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## **Abstract**

Resolving difficult dilemmas is an inescapable component of teaching. If teachers progress into positions of responsibility, middle management positions, the situations they are required to resolve become more complex, requiring a greater range of skills to effectively resolve.

Little research has been undertaken to identify the factors influencing middle managers' resolution of difficult dilemmas. Given that such situations occur frequently in teaching it is a gap in the knowledge base of the profession. This study began to fill that void by identifying the types of dilemmas arising most frequently in the work of secondary school middle managers and identifying the strategies employed when they resolve these dilemmas. Of particular interest was identifying the extent to which the example of the principal is an influencing factor as this is heavily intoned in much educational leadership literature.

A qualitative study was dictated and an inductive approach utilising thematic analysis was employed to examine the personal accounts describing the resolution of dilemmas. Semi-structured interviews were used to elicit narratives describing occasions in which middle managers or their colleagues had resolved difficult dilemmas. Narrative analysis revealed that the multifaceted and busy nature of middle managers' positions, and the constraints and obstacles existent in schools, are not conducive to considered and reflective resolutions to the difficult problems and dilemmas encountered.

Middle managers take seriously their role in resolving the problems and dilemmas arising in their work. However little guidance is available to help them, or in their preparation for promotion into such positions. It was expected the example of the principal would exert a strong influence. However, this was not supported by data. Greater preparation for all teachers to assist them in recognising the values conflicting in challenging dilemma situations is essential so they are better placed to comprehend their moral duty in resolving such situations and can propose appropriate resolutions. The principal can play a significant role in developing this capacity.

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