

THE ROLE OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION IN MANAGING PEER CO-WORKER  
CONFLICT IN A NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATION: A CASE STUDY OF SILC KENYA,  
ELDORET

by

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## DECLARATION

Student number: 55717284

I declare that “**THE ROLE OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION IN MANAGING PEER CO-WORKER CONFLICT IN A NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATION: A CASE STUDY OF SILC KENYA, ELDORET**” is my own work and that all the sources that I used or quoted from are indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.



15<sup>TH</sup> July 2016

.....  
SIGNATURE

.....  
DATE

## **DEDICATION**

I firstly wish to dedicate this dissertation to my Heavenly Father who has brought me this far. His mercies are never ending. There were times it seemed like the journey was too tough but again He lifted me up and continues to do so. Your Name be praised forever and ever Amen!

Secondly, to my parents, Mr Francis Omayo and Mrs Veronicah Omayo, you have been a complete blessing in my life. You taught me the value of education and to always go for what I believe is right for me. Thank you for your immense support and provision throughout my life. May God continue keeping and blessing you.

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## ABSTRACT

Conflict is an inevitable occurrence in any human interaction setting and organisations are no exception. Communication is an essential an important aspect of conflict. People run organisations and without interaction through communication, organisational existence would be next to impossible.

This dissertation aims to explore the role of interpersonal communication in managing peer co-worker conflict in a Non-Governmental organisation, SILC KENYA, Eldoret.

This study adopted a qualitative case study. Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted to collect data from fifteen employees of the same hierarchical level.

The study revealed various causes of conflict amongst the peer co-workers. Exchange of resources amongst peer co-workers was seen to better interpersonal relations in the workplace and it was further noted that interpersonal communication plays an important role in conflict management. The study recommends that peer co-workers should be equipped with interpersonal communication skills through frequent teambuilding activities and training workshops to aid in conflict management.

**Keywords:** Conflict, Conflict management, Organisational communication, Interpersonal communication, Interpersonal conflict, Resource exchange, Social Exchange theory, Non-Governmental organisations, Peer co-worker relationships, Peer co-worker exchange.

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
SET	Social Exchange Theory
QDA	Qualitative Data Analysis
SILC	Savings and Internal Lending Communities
SKE	SILC Kenya Eldoret
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
CSR	Catholic Relief Services
FSD Kenya	Financial Sector Deepening Kenya

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Interpersonal communication is an essential skill as it is an inevitable part of human interaction because “One cannot not communicate” (Watzlawick, Beavin & Jackson 1967: 275). Interpersonal communication is described as a “symbolic process by which two people, bound together in a relationship, provide each other with resources or negotiate the exchange of resources” (Roloff 1981: 30).

Conflict too is inevitable in any human interaction setting. As human beings, it is not possible to get along with each other at all times, therefore, evading conflict is impossible. Conflict is often viewed as being destructive, but when managed properly it can be constructive, especially in the workplace. Employees in an organisation interact with one another on a daily basis and these interactions make them prone to conflict. Many studies conducted on workplace relationships lean towards the superior-subordinate relationships and this has created a huge gap in the study of peer co-worker relationships (Sias 2009). Sias believes that studies on peer co-worker relationships are necessary.

According to Putman and Poole (1987: 552), conflict is “the interaction of interdependent people who perceive the opposition of goals, aims, and (/or) values, and who see the other party as potentially interfering with the realization of these goals (aims, or values)”. Folger, Poole and Stutman (2005: 4) added to the definition by describing conflict as the “interaction of interdependent people who perceive incompatibility and the possibility of interference from others as a result of this incompatibility”. These two definitions point out the fact that for conflict to manifest, people have to interact. These interactions bring about conflict at one point or another because as human beings, we are wired differently and when others’ views differ from ours, we tend to disagree with them.

Putman (2006), states that communication is an essential and important aspect of conflict. Therefore, it is almost impossible to explain how conflict manifests itself without communication. Putman (2006) continues by saying that the communication act is, in itself, a key factor in how conflict manifests and are enacted. This explains how communication studies and conflict go hand in hand and how difficult it is to explain one without the other.

Conflict hinders healthy working relations between peer co-workers and the general organisational performance is affected as well. A study conducted by Mughal and Khan (2013: 11) confirmed that intra- personal and interpersonal conflicts were the conflicts most experienced by the respondents in their study. They stated “sharing of limited resources, poor communication, employees’ own personality differences and increased competition” as some of the reasons which fuel intrapersonal and interpersonal conflict in organisations (Mughal &Khan 2013: 11).

In view of the above, the study intends to explore the causes of conflicts among peer co-workers in SKE. This will include the economic and social exchanges made between peer co-workers in the organisation, how such conflicts affected the peer co-worker’s interpersonal relations, job satisfaction and job outcomes and how interpersonal communication could be used to curb such conflicts.

## **1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

Interpersonal communication in the organisation is essential for satisfactory personal work relationships (Bormann, Howell, Nichols & Shapiro 1982). These relationships are necessary because the organisation’s members (employees) rely on these personal relationships to share knowledge and develop their skills. The skills gained in these interactions can equip them to solve problems, satisfy their informational needs and reduce uncertainty between employees (Myers, Seibold & Park 2011). This, in turn, builds up trust which is essential for healthy relationships where employees feel their work contributions are recognised by co-workers and the organisation as a whole. Peer co-workers spend most of their time at the workplace interacting with one another and these interactions make them prone to conflict. Peer co-worker

relationships tend to be more prone to conflict than superior-subordinate relationships. This is mostly because peer co-workers are in the same hierarchical level and thus have no formal authority over one other (Sias 2005).

“Workplace relationships are unique interpersonal relationships with important implications for the individuals in those relationships, and the organisations in which the relationships exist and develop” (Sias 2005: 377). There are three types of peer co-worker relationships, namely information peer relationships, collegial peer relationships and special peer relationships (Sias 2005).

Sias (2005) states that in information peer relationships, peer co-workers have low intimacy and their communication is mostly work-related; there are low levels of self-disclosure and since the intimacy levels are low, trust is low as well. In collegial peer relationships, peer co-workers are moderately friendly with one another and they disclose more about themselves, thus trusting one another and seeking emotional support. On the other hand, special peer relationships are much friendlier. In these types of relationships, peer co-workers are more open to one another, offering emotional support and friendship and can be a source of career motivation and trust. Interpersonal communication is an important aspect in organisational communication. Peer co-workers share all kinds of information with each other and are only possible through interpersonal communication. According to Sias (2005), peer co-workers relate with one another and the kind of information they share with each other has an effect on the quality of their relationships.

In the past decades, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO's) have grown extraordinarily all over the world and they are involved in all sectors of countries' activities. NGO's are common in developing countries, mostly in Africa and Asia. These organisations play a significant role in developing countries as they aid in development activities. In the Kenyan context, NGO's are mostly involved in the development activities of the country and act as human rights vocalists for the vulnerable population.

According to the Non-Governmental Organisations Co-ordination Act, 1990, no. 19 of 1990, which was amended through the Kenya Gazette Supplement No. 85, Act No. 8 on 23 October 1992, an NGO is defined as “a private voluntary grouping of individuals or associations, not operated for profit or for other commercial purposes but which have organized themselves nationally or internationally for the benefit of the public at large and for the promotion of social welfare, development, charity or research in the areas inclusive of, but not restricted to, health, relief, agriculture, education, industry, and the supply of amenities and services” (Abok, Waititu, Ogutu, & Ragui 2013: 297).

In Kenya NGO's were founded way before independence and their countrywide numbers started growing in the early 1990's (Brass 2010). According to Brass (2010), after independence the Kenyan government encouraged the formation and development of not-for-profit organisations which went by the local Swahili name of '*harambee* groups', meaning “let us pull together”. These groups are currently registered in the Kenyan government as community-based organisations. The numbers of NGO's started to increase during the post-colonial era and according to a report on the number of registered NGO's in Kenya by 2008, was 5 929 (National survey of NGOs report 2009).

The Kenyan Government developed a board (The Non-Governmental Organisations Coordination Board) to govern the NGO's. It was established by a Parliament Act in 1990; to streamline the registration and coordination of all NGO's in Kenya. The board now estimates the total number of NGO's in Nairobi alone to be around 1 425 as of 2014 (NGO Bureau 2014). These growing numbers show how important NGO's are to Kenya's economy and how their organisational performance benefits the country. The study was therefore beneficial in that it sought to establish how interpersonal communication could be implemented to curb conflicts, thus improving peer co-worker relationships leading to improved individual work performance and organisational performance in these organisations.

### **1.2.1 SILC (Savings and Internal Lending Communities) Kenya**

SILC KENYA is one of the largest NGO's operating in Kenya. SILC KENYA is located in the towns of Kilifi, Mombasa, Malindi and Eldoret. SILC is a savings-led programme piloted by the Catholic Relief Services (CRS) with the broad aim of supporting the poor by diversifying their income generating activities. SILC KENYA's branch in Eldoret (SKE) was the case study for this research.

Eldoret is a town located in the Rift Valley region of Kenya. SKE was established in August, 2009, after the Post-Election Violence that occurred in Kenya after the 2008 Presidential elections. After discussions on the aftermath of the region's Post-Election Violence, the organisation was established to assist people who relied on donors for food, shelter, security and clothing.

This NGO was funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation for the initial first three years. Two major donors then signed up to support the NGO, namely the Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and the Financial Sector Deepening Kenya (FSD Kenya). The main aim of this NGO was to offer simple financial services to communities who do not have access to such services. The main target population was low income earners without access to financial services due to the lack of collateral. Currently SKE has 145 employees.

### **1.3 MOTIVATION OF THE STUDY**

As part of the undergraduate degree requirements, an internship with an organisation had to be completed. An internship was therefore secured with an NGO in Eldoret, Kenya. During the internship, several conflict situations were witnessed that ranged from mild to severe episodes with peer co-workers not talking to each other, let alone working together. This personal experience was part of the drive to conduct research on this topic to find conflict management solutions in Kenyan NGO's.

## **1.4 RESEARCH PROBLEM**

Conflict is inevitable in any interaction setting, and workplaces are no exception. Because of this fact, conflicts between peer co-workers in the workplace are common. Previous research leaned towards superior-subordinate relationships and therefore the need for a peer co-worker relationship study exists (Sias 2009).

Peer co-worker conflict is a major problem in the workplace because it hinders healthy working relations, which are important for work productivity (Xerri 2013). Conflict therefore affects organisational productivity and performance.

The study sought to investigate and solve the problem of conflict among peer co-workers in the workplace. According to a study conducted by Younyoung Choi, the findings showed that there is a direct link between conflict management and job satisfaction (Choi 2013). He goes on to state that “in a workplace, conflict and the style of conflict management implemented, substantially influence individual, group, and organisational effectiveness “ (Choi 2013: 687). Therefore, if conflict between peer co-workers is not managed effectively, it can lead to a decline in both individual and organisational performance. Based on the above arguments, the researcher concluded that peer co-worker conflict is indeed a problem affecting organisations and addressing it is important.

### **1.4.1 Statement of the problem**

A cross-sectional, qualitative case study exploring the role of interpersonal communication to manage peer co-worker conflict in an NGO by conducting semi-structured face-to-face interviews.

### **1.4.2 Sub-problems**

**Sub-problem 1:** Exploring causes of conflict among peer co-workers in an NGO.

**Sub-problem 2:** Exploring how interpersonal communication can be implemented to aid in conflict management in an NGO.

## **1.5 AIM AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

Currently, the number of NGO's in Kenya is increasing almost daily. These organisations' range stretches through all sectors from health, the economy and the environment, Human rights, HIV/AIDS and agriculture, to name but a few. In any human interaction setting, conflict is inevitable and organisations are no exception (Nicotera 2009). Employees of an organisation must work together in order to establish organisational performance. Healthy interpersonal relations amongst employees are important, and to realise this, the organisation's members have to embrace interpersonal communication (Bormann et al. 1982).

However, in this social media era, spare time is rarely available for face-to-face interpersonal communication with peer co-workers. This has also been a major hindrance in promoting interpersonal communication in the work place.

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of interpersonal communication when managing peer co-worker conflict in an organisation, and to give insights on how it could be enhanced within the organisation.

The study aimed at describing and exploring the role of interpersonal communication in managing peer co-worker conflict in SKE. The study further aimed at assessing the effects of conflict on peer co-worker relationships in SKE. By interviewing the employees of SKE the researcher sought out the causes of conflict among the peer co-workers, its effects on their interpersonal relationships and how the peer co-workers dealt with these conflicts.

## 1.6 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study were to address the following:

- Objective 1:** To explore the causes of conflict among peer co-workers in SKE.
- Objective 2:** To explore the economic and social resources exchanged between peer co-workers in SKE.
- Objective 3:** To explore the effects of conflict in a working environment.
- Objective 4:** To explore the importance of interpersonal communication regarding conflict management in the organisation.

## 1.7 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions investigated were:

- Research question 1:** What are the causes of conflict among peer co-workers in SKE?
- Research question 2:** What are the economic and social resources exchanged between peer co-workers in SKE?
- Research question 3:** What are the effects of conflict in this working environment?
- Research question 4:** What is the importance of interpersonal communication regarding conflict management in this organisation?

## 1.8 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Conflict is a predominant topic in the communication field and even though scholars and researchers gave it much attention, it has not diminished. Organisations are mostly affected by conflicts as they affect the general organisational performance. For example, a study by Choi (2013) confirms that there is a direct link between conflict management strategies and employees' job satisfaction and thus general organisational performance. He found that if employees are satisfied with their job/(s), their outcomes improve.

Interpersonal communication is an important aspect of organisational communication. It helps establish and maintain interpersonal relationships among peer co-workers that are very important to create a healthy working environment. When people get along, conflict is minimal because personal relationships affect how peer co-workers communicate with each other. “Good personal relationships make for better task-oriented communication in that the participants can express disagreements, confront conflicts, and hammer out decisions” (Bormann et al 1982: 23).

In a study conducted by Myers and Oetzel (2003), the participants reported that when they were familiar with each other, they were more willing to participate in task-related interactions (Myers et al 2011). Interpersonal communication leads to comfortability when working with others and is essential for peer co-workers in the workplace.

The study was therefore significant because firstly, it sought to establish how interpersonal communication could be implemented to improve peer co-worker relationships, and in so doing, help in managing peer co-worker conflict in SKE. Since not many studies have been conducted on this topic, especially the role of interpersonal communication in managing peer co-worker conflict, the researcher believes this research study findings would bridge this gap by adding to the body of knowledge. Secondly, the study could enhance the importance of interpersonal communication knowledge in the workplace. Thirdly, the study provided usable data in enhancing knowledge in the communication field. The knowledge acquired from this study also gave more insight on the Social Exchange theory and its role in explaining workplace relationships. Finally, the study findings were useful to the employees of SKE and brought to them new insight on how to manage peer co-worker conflict by using interpersonal communication.

## **1.9 DEFINITION OF TERMS**

### **1.9.1 Conflict**

Conflict is the “interaction of interdependent people who perceive incompatibility and the possibility of interference from others as a result of this incompatibility” (Folger et al 2005: 4).

## **1.9.2 Organisational communication**

Organisational communication is “the process by which individuals stimulate meaning in the minds of other individuals by means of verbal or nonverbal messages in the context of a formal organisation” (Richmond, McCroskey & McCroskey 2005: 20).

## **1.9.3 Interpersonal communication**

Interpersonal communication is described as a “symbolic process by which two people, bound together in a relationship, provide each other with resources or negotiate the exchange of resources” (Roloff 1981: 30).

## **1.9.4 Peer co-worker relationships**

Peer co-worker relationships refer to “relationships between employees at the same hierarchical level who have no formal authority over one another” (Sias 2009: 58).

## **1.9.5 Conflict management**

Conflict management refers to the actions that occur before, during and after a conflict is perceived (Roloff & Chiles 2011).

## **1.9.6 Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO)**

An NGO is “a private voluntary grouping of individuals or associations, not operated for profit or for other commercial purposes, but which have organised themselves nationally or internationally for the benefit of the public at large and for the promotion of social welfare, development, charity or research in the areas inclusive of, but not restricted to, health, relief, agriculture, education, industry, and the supply of amenities and services” (Abok et al 2013: 297).

## **1.10 DISSERTATION STRUCTURE**

The dissertation is structured as follows;

Chapter 1 contains the Introduction, Background to the study, Motivation, Statement of the problem, Aim of the study, Objectives of the study, Research questions, Significance of the study, Definition of terms, Dissertation Structure and Summary.

Chapter 2 presents the literature reviewed pertaining to the study of the interpersonal communication role in managing co-worker conflict in organisations. The chapter is guided by the objectives of the study.

Chapter 3 outlines the research paradigm in which the study is situated, the research design and methods, the population, the sample and the procedures of data collection, analysis and interpretation.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the qualitative field research gathered by the semi-structured face to face interviews. Data from the study was analysed qualitatively using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis model.

Chapter 5, guided by the four main objectives of the study, presents the discussions of the study findings.

Chapter 6 summarises the study's main findings and presents the conclusion and recommendations.

## **1.11 SUMMARY**

This first chapter provided background information on the conducted study. This included the motivation and significance of the study, problem statement, research objectives and research questions briefly stated and discussed. A structure of the dissertation is provided to take the

reader through the chapters. The study at hand sets out to explore the role of interpersonal communication in conflict management among peer co-workers in an NGO in Kenya. This chapter gives a background to conflict and how it manifests itself in the organisation. It was indicated that conflict is inevitable in human interaction settings and thus ways of managing it are paramount in fostering better peer co-worker relationships. The chapter establishes the importance of interpersonal communication in the organisation. The next chapter explores the existing literature pertaining to the study.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

The previous chapter introduced this study, investigating the relationship between interpersonal communication and conflict. The concepts associated with this study such as conflict, conflict management and interpersonal communication were defined. This chapter explores the literature pertaining to the study. The researcher made use of primary and secondary literature sources.

According to Creswell (2003: 29-30), a literature review firstly, "shares with the reader the results of other studies that are closely related to the study being reported". Secondly, "it relates a study to the larger on-going dialogue in the literature about a topic, filling in gaps and extending prior studies" and finally "it provides a framework for establishing the importance of [your] study as well as a benchmark for comparing the results of a study with other findings". The study objectives will guide this chapter:

In the next section the researcher explores the definition of conflict, causes of conflict in organisations and conflict management.

#### **2.2 CONFLICT IN ORGANISATIONS**

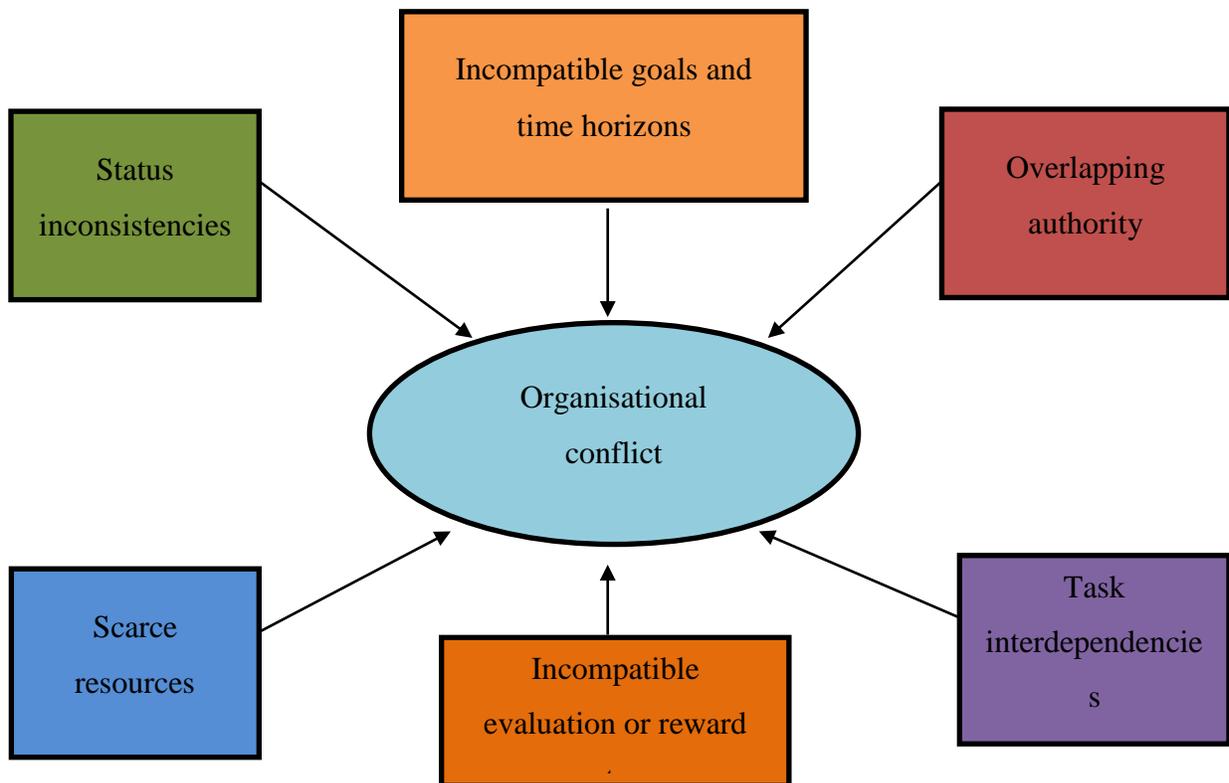
According to Folger, Poole and Stutman (2005: 4), conflict is "the interaction of interdependent people who perceive incompatibility and the possibility of interference from others as a result of this incompatibility". Nicotera (2009: 165), states that communication theorists view conflict as "an inevitable and necessary social process that when managed well contributes to creativity, cohesiveness, relational growth, and productivity".

Given the many conflict definitions by different scholars, Baron (1990: 199) attempted to give five elements which overlap the definitions. These are:

- At first, when combined, conflict includes opposing interests between individuals or groups involved in zero-sum situation.
- The opposing interests must then be recognised for conflict to exist.
- Conflict involves beliefs by each side that the other will thwart or has already thwarted its interests.
- It is also suggested that conflict is a process and it develops out of existing relationships between individuals or groups and reflects their past interactions and the contexts in which these took place.
- Finally, actions by one or both sides that, in fact, produces thwarting of others' goals.

Conflict in the organisation can emerge in a variety of forms. Below is a diagram illustrating the different sources of organisational conflict (Jones & George 2003).

**Figure 1: Sources of organisational conflict-adapted from Jones and George (2003)**



Some of the ways conflicts can emerge are through task allocation disagreements, disagreements between colleagues and also disagreements in the on-going processes in the organisation. These forms are labelled as relationship conflicts, task conflicts and process conflicts (Pearson, Ensley, & Amason 2002). Below follows a short description of each of these conflicts:

Relationship conflicts, also known as affective conflicts, occur when “two interacting social entities, while trying to solve a problem together, become aware that their feelings and emotions regarding some or all the issues are incompatible” (Rahim 2001: 21). According to Jehn, Northcraft and Neale (1999), these conflicts are caused by social category diversity. Jehn and Mannix (2001) also affirm that these types of conflicts are involved around personal issues and emotions.

Task conflicts, also labelled as substantive conflicts, occur from disagreements on “task or content issues” (Rahim 2001: 21). These conflicts often arise because of different viewpoints on particular tasks carried out by employees (Jehn & Mannix 2001). These types of conflicts are not characterised by emotions of the parties involved as compared to the relationship conflicts (Jehn & Mannix 2001).

Process conflicts are defined as “an awareness of controversies about aspects of how task accomplishment will proceed” (Jehn & Mannix 2001: 239). These conflicts come about over disagreements issues of duty and resource delegation (Jehn & Mannix 2001). When employees disagree on who should do a specific task or who should bear more responsibility on the task completion, they are experiencing process conflict.

According to Rahim (2001: 97) organisational conflict is classified as intrapersonal, interpersonal, intragroup and intergroup “on the basis of levels”.

- **Intrapersonal conflict**

This type of conflict develops from within an individual. Rahim (2001: 23) states that this type of conflict occurs when “an organisational member is required to perform certain tasks and roles that do not match his or her expertise, interests, goals, and values”.

- **Interpersonal conflict**

Also known as *dyadic* conflict, this type of conflict occurs between two or more people. Interpersonal conflict between organisational members occurs within “the same or different hierarchical levels” (Rahim 2001: 23).

- **Intragroup conflict**

This type of conflict is also known as “intradepartmental conflict” (Rahim 2001: 23). This type of conflict occurs among members of the same group or department. Rahim (2001: 24) believes that this conflict mostly arises due to differences among members in terms of “goals, tasks and procedures”.

- **Intergroup conflict**

Also known as interdepartmental conflict, this type of conflict occurs between two or more groups or departments within an organisation (Rahim 2001: 24). This conflict arises due to differences among members of different departments. It can be because of difference in goals or competition among the departments.

### **2.2.1 Causes of conflict**

Interpersonal conflict, which this study is focused on, refers to “the manifestation of incompatibility, disagreement, or difference between two or more interacting individuals” (Rahim 200: 117).

There are many causes of conflict in organisations. A study conducted by Van Tonder, Havenga and Visagie (2008: 394), confirms this as they also discovered that the causes of organisational conflict are driven by factors such as the “heterogeneity of the workforce, loyalties of groups and diverse economic interests”. The findings also affirmed that “ resource availability, affirmative action programs, the scope and content of work, the introduction of new management techniques, and differences of a cultural and racial nature to be causes of conflict at the organisation level”(Van Tonder et al 2008: 394).

According to Buss (2009: 13), other causes of conflict include personality clashes, stress, heavy workloads, poor leadership, lack of openness and lack of role clarity or poor performance management. He also adds that cultural, linguistic and socio-economic differences may be causes of conflict in a workplace that consists of diverse staff. Grace (2012), points out differing values, opposing interests, personality conflicts, poor communication and personal problems to be the causes of conflict. She goes on to mention that poor communication can lead to misunderstandings among employees. Employees should always strive to convey the correct information to each other so as to avoid conflict.

Another recent study conducted in Pakistan by Mughal and Khan (2013: 14-15) found that lack of resources, poor communication, employees’ own personality differences and increased competition were the major causes of conflict in organisations. Putnam and Poole (1987) viewed the competition for resources, coordination of systems, work distribution and participation in decision-making as key factors to conflict in organisations.

The above-mentioned studies site poor communication or lack of communication among employees to be a major cause of conflict in organisations. However these studies do not state causes of conflict among peer co-workers specifically. This explains the importance of the study at hand. This study sets out to explore in depth the causes of conflict among peer co-workers in an NGO setting. This will help in filling the existent gap in the literature cited above.

Pearson et al (2002) points out that conflict can be either functional or dysfunctional. Functional conflicts are the conflicts that are beneficial to organisations while the dysfunctional conflicts are

the conflicts that cause harm to either the individuals affected by the conflicts or the organisation as a whole. For the purpose of this study, the researcher focused on studying the dysfunctional conflicts among peer co-workers in SKE. After observing what causes conflict in organisations, the researcher discusses conflict management and the styles of managing conflict as proposed by Rahim (2002).

### **2.2.2 Conflict management**

Roloff and Chiles (2011) noted that conflict management can be described as the actions that occur before, during and after a conflict is perceived. Conflict management should be instrumental in any workplace, as workplace conflicts are inevitable. Of importance is how such conflict could be handled and managed and it is a favourable skill to improve peer co-worker interpersonal relationships. According to Rahim (2001: 76), conflict management is not about avoidance, reduction or termination of the conflict but rather how to “design effective strategies to minimize the dysfunctions of conflict and enhance the constructive functions of conflict in order to enhance learning and effectiveness of an organisation”.

There are many conflict management models (Blake & Mouton 1964; Kilmann & Thomas 1975; 1977; Pruitt 1983; Khun & Poole 2000; DeChurch & Marks 2001 & Rahim 2002). The researcher adopted the Rahim (2002) model of conflict management. According to this model, there are five styles of managing conflict, namely integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding and compromising.

#### **1. Integrating**

This style is viewed as a win-win style and is characterised by high concern for self and others. This style is mostly used in problem solving. Here both parties involved in the conflict look for collaborative ways of dealing with the conflict (Rahim 2002).

## **2. Obliging**

This style of handling conflict, viewed as a lose-win situation, is characterised by low concern for self and high concern for others. With this style of conflict, sacrifices have to be made. One person has to willingly give in to resolve the conflict (Rahim 2002).

## **3. Dominating**

This style is characterised by high concern for self and low concern for others and is viewed as a win-lose situation. With this type of style, one party totally disregards the other party's interests and focuses on themselves and is generally selfish. The other party is only interested in their own well-being (Rahim 2002).

## **4. Avoiding**

This style is characterised by low concern for self and others and is viewed as a lose-lose situation. In this conflict style, people avoid the entire conflict and act, as if nothing happened. The style is mostly applied when the costs of a confrontation outweighs the benefits and is dangerous as the problem remains buried and when not confronted, and can lead to future eruptions (Rahim 2002).

## **5. Compromising**

This style, viewed as a no win-no lose situation, is characterised by intermediate in concern for self and others. This style advocates for a middle ground in that both parties compromise and take into account each other's own goals to resolve the conflict (Rahim 2002). These five styles are all beneficial to peer co-workers when dealing with conflict. The next section discusses the resources exchanged between peer co-workers in organisations.

## **2.3 RESOURCES EXCHANGED BETWEEN PEER CO-WORKERS IN ORGANISATIONS**

Peer co-workers exchange resources in the workplace all the time and are mostly due to the unavoidable interactions between them. Resources exchanged in the workplace can be either economic or social in nature.

According to Foa and Foa's (1974; 1980), resource theory lists love, status, information, money, goods and services as the resources exchanged in workplace relationships. These resources are often exchanged between peer co-workers. The resources exchanged differ in terms of how long the relationships last. The natures of the resources also influence the manner in which they are exchanged. The peer co-worker exchanges can be labelled as either positive or negative, depending on the outcomes.

### **2.3.1 Positive peer co-worker exchanges**

Many scholars define positivity in peer co-worker relationships differently (Dutton & Heaphy 2003; Roberts 2007; Kahn 1992; 2007). A relationship is considered positive depending on the extent of the resources exchanged (Halbesleben 2012). A peer co-worker relationship can be labelled as positive if the act of "being in a relationship results in the employee having a stronger, more positive work identity" (Halbesleben 2012: 108).

Halbesleben (2012) lists mutuality and social support as the key constructs of positive peer co-worker exchanges. Halbesleben also asserts that positive peer co-worker exchanges are important because they help to bring about positive behaviour among peer co-workers as well as gain positive cycles which are significant to both employees and organisations. Knowledge building and sharing is also enhanced through the positive peer co-worker exchanges. Communication is an important factor to knowledge-sharing because it is the channel through which it is shared.

Sias (2009: 66) sites information exchange as one of the exchanges that occurs between peer co-workers. The type and quality of information exchanged between peer co-workers determines the

kind of relationships that they will have. Quality information exchanges results in healthy interpersonal relationships between peer co-workers in organisations. Peer co-worker relationships thrive when these exchanges are involved (Sias 2009).

### **2.3.2 Negative peer co-worker exchanges**

According to Griffin, Stoverink & Gardner (2012: 133), negative peer co-worker exchanges are defined as “a social interaction between two or more employees of the same, or similar, hierarchical level, which results in injury to one or more of the parties involved”. Griffin et al (2012: 132) also state that the “negative exchanges are characterised by behaviours that are generally undesirable, disrespectful, and harmful to the focal employee or employees”.

Negative peer co-worker exchanges impact negatively on peer co-worker relationships. The negative exchanges in organisations can be in the form of aggression, incivility, deviance, bullying, theft, sabotage and whistle blowing (Griffin et al 2012) and cause conflict between peer co-workers. Occurrences of bullying, theft and sabotage can create high levels of friction between employees thus leading to conflict. Peer co-workers should therefore try to minimise negative exchanges so as to develop and maintain healthy interpersonal relationships with each other.

In the next section the effects of conflict in the workplace will be discussed. There can be positive and negative effects of conflict in the workplace and this study deals with the dysfunctional conflicts. These types of conflicts lead to negative effects among individuals and the organisation as a whole.

## **2.4 EFFECTS OF CONFLICT IN THE WORKPLACE**

Conflict can either be destructive or constructive depending on how it is managed in the workplace. Peer co-workers often encounter conflict episodes and it is therefore very important to manage these conflicts.

Van Tonder et al (2008) discovered that conflict is a stress factor in organisations and is associated with reduced work performance and also affects the overall well-being of the employee. The study also determined that conflict severely impacts interpersonal and social relations of employees as well as their mental, emotional and physical well-being and confirmed the negative effects of conflict in the workplace. A study conducted by Giebels and Janssen (2005) affirms that indeed conflict stress leads to emotional exhaustion, absenteeism, and turnover intentions.

Buss (2009: 20) asserts that employee conflicts can lead to “frustration and low morale, which can result in missing deadlines, loss of confidence and trust levels, communication problems, withholding of information, withdrawal or absenteeism”. He mentions the other effects of conflict which tend to affect the organisation, namely “an increase in court cases and associated legal fees”.

Another study conducted by Mughal and Khan (2013: 15) in Pakistan concluded that conflict has negative effects on organisational performance. They stated that “poor business operations, poor communication, low productivity and wastage of organisational resources” as some of the negative effects of conflict.

As seen above, these effects of conflict can be destructive to both the individuals involved in conflicts as well as the organisation as a whole. The studies discussed above also show that poor communication or lack of communication can develop between employees after episodes of conflict. Peer co-workers should thus strive to maintain healthy interpersonal relations through interpersonal communication so as to minimise conflict. It is evident that there is lack of extensive research on effects of conflict that directly affect peer co-workers in an NGO setting. The study at hand will be useful in addressing this gap.

In the next section the concepts of organisational communication and interpersonal communication is discussed in detail. This section will explain how interpersonal communication can be harnessed as a solution to conflict management.

## **2.5 IMPORTANCE OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION REGARDING CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN THE ORGANISATION**

In order to understand how interpersonal communication can be used as a solution to organisational conflict management, the concepts of organisational communication and interpersonal communication need to be defined and explained in detail.

### **2.5.1 Organisational communication**

Organisational communication refers to “the process by which individuals stimulate meaning in the minds of other individuals by means of verbal or nonverbal messages in the context of a formal organisation” (Richmond, McCroskey & McCroskey 2005: 20). Organisational communication is divided into two types of communication namely internal organisational communication and external organisational communication (Spaho 2013).

- **Internal organisational communication**

This communication process occurs among employees at different levels within the organisation.

- **External organisational communication**

This communication process occurs between an organisation and other organisations, its clients, the general public and stakeholders.

The study strived to explore more about internal organisational communication which occurs within the organisation. According to Richmond et al (2005), organisational communication occurs in two networks; the formal communication network and the informal communication network. The formal communication network follows the hierarchical structure that is set by the organisation while the informal communication network follows the grapevine route (Richmond et al 2005).

There are different ways in which communication occurs in the formal communication network, depending on the direction of the information flow that can be either vertical or horizontal.

- Vertical communication encompasses communication between “employees at different hierarchical levels” that normally uses the downward and upward channels of communication (Richmond et al 2005: 28).
- Horizontal communication, also known as lateral communication, is communication between “employees at the same level in the organisation” (Richmond et al 2005: 28).

Peer co-workers therefore use horizontal communication. Richmond et al (2005: 31) state that “there is much more horizontal communication in organisations on a daily basis than there is vertical”. This explains how important communication between peer co-workers is and brought about this specific study.

### **2.5.2 Interpersonal communication**

According to Roloff (1981: 30), interpersonal communication is a “symbolic process by which two people, bound together in a relationship, provide each other with resources or negotiate the exchange of resources”. Interpersonal communication involves face-to-face interaction between individuals and this form of communication is mostly intentional as participants desire something out of it. Employees in a work setting often partake in interpersonal communication which is unavoidable considering their proximity to peer co-workers. According to DeKay (2012: 449), “despite the significance of interpersonal communication in the workplace, our knowledge of these skills and how they may be taught is limited”. This statement shows that interpersonal communication is underutilised despite its importance in the workplace.

#### **Elements of the interpersonal communication process**

In order to understand interpersonal communication effectively, the elements that it encompasses must be understood.

- **The sender**

The sender is the originator of a message in the communication process who encodes a message before sending it. Senders of messages should always be aware of not only the verbal message they are sending, but also the non-verbal cues that accompanies the message. This assists in avoiding misinterpretation of the message.

- **The message**

The message is the information sent from the sender to the receiver and can be verbal or non-verbal. Non-verbal cues like facial expressions, body language and tone of voice can be used to enhance information given through speech (Sethi & Seth 2009: 34).

- **The channel**

The channel refers to the path in which a message is transmitted from the sender to the receiver. According to Sethi and Seth (2009: 35), speech and vision are the channels used in interpersonal communication.

- **The receiver**

This is the person who receives the message who then decodes the message after receiving it. The receiver interprets and evaluates the sent message so as to attach meaning to it.

- **Feedback**

This refers to the response from the receiver back to the sender and can be either verbal or non-verbal. Feedback is a two way interaction as the sender has to convey back information after receiving feedback (Sethi & Seth 2009).

- **Context/Background**

Context refers to the environment where communication takes place and ranges from physical, social and psychological (Sethi & Seth 2009: 35). The context in which communication takes place can affect the communication process.

- **Noise**

Noise in interpersonal communication refers to anything that has the potential to distort the message being passed from sender to receiver. Apart from the physical noise, Sethi and Seth (2009: 34) label “use of jargon, unsuitable body language, negligence and cultural disparities” as noise.

### **Barriers to effective interpersonal communication**

Effective interpersonal communication is not easily achieved as there are many barriers that can hinder the process (Sethi & Seth 2009). These barriers are:

- **Sentiments**

Perceptions tend to be a barrier to effective interpersonal communication. When people already have preconceived perceptions about a subject matter, then communication can be difficult. Sethi and Seth (2009: 36) state that “intense emotions are most likely to encumber effective communication because the idea or message may be misconstrued”.

- **Filtering**

Filtering information can be a big barrier to effective interpersonal communication. A sender can filter his/her message so that it benefits them and make it appealing to the receiver of the message. This can turn tragic if the receiver perceives this and thus communication can break down (Sethi & Seth 2009: 36).

- **Message crammed with information**

Interpersonal communication can be unsuccessful if the message being sent is crammed with too much information. The receiver can fail to grasp the important information if it is engrossed with too many words that are meaningless to him/her (Sethi & Seth 2009: 36).

- **Defensiveness**

Human beings are defensive by nature and this defensiveness can create a barrier to effective interpersonal communication. When people feel threatened during communication, they may end up “putting out sardonic remarks, questioning motives or being excessively judgmental about the topic” that a sender is trying to communicate (Sethi & Seth 2009: 37).

- **Cultural differences**

Culture can also be a language barrier to effective interpersonal communication. When two people from different cultures communicate, there can be misunderstandings due to this factor. This mainly happens when people misinterpret the true meaning of the intended message (Sethi & Seth 2009: 37)

- **Jargon**

When two or more people communicate with one another, slight use of jargon is always common. In organisations, employees from different departments will be familiar with only the terminologies used within a specific department. When they interact with other employees from other departments, use of jargon during conversations is imminent. Peer co-workers should therefore strive to use words which are understood by all colleagues to effectively communicate with each other. Sethi and Seth (2009: 37) affirm that “argot is best avoided when talking to someone who one is not familiar with personally or within one’s organisation”.

From the information given above, it is evident that interpersonal communication is useful in curbing conflict in a working environment. Strong and healthy interpersonal communication is a necessity in an organisation as organisations are mainly social systems. For the social systems to work effectively, communication, especially interpersonal communication among co-workers, is mandatory. Interpersonal communication is an important aspect of organisational communication, especially with internal organisational communication. Communication between peer co-workers in an organisation happens mostly through interpersonal communication. According to Putnam (2006), conflict cannot manifest and enact itself without communication, it is therefore important for peer co-workers to embrace interpersonal communication. It is only through interpersonal communication that strong and healthy interpersonal relationships between peer co-workers can be established and maintained (Bormann et al 1982). By establishing healthy interpersonal communication, peer co-workers can more easily confront and work through episodes of conflict. The next section deals with the theoretical framework adopted for the study.

## **2.6 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The study adopted the Social Exchange theory, also called the Communication Theory of Social Exchange. Social Exchange Theory has its origins in “anthropology, social psychology, and sociology” (Cropanzano & Mitchell 2005: 874).

“The Social Exchange theory is one of the most influential conceptual paradigms for understanding workplace behaviour” (Cropanzano & Mitchell 2005: 874). Employees’ everyday life in a workplace can be described as an exchange of resources, which are weighed out by the rewards-cost balance.

This theory argues that the major force in interpersonal relationships, that keeps and maintains the relationships, is the satisfaction of both parties’ self-interest. It also argues that interpersonal relationships can be viewed as economic exchanges where individuals strive to maximise benefits and reduce costs. Peer co-workers’ relationships is social, but how they relate with/to

one another can be compared to how economic exchanges happen/are done with the intent to maximise rewards and minimise costs.

### **2.6.1 History of the Social Exchange Theory**

According to the Social Exchange theory, social interactions between peer co-workers have rewards and costs. Thibaut and Kelley (1959) argue that people view personal relationships in terms of costs versus benefits. They argued this through three assumptions; firstly, people in personal relationships compare rewards gained versus the costs to get those rewards. Secondly, people in personal relationships want to attain maximum rewards while minimising the costs. Lastly, they mention that human beings are naturally selfish and thus they look out for their own personal interests first before thinking of others in the relationship (Dainton & Zelley 2004).

Gouldner (1960) mentions that people learn the rules of social exchange at childhood. He adds that the social exchange process is reciprocal and it grows over time only if the parties involved feel their needs were met concerning reciprocity (Xerri 2013).

Homans' (1961) work was built on the notion of dyadic exchanges. He explained social exchange as the exchange between two or more people, whether it be tangible or intangible, and that it could be rewarding and costly for those involved. Makoba asserts that critics of his work, for example Ekeh (1974), suggest that he majorly used psychological principles as basis for his theory and thus underrated the significance of the institution, social processes and the structures involved in relation to the exchange process as a whole (Makoba 1993).

Blau (1964) contributed to the Social Exchange theory by adding in the aspects of rewards and cost as a means of understanding the social exchange process. Building on his work, many scholars, such as (Eisenberger et al. 2001 and Podsakoff et al. 2000), argued that employees form work relationships that can either be economical or social, where the economic exchange relationships generally do not last. Rupp and Cropanzano (2002: 926) state that “they involve exchange of concrete and often pecuniary resources”. The social exchanges, which this study will focus on, are longer lasting, “They are more likely to involve less tangible and perhaps more

symbolic or socio-economic resources such as recognition or esteem” (Rupp & Cropanzano 2002: 926).

Sahlins (1972) contributed to the theory as well by building on the seminal work of Malinowski (1932) and Gouldner (1960). He explained reciprocity by using a continuum. At one end of the continuum, there is balanced reciprocity where an individual has no preformed judgement of how his or her exchanges should be reciprocated and, on the other end; the individual has a pre-set form of ideas as to how the exchanges should be dealt with. The provided continuum clearly shows the difference between economic and social exchanges (Xerri 2013).

Foa and Foa’s (1974; 1980) resource theory lists love, status, information, money, goods and services as the resources exchanged in workplace relationships. The nature of resources exchanged is viewed through two dimensions, namely particularism versus universalism and concreteness. The theory proposed that the way in which resources are exchanged differs and can be due to the nature of the resources. More concrete and less particularistic resources are short-term but the high particularistic resources are long-term (Cropanzano & Mitchell 2005).

Aligning with the past literature from social exchange theorists, it is evident that the exchange models propose individuals should evaluate their relationships by comparing the rewards gained or costs incurred from their interactions. According to Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005), the main three tenets of the Social Exchange theory are: (a) rules and norms of exchange, (b) types of resources exchanged, and (c) social exchange relationships that emerge. These tenets will lead this study in determining if they affect the peer co-workers’ interpersonal relationships and thus lead to conflict.

Even though the Social Exchange theory has been criticised for relying more on the economic explanation of human behaviour, it provides a theoretical understanding of the workplace relationships and, in this case, peer co-worker relationships. The theory will inform the study as to how interpersonal relationships are formed, maintained and even ended in the organisation. This will help explain the causes of conflict, how these conflicts affect these workplace

relationships and how interpersonal communication can be used by peer co-workers to manage these conflicts.

## **2.6.2 Examining peer co-worker relationships by using the Social Exchange Theory**

This study is mainly focused on conflict affecting peer co-worker relationships. According to Sias (2009: 58), peer co-worker relationships refer to “relationships between employees at the same hierarchical level who have no formal authority over one another”. She also states that the study of peer co-worker relationships started gaining ground in 1985 and that many studies focus on the superior-subordinate relationships and not the peer co-worker relationships. She further mentions that mentoring, information exchange, and social support as some of the functions of peer relationships. For these above mentioned reasons, this study shifted focus to the peer co-worker relationships.

Communication in the workplace is very important and it is essential for peer co-workers to have healthy interactions. These interactions are achievable through communication, especially interpersonal communication. Communication in the workplace promotes information sharing, coordination, influence, motivation, decision making and identification (Myers et al 2011). Although peer communication is one of the most important forms of communication carried out in the workplace, minimal research has been conducted in this area.

According to Sias (2009), most of the scholarly research on workplace relationships has always been quantitative. This study will therefore adopt the qualitative research approach to bring in a new methodological perspective. She identified four theoretical perspectives that guides research in this area of workplace relationships, namely (a) post positivism, (b) social construction, (c) critical approaches and (d) structuration. Some scholars have also used the social exchange theory to explain what transpires in workplace relationships (Xerri 2013). According to Xerri (2013: 41), “The prominence of Social Exchange theory is derived from the fact that in contrast to monetary benefits or gains implicated in an economic exchange, the benefits associated with social exchanges are dependent upon mutual support and effort that is exerted during the exchange”.

The earliest studies that set the pace for peer relationship studies can be traced back to the Hawthorne studies. The Hawthorne studies were conducted by Elton Mayo at the General Electric plant in Hawthorne, Illinois. The Hawthorne studies revealed that individuals are motivated to work if they perceive to receive rewards, for instance satisfaction and development, and this is accomplished through communication with their peer co-workers. The Hawthorne studies also discovered that employee performance was positively affected through informal communication with their peer co-workers, other than the formal communication passed down by management. Furthermore, the Hawthorne studies revealed that employees preferred to interact with their peers and thus the skill of interpersonal peer communication was important. Therefore peer communication impacted positively on employee behaviour and work performance (Sias 2009).

The Hawthorne studies showed that the quality of peer co-worker relationships is beneficial to both the peer co-workers involved in the relationship as well as the organisation as a whole. The relationships bring about both individual outcomes such as satisfaction and organisational outcomes which are visible through employees' performance (Sias 2009).

According to Sias (2009), a study conducted by Kram and Isabella (1985) revealed that there are three types of peer co-worker relationships. These are information peer relationships, collegial peer relationships and special peer relationships, which are notable primarily by the nature of communication between the peer co-workers.

- Information peer relationships “exist at a superficial level” (Sias 2009: 61). These relationships are characterised by low levels of intimacy and low levels of self-disclosure. Communication happening in these relationships is mandatory by nature because of the work structures between peer co-workers.
- On the other hand, collegial peer relationships occur at a moderate level. Peer co-workers in these kinds of relationships have “moderate levels of intimacy, self-disclosure and trust” (Sias 2009: 61). Peer co-workers in collegial relationships offer each other emotional

support and also discuss both work and non-work issues, for instance collegial peers “combine both co-worker and friendship roles in their relationship”.

- Special peer relationships occur at a very intimate level. Peer co-workers in these kinds of relationships more often practice trust, intimacy and self-disclose (Sias 2009: 61). They also offer each other support and since their intimacies levels are high, special peers tend to be open with each other thus discussing any topic be it personal or work related.

These different types of relationships between peer co-workers explain how communication occurs between them and what kind of information they might share. Even though not much research has been carried out on workplace relationships involving peer co-workers, the few that were conducted still adopt the use of quantitative research (Xerri 2013). This study will therefore strive to bring about a new insight to the peer co-worker relationship study, using a qualitative approach. Adopting the Social Exchange theory to explain peer co-worker relationships will bring new understanding of these relationships.

### **2.6.3 Strengths and weaknesses of the Social Exchange Theory**

According to Zafirovski (2005), the Social Exchange theory, just as with any other scientific theory, has its strengths and weaknesses. Some of them are explained below:

- **Strengths of the Social Exchange Theory**

Firstly, being a scientific theory, the Social Exchange theory has an ability to predict how individuals maximise rewards and reduce costs in relationships. This theory helps explain the social exchanges that exist between peer co-workers in the workplace (Xerri 2013).

Secondly, the Social Exchange theory is humanistic in nature thus applicable in actual human relationships. Communication between peer co-workers is unavoidable and this theory provides a systematic approach with multiple truths to explain the process.

Lastly, the Social Exchange theory makes it possible to understand the concept of relationships, how they develop and terminated. It also helps to understand that if rewards outweigh costs in a relationship, the relationship will progress but if costs outweigh the rewards in a relationship, the relationship is likely to be terminated. Peer co-worker relationships progress or diminish depending on the rewards and costs in the relationships.

#### ▪ **Weaknesses of the Social Exchange Theory**

A first weakness of the Social Exchange theory is that it assumes relationship developments occur in a specific order but truth is relationships can either skip or repeat certain stages in the process. For example, peer co-workers can be friends one day and enemies the next and after a while friends again. Relationships exist in cycles and don't necessarily follow a hierarchical order.

A second weakness is that the theory tends to rest more on the economic side of exchanges and not on the social side. It explains that relationships progress only if material things, for example money, are exchanged between individuals. However, in this particular study, the researcher concentrated on the social exchanges between peer co-workers.

After discussing the theoretical framework adopted for the study and explaining both the strengths and weaknesses of the adopted the Social Exchange theory, the next section will summarise the chapter.

## **2.7 SUMMARY**

This chapter presented the literature associated with the study and was based on the objectives of the study. The literature review shows that conflict is perceived negatively but this is not without doubt the case. It is evident that conflict may be functional or dysfunctional but it all depends on how it is managed. Since inevitability of conflict has been proven, as part of human interaction, it cannot be avoided but it can be managed. Dysfunctional conflicts which are often destructive in the workplace must be eliminated because of its negative effects.

The literature presented further proves that interpersonal communication is indeed important among peer co-workers. However, the literature presented does not point out exactly as to how interpersonal communication can be applied to manage conflict among peer co-workers in organisations. In light of the above literature, this study will now explain how interpersonal communication can be applied in conflict management among peer co-workers in organisations. This literature review also supports the use of the Social Exchange theory to explain peer co-worker relationships in this study. The next chapter will deal with the adopted methodology for the study.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

In the previous chapter, the literature pertaining to the study was discussed. Viewpoints by different scholars on conflict and interpersonal communication were looked at. The theoretical framework for the study, the Social exchange theory, was discussed and used in examining peer co-worker relationships in organisations. This chapter begins with a discussion of the research paradigm, thereafter discusses the theoretical basis of the qualitative research method. It further outlines the rationale for the choice of the research method employed for this study. This is followed by a description of the research design for the study, a description of the study population and procedures used in selecting the participants who were interviewed. An explanation of the methods used to analyse, order and understand the data is also given. The chapter further gives an account of the methods used to ensure trustworthiness of the research was achieved and the ethical considerations that were adhered to in the study.

Research methodology refers to “a philosophical stance of worldview that underlies and informs a style of research” (Sapsford 2006: 175). It is “a way to systematically solve the research problem” (Kothari 2004:8). It involves the study on how research is done scientifically and the steps followed by the researcher in studying the problem and the reasons behind the chosen steps. Leedy & Ormrod (2001: 14) define research methodology as “the general approach the researcher takes in carrying out the research project”. Kothari (2004: 8) believes that it is not only important to know the research methods/techniques involved in research, but also the methodology.

#### **3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM**

According to Rossman and Rallis (2003: 36) a paradigm refers to “shared understandings of reality” or a “worldview” on how things work. Both qualitative and quantitative research

methods have different assumptions on how research should be conducted. In addition, Bogdan and Biklen (1998: 22) define a paradigm as "a loose collection of logically related assumptions, concepts, or propositions that orient thinking and research". However, Mackenzie and Knipe (2006: 194) point out that "authors prefer to discuss the interpretive framework in terms of knowledge claims; epistemology or ontology; or even research methodologies rather than referring to paradigms".

Ontology refers to the very nature of reality and existence whereas epistemology refers to the theory of knowledge. Guba and Lincoln (1994: 108) describe ontology as "the nature of reality" and epistemology as "the nature of the relationship between the knower or would-be knower and what can be known".

Existing paradigms in literature include positivist paradigm, post positivist paradigm, constructivist paradigm, interpretivist paradigm, transformative paradigm, emancipatory paradigm, critical paradigm, pragmatism paradigm and deconstructivist paradigm (Mackenzie & Knipe 2006). Bryman (2001) mentions that in social research, the assumptions that underlie its study are often referred to as the positivist and the interpretivist paradigms.

### **Interpretivist paradigm**

This paradigm is associated with qualitative research and was influenced by hermeneutics, which is the study of meaning and interpretation of historical texts. According to Creswell (2003: 9), interpretivist paradigm, assumes that "individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work". Interpretivist paradigm is concentrated on viewing reality through people's experiences of their external world.

The main view of this paradigm is in seeking to understand human behaviour and situations through the participants' views. The sole role of the researcher in interpretivism paradigm is "to understand, explain and demystify social reality through the eyes of different participants" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2007: 19). Below is a table that sets out the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the interpretivist paradigm adopted from Lindsay (2010: 8).

Ontological assumptions	Epistemological assumptions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reality is indirectly constructed based on individual interpretation and is subjective.</li> <li>• People interpret and create their own meaning of events.</li> <li>• Events are distinctive and cannot be generalised.</li> <li>• There are multiple perspectives on one incident.</li> <li>• Causation in social sciences is determined by interpreted meaning and symbols.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge is gained through a strategy that “respects the differences between people and the objects of natural sciences and therefore requires the social scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social action” (Bryman as cited in Grix, 2004, p. 64).</li> <li>• Knowledge is gained inductively to create a theory.</li> <li>• Knowledge arises from particular situations and is not reducible to simplistic interpretation.</li> <li>• Knowledge is gained through personal experience.</li> </ul>

**Table 1: Interpretivism ontological and epistemological perspectives**

The study adopted an interpretive paradigm as it enabled the researcher to explore and understand the issue of conflict and conflict management among peer co-workers in SKE through the participants’ own views. The next section will deal with the research method adopted for the study.

### **3.3 RESEARCH METHOD**

There are three types of research methods namely qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods (Creswell 2007).

#### **Qualitative research**

Creswell (2007: 4) defines qualitative research as “an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem”. This study adopted a

qualitative research method which emphasises the understanding of behaviour from the participants' own point of view. It differs from the quantitative method, where the main concern is to understand human behaviour through the measurements used in natural sciences. The study adopted the qualitative method because it offered an in-depth understanding of the peer co-workers in their natural environment. Qualitative research is inductive in nature as opposed to deductive that is a feature of quantitative research. Therefore, the qualitative research method allows the researcher to come to conclusions and generalise on ideas only after observing events and phenomena in the field which would be difficult to measure using the quantitative method.

Kothari (2004: 5) further argues that “qualitative approach to research is concerned with subjective assessment of attitudes, opinions and behaviour”. This means that qualitative research does not manipulate variables but rather deals with events and processes happening during a study. Qualitative research is more concerned with present events since actions or behaviours of interest cannot be re-arranged in a realistic setting and being able to answer the how and why questions. This is applied to translate the process to capture the meaning of events as they happen. Qualitative research makes it possible for the researcher to understand the different meanings that people attach to their experiences of their day to day occurrences and this helps to further investigate the hidden interpretations, understandings and motivations.

In the book, the handbook of qualitative research, Denzin and Lincoln (2005: 3) explain further and state that; “qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them”.

Qualitative research focuses on the meaning, language and cultural parts that are set in in social contexts. The method focuses mainly on the understanding of specific events and not on the generalising of the research findings (Du Plooy 2009). This method roots for the case study

method and was adapted for this study. This research method was useful to the study as the participant's own perspectives and experiences were documented and recorded. Unlike survey research, field research offers more flexibility and collecting in-depth data by conducting field interviews with open-ended questions (Neuman 2007).

The study adopted qualitative research to explore the role of interpersonal communication in managing peer co-worker conflict in SKE. The researcher explored the causes of conflict among the peer co-workers, as well as explored the economic and social resources exchanged between these peer co-workers. The research also explored the effects of conflict in a working environment and the importance of interpersonal communication in conflict management among peer co-workers.

Despite qualitative research being appropriate for conducting the study at hand, several approach weaknesses have been mentioned over the years (Babbie & Mouton 2007; Bryman & Bell 2007). Firstly, a researcher needs to spend a considerable amount of time and finances in the research setting in order to accurately capture the events as they happen. Secondly, generalising in qualitative research isn't possible considering the small samples they entail. Thirdly, data analysis is time consuming. Fourthly, during the reporting and presentation of qualitative data, anonymity may be compromised which contradicts research ethics (Corden and Sainsbury, 2006). Finally, even though qualitative research advocates for trustworthiness, at times it is very difficult to prevent or detect a researcher's personal biases (Babbie & Mouton 2007).

Nevertheless, the qualitative research method was deemed appropriate for this study because the study's main aim was to explore and extract more information on the topic of interpersonal communication and conflict management among peer co-workers in SKE through the use of semi-structured face to face interviews. The decision to use qualitative research was justified in that an in-depth understanding of peer co-worker conflict in the organisation was obtained through the participants' own viewpoint. Additionally, qualitative research was chosen as it accommodated the data collection instrument which was the face-to-face semi-structured interviews. Finally, the research approach was chosen because the researcher's intention was not in variables' manipulation but rather on the description and exploration of the peer co-workers'

situation in regards to conflict and its management. The research design used in this study is explained in the next section.

### **3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN**

In the words of Creswell and Clark (2007: 3), research designs are “plans and the procedures for research that span the decisions from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection and analysis”. Kothari (2004: 31) also defines research design as “the arrangement of conditions for collection and analysis of data in a manner that aims to combine relevance to the research purpose with economy in procedure”. According to Kothari (2004), research design is important as it facilitates the smooth running of various research operations.

A research design generally includes an outline the researcher will follow, commencing with stating the aim, objectives and research questions of the study to the final analysis of data (Kothari 2004). It is a practical plan adopted by the researcher to answer questions objectively, accurately and economically. Kothari (2004) insists on the issue of conducting research economically. A researcher should be able to determine whether the research design is suitable, even in terms of time and money. According to Kothari (2004), decisions regarding what, where, when, how much, by what means, concerning an inquiry or research study, constitute a research design. He further mentions that a research design will be deemed appropriate for a particular research problem if it involves the consideration of the following factors:

- the means of obtaining information;
- the availability and skills of the researcher;
- the objective of the problem to be studied;
- the nature of the problem to be studied; and
- the availability of time and money for the research work (Kothari 2004: 33).

An exploratory case study research design was adopted for this study as it offered the researcher opportunity to conduct in-depth analysis of the phenomenon at hand and the researcher searched to gain new insight. According to Yin (2009: 18), a case study refers to “an empirical inquiry

that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident”. Additionally, Creswell (2003: 15) defines a case study as a design where a “researcher explores in depth a program, an event, an activity, a process, or one or more individuals”. A case study makes it possible to concentrate on one specific program, activity or event and by thus doing so, are able to collect in-depth data.

By adopting a case study method, a deeper and richer understanding of the study was achieved. By choosing to study only one Non-Governmental Organisation namely SKE, the researcher also had the opportunity to conduct an extensive study and accumulate in-depth data, which answered the research questions and met the research objectives. The study population is discussed next.

### **3.5 STUDY POPULATION**

Mouton (1996: 34) referred to a population as “a collection of objects, events or individuals having some common characteristics that the researcher is interested in studying”. This simply means that a population refers to the possible units a researcher can study. According to Du Plooy (2009), a population refers to all the possible analysis units in a research study. Creswell (2008) also defines a population as a group of individuals who have the same characteristics. A study population is the unit from which generalisations can be achieved. In this study, the population encompasses all the employees of SILC KENYA, a Kenyan NGO.

#### **Target population**

A target population refers to the actual population the researcher plans to generalise the findings results to (Du Plooy 2009: 109). In this study, the target population were all the employees of SKE. The target population’s inclusion criterion was that the employees had to have worked at the organisation for more than one month, and the target population’s exclusion criterion was the employees on leave during the study. The researcher felt that employees who worked for the organisation for more than one month were well oriented into the organisation and could provide

the needed data for the study and employees on leave during the study were excluded due to unavailability.

### **Accessible population**

An accessible population refers to the “units of analysis in the target population to which researchers has access” (Du Plooy 2009: 109). The accessible population consisted of 15 employees of SKE. The organisation’s registries were examined and then 15 employees from the same hierarchical level were chosen from the office headquarters. The reason was that these employees would provide the data needed for the study and employee representativeness was achieved.

### **Sampling technique**

According to (Du Plooy 2009: 108), sampling refers to “a rigorous procedure undertaken to select units of analysis from a target or accessible population”. Kothari (2004: 152) refers to sampling as “the process of obtaining information about an entire population by examining only a part of it”. According to Kothari (2004), a sampling technique is a plan of obtaining a sample from a given population and the sample obtained for the study need to be representative of the total population.

Sampling is a crucial process in research because it supplies the researcher with the entire target population representation. It could be impossible to study an entire target population and therefore sampling is the best option of choosing an analysis unit from the target population. A target sample, according to Creswell (2008: 152) is “a group of individuals with some common defining characteristic that the researcher can identify and study”. In other words, these are the people the researcher have access to and can study.

There are two types of sampling in research; probability sampling and non-probability sampling (Kothari 2004; Bhattacharjee 2012). Non-probability sampling “is a sampling technique in which some units of the population have *zero* chance of selection or where the probability of selection

cannot be accurately determined” (Bhattacharjee 2012: 69). Kothari (2004: 59) also defines non-probability sampling as “that sampling procedure which does not afford any basis for estimating the probability that each item in the population has of being included in the sample”

Probability sampling is mainly used in quantitative research whereas non-probability sampling is common in qualitative research (Du Plooy 2009). Types of non-probability sampling include convenience sampling, snowball sampling and purposive sampling. Purposive sampling was chosen to draw a sample for this study. Creswell (2003: 213) believes that “the idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants or sites”. The researcher selects participants for the study “because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (Creswell 2007: 125).

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), in qualitative research, the sampling technique is guided by convenience. However, this type of sampling was chosen as the most relevant sampling method in qualitative research because it relies on the researcher’s judgement to choose information-rich participants to inform a study (Neuman 2007). Non-probability sampling means that not all population members have an equal chance to be selected as a sample. Neuman (2007) states that purposive sampling is often used in field research where the researcher selectively chooses cases with a specific purpose in mind. As the selection relies entirely on the researcher’s judgement, this sampling technique was appropriate because in qualitative research, unlike quantitative research, the interest is not in a large sample, but in the data’s depth offered by the chosen sample. This sampling type also aided in choosing participants who could provide the most credible information to the study.

### **Sample size**

A sample size refers to the number of data sources selected for analysis from a population (Davis, Gallardo & Lachlan 2009). In qualitative research, sample sizes are usually small because of saturation, ability to analyse the collected data extensively, research resources manageability and since provided estimates or statistically determining discriminatory variables is unnecessary (Ritchie et al. 2013). According to Ritchie et al (2013), a sample size in a single

qualitative research study involving interviewing participants, should be under 50. It is further noted that if the number exceeds 50, the collection and data analysis will become unmanageable, thus compromising on quality. Out of the 145 employees, 15 participants were chosen from the SKE office. This decision was based on the fact that these employees would provide sufficient information on the study and a manageable sample size was chosen considering the amount of time and resources available during the study. The researcher took into consideration the characteristics of the sample chosen. It was made sure that the sample chosen in regard to gender, age, number of years in employment in the organisation and education level characteristics of the sample was diverse so as to help in capturing the different demographics of the participating sample. The next section deals with the data collection instrument used in this study.

### **3.6 DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT**

A data collection instrument is a tool which researchers use to obtain data from the research participants. The data collection instrument used for this study was semi-structured face to face interviews. This data collection instrument was deemed most appropriate to collect more personal account of events from the participants. The other two qualitative data collection instruments, focus group discussions and observation checklists weren't deemed appropriate due to the sensitivity of the research topic.

#### **Semi-structured face to face interviews**

Interviewing is a data collecting technique to gather data from research participants by asking them questions and giving them the opportunity to react verbally. There are three types of interviews used to collect data, namely structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are most often used in qualitative research. These interviews offer “an interview guide, usually including both closed-ended and open-ended questions” (Zhang & Wildemuth 2009: 222). This type of interview is more flexible and the researcher is allowed to “adjust sequence” of questions or “add questions” in the process of the study (Zhang & Wildemuth 2009: 222).

However, qualitative interviews are either semi-structured or unstructured due to their probing nature to seek in-depth data. Babbie and Mouton (2010: 289) describe a qualitative interview as an “interaction between an interviewer and a respondent in which the interviewer has a general plan of inquiry but not a specific set of questions that must be asked in particular words and in a particular order”.

The study used semi-structured face to face interviews to collect data from the participants and interview schedules were used to obtain in-depth data to inform the study. A semi-structured face to face interview was a reliable instrument to collect qualitative data from the participants. The open ended questions allowed the participants to provide their own views and experiences without word limitations. The closed questions were also helpful in instances where not much data was expected on a certain question/(s). To facilitate the process, an introductory letter was obtained from the University of South Africa, enabling the research. The organisations’ headquarter offices in Eldoret, Kenya was visited and appointments booked for the face to face interviews. The face to face interviews were conducted on the appointed dates and before each interview, the researcher made a point of reminding the research participants of the purpose of the study. A tape recorder was used to audiotape the interviews which were helpful in the later transcription phase. The researcher affirmed that the face-to-face semi-structured interviews elicited more personal recount of events from the participants. The next section will discuss the pilot study.

### **3.7 PILOT STUDY**

A pilot study was conducted where the data collection instrument was tested. The pilot study was conducted in a different NGO, namely Unbound Kenya. The pilot study was conducted at its headquarters in Kisumu, Kenya and non-probability sampling was used. Purposive sampling was employed to pick 4 employees from the headquarters office of Unbound Kenya in Kisumu and the same sampling technique applied that was to be used in the main study. The participants were interviewed through semi-structured face to face interviews.

Unbound Kenya was selected for the pilot study because they are also an NGO which has same organisational structure as SKE and is also involved in community outreach programs, therefore it helped in the pre-testing of the data collection instrument.

The pilot study helped in assessing whether the questions were clear and therefore understood by the participants and whether the interpretations matched the intended meaning of the questions (Neuman 2007). The pilot study was beneficial as it assisted in knowing whether the proposed data collection instrument was efficient prior to the implementation of the study. Data analysis is discussed in the next section.

### **3.8 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES**

The researcher obtained an introduction letter from the project co-ordinator, Mr Isaac Mukenya, which allowed entry into the organisation and access to the employees. The participants were requested to sign informed consent forms before the interviews commenced. The participants were assured of confidentiality in that the given information would only be used for research purposes. The participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time if they wished to do so. The researcher conducted the semi-structured face to face interviews in a thirty minutes span as it was the participants' lunch time. The interviews were tape recorded to capture the responses of the participants accurately.

### **3.9 DATA ANALYSIS**

Data analysis is the process of giving order, structure and meaning to the data collected from a research study. Data analysis was articulately stated by Hatch (2002:148) as:

“A systematic search for meaning. It is a way to process qualitative data so that what has been learned can be communicated to others. Analysis means organizing and interrogating data in ways that allow researchers to see patterns, identify themes, discover relationships, develop explanations, make interpretations, mount critiques, or generate theories. It often involves synthesis, evaluation, interpretation, categorization, hypothesizing, comparison, and pattern finding. It always involves what H. F. Wolcott

calls “mind work” . . . Researchers always engage their own intellectual capacities to make sense of qualitative data”.

The data analysis process for qualitative researchers ensues when the researcher is still in the field. This is because the researcher already grasps the ideas and themes emerging from the interviews during the data collection.

## **Qualitative Data Analysis**

In the words of Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2007), data analysis is one of the most important steps in the research process as it aids researchers in making sense of the data obtained from the field. Qualitative data analysis is the process and procedures applied by a researcher to provide explanation, understanding and “sense making” of the people investigated phenomenon after studying the qualitative data collected from them (Bhattacharjee 2012: 113). There are different types of QDA (Qualitative Data Analysis) namely thematic analysis, grounded theory, content analysis, narrative analysis and discourse analysis. The type of QDA used in this study was the thematic analysis.

Thematic analysis refers to a method for “identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke 2006: 79). It minimally organises and describes data set in (rich) detail. However, it often moves further, and “interprets various aspects of the research topic” (Braun & Clarke 2006: 79). Even though thematic analysis were criticised in the past as being unclear, scholars like Attride-Stirling (2001) argue that it still suffices in analysing data methodically thus gaining meaningful and useful findings.

Below is a table explaining the thematic data analysis steps, provided by Braun and Clarke (2006).

PHASE	DESCRIPTION OF THE PROCESS
1. Familiarising yourself with the data	Transcribing interviews, reading and re-reading the transcripts, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating the codes	Coding interesting features of the transcripts in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating examples for each code.
3. Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential link.
4. Reviewing themes	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (level 1) and the entire data set (level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes	On-going analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back to the analysis of the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

**Table 2: The thematic analysis process as outlined by Braun & Clarke (2006)**

The steps provided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis model guided the researcher in the data analysis;

1. Familiarising yourself with the data. In this initial stage, the researcher transcribed the interviews verbatim. The interview transcripts are then perused one by one and initial ideas and comments are noted.

2. Generating initial codes. The researcher then systematically codes the whole dataset. Miles and Huberman (1964: 56) explained that coding in relationship to analysis is “to review a set of field notes, transcribed or synthesized and to dissect them meaningfully while keeping the relations between the parts intact”.
3. Searching for themes. In this stage, the researcher organises similar codes into potential themes and then gathers all data for the potential themes. Identifying the data thus becomes easier.
4. Reviewing themes. In this stage, a thematic map is generated. Additionally the researcher checks if the produced themes are in relation with the dataset and non-fitting examples were scrutinised.
5. Defining and naming themes. In this phase the researcher studies the themes critically, refines specifics of the themes, determine correlations between them and make propositions.
6. Producing the report. This is the final stage of the data analysis. The report is written up using the themes and data extracts from the study.

### **3.10 TRUSTWORTHINESS IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

According to Creswell (2014: 201) qualitative validity “means that the researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures” and qualitative reliability “indicates that the researcher’s approach is consistent across different researchers and different projects”. He continues to state that current qualitative literature however tends to use terms such as “trustworthiness”, “authenticity” and “credibility” instead of validity and reliability. The four constructs provided in the seminal work of Lincoln and Guba (1985) were used to achieve trustworthiness in this study.

## **1. Credibility**

According to Majola (2013: 105), credibility is “the alternative to internal validity”. Credibility entails the accurate identification and description of the research participant and encompasses the believability of the research findings. The study’s credibility was ensured by supplying extensive details on the participants’ age, gender, religion, level of education and their level of employment within the organisation. All the research findings were reported regardless of their negativity or impact on the outcome of the study.

## **2. Transferability**

This is the alternative to “external validity or generalisability” (Majola 2013: 105). This construct assists in ensuring that generalisations of the findings can be linked to other contexts. Bhattacharjee (2012: 111) states that “the researcher must provide rich, detailed descriptions of the research context and thoroughly describe the structures, assumptions, and processes revealed from the data so that readers can independently assess whether and to what extent are the reported findings transferable to other settings”. A full description of the study background, the theoretical framework, the research method and the research design was supplied in order for the findings to be applicable in other contexts.

## **3. Dependability**

Dependability is the alternative to reliability (Majola 2013: 106). This construct concerns whether similar findings would be obtained if the same study was repeated. Majola (2013: 106) asserts that “Dependability is ensured by member checking and the discussion of the identified themes with the participants to make sure that they are correct and can be trusted”. The participants were revisited with the identified patterns and themes collected during data analysis to verify with them whether it were compatible with what they stipulated during data collection. Rich documentation and a detailed description of the methodology section were provided to aid in replication of the study.

#### **4. Confirmability**

Confirmability captures the concept of objectivity (Bhattacharjee 2012: 111), as is mainly to control researcher bias. The issue of confirmability was adhered to by making use of only the data provided by the study's participants to prevent any form of bias. The study's participants were provided with the research report to review the findings. They agreed with the interpretations derived from the research, thus confirming the study findings. Ethical rules abided by during this study are discussed next.

#### **3.11 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Babbie and Mouton (2010: 520) defined ethics as “conforming to the standards of conduct of a given profession or group”. According to Rubin, Rubin and Piele (2000), research ethics is concerned with the ‘what is right and wrong’ process of conducting research. Researchers must be accurate and honest when conducting research as well as consider their informants or participant's wellbeing. According to Hamsen and Machin (2013), ethics is most important where the main subjects of investigation are human beings, which was the case in this study. Researchers must ensure that their participants are protected from any harm that might ensue as a result of the researchers' activities.

Before the study was conducted, the University of South Africa (UNISA) requested an ethical clearance. As this study was conducted at SKE, permission was therefore required from the organisation before the study could commence. The targeted sample consisted of employees working at SKE. An email containing an attached letter explaining the conducted study was sent out to the Project Co-ordinator, Mr Isaac Mukenya.

The project co-ordinator was asked to draft a letter stating that permission was granted for employees to participate in the study. Participants were informed that the study would be strictly confidential and anonymous.

In order to gain access to the organisation, the researcher displayed the ethical clearance letter from Unisa to the gatekeeper, Mr Isaac Mukenya. Neuman (1997: 454) cautions that gatekeepers may refuse access unless they receive information on the subject. According to Creswell (2009: 178), “It is important to gain access to research or archival sites by seeking the approval of gatekeepers, individuals at the research site that provide access to the site and allow or permit the research to be done”. It was ensured that participation in the study was completely voluntary as participants were formally requested to participate and they were given the choice to withdraw from the study at any time they felt the need to. Informed consent consists of informing the research participants about the purpose of the study and what it entails as well as any possible risks and benefits that may arise from the study (Brinkmann & Kvale 2015). In this regard, the participants were given information about the study and consent was required before anyone could participate in the study. Babbie and Mouton (2001: 521) asserts that no one should be compelled to participate in a study. Participants were free to refuse to partake in the study.

Every individual has his or her own right to confidentiality. Confidentiality in research is ensuring private data obtained from research participants during a research project are not disclosed (Brinkmann & Kvale 2015). Any personal information collected during the study was kept confidential from the general public and the entire transcribed interviews remained anonymous. No identifying information was present on the transcribed interview papers. Neuman (1997: 453) asserts that it is important to protect the identity of the participants. All returned data was kept in a safe place only accessible to the researcher. The participants were allocated with alphabetical letters as identifiers in order to protect their real names. The participants’ identities remained undisclosed so as no repercussions could develop after the research was finalised, Anonymity is important in research ethics as the participants cannot be identified even after the research is completed.

### **3.12 SUMMARY**

This chapter introduced the methodology adopted for the study as well as the research paradigm in which the study is situated was discussed. The interpretivist paradigm played a pivotal role in the selection of the research method and design of this study. The chapter discloses that the

qualitative research method that was adopted for the study is relevant in exploring the topic at hand from the participant's own viewpoints and personal experiences. Purposive sampling that was used to choose the participants made it possible to choose participants who would offer in depth data regarding the study at hand. The data collection instrument used, face-to-face semi-structured interviews, enabled the researcher to interview and get answers from participants regarding the research questions in a positive and timely manner. Ethical considerations of the study and trustworthiness in qualitative research were also mentioned and explained. The next chapter will present the research data from the study.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **DATA PRESENTATION**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

This study sought out to explore the role of interpersonal communication in managing peer co-worker conflict in SKE. In the previous chapter, the researcher provided the research paradigm and methodologies employed to gather data from peer co-workers at SKE using face-to-face semi-structured interviews. The purpose of this chapter is to present the research data collected. The data presentation is based on the objectives of the study as presented in chapter one. The face to face interviews were conducted at the SKE headquarters from 9<sup>th</sup> July 2015 to 30<sup>th</sup> July 2015. The study sampled 15 participants and all responded positively to the interviews. Their social demographic profile is presented in tables to disclose the participants' distribution which captured all aspects of the study's topic. The research participants are identified with letters to confirm their anonymity and a summary is given thereafter.

#### **4.2 DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS**

In this section, the participant's distribution by their age, gender, educational qualifications and work experience were established. The biographical profile was deemed appropriate because during the pilot study it was established that age, gender, educational level and number of years working for an organisation influenced how the employees initiated or dealt with conflicts.

##### **4.2.1 Distribution of participants by age**

The age factor needs to be considered in reference to the expected number of retirements and replacements correspondingly in order to maintain quality service provision by employees. The findings are shown below in Table 3.

<b>Age brackets</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
20-30 years	8	53.4
31-40 years	3	20
41-50 years	2	13.3
Above 51 years	2	13.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 3: Age distribution of the participants**

It was established that slightly above half of the participants were between 20 and 30 years of age. Those in age bracket of between 31 and 40 years were 20% while 20% were aged between 41 and 50 years. Only 13.3% were above 51 years of age. If given an enabling environment, including proper interpersonal communication with peer co-workers, the majority of the employees were middle aged and thus strong enough to deliver on their mandate.

#### **4.2.2 Distribution of employee by gender**

To establish the organisation's employee distribution by gender, the employees were required to indicate their gender. The results are indicated in Table 4.

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Male	8	53.3
Female	7	46.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 4: Distribution of employees by gender**

Out of the 15 employees, 53.3% were male while the remaining 46.7% were female. There is gender balance among employees in the organisation. The policy of gender equity has been upheld in the organisation.

### 4.2.3 Educational qualification of the participants

It is important to note that for an individual to work competently in any field of specialisation, they must possess specific relevant qualifications. It was therefore imperative that employees indicate their highest educational qualification, as shown in Table 5 below.

<b>Educational Qualification</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
A-Level	9	60
Undergraduate Degree	6	40
Masters' Degree	-	-
Doctorate Degree	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 5: Educational qualification of the participants**

The study findings revealed that 60% of the participants were A-level holders as their highest educational qualification and 40% were holders of undergraduate degrees. It can be deduced from the study that employees were educated hence were in a position to understand the role of interpersonal communication in managing peer co-worker conflict.

### 4.2.4 Religious affiliation of the participants

The participants were asked to indicate their religious affiliation. While reviewing literature, it was established that various studies (Salleh & Adulpakdee 2012; Riaz & Junaid 2012), discovered that people from different religious affiliations tend to be in conflict with each other in their work places and hence it was important to research this issue. The study findings are shown in Table 6 below.

<b>Religious affiliation</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Christian	15	100
Muslim	-	-
Others	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 6: Religious affiliation of the participants**

The entire population indicated that they were Christians which means that the organisation is affiliated to Christianity.

#### **4.2.5 Working experience of employees**

Work output and productivity largely depends on appropriate experience. It was therefore necessary to establish the experience of the employees. Table 7 indicate their responses.

<b>Work experience</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Less than a year	2	13.3
1-2 years	2	13.3
2-5 years	5	33.4
Over 5 years	6	40
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 7: Working experience of employees**

In Table 8, 13.3% of the employees had a working experience of less than one year, another 13.3% had working experience of between 1 and 2 years, 33.4% had worked for between 2 and 5 years while 40% had a working experience of over 5 years.

### **4.3 CAUSES OF CONFLICT AMONG PEER CO-WORKERS IN SILC KENYA, ELDORET**

The study sought to explore the conflict causes amongst peer co-workers at SKE. The findings are discussed in detail below.

#### **4.3.1 Participants' understanding of conflict**

The study sought to explore how well participants understood conflict. The majority of the participants had an understanding of what conflict was. Participant G described conflict as a situation where there is no understanding between himself and the next person. Participant F described conflict as a situation where people are in disagreement over certain issues.

Participant B noted as follows:

*“You see, to my understanding, conflict is ideological differences between two or more individuals, depending on different matters”.*

Further, conflict was understood by the participants as failure to communicate amicably with one another and to understand one another. Conflict was also understood to arise when two parties are not in a healthy relationship or on good terms.

Participant C further noted that:

*“You see my sister, I can describe conflict in my own understanding as failure to communicate to one another amicably and understand one another”.*

Participant L mentioned the following:

*“You see Faith, for me conflict is a misunderstanding between two people or two parties, and yeah that's conflict. If they don't agree on their goals or values, or their thoughts are different on a certain issue then they are in conflict”.*

Participant H also echoed participant's L statement, stating the following:

*“I believe conflict is a situation where individuals do not agree about a certain issue”.*

Participant D brought in the relationship perspective and stated the following:

*“According to my own understanding, conflict is when two parties of people are not in a good relationship or on good terms”.*

However, in contrast to the above definitions, participant I mentioned the following:

*“To me conflict is a way of solving misunderstanding in the workplace or between parties”.*

According to him, conflict was a way of solving a misunderstanding and not the misunderstanding itself.

#### **4.3.2 Frequency of conflict occurrence in the workplace**

At times, the experience of conflict by employees in an organisation occurs quite often, often or rarely. The study sought to explore the frequency in which conflicts occur at SKE. One of the employees lamented that the conflicts occur on a daily basis.

Participant K stated the following:

*“Conflicts among peer co-workers here in our workplace occur on a daily basis”.*

Participant C shared the following:

*“Most of them usually occur after two months, that’s when we do serious reports”.*

Participant A however mentioned the following:

*“For me, my conflicts occur almost monthly although it’s reducing depending on the individuals because my reports are submitted on a monthly basis”.*

Participant L also agreed with participant’s C statement and mentioned the following:

*“Yeah conflicts here occur monthly”.*

On the contrary, Participant I lamented that:

*“For me, I normally see that whenever we have meetings conflicts tend to occur”.*

Even though most of the participants state the frequency of conflict occurrence to be either weekly, monthly, and so on, two participants, J and E, also pointed out those conflicts do not occur that often in the organisation.

Participant J stated that:

*“For us here conflicts do not occur so often, only once in a while”.*

### **4.3.3 Causes of conflicts amongst peer co-workers**

The participants were asked to indicate the causes of conflicts amongst peer co-workers at SKE. The conflict causes deduced from the findings are listed below.

#### **1. Failure to meet deadlines**

From the study, it was established that conflict arises from disagreements over attainable goals or the methods used to accomplish certain goals. In this case, the goals were the tasks that needed to be completed within given deadlines. An employee was supposed to accomplish assigned duty and failure to meet the expectation resulted in conflict.

Participant A said the following:

*“Failure to submit reports on time really causes conflict among peer co-workers in this organisation”.*

Participant C also agreed with the above statement and mentioned the following:

*“You see according to me, I can say failure to submit the reports on time brings conflict as we work with deadlines in this organisation and donors need the monthly reports on time”.*

Participant J also mentioned the following:

*“For me lack of time management, which leads to not submitting reports on time, thus not meeting the deadlines put up by the organisation causes conflict”.*

Also in support of the finding above, participant H said the following:

*“When deadlines aren’t met in the organisation conflicts tend to occur, I think peer co-workers should always strive to do their tasks within given time frames”.*

On the contrary, participant K felt that other peer co-workers did not meet deadlines because they were overloaded with work. He mentioned the following;

*“For me I do know I am supposed to meet specific deadlines at work but sometimes my tasks are just too many and I just can’t finish on time”.*

## **2. Limited resources**

The study findings established that resources such as money, time and equipment are often scarce. Competition among people or departments for limited resources was a cause for conflict. It was established that when a group of employees have access to such resources while others do not, conflict may arise among peer co-workers. Important resources are often limited in the organisation and were one cause of conflict.

Participant D mentioned the following:

*“Resources such as computers and office stationery are not always enough. This means we have to share. When others don’t want to share and give everyone equal opportunity of using them, then conflicts arise”.*

Participant O stated the following:

*“I believe it could be lack of enough resources in the organisation, like computers, which cause conflicts”.*

Also in support of the finding above, participant F shared the following:

*“When there aren’t enough resources in our office, conflicts occur because we all want to use the resources at the same time”.*

Contrary to this, participant K did not agree with the statement and expressed the following:

*“I feel resources might be limited yes and this creates conflict, but sometimes other peer co-workers just want to be bossy so that they can get away with using the office resources by themselves”.*

### **3. Task interdependence**

Another established cause of conflict from the study was task interdependence, meaning when accomplishment of a goal requires reliance on others to perform their tasks.

Participant A mentioned:

*“When you agree to do an assignment with someone and to complete it within a certain timeframe and they don’t do what you agreed upon, this creates conflict in the workplace. We always have to work together to accomplish the organisation’s goals”.*

Participant J agreed with the above statement and said the following:

*“I feel lack of clear roles and relying on peer co-workers to do some tasks often creates conflict among us”.*

Participant B also mentioned:

*“According to me, something that causes conflict between me and my colleagues is when they don’t do their part of tasks we are to accomplish as a group. This usually creates trouble during weekly meetings”.*

Participant F echoed participant B’s statement and noted:

*“When co-workers relax on their duty and do not accomplish certain tasks that are a group task then that creates confrontations. For example, if we were to do a presentation together and I do*

*my part only to come for the meeting and my other colleague hasn't done their part this makes me angry and creates conflict between us”.*

Contrary to the above findings, participant C mentioned the following:

*“For me so long as I submit my own section of a combined report I don't care whether my co-workers meet the deadline or not. Sometimes when you rely so much on someone they can disappoint you”.*

#### **4. Incompatible goals**

Another cause of conflict that emerged was incompatible goals. The peer co-workers in the organisation thought that their goals were mutually exclusive. Within the organisation, incompatible goals often arose because of the different ways in which peer co-workers were compensated. Most participants mentioned that when there was talk of promotions, tension among peer co-workers was tangible and in most cases, conflicts started occurring later.

Participant F mentioned that:

*“When there is talk of promotions, then we often face conflicts here in the workplace”.*

Additionally, participant N noted the following:

*“We don't all want the same thing and this leads to different levels of goals this can sometimes cause conflict among peer co-workers in our organisation”.*

Participant O agreed with the above finding, saying:

*“We all have different goals individually; this sometimes can cause conflict as some of the goals are not always compatible”.*

In line with the above statements, participant J mentioned that according to him, not having the same goals with peer co-workers in the workplace can create conflict and people should accept each other the way they are. He said:

*“You see my sister, we can have different goals here in the workplace but people should respect each other and accept one another the way they are”.*

## **5. Personality differences**

During the study, the participants noted that their different personalities sometimes cause conflict between peer co-workers.

Participant O stated the following:

*“You see my dear sister we all can’t have the same character here in the office, we were all brought up differently. Different personalities can cause conflict among peer co-workers here”.*

Participant H went on to say:

*“By understanding some fundamental differences among the way people think and act, we could better understand how others see the world, this way we can reduce conflicts”.*

Participant I also agreed with this statement and stated that:

*“I strongly feel we all can’t act the same and this sometimes causes conflict among us in the workplace”.*

Participant M mentioned that:

*“Another cause of conflict is different personalities but we are forced to be in one place yeah”.*

## **6. Communication problems**

Another cause of conflict mentioned by the participants was communication problems. Participant A lamented that at times conflict arises simply from a small, unintentional communication problem.

He stated the following:

*“You see communication sometimes is not easy! Conflict among co-workers here can be a result of a small unintentional communication problem like misunderstanding or not giving feedback”.*

Participant B had the same view and pointed out that not receiving feedback during communication, it can quickly escalate into a conflict situation.

In support of the finding above, Participant D noted the following:

*“We just don’t know how to communicate! We are always so busy with our phones and computers that talking to our co-workers face-to-face is next to impossible”.*

Participant C agreed with the above statement, stating:

*“Lack of communication with peer co-workers causes conflict. We cannot work together without engaging our colleagues through communication. It is not possible”.*

Contrary to the above mentioned findings, Participant N felt that even though lack of communication causes conflict among peer co-workers, it was not lack of communication but lack of effective communication.

He stated that:

*“For me lack of effective communication is the cause of conflict in the workplace and not just communication; we need to learn effective interpersonal communication skills to survive conflict in the work place”.*

## **7. Tribal frictions**

Tribalism was also mentioned by the participants to be a cause of conflict among peer co-workers in the organisation. Participant G mentioned the following:

*“Some peer co-workers have strong tribal beliefs, which they are not willing to compromise and these beliefs can conflict with other peer co-workers, thus in the end creating conflict”.*

Participants L stated that:

*“For me, tribalism is a cause of conflict as it leads to colleagues undermining fellow co-workers in the workplace”.*

Participant E agreed with the above-mentioned statement, saying:

*“Tribalism, according to me is a major cause of conflict amongst the peer co-workers in the organisation, tribalism in Kenya is rampant and sometimes it brings about unfairness in the workplace”.*

In line with the above findings, participant D felt that tribalism was a major cause of conflict among peer co-workers in the organisation. She stated the following:

*“Tribalism is a big vice in Kenya at the moment and I feel it’s trickling into our organisations”.*

Participant B shared the same sentiments and noted:

*“Tribalism in the workplace is very rampant and it is not a good thing, I always feel like since I am not from the majority tribe, I am side-lined in some issues at work”.*

## **8. Language barrier**

Language was mentioned by the participants as a cause of conflict among peer co-workers in the organisation. Participant D pointed out that:

*“Language barriers sometimes cause conflict too in the workplace because other employees gossip in their mother tongue”.*

Participant L also mentioned the following:

*“Most of us here are from different tribes and thus sometimes co-workers group each other this way. They then start talking in their mother tongue it’s like they are talking about you”.*

Participant G agreed with the above-statement and noted:

*“Language! language! language! I am telling you my sister, colleagues here in the office can talk in their mother tongue so that you don’t get to hear what they are talking about, I think this is wrong and it creates tension in the workplace”.*

Participant F shared the same sentiments and noted that indeed language barriers did cause conflict among peer co-workers in the organisation.

However, Participant N brought in a new perspective and shared:

*“I know language barriers sometimes can cause conflict because of pronunciation problems and stuff but again if we don’t accept each other then we can’t work in harmony”.*

## **9. Level of education**

Participant G mentioned another cause of conflict during the study, namely the level of education among the peer co-workers in the organisation. She said the following:

*“It’s very sad that some co-workers here in our organisation look down upon others who aren’t as qualified as them, I think to me this creates conflict”.*

Participant L also pointed out that the different education levels created issues of misunderstanding between peer co-workers and this caused conflict amongst peer co-workers in the organisation.

Participant N went ahead to mention that:

*“I can also point out that education levels here in the workplace cause conflict. You see we are not all the same and sometimes others may look down upon you. For example, I got employed right after my A-levels but when I came to work here I felt looked down upon but now that I managed to finish my undergraduate degree I feel at par with others”.*

In line herewith, participant O noted that different education levels did create conflict among peer co-workers in the organisation. On the contrary, participant M noted the following:

*“I also think different levels of education cause conflict among peer co-workers in this organisation, but I also think it is a positive thing as it motivates others to strive for better educational qualifications thus improving the skills of our workforce”.*

## 10. Age

Age was mentioned by participant A as a cause of conflict amongst peer co-workers in the organisation. He stated that:

*“You see my sister, sometimes age brings about conflict among co-workers here. The older employees feel entitled to more resources than us”.*

Participant C felt the same way and mentioned:

*“For me my problem sometimes is that these older co-workers think that they know everything! It pisses me off!”*

In line with the above findings, participant K answered as follows:

*“When I first came to work for this organisation I was young and I felt that the older employees would look down upon me but that’s not the case anymore”.*

Additionally, participant I felt that the different ages among peer co-workers in the organisation caused conflict. Contrary to the above-mentioned findings, participant D noted that:

*“I can also say sometimes age is an issue. Older employees feel they know better than the young employees but I feel that is under control now that our management has addressed the issue”.*

## 11. Financial matters

One participant, participant E mentioned finances to be a major cause of conflict amongst peer co-workers in the organisation.

Participant D shared the same sentiments and said the following:

*“For me I feel like conflicts do occur due to financial reasons of borrowing money from each other and not returning it in time”.*

Supporting the findings above, Participant L mentioned that:

*“I think for me, a major cause of conflict here in our workplace is money. When your colleagues borrows your money and does not return it as agreed it causes conflict”.*

Participant B felt that finances brought about friction in the workplace. She mentioned as such:

*“I feel that finances cause conflict between my co-workers and me because financial management here is not so good”.*

However, contrary to the above findings, participant O noted the following:

*“I can mention money too as a cause of conflict among peer co-workers here in our office, however sometimes this money is what brings peace in the office. For example yesterday, my colleague was very moody and causing havoc in the office and I went to ask her what the problem was only to find out that she hadn't paid her rent and her landlord had threatened to evict her from her house. When I gave her money to sort herself out peace returned to the office you see, money isn't always so bad”.*

## **12. Work overload**

Participants noted that when there was too much work which was not being distributed equally in the workplace, it created conflict. Participant B insisted that when she was overloaded with work, it caused conflict between her and her peer co-workers as she felt the work wasn't being distributed fairly.

Participant N agreed and mentioned that:

*“Indeed when the workload is too much, especially during month end report deadlines, conflicts occur, I always think that maybe we get too stressed about the reports and we pass our frustrations to each other”.*

In agreement with the above finding, Participant D shared the following:

*“According to me, I feel that sometimes when we are overloaded with too much work here in the office we get frustrated and end up confronting our co-workers”.*

Participant E shared the same sentiments, stating that:

*“As human beings we are bound to complain when we feel we are doing too much work, especially when you feel you are overloaded with work which you feel you shouldn’t be doing in the first place, this creates conflict among us here in the office”.*

Contrary to the above findings, participant L answered as such:

*“Heavy workload sometimes creates conflict between myself and my co-workers but I feel that if work is shared equally then this would be solved. Sometimes we just need to share our work equally so as not to burden one individual”.*

### **13. Lack of clarity on roles and responsibilities**

Participants mentioned that lack of clear roles and responsibilities of peer co-workers in the organisation caused conflict between them.

Participant J said the following:

*“Lack of clear roles of every co-worker creates conflict, I want to know what I am supposed to do but without interfering with someone else’s work”.*

Participant M echoed this statement and stated that:

*“Roles are very unclear; mine can touch yours at some point and cause conflict. If roles were clear then conflict could be minimal”.*

Participant F also felt that by not minding your own business and delving into those of colleagues created tension. He stated the following:

*“You see for me you should mind your own business even at work, but I believe we should have clear boundaries of what work we are doing so that we don’t get in each other’s way at work”.*

Participant H agreed with the above sentiments as well and felt that peer co-workers should be obligated to do their own tasks. She mentioned that:

*“This issue of tasks not being clear among co-workers is a big one! Am telling you it brings chaos! Today you are told to do this, tomorrow you find your co-worker is doing it, so you get confused”.*

However, participant N had a different perception and mentioned the following:

*“Unclear allocation of responsibilities causes conflict in the workplace but if you ask me, if my co-workers here communicated more this will not be the case. They would know what to do and what not to do by talking to each other”.*

#### **4.4 ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RESOURCES EXCHANGED BETWEEN PEER CO-WORKERS IN SILC KENYA, ELDORET**

Employees exchange resources in the workplace all the time, creating unavoidable interactions between them. Resources exchanged in the workplace can either be economical or they can be social in nature. From the participants, the study sought to establish the economic and social resources exchanged in the organisation and the findings were as follows:

##### **4.4.1 Economic resources**

Regarding economic resources, Participants E mentioned the following:

*“You see for us here as co-workers, sometimes we exchange finances to help each other out”.*

Participant I agreed with the above statement and pointed out:

*“Sometimes we exchange money with peer co-workers when you are broke and month end isn't around the corner”.*

Participants J and O also mentioned money to be an economic resource they exchanged with peer co-workers in the workplace.

Participant K mentioned the following:

*“Yeah we do exchange economic resources like money all the time, it’s actually unavoidable because at times you can be in a cash fix and you need financial help from a co-worker”.*

In addition, participant L stated money to be the economic resource that was mostly shared among peer co-workers in the organisation. Participant M mentioned that:

*“For sure we support each other financially”.*

#### **4.4.2 Social resources**

Some of the social resources exchanged were love, ideas, information, experience and moral support. Participant D pointed out:

*“We share experiences on how to tackle issues with peer co-workers when we meet during monthly meetings”.*

In addition, participant C mentioned that they exchanged ideas and knowledge with each other frequently. Participant N stated that;

*“We exchange office stationery, files we use, documents we use and we also exchange phones when we don’t have airtime”.*

In support of the above findings, participant J mentioned the following:

*“We exchange ideas through our exchange programs in the workplace”.*

Participant E agreed with the above findings and shared:

*“We also exchange ideas and give each other moral support”.*

Participant E went further by mentioning that they try to be caring towards peer co-workers in the workplace so as to understand each other better and work in harmony.

#### **4.4.3 Effects of exchanging resources on interpersonal communication with peer co-workers in the organisation**

Peer co-worker exchange of resources can be labelled as either positive or negative, depending on the outcomes. From the participants, the study sought to determine the effects exchange of resources has on interpersonal communication. Participant C said that the exchange of resources made the peer co-workers work as a team and thus they communicated more interpersonally.

Participant C mentioned that:

*“When exchanges of resources like knowledge increase, productivity in the workplace also increases and we find out that at the end of the day we talk more”.*

Participant O stated the following:

*“Well, at times for somebody to deliver they require those resources and if they don’t get them then there can be a communication breakdown among the co-workers”.*

Participant K commented as well:

*“The exchange of resources does affect interpersonal communication in that sometimes when nagging occurs out of borrowing some resources, bitter words are exchanged which lead to communication breakdowns”.*

Additionally, participant E mentioned that according to him the exchange of resources was beneficial as it helped to improve relationships with peer co-workers. Participant E stated:

*“I feel that when we exchange resources in the workplace, both economic and social, we understand each other more interpersonally and we can also pass on advice to peer co-workers”.*

In line with the above finding, participant J noted the following:

*“According to me it’s beneficial because it helps me improve my interpersonal relations with my peer co-workers and at the end of the day our interpersonal communication improves”.*

Participant L agreed with the above finding, stating:

*“Exchange of resources does affect interpersonal communication among us. If we exchange things like money, we communicate more”.*

However, contrary to the above findings, other participants (participant I) felt that the exchange of resources had no effect on how they communicated interpersonally with their peer co-workers. Participant I said that:

*“I don’t think the exchange of resources affects interpersonal communication with my peer co-workers”.*

## **4.5 EFFECTS OF CONFLICT IN A WORKING ENVIRONMENT**

Conflict can either be destructive or constructive, depending on how it is managed in the workplace. Peer co-workers often have conflict episodes. How these conflicts are managed is very important. The participants indicated that conflicts have both negative and positive effects.

### **4.5.1 Positive effects**

Participant O mentioned that some effects, for instance that the peer co-workers could better understand each. She said the following:

*“I believe that some conflicts can bring about positive outcomes like getting to understand your co-workers better”.*

Participant E echoed this statement and said:

*“I think according to me sometimes conflicts help in understanding how things are at the moment and how they should be solved too”.*

Participant G noted the following:

*“You see, some of these conflict situations have helped me to build up a strong personality and to face the conflicts in the workplace.”*

In line with the above finding, participant F mentioned that:

*“I believe sometimes conflict can help in that you can know each other’s weaknesses in the workplace and know not to step on other people’s toes”.*

#### 4.5.2 Negative effects

Participant O mentioned that conflicts led to underperformance in the workplace. She stated:  
*“According to me, I feel that conflicts lead to time wastage and a bad working environment”.*

Participant A agreed and felt that conflict led to demoralisation of peer co-workers in the organisation.

Participant K mentioned the following:

*“I have been victimised because of conflict and at times I have witnessed conflicts leading my co-workers to resign from work”.*

Participant I agreed with the above finding and stated that:

*“I believe conflict in the workplace brings about resignation. You see, at times it even gets hard to work as you cannot communicate well with your fellow co-workers”.*

Participant L felt that when there was conflict, goals could not be attained in the workplace. Participant H confirmed that conflict leads to a negative attitude amongst peer co-workers. He said:

*“Conflict makes you have a negative attitude towards work and sometimes, because it brings tension in the office, you avoid coming to work”.*

Additionally, participant C said that conflict led to slow productivity in the workplace. He mentioned the following:

*“Conflict has often slowed down communication in the organisation and it has led to degeneration of good personal relationships with peer co-workers”.*

Contrary to the findings on the positive effects (see section 4.5.1); participant G mentioned that conflicts in the workplace brought about low self-esteem which negatively influenced her work. Another negative effect the findings highlighted was that projects often stalled and reports were delayed due to conflicts. Participants D and B respectively supported this.

### 4.5.3 Participants' perceptions of conflict

Conflict can be perceived differently by different people. The researcher sought to explore how the participants perceived conflict. Participant A mentioned that according to him conflict wasn't a good thing and it was to be avoided at all costs, especially in the workplace.

Participant I mentioned that:

*“Okay conflict is not a good thing to me personally; this is because it brings about chaos”.*

Participant N echoed the above statement, saying:

*“As an individual, I don't feel that conflict is a good thing”.*

However, contrary to the above statement, participant N mentioned that despite conflict being a bad thing, it did help to know someone else better or to better understand a situation.

Participant H brought in a different perspective and stated that:

*“Conflict is something that's unavoidable but I believe when there is proper communication it can be avoided. And also there are some proper channels to solve conflicts when they arise”.*

Participants J mentioned the following:

*“I believe conflict is a normal occurrence because not everyone is the same in the workplace”.*

Participant J added that since people's thoughts, their upbringing and personalities are different, conflicts are bound to occur but they have to be solved.

Participant L echoed the remarks of participant J by saying:

*“Conflict is a common and normal occurrence but how you handle it is what matters”.*

Participant C perceived conflict as relative in that some situations might be okay for one person, but not okay for the other person.

Contrary to the findings above, one participant, participant O, said that according to her not all conflicts were bad. Some were beneficial in the workplace while others were destructive.

Participant B also echoed this statement by pointing out:

*“Even though no one likes conflict, it does help to know the other person better and to learn how to deal or handle them during those situations”.*

#### **4.6 IMPORTANCE OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION REGARDING CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN THE ORGANISATION**

The study sought to explore how interpersonal communication could be applied by peer co-workers at SKE in managing conflict amongst them. Below are the findings.

##### **4.6.1 Participants’ understanding of interpersonal communication**

Most of the participants had a clear understanding of what interpersonal communication is.

When asked about his understanding of interpersonal communication, Participant A said:

*“According to me, interpersonal communication is a process where there is free flow of information from one person to the other and feedback is received”.*

Participant H echoed the above statement, saying:

*“According to me, interpersonal communication is passing of information from one person to another”.*

Participant B mentioned the following:

*“For me, I understand interpersonal communication as face to face communication between one person to the other”.*

Participant E described interpersonal communication as communication between two people and in line with the above findings, participant L noted that:

*“I feel interpersonal communication is communication between me and another person”.*

Participant N understood interpersonal communication as communication between two people.

However, contrary to the findings above, there were other participants who did not fully understand what interpersonal communication was. For instance, participant K mentioned that according to him interpersonal communication was his relationship with his peer co-workers. Another participant, participant D, mentioned that according to her interpersonal communication was how she tackles conflicts with peer co-workers.

#### **4.6.2 Participant’s engagement in interpersonal communication with peer co-workers**

Additionally, the study sought out to explore whether the participants engaged in interpersonal communication with their peer co-workers. The majority of the participants stated that they indeed engaged in interpersonal communication with their peer co-workers.

Participant A mentioned the following:

*“Yes we do engage in interpersonal communication with peer co-workers and when it happens we even get feedback, thus making the process complete”.*

Adding onto the above statement, Participant M stated that:

*“I do because at the end of the day what I do I can’t do alone - I have to engage other people”.*

Participant D mentioned:

*“Yeah, most of the time we engage in interpersonal communication because of the nature of our work”.*

In line with the above findings, participant H noted that:

*“Yeah, we do engage in interpersonal communication with our peer co-workers, in fact it happens daily as we cannot avoid it”.*

Participant O stated that they engaged in interpersonal communication with peer co-workers daily, stating:

*“You see for us here, we engage in interpersonal communication daily and on all levels not just with peer co-workers”.*

#### **4.6.3 Peer co-workers’ perceptions on the importance of interpersonal communication in conflict management between themselves in the organisation**

The study explored the role of interpersonal communication in managing conflict according to the participants’ views and experiences. Most of the participants stated that indeed interpersonal communication could be applied to help manage conflicts in the organisation.

Participant A said the following:

*“According to me when peer co-workers communicate well interpersonally and understand the conveyed message, there will be no misunderstanding and therefore no conflict”.*

In agreement with the above statement, Participant C mentioned:

*“For me I do think that indeed interpersonal communication plays an integral part in the office setup and it should never stop. It is the only way of managing conflict”.*

Participant N stated that:

*“Interpersonal communication helps in managing the conflict. It helps in achieving the set goals for an organisation and interpersonal communication will bring better understanding between peer co-workers, our management and the people we serve”.*

Participant M echoed participant N’s comments and said that indeed interpersonal communication did help in solving conflicts, sharing information and clarifying issues.

Participant J went ahead to mention that building good relationships with peer co-workers through interpersonal communication helps to minimise conflicts.

In line with the above findings, Participant I pointed out:

*“Personally I feel that interpersonal communication can be used in conflict management as it heals 90% of whatever people are conflicting about, it is very important”.*

In addition, participant O mentioned that when peer co-workers had good interpersonal communication unnecessary conflicts could be avoided. She felt that conflicts occurred as a result of poor public relations because people couldn't communicate and relate well with others.

Participant E echoed the above statement, stating:

*“Interpersonal communication brings people together hence helping in conflict management. It also brings peace when people communicate”.*

Participant D felt that interpersonal communication was important in conflict management as it helped to bring parties together.

Participant H mentioned the following:

*“When interpersonal communication is played out well, conflicts are avoided”.*

Supporting the above findings, Participant K felt that interpersonal communication helped in conflict management as it encouraged frequent communication with peer co-workers.

Two participants, participant G and participant F, didn't say outright if they felt interpersonal communication could help in conflict management between peer co-workers.

However, contrary to the above findings, participant H did mention that:

*“According to me, when interpersonal communication is not handled properly, let's say for example there are those body languages and gestures that someone can misinterpret and these may cause conflict”.*

#### **4.6.4 Strategies to enhance interpersonal communication between peer co-workers in the organisation**

The study strived to explore what strategies could be adopted in order to enhance interpersonal communication between peer co-workers in the organisation. Most of the participants noted that team building, frequent meetings and more frequent communication were the three major strategies that were to be adopted by the peer co-workers in order to enhance interpersonal communication amongst them.

Participant A mentioned as follows:

*“According to me, I think that frequent communication could be adopted. This can lead to more understanding amongst peer co-workers, especially when others have pronunciation problems which could lead to miscommunication”.*

Additionally, participant B mentioned team work, more frequent meetings and team building activities to be strategies that could be adopted to enhance interpersonal communication between her and peer co-workers.

Participant O echoed participant’s B statement, stating:

*“I think it is better when we have some gathering of sorts once in a while to bring people together to communicate, team building activities are also good”.*

Participant J pointed out the following:

*“I think peer co-workers should be taught about good interpersonal communication skills so that they know how to communicate better with others and thus enhance good relationships among them”.*

Participant N echoed the above statement, saying:

*“Maybe more can be done about communication skills. I do think it’ll help interpersonal communication if we are equipped with these skills between ourselves”.*

Participant E mentioned that healthy relationships should be encouraged between peer co-workers and they should choose words carefully before communicating.

In line with the above findings, participant L mentioned as follows:

*“For me, I think frequent meetings are of the essence in the workplace, this way you can share problems and come up with ideas which can help in improving interpersonal relations with co-workers”.*

Participant H stated:

*“If you ask me, I will say more team sessions should be held at least once a month so that we can know each other better and forums for bonding too can be adopted to enhance communication among us”.*

#### **4.7 SUMMARY**

To summarise this chapter, all participants had opinions on the questions posed to them, the answers varied among the participants. This chapter presented the findings of the research study which were collected through the qualitative research method of face-to-face semi-structured interviews. The participants could define the concepts of conflict, conflict management and interpersonal communication adequately. They reported that conflicts do occur among them in the workplace. The participants mentioned that conflict has both a negative and positive element. They further mentioned that they do exchange resources at the workplace and how the exchange of those resources affects their interpersonal relationships. The participants mentioned that interpersonal communication was important in conflict management among them in the workplace. The next chapter deals with the data analysis and findings discussion of the study.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

The previous chapter presented the study findings. This chapter analyses and discusses the study findings as presented in chapter four. The chapter provides insight into the findings against the aim of the study which was to describe and explore the role of interpersonal communication in managing peer co-worker conflict in SKE. The findings of the study are explained against the theory that was adopted for this study, the Social Exchange theory. The findings that are analysed and discussed below were obtained from face-to-face semi-structured interviews with peer co-workers from SKE.

Data analysis is generally the process of creating order, structure and meaning to the data collected from the research study. Qualitative Data Analysis on the other hand is defined as “the range of processes and procedures whereby we move from the qualitative data that have been collected into some form of explanation, understanding or interpretation of the people and situations we are investigating” (Taylor & Gibbs 2010).

According to Taylor and Gibbs (2010), Qualitative Data Analysis is usually based on an interpretative philosophy. In this way, the qualitative data obtained is examined by defining the meaning and the symbolic content of the data.

#### **5.2 DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS**

As the previous chapter indicated, majority of participants were aged between 21 and 30 years. The findings suggest that more than half of the participants were primarily young adults and therefore experienced conflict situations because of their age. A study by Dwomoh, Kwarteng, Frempong and Frempong (2014) found that age was a determinant of conflict in the workplace.

Another study by Elmagri (2013) found that the age gap between peer co-workers did cause conflict in the organisations. In support of these views, Hasani, Boroujerdi, Sheikhesmaeli and Aeini (2014) viewed age as a factor in organisational conflict. However, according to Dwomoh et al (2014), the older respondents handled conflicts better in comparison to the younger respondents due to their experience in handling conflict situations. Interpreted in line with the Social Exchange theory, these findings suggests that older peer co-workers with more experience gained during many conflict interactions will avoid conflict or have better ways of managing conflict than the ones with less experience.

Secondly, with regards to gender, the majority of the participants were male in comparison to their female counterparts. The participants did not mention gender to be a cause of conflict among peer co-workers in the organisation and Hasani et al (2014) confirms this finding. However, in contradiction a study done by Dwomoh et al (2014) found that gender did influence conflict in the workplace; females were found to be more likely to encounter and engage in conflicts than their male counterparts.

Thirdly, regarding the education level of participants, the majority of the participants were A-level holders followed by undergraduate degree holders. The findings indicated that the difference in education level did affect how the peer co-workers communicated with one another and at times it was a major cause of conflict in the organisation. These findings are in line with a study done by Dwomoh et al (2014) which found that the differences in education level in the workplace tended to bring about conflict. In support of this finding, Hasani et al (2014) found that differences in education levels in the workplace are a determining factor of conflict. Interpreted in light of SET, these findings show that peer co-worker interactions are usually independent and contingent on the actions of another person (Blau 1964). Therefore, when the less educated peer co-workers feel looked down upon they will lessen their interactions with the more educated peer co-workers. By doing this, conflict easily emerges as there are no interactions or communication among them.

Fourthly, with regards to the religious affiliations of the participants, all the participants were Christians. In the past, various studies indicated that different religious affiliations in the

organisations' workforce can create conflict (Ramani & Zhimin 2010; Salleh & Adulpakdee 2012; Riaz & Junaid 2012). However, contrary to these studies, the present study found that all the participants were Christians and therefore this study could not confirm whether different religious affiliations could be a cause of conflict in Non-Governmental organisations.

Finally, regarding years of working experience, the majority of participants worked in the organisation for more than 5 years, confirming that most participants worked in the organisation for quite some time. The study determined that the longer serving peer co-workers experienced conflict more than the ones who for less years in the organisation. A study by Dwomoh et al (2014) confirms this finding as it established that the longer serving employees were more inclined to be in conflict than the employees who had been working for a shorter time. Supporting this finding is a study done by Hasani et al (2014) which established conflicts occurred within different levels of working experience. In line with the theory on which the study is based, these findings confirm SET's proposition that interpersonal relationships are built over time through the exchange of resources in the workplace (Blau 1964). Therefore, the probability of experiencing conflict increases with the number of years working for an organisation because if peer co-workers perceive their colleagues are not following the rules and norms of exchange, they are bound to get into conflict over time.

### **5.3 CAUSES OF CONFLICT AMONG PEER CO-WORKERS IN SILC KENYA, ELDORET**

With conflict an inevitable occurrence, it is important to know what some of the causes are. Conflict is part of organisational life and Nicotera (2009) believes that conflict is inevitable in any human interaction setting and organisations are no exception. According to Roloff (1987: 496), "organisational conflict occurs when members engage in activities that are incompatible with those of colleagues within their network, members of other collectivities, or unaffiliated individuals who utilize the services or products of the organisation". This shows how unavoidable conflict is, especially for peer co-workers in organisations. However, to fully explore the causes of conflict among peer co-workers in SKE, the researcher had to first explore

whether the participants fully understood what conflict was and how frequent it occurred among peer co-workers in the organisation. Below is the discussion on this objective.

### **5.3.1 Participants' understanding of conflict**

Knowledge of conflict often differs from one person to another. To understand how to deal with conflict, one should first understand what it is and all the participants had an understanding of conflict. According to some of the participants, the understanding of conflict was in accordance with Putman and Poole (1987: 552) who described conflict as “the interaction of interdependent people who perceive opposition of goals, aims, and values, and who see the other party as potentially interfering with the realization of these goals”. Other participant’s definition of conflict was in agreement with Jehn and Bendersky’s (2003: 189) definition of conflict “perceived incompatibilities or discrepant views among the parties involved” The participants felt that having different views or ideologies often caused conflict between them and their peer co-workers.

Additionally the participants pointed out that conflict occurs between them and their peer co-workers when they interact on a daily basis but as they have different personalities, they won’t always agree on certain issues.

According to Folger, Poole and Stutman (2005) conflict occurs when “interaction of interdependent people who perceive incompatibility and the possibility of interference from others as a result of this incompatibility”. Therefore, these interactions create conflict at one point or another because as human beings we are wired differently and when others do not interpret things our own way; we tend to disagree with them.

In line with the theory on which this study is based, the findings of conflict understanding among participants suggest that when in conflict, because of self-interest individuals act in a way that will give them maximum opportunity to attain their goals regardless of whoever they are in conflict with (Homans 1961; Blau 1964; Folger 2001). Because of individual self-interest, the

two parties in a conflict situation both want to achieve what's best for them and this, at times, will not assist in managing the conflict but instead escalate it.

### **5.3.2 Frequency of conflict occurrence in the workplace**

It can be deduced from the study that there is no specific trend or frequency of conflict occurring in the organisation. Conflicts occur in the course of performing certain tasks in an organisation and can be daily, weekly, after two weeks or monthly. The frequency of conflict occurrence depends on issues being handled hence its frequency of occurrence. Participants pointed out that the frequency of conflicts rose when there were important reports to be submitted. This means that when the peer co-workers had deadlines, conflict tended to arise.

This finding was in line with the study findings conducted at UNHCR which found that there is no specific frequency of conflict. Respondents in the study cited conflict to occur at times, often, others said the conflicts didn't occur at all and others said that they didn't know anything about conflicts in the workplace (Buss 2009). In support of these views, in her study Bankovskaya (2012) established that the frequency of conflict between peer co-workers was not specific; other respondents mentioned that the conflicts never occurred but the majority of the respondents stated that the conflicts do occur frequently.

Interpreted in light of SET, the findings suggest that the nature of individual action during conflict is felt in the occurrence and frequency of conflict in the organisation (Boyd 2007). Differences in personalities always brings about different conflict perceptions in that one can view himself or herself as being in a conflict when the other party's feelings differ on the same conflict situation.

### **5.3.3 Causes of conflicts amongst peer co-workers**

According to Pondy (1967: 308), conflict "disturbs the equilibrium of the organisation". In this regard, the participants were asked to indicate the causes of conflicts amongst peer co-workers at SKE. Set out below are the finding discussions.

## **1. Failure to meet deadlines**

Effective time management is one very important key to positive organisational outcomes. From the study it was established that conflict arose from disagreements over the failure to achieve certain goals or the methods used to accomplish certain goals. The goals in this case were the tasks that needed to be completed within a given deadline and when peer co-workers failed to accomplish these goals or failure to meet the deadlines conflicts arose.

These findings were consistent with the findings from a study by Salleh and Adulpakdee (2012) which found that when the peer co-worker teachers failed to meet their teaching time schedule, conflict arose. In line with these findings was a study done in Nigeria by Femi (2014) who established that peer co-worker contractors in the organisation mentioned that failure to meet deadlines was a cause of conflict among them. SET assumes that individuals are goal-oriented in a freely competitive social system, therefore when these goals are at times not met within certain time frames, conflicts occur.

## **2. Limited resources**

The study findings established that resources such as money, time, and equipment are often scarce in the organisation. Competition among people or departments for limited resources is a cause of conflict. It was established that when a group of employees have access to such resources while others do not, conflict may arise among peer co-workers. As important resources are often limited, this is one cause of conflict in the organisation.

This finding was in line with a study by Ongori (2009) who found that limited resources were a cause of conflict among peer co-workers. A study by Hotepo, Asokere, Abdul-Azeez and Ajemunigbon (2010) is also in line with these findings as it determined that competition for limited resources causes conflict among peer co-workers in the organisation. Recent studies by Yorid and Pakiza (2013) and Mughal and Khan (2013) reported similar findings.

In line with SET, these findings suggest that due to the sharing of limited resources supply in the workplace, relationships degenerate, thus causing conflict. This is because SET purports that individuals enter into relationships with each other for the purpose of sharing the limited supply of resources (Boyd 2007).

### **3. Task interdependence**

Another cause of conflict established from the findings is interdependence; meaning when goal accomplishment requires reliance on others to perform their tasks. This is unavoidable in organisations as peer co-workers need one another to do their daily tasks. Similarly studies conducted by Ongori (2009) and (Bankovskaya 2012) found that task interdependence was a cause of conflict amongst peer co-workers in organisations. A study by Hotepo et al (2010) reported similar findings and another Kenyan study by Barmao (2012) established that task interdependence indeed created conflict among peer co-worker teachers as their roles were intertwined.

Additionally, in line with the above findings is a study by Omisore and Abiodun (2014: 126-127) who stated that “when a person has to depend on someone else to complete his/her task, it becomes easier to blame a co-worker when something goes wrong” thus creating conflict between them.

In line with SET, these findings show that interdependence, which is a defining characteristic of social exchange, is vital in the workplace as peer co-workers need each other to achieve both personal and organisational goals (Blau 1964). Greenwald (2008: 6) defines an organisation as “a body of individuals working under a defined system of rules, assignments procedures, and relationships designed to achieve identifiable objectives and goals.” In this regard, organisational members have to work together independently to achieve organisational goals and when this isn't realised, then conflict is bound to occur.

#### **4. Incompatible goals**

Conflict arises when employees think their goals are mutually exclusive. Incompatible goals often arise within organisations because of the different manners in which peer co-workers are compensated. A study by Ramani and Zhimin (2010) established that incompatibility of goals among peer co-workers caused conflict among them.

In line with the above findings, a study by Bankovskaya (2012) found that indeed incompatible goals were causes of conflict amongst peer co-workers in organisations. Human beings are not the same and therefore the driving force to accomplish different tasks in the workplace differs. In addition, when it comes to matters of compensation or promotions, the peer co-workers only care about themselves and this creates conflict. Aligning with these findings is a study by Omisore and Abiodun (2014) which states that incompatible goals in the organisation results in conflict.

In line with SET, this finding confirms what Folger (2001: 71) stated, “The guiding force behind behaviours is self-interest”. SET argues that the major force in interpersonal relationships is the satisfaction of both people’s self-interest, however self-interest is not necessarily a negative thing and it can actually enhance relationships. The Equity Theory goes further, stating that “employees become unsatisfied if they perceive that another employee is receiving the same or a similar remuneration package, reward or bonus for less effort or value adding qualities” (Xerri 2013).

#### **5. Personality differences**

Personality differences among co-workers are common. By understanding some fundamental differences in the way people think and act, we can better understand how others see the world. Knowing that these differences are natural and normal, leads us to anticipate and mitigate interpersonal conflict. The participants mentioned that when their different personalities clash, it

leads to conflict. However, they felt if they tried to understand and accept each other's different personalities, they could minimise the conflict.

Studies conducted in Iceland and Yala, Thailand found that personality differences were a major cause of conflict among peer co-workers in the workplace (Bankovskaya 2012; Salleh & Adulpakdee 2012). In line with these findings was a study conducted by Mughal and Khan (2013) which reported similar findings.

## **6. Communication problems**

Conflict could simply arise from a small, unintentional communication problem and can be due to poor or lack of communication. Giving feedback is another situation where the best intentions can quickly escalate into a conflict situation. The study found that this was indeed a major cause of conflict among peer co-workers in the organisation. Participants felt that when their peer co-workers didn't communicate effectively with them, conflict tended to arise.

Similarly, a study by Ongori (2009) found that lack of communication was a cause of conflict in organisations. This too was echoed in a study by Hotepo et al (2010) which came to the same conclusion. According to another study in Iceland, the respondents attribute communication breakdown as a cause of conflict among peer co-workers in the organisations (Bankovskaya 2012). In her study, Barmao (2012) also cited poor communication through lack of proper communication channels caused conflict among peer co-workers.

Additionally, other studies cited miscommunication as a cause of conflict between peer co-workers (Yorid & Pakiza 2013; Mughal & Khan 2013). In their study, Yorid and Pakiza (2013) found that due to a large number of peer co-workers with different personalities and perspectives on issues, disagreements and misunderstandings were bound to occur due to improper communication.

However, a study by Salleh and Adulpakdee (2012) found that not all peer co-workers experienced communication obstruction as a cause of conflict between them. This was one study

in contrast to the present study findings. In line with SET, these findings suggest that effective communication is important in interpersonal relationships as it is the medium in which exchanges occur.

According to Roloff (1981: 30) interpersonal communication is a “symbolic process by which two people, bound together in a relationship, provide each other with resources or negotiate the exchange of resources”. This explains that without communication it is impossible for exchanges to occur as the individuals participating in the exchanges need it (communication) to make the exchange process likely.

## **7. Tribal frictions**

Conflicts can arise in the form of misunderstandings due to many reasons: the nature, aims and objectives of a job, differing expectations about how tasks should be completed and differences in values, beliefs, needs or priorities. Some employees have strong beliefs on which they will not compromise. These beliefs can be in conflict with peer co-workers, thus creating conflict. Although the study area in Eldoret, Kenya is metropolitan, a tribe called Kalenjins are in the majority. This meant many of the employees of SKE were Kalenjins. The participants from the minority tribes felt that this fact created conflict with their Kalenjin peer co-workers.

A study by Ramani and Zhimin (2010) in Nairobi, Kenya, found that social and cultural background differences caused conflict among peer co-workers. A recent study by Elmagri (2013) also established that tribalism caused conflict among peer co-workers in organisations.

In line with the theory on which this study is based, the findings show that since SET stipulates exchange operates within cultural norms, peer co-workers face conflicts when their different cultural norms don't allow for effective exchanges between themselves.

## **8. Language barriers**

Many different languages are spoken in Africa, let alone Kenya. In Kenya, there are 42 tribes, all speaking in different mother tongues. Eldoret, being a metropolitan town, means that many people from different tribes reside there. The Eldoret population thus comprises of people from various ethnic groups in and around Kenya. The employees of SKE speak different languages and even though the official languages to be used in the office are English and Kiswahili, some people don't adhere to this rule.

Peer co-workers in SKE felt that the language barrier was a cause of conflict among them. They ascertained this to sometimes not being able to understand each other clearly and miscommunication due to pronunciation problems as a result of mother tongue interference. Other peer co-workers felt that by using different tribal languages in the workplace, gossip was encouraged. Ramani and Zhimin (2010) confirmed this in their study; cultural backgrounds did lead to conflicts in organisations.

## **9. Level of education**

In the words of the late Nelson Mandela, "education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world". Even though the importance of education is noteworthy, not many people have access to higher education. For instance, in SKE, many of the employees do possess formal qualifications, but levels of education vary from A-levels to undergraduate degrees. None of the participants had a masters or a doctoral degree.

However, it was found that the peer co-workers with undergraduate degrees conflicted with those with A-level qualifications. Other peer co-workers with lower qualifications felt that their colleagues undermined their work or decisions because of the difference in education levels. A study by Elmagri (2013) in Libya found that different education levels between peer co-workers indeed caused conflict in organisations. In agreement with this finding are studies conducted by Dwomoh et al (2014) and Hasani et al (2014) who found that the different levels of education among co-workers sometimes created conflict.

## **10. Age**

In an organisation, peer co-workers' ages will always differ and in this study, the participants were from all age groups. Even though the majority of the participants were young, there were older ones as well. The study revealed that the age differences of the peer co-workers did cause conflicts. The young employees felt the older employees sometimes used their age to overrule them. On the other hand, the older employees felt that the younger employees weren't doing their tasks the correct way.

This finding concurs with a study done in Libya which found that the age gap between peer co-workers caused conflict in the organisations (Elmagri 2013). In line with this finding are studies by Dwomoh et al (2014) and Hasani et al (2014) who found that age was indeed a determinant of conflict among co-workers in the workplace.

## **11. Financial matters**

This was the cause of conflict least mentioned among the participants. This is in contrast with the assumption that monetary issues form part of major causes of conflicts in an organisation. A study by Ikeda, Veludo-de-Oliveira and Campomar (2005) in Brazil found that financial matters such as salary comparisons can lead to conflict between peer co-workers but not necessarily borrowing from each other. In line with SET, these findings suggest that when economic exchanges occur between individuals, reciprocation should be within a specified timeframe (Gouldner 1960; Blau 1964). When peer co-workers borrow money from each other it needs to be returned within the agreed period in order to avoid conflicts.

## **12. Work overload**

Work overload generally means a situation where an individual is expected to do much more work or accomplish more tasks than he or she can handle. When peer co-workers are overloaded with work in the workplace, conflicts tend to arise because some might feel there is an unfair

distribution of work or responsibilities. Some participants noted that when they experienced work overload in comparison to other peer co-workers, conflicts arose.

Work distribution in the workplace should always be fair, ensuring that none of the peer co-workers will feel there is unfairness. This will, in turn, create harmony in the workplace, thus evading some conflict situations. A study by Yorid and Pakiza (2013) found that peer co-workers with a higher workload will try to avoid extra duties and in so doing, create conflict with their colleagues who are performing the extra duties.

Several other studies agree with this finding (Elmagri 2013; Johari, Morni, Bohari & Sahari 2013). Interpreted in line with SET, these findings confirm that when unfairness in task allocation is felt by peer co-workers in the workplace, conflict is bound to occur. This happens because individuals judge input and outcomes by assessing the other parties involved in the same situation.

### **13. Lack of clarity on roles and responsibilities**

An organisation consists of many people working together, thereby ensuring its success. Different roles and responsibilities are undertaken by different people, from top management to the lowest hierarchy of employees. When there is unclear specification of roles and responsibilities to be undertaken by members of the organisation, especially peer co-workers, then there is bound to be conflict. This is because lack of clarity on roles and responsibilities brings about a disorganised situation which will, in turn, cause chaos in the workplace.

The participants found that this lack of clarity to be a cause of conflict between peer co-workers in the organisation. A study by Buss (2009) agrees with this finding. Another recent study by Salleh and Adulpakdee (2012) agrees that ambiguously defined roles at the workplace cause conflict between peer co-workers. Additionally, in line with these findings is a study by Barmao (2012) which established that when peer co-workers are unclear on their roles in the workplace, conflict is bound to occur.

## **5.4 ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RESOURCES EXCHANGED BETWEEN PEER CO-WORKERS IN SILC KENYA, ELDORET**

Employees exchange resources in the workplace all the time due to the unavoidable interactions between them. Resources exchanged in the workplace can be either economic or social in nature. The study sought to establish from the participants the economic and social resources exchanged in the organisation and whether the exchange of these resources influenced how they communicated with their peer co-workers in the workplace. These findings are discussed below.

### **5.4.1 Economic and social resources exchanged with peer co-workers**

According to the SET, interpersonal relationships are only sustainable when both parties are satisfied concerning their self-interest. Being one of the most influential conceptual paradigms for understanding behaviour at the workplace (Cropanzano & Mitchell 2005: 874), the study sought to determine the economic and social resources exchanged between peer co-workers.

#### **5.4.1.1 Economic resources**

The economic resource most exchanged between the participants was money. They felt by doing so they were supporting each other financially during tough times. Exchange of this resource brought the peer co-workers closer together but it also caused conflict when the money borrowed was not returned at a time agreed on.

Ledingham, Fruning, and Wilson (1999) stipulate money as an example of a resource exchanged between individuals. In support of this view, Shore, Tetrick, Lynch and Barksdale (2006), view money as the economic resource exchanged between co-workers in organisations.

In line with the theory on which the study is based, the findings confirm Foa and Foa's (1974, 1980) resource theory which stated money to be a type of economic resource exchanged between individuals. Foa and Foa (1974, 1980) further stated that economic exchanges, which tend to be

universal and concrete in nature, lead to economic outcomes which address financial needs and are mostly tangible.

#### **5.4.1.2 Social resources**

Social resources were exchanged more often between peer co-workers than economic resources. Participants felt that the exchange of social resources (love, ideas, information, experience and moral support) lead to the improvement of their interpersonal relationships and this improved their knowledge at the workplace.

A study by Ibrahim (2014: 74), found that “individuals who experience higher levels of emotional support, such as caring and empathy and instrumental support, such as assistance in problem solving or information exchange; perceived themselves to be a valued member of the organisation. This consequently leads to employees having positive and high levels of self-esteem”.

Interpreted in light of SET, the findings suggest, as noted in Foa and Foa’s resource theory (1974, 1980), that exchange of social resources such as love, status and information lead to socio-emotional outcomes that address social and esteem needs and are often symbolic and particularistic in nature.

#### **5.4.2 Effects of resources exchanged on interpersonal communication with peer co-workers in the organisation**

The present study determined that the majority of participants associated resources with positive effects on interpersonal communication. These findings were in agreement with Halbesleben (2012) who stated that mutuality and social support is the key constructs of positive peer co-worker exchanges.

Halbesleben (2012) also observed that positive peer co-worker exchanges are important as they help to bring about helpful behaviour among peer co-workers. Regarding these positive peer co-

workers exchanges, positive gain cycles being significant to both peer co-workers and organisations, are also harnessed.

In addition, positive peer co-worker exchanges lead to knowledge building and sharing through communication. When there are positive peer co-worker exchanges, it leads to better interpersonal communication enhanced through good interpersonal relationships. A study by Xerri (2013) agrees with this statement as it found that when the participants exchanged resources, they had healthier communication between themselves.

Contrary to the above findings, some participants felt that the exchange of resources brought about a communication breakdown. This was attributed to nagging and lack of reciprocity in the exchanges.

In line with SET, the findings confirm that peer co-worker relationships exist because of interpersonal attachments that result from a series of interdependent exchanges between two or more individuals (Organ & Konovsky 1989). These interpersonal relationships are maintained through reciprocity in terms of exchanges. Blau (1964: 20) suggested that social exchange occurs when “an individual is attracted to another if he expects associating with him to be in some way rewarding for him, and his interest in the expected social rewards draws him to the other”.

## **5.5 EFFECTS OF CONFLICT IN A WORKING ENVIRONMENT**

Conflict can be either destructive or constructive, depending on how it is managed in the workplace. Peer co-workers often experience conflict episodes. How these conflicts are managed is very important. The participants in this study indicated that conflicts have both negative and positive effects.

### **5.5.1 Positive effects**

Most of the time conflict is viewed as negative and destructive. However, from the present study, it was found that conflict can have positive effects as well. Participants felt that conflict could

help improve relationships between them through better understanding of each other. Better decision making skills, improvement in self-esteem and improved conflict management skills for the participants was found to be the positive effects of conflict at SKE.

These findings are in line with a study by Omisore and Abiodun's (2014) who reported that conflict led to higher self-esteem and better understanding of one another at the workplace. Other studies in agreement that conflict has positive effects in the workplace are Ongori (2009), Hotepo et al (2010) and Mughal and Khan (2013).

In line with SET, the findings suggest that peer co-workers can use conflict to uplift themselves. This is because unlike economic exchanges, social exchanges do not occur within a specific timeframe (Blau 1964), therefore a favour may not be reciprocated today which may lead to tension but it can be reciprocated another day and this will mend the relationship, leading to better understanding of the person.

### **5.5.2 Negative effects**

Interpersonal conflict with colleagues is significantly related to personal outcomes such as self-esteem, general well-being and emotional exhaustion while interpersonal conflicts with superiors is significantly related to organisational outcomes such as job satisfaction, organisational commitment, turnover intentions and real turnover (Riaz & Junaid, 2011).

However, this study found that sometimes conflict with peer co-workers also led to slow work productivity, time wastage and underperformance in the workplace. In addition, the study found that conflict between peer co-workers led to absenteeism and resignation from work.

This finding was in line with Omisore and Abiodun's (2014) study which found that conflicts led to loss of productivity at the workplace and time wastage. Other studies in agreement with these findings that conflict has negative effects in the workplace are Ongori (2009), Hotepo et al (2010), Mughal and Khan (2013) and Johari et al (2013).

Interpreted in light of SET, the findings suggest that when peer co-workers can no longer sustain their interpersonal relations, conflict occurs and this can cause destructive outcomes. This is because peer co-workers repay favour with favour and conflict with conflict. According to Homans (1961), when a person's action does not receive the expected reward, or receives unexpected punishment, he will be angry and is more likely to display aggressive behaviour which may end up in conflict with peer co-workers.

### **5.5.3 Participant's perceptions of conflict**

Perceptions on issues are viewed differently from one human being to another and hence conflict is an inevitable phenomenon at the workplace. The findings in this study showed that some peer co-workers viewed conflict as positive whereas others viewed it as negative. The participants felt that since conflict is an unavoidable, normal and common occurrence, knowing how to deal with it mattered most.

The participants experienced conflict as a positive thing as it helped them to understand each other better and learning how to deal and manage them. These results indicate that conflict is in fact not always a negative thing and if handled correctly, conflict can be beneficial to an individual or the organisation as a whole. Many studies agree with this finding (Omisore & Abiodun 2014; Mughal & Khan 2013; Ongori 2009).

On the other hand, some participants experienced conflict as a negative thing. They felt that conflict in fact created turmoil in the workplace and it should be avoided by all means possible. Many studies support this finding as well, namely Ongori 2009; Mughal and Khan 2013 and Omisore and Abiodun 2014.

Interpreted in light of SET, the findings suggest that people have different perceptions on different matters, and this is also true regarding conflict. However, according to Blau (1964), conflict is inevitable when each person's selfish interests cannot be simultaneously met. Conflict in the organisation is therefore inevitable as meeting all individual self-interests is next to impossible.

## **5.6 IMPORTANCE OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION REGARDING CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN THE ORGANISATION**

The study sought to explore the importance of interpersonal communication regarding conflict management in the organisation. The study was mainly interested in peer co-workers; to probe them in giving their views and perceptions on what interpersonal communication was according to them and whether they engaged in it or not. Additionally, the researcher desired to explore the participants' perceptions on the importance of interpersonal communication in conflict management between themselves and whether there were any strategies they felt could be adopted in order to enhance it. Below are the discussions of the findings.

### **5.6.1 Participants' understanding of interpersonal communication**

Interpersonal communication is defined differently by various scholars (Roloff 1981; DeVito 2009; Knapp & Daly 2011; Wood 2010). The participants had an understanding of interpersonal communication and each participant defined it differently. However, most of them understood that interpersonal communication was passing information or messages delivered face to face from one person to another and receiving feedback.

This finding meant that the participants could implement interpersonal communication as they knew and understood the concept. The participant's definition of interpersonal communication was leaning towards Trenholm and Jensen's (2008: 29) definition which states that "Interpersonal communication refers to dyadic communication in which two individuals, sharing the roles of sender and receiver, become connected through the mutual activity of creating meaning".

The participants also viewed interpersonal communication as the exchange of information between themselves, thus in line with Roloff's (1981: 30) definition where he described interpersonal communication as a "symbolic process by which two people, bound together in a relationship, provide each other with resources or negotiate the exchange of resources" .

In line with SET, these findings suggest participants understood that their relationships were sustained through the exchange of resources between themselves.

### **5.6.2 Participant's engagement in interpersonal communication with peer co-workers**

Peer co-workers interact with each other on a daily basis. This daily interaction makes interpersonal communication very important as they need to communicate with each other constantly. The study found that most of the participants did in fact engage in face-to-face interpersonal communication with their peer co-workers and felt that interpersonal communication could not be avoided in the workplace. By engaging in interpersonal communication, participants were able to exchange resources and information with each other.

A study by White, Vanc and Stafford (2012) agrees with this finding as it found that while emails were efficient for information exchange, the preferred form of communication for most of the groups of employees was face-to-face interaction. In line with these findings is a study by Arndt (2011), which found that face-to-face interpersonal communication was a preferred method of communication in the organisation.

Lining up with SET, these findings suggest that communication between peer co-workers would not be possible if there weren't any exchanges of resources. The findings confirm that by exchanging resources, the peer co-workers were able to engage more interpersonally among themselves through reciprocation (Gouldner 1960; Blau 1964). The exchange of resources develops and maintains interpersonal relationships between peer co-workers which, in turn, enhance interpersonal communication between them.

### **5.6.3 Peer co-workers' perceptions on the importance of interpersonal communication regarding conflict management between themselves in the organisation**

Over the years scholars have dwelt on the importance of interpersonal communication to help manage conflict in the workplace (Putman 2006; Bormann et al 1982; Myers et al 2011).

Participants felt that interpersonal communication was important in helping them to manage conflict between themselves and their peer co-workers. They felt that by embracing face-to-face interpersonal communication and interaction they could improve their interpersonal relationships, thus reducing conflict between themselves.

Thomas and Pondy (1977: 1100) considered communication to be the factor “with which we are most concerned in understanding conflict management”. To know how to deal and manage conflicts in the workplace, peer co-workers should embrace interpersonal communication. However, different expectations about the nature of communication lead to different conceptualisations of conflict, which is a major factor when people make decisions about the proper ways to approach conflicts (Ruben 1978). In addition, a study by White et al (2012) established that interpersonal communication remains important to employees at every level of the organisation.

In line with SET, which states that “relationships grow, develop, deteriorate, and dissolve as a consequence of an unfolding social-exchange process, which may be conceived as a bartering of rewards and costs both between the partners and between members of the partnership and others” (Huston & Burgess, 1979: 4), the findings confirm that when peer co-workers were involved in exchanges with each other through interpersonal communication, their interpersonal relationships improved and thus were able to manage conflict better.

#### **5.6.4 Strategies to enhance interpersonal communication between peer co-workers in the organisation**

The results of the study established that interpersonal communication can indeed be useful in managing conflict between peer co-workers in an organisation. Most of the participants agreed that interpersonal communication was beneficial to help manage conflicts in the organisation. They felt that by learning new communication skills and participating in more frequent interpersonal communication during meetings, they could enhance interpersonal communication in the workplace.

It was suggested that the organisation should introduce more team building activities, for instance seminars and workshops where the peer co-workers could interact and get to know each other better. They believed this would enhance their interpersonal relationships thus leading to healthier and stronger interpersonal communication. In order to improve interpersonal communication among peer co-workers, combined effort from both the peer co-workers and organisation are needed. Peer co-workers should strive to be stronger interpersonal communicators by learning new communication skills whereas the organisation should be able to avail bonding forums to enhance interpersonal relationships and interpersonal communication as a whole.

The researcher hasn't encountered studies that had similar findings as mentioned above. However, there are several studies that mention ways in which employees can enhance communication between themselves thus improving their interpersonal relationships (Sethi & Seth 2009; Conrad 2014).

Interpreted, in light of SET, the findings suggest that the only way peer co-workers can improve interpersonal communication is through frequent meetings, team building and training workshops. This shows that relationships can only be started and developed through constant exchanges between peer co-workers. Blau (1964) stated that social exchange, unlike economic exchange, is long term thus these relationships can be maintained through constant exchanges.

## **5.7 SUMMARY**

This chapter analysed and discussed the findings of the study as presented in chapter four which was done according to the themes that were derived from the data. The themes were presented under the objectives of the study. The discussion of the findings provided insight against the aim of the study and the theory adopted for this study (SET). Majority of the participants could define the concepts of conflict and interpersonal communication clearly. The findings show that peer co-workers in SKE face conflict on a day to day basis. The participants reported that they are aware of these conflicts and how they affect them. It is evident that the exchange of resources among the peer co-workers leads to better interpersonal relationships among them thus

enhancing interpersonal communication. The next chapter deals with the summary, conclusion and recommendations.

# CHAPTER SIX

## SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

The second chapter of this study concentrated on reviewing literature on the concepts of conflict and interpersonal communication. The theoretical framework for the study was also introduced and used to explain peer co-worker relationships in organisations. The third chapter of this study illustrated the research design and methodologies employed for the study. The fourth chapter presented the research data collected from the field.

The previous chapter analysed the research data and discussed the study findings. This chapter summarises the outcomes based on the study findings, concludes and makes recommendations on how interpersonal communication can be implemented to aid in conflict management amongst peer co-workers in a Non-Governmental Organisation. It is based on the objectives of the study, as indicated in chapter one.

### 6.2 SUMMARY

The summary will be discussed under the following headings, based on the objectives of the study:

#### 6.2.1 Causes of conflict among peer co-workers in SILC KENYA, Eldoret

This objective was aimed at exploring the conflict causes among peer co-workers in SKE. The findings indicate that participants are aware of what conflict is regardless of their different definitions and understanding of the term. Conflict does not have one specific definition (Baron

1990; Rahim 2001; Folger et al 2005; Nicotera 2009) and this was confirmed by the study. It was highlighted by the participants that conflict was generally a misunderstanding between themselves due to incompatibility in goals and values. The findings further indicate that conflicts, being an inevitable part of organisational life, occur frequently. The findings however indicated that the frequency of conflict occurrence in SKE was not specific. It was highlighted that conflict frequency differed among the peer co-workers. However, the frequency occurred from daily to weekly and even monthly intervals.

The findings indicated a number of conflict causes that occur among peer co-workers in SKE. Failure to meet deadlines was one of them. The findings indicate that when deadlines are not met in the workplace, conflicts are bound to occur. The participants indicated that if there were specific deadlines to be met, colleagues were expected to adhere to them. It was highlighted that frustration was experienced when peer co-workers failed to meet deadlines and this created conflict. In addition, limited resources were pointed out as a cause of conflict among the participants. The participants struggled with the limited organisational resources like computers and office stationery which always created conflict. The overall feeling was that if the organisation had enough resources, conflict can be avoided.

The participants felt that task interdependence was a cause of conflict among them. With an organisation being a social system, its members are interdependent and this can sometimes bring about conflict. Task interdependence means that one peer co-worker relies on his or her colleagues to complete tasks. The participants felt that when colleagues relaxed on the job they were meant to do together, this often created conflict between them. The participants mentioned incompatibility of peer co-workers regarding the goals they need to achieve or how they want to achieve these goals causes conflict. The reason is because when it comes to compensation or bonuses, the peer co-workers desire fairness.

The findings indicate that peer co-workers felt their different personalities sometimes caused conflict between them. It was highlighted that the different personalities among peer co-workers

often led to misunderstanding and conflict episodes. However, it was reiterated that by understanding each other and being more accommodative of each other's different personalities, conflict can be avoided. The participants further mentioned that lack of effective communication is a cause of conflict between the peer co-workers. It was highlighted that communication problems can be dealt with by striving to communicate better by gaining new interpersonal communication skills.

Tribal frictions were also indicated as a cause of conflict by the participants. The findings indicated that since Kenya has 42 tribes, the issue of tribalism is rampant and the workplace is no exception. The study area is dominated by a tribe called the Kalenjins. It was highlighted by some participants that they faced tribalism in the workplace and it caused conflict between peer co-workers. In connection to tribal frictions were language barriers. As different languages are used in the workplace, gossip was common and at time, during communication, pronunciation problems lead to misunderstandings which caused conflict if interpreted wrongly.

The participants further reported that the different levels of education were a cause of conflict among them. The findings show that the participants felt they were looked down upon due to different education levels. The participants mentioned age too as a cause of conflict among them. The findings indicate that the participants were of various ages and sometimes this created conflict between them. It was highlighted that sometimes peer co-workers used their ages to manipulate and dominate others in the workplace. In addition, financial matters were highlighted to be a cause of conflict between the peer co-workers in the organisation. Monetary issues of borrowing from each other and not being able to pay up caused chaos in the workplace. It was indicated that though financial support was positive when assisting a peer co-worker in the workplace, when the money is not paid back, it created conflict.

It was found that when peer co-workers are overloaded with work, conflict tended to occur. The occurrence of these conflicts was attributed to unfair workload distributions in the workplace. It

was highlighted that when peer co-workers are overloaded with work, frustrations occur and they end up confronting their peer co-workers which leads to conflict. Lastly, lack of clarity on roles and responsibilities was mentioned as a cause of conflict among the peer co-workers in the workplace. The findings indicate that when there are unclear specifications of roles and responsibilities of peer co-workers in the workplace, conflicts tend to occur. The participants highlighted that this lack of clarity often caused disorganisation in the workplace and when their duties collided, conflict was inevitable.

### **6.2.2 Economic and social resources exchanged between peer co-workers at SILC KENYA, Eldoret**

This second objective was aimed at exploring the type of resources, either economic or social, that were exchanged between peer co-workers in SKE. The findings indicate that money was the predominant economic resource exchanged between peer co-workers in SKE. It was highlighted by the participants that by supporting each other financially, they were able to assist each other in times of need. The mentioned social resources that were exchanged between peer co-workers are love, ideas, information, experience and moral support. It was indicated that the exchange of social resources led to improved knowledge and better interpersonal relationships in the workplace.

The findings further indicate that exchange of resources impacts both positively and negatively on interpersonal communication. It was highlighted that interpersonal relationships are enhanced through the constant exchanges thus improving on interpersonal communication. However, the participants mentioned that sometimes exchanges of resources led to communication breakdowns due to nagging and lack of reciprocation after exchanges.

### **6.2.3 Effects of conflict in a working environment**

The objective was to explore the effects of conflict in a working environment, in this case, SKE. The findings indicate that conflict is viewed both negatively and positively by peer co-workers at SKE. The participants highlighted that when conflict was better applied, it would lead to better

knowledge of each other and improvements in conflict management skills. On the hand, the participants mentioned that conflict was in fact a disaster and it should be avoided at the workplace.

The findings do show that contrary to the normal assumption that conflict is negative, it actually has positive effects. It was highlighted that conflict led to better understanding between peer co-workers, improved conflict management skills and improved self-esteem. However, the findings indicated that conflicts definitely have negative effects in the workplace. It was highlighted that episodes of conflict between peer co-workers led to slow work productivity, time wastage and underperformance at work. In extreme cases conflict at work led to absenteeism and resignation from work.

#### **6.2.4 Importance of interpersonal communication regarding conflict management in the organisation**

This last objective was aimed at exploring the importance of interpersonal communication regarding conflict management in the organisation. The findings indicate that the participants understand what interpersonal communication is and they know what the process entails. It was highlighted that interpersonal communication occurs in dyads. The findings indicate that the participants did engage in interpersonal communication on a frequent basis due to the nature of their work. The participants felt that they had to communicate with each other as they needed each other's input to do their jobs effectively. The findings further indicate that interpersonal communication is important in the workplace as it assists in conflict management. The participants stated that by using interpersonal communication, their interpersonal relationships improved and this brought about a more peaceful working environment.

The participants highlighted that changes must be implemented on both their side and the organisation's side regarding strategies to enhance interpersonal communication. The participants felt that by adopting new interpersonal communication skills, communication between them will be improved. It was additionally mentioned that if the organisation invested

more time into frequent meetings, team building activities and training workshops, interpersonal relationships between peer co-workers will enhance which will, in turn, enhance interpersonal communication.

## **6.3 CONCLUSIONS**

Based on the objectives of the study, the conclusions will fall under the following headings:

### **6.3.1 Causes of conflict among peer co-workers at SILC KENYA, Eldoret**

Although the study revealed conflict has many definitions, peer co-workers at SKE understand what conflict is and what it entails. This shows that they can actually point out to a conflict situation and search for ways to manage it. The study revealed that conflict is inevitable in organisational life however; conflict frequency is not consistent among all peer co-workers. This point to the fact that the peer co-workers have different personalities and views on conflict and when one person feels in conflict, the other party does not necessarily experience conflict.

The study concludes that deadlines are set in an organisation to ensure the smooth running of operations and activities. The study revealed that failure to meet deadlines is a cause of conflict among peer co-workers in this organisation. Peer co-workers should stick to the task deadlines thereby ensuring the smooth running of operations in the organisation and to avoid conflict with their colleagues. It was further revealed that resources in SKE are limited as the NGO relies on donors for their day to day operations. Because of this fact, peer co-workers are in conflict when they have to compete for these limited resources. The study concludes that by sharing the scarce resources with each other, peer co-workers can reduce conflict.

With regard to task interdependence, it is concluded that due to the nature of an organisation system, peer co-workers need each other to complete their daily tasks. Due to interdependence, no person can achieve the organisational goals alone. Therefore, peer co-workers need to work together in harmony to achieve both personal and organisational goals. Goal incompatibility among peer co-workers is a cause of conflict in this organisation. People differ and what drives

one person to achieve his or her goals may not be the same thing that drives another person, therefore conflict occurs. Therefore, peer co-workers must be accommodative of each other regardless of their different ways of achieving goals etc.

The study revealed that differences in peer co-worker's personalities cause conflict among them as peer co-workers have individual ways of handling issues. The study however concludes that when peer co-workers appreciate each other's differences and personalities by understanding they cannot think the same, then this type of conflicts can be avoided. When it comes to the issue of lack of effective communication, if peer co-workers practice effective communication, this conflict can be managed and avoided.

The study revealed the organisation comprises of members from different ethnic groups across Kenya. Tribalism among peer co-workers is viewed as a cause of conflict but can be managed by peer co-workers being accommodative of each other, regardless of their ethnic affiliations. It is further concluded that the problem of language barrier be addressed by peer co-workers communicating only in the official national languages during working hours to manage this kind of conflict.

The peer co-workers at SKE have different levels of education and this, at times, causes conflict among them. It was revealed that conflict occur when peer co-workers undermine colleagues with lower educational qualifications. Peer co-workers should treat each other equally regardless of their level of education, and in this way, these conflicts can be managed. The peer co-workers in this organisation fall into different age groups and sometimes conflict arises because peer co-workers at times undermine each other because of age differences. It is concluded that peer co-workers must listen and respect each colleague regardless of their age to minimise and manage these conflicts.

Peer co-workers at SKE are faced with financial conflicts from time to time and these conflicts arise when borrowed money is not returned as agreed upon during the exchange process. Since money is often a sensitive commodity, peer co-workers should always be on time to return it when they borrow from their colleagues. By adhering to set rules and timeframes, the financial

conflicts can be managed in the organisation. In addition, workload was revealed as a cause of conflict among peer co-workers in this organisation. The study revealed that if peer co-workers have a heavy workload, it equals frustrations which then lead to confrontations with colleagues and conflicts occur. The study concludes that by distribution of workload to be done equally and fairly, these conflicts can be managed or avoided. Lastly, the study revealed that because peer co-workers are in the same hierarchical level at work, they have no formal authority over one another. Roles and responsibilities should therefore be clearly spelt out in order to avoid conflicts that arise out of disorganisation.

### **6.3.2 Economic and social resources exchanged between peer co-workers in SILC KENYA, Eldoret**

The study revealed that peer co-workers in SKE exchange resources in the workplace all the time. The economic resource which is exchanged the most between peer co-workers is money, thereby assisting each other through hard financial times. Exchanging money between peer co-workers is only beneficial when it is returned on time, as agreed upon during the exchange process. When it is not returned, conflicts tend to occur. The study further revealed that peer co-workers in this organisation exchange quite a number of social resources as well, compared to economic resources. When peer co-workers exchange social resources, they gain more knowledge on different organisational issues as well as improve their personal well-being.

It was revealed that resource exchanges effects interpersonal communication between peer co-workers and is both positive and negative. The positive effect is that interpersonal relationships improve, thus enhancing interpersonal communication between peer co-workers. The negative effect is that due to the lack of reciprocation during the exchange process, communication breakdowns occurs thus hindering interpersonal communication between peer co-workers. Therefore, peer co-workers need to be vigilant when exchanging resources to maximise the benefits of the transactions and reduce the costs.

### **6.3.3 Effects of conflict in a working environment**

The study revealed that peer co-workers in SKE perceive conflict both positively and negatively. The positive side is that it can assist them to understand each other better and improve their conflict management skills and the negative side is that it creates havoc in the workplace and no good things come out of it. The study concludes that the negative impact of conflict outweighs the positive impact and therefore peer co-workers should strive to manage conflicts to thereby avoid chaos and havoc in the workplace. The study further revealed that contrary to the normal assumption that conflict is always negative, it does have positive effects for both the individuals and the organisation as a whole. Conflict can aid in enhancing stronger decision making skills through better understanding of the other parties involved in the conflict. However it was revealed that even though conflicts have some benefits, the costs outweigh the benefits as conflict causes many disruptions in the workplace and should be avoided at all costs. It is therefore concluded that peer co-workers should keep to a minimum conflict among themselves in order to perform better in the organisation.

### **6.3.4 Importance of interpersonal communication regarding conflict management in the organisation**

This final objective was aimed to explore the importance of interpersonal communication regarding managing peer co-worker conflict in the organisation. The study revealed that most of SKE's peer co-workers understand interpersonal communication and what it entails. It revealed that peer co-workers in this organisation understand that interpersonal communication occurs between two people (dyads) and for completion thereof, feedback is important. Since peer co-workers understand interpersonal communication, adapting and enhancing it in their daily interactions is possible. It was further revealed that peer co-workers in SKE do engage in interpersonal communication due to the nature of their work and inevitable day to day interactions. Since peer co-workers in this organisation already engage in interpersonal communication, all that is needed is more information on the subject to further enhance these interactions. Interpersonal communication is important when managing conflict between peer co-

workers in this organisation. By using interpersonal communication, peer co-workers can identify conflict and better manage it. The study further revealed that interpersonal communication enhanced healthy interpersonal relationships which help in fostering a peaceful working environment. The study concludes that if peer co-workers take part in interpersonal communication with colleagues they improve their working relationships with each other. When working relationships is healthy then conflict can be better managed or avoided.

In this study it is reported that interpersonal communication is important in managing peer co-worker conflict in this organisation and therefore enhancing strategies are paramount. Enhancing strategies towards interpersonal communication between peer co-workers comes from both the peer co-workers as well as the organisation. The study concludes that peer co-workers need to enhance their interpersonal communication skills by participating in training workshops on the subject. The organisation should schedule frequent meetings, training workshops and team building activities to foster healthy interpersonal relationships between peer co-workers to aid and improve their interpersonal communication with one another.

## **6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS**

The recommendations will be based under the following headings, based on the objectives of the study:

### **6.4.1 Causes of conflict among peer co-workers at SILC KENYA, Eldoret**

The peer co-workers in SKE should be educated more on what conflict really is so that they will fully understand the various dimensions of conflict. They should ensure that they tackle conflicts as soon as they occur in order to manage such conflict before escalation thereof. In regard to failure to meet deadlines, specific deadlines should be set by the peer co-workers when to submit reports so that everyone is on the same page and no one becomes a victim of late submissions. The peer co-workers should learn to share the limited amount of resources available in order for everyone to complete their tasks. They should encourage each other to work together as a team for the betterment of themselves as well as the whole organisation.

To address incompatibility of goals among peer co-workers at SKE, specific compensation structures should be developed in order to avoid conflicts that could arise due to incompatible goals. All human beings have different personalities and thus the peer co-workers at SKE should accept each other regardless. A culture of embracing healthy communication skills should be adapted by the peer co-workers to aid effective communication within the workplace and peer co-workers are encouraged to overlook tribal lines and instead work together as a unit to be able to meet the organisational goals. Language barriers should be addressed by ensuring that only official languages of English and Kiswahili should be spoken at the office during working hours. By doing so, peer co-workers can minimise chances for gossiping which would lead to conflict.

Peer co-workers should encourage each other to obtain higher educational qualifications to better themselves and the organisation as a whole and as the saying, ‘age is nothing but a number’ reads; peer co-workers should accept each other in the office regardless of their age. Furthermore, peer co-workers should be advised to only borrow/lend money from/to each other when it’s absolutely a necessity and to return it on time, without failure. Organisational workload should be distributed fairly amongst all the peer co-workers without inequity. The organisation should clearly state the roles and responsibilities of each peer co-worker in the workplace so as to avoid confusion regarding tasks.

#### **6.4.2 Economic and social resources exchanged between peer co-workers in SILC KENYA, Eldoret**

Peer co-workers are encouraged to exchange both economic and social resources in the workplace, thereby improving interpersonal relationships. However during these exchanges, peer co-workers should keep in mind the norm of reciprocity when exchanging finances at the workplace. They should return all resources on the scheduled time. They should try to exchange social resources as it builds up knowledge in the workplace and increases emotional support which leads to higher self-esteem.

### **6.4.3 Effects of conflict in a working environment**

Peer co-workers are encouraged to use conflict episodes as learning experiences for the betterment of themselves. They should avoid conflict that is destructive to both themselves and their colleagues in the workplace. However, since conflict can be either positive or negative, peer co-workers should know when to confront conflict and when to avoid it by communicating interpersonally with their colleagues.

### **6.4.4 Importance of interpersonal communication regarding conflict management in the organisation**

Peer co-workers should strive to understand more about the interpersonal communication process in order to apply it successfully. By so doing, they will enhance their use of interpersonal communication among themselves in the workplace. They are further encouraged to continue engaging in interpersonal communication to improve their interpersonal relationships as well as their interpersonal communication skills. Peer co-workers are encouraged to use interpersonal communication to manage conflict between them in the organisation. When they feel pressured by conflict with a fellow peer co-worker, they should confront and talk about it to avoid the escalation of conflict. Lastly, peer co-workers should learn effective interpersonal communication skills so that they can communicate better interpersonally. This can be achieved by the organisation, which should organise interpersonal communication training workshops for the peer co-workers. The organisation should facilitate frequent meetings and team building activities to enhance healthy interpersonal relationships among the peer co-workers to improve their interpersonal communication with each other.

## **6.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

This study explored the role of interpersonal communication in managing peer co-worker conflict in Kenyan NGOs. However, as the study focused on only one NGO in Kenya, namely SKE, it is recommended that further research be conducted:

- 1) To replicate the study in other NGOs in Kenya.
- 2) To explore managers' experiences and perceptions on the nature of peer co-worker conflict in NGOs in Kenya.
- 3) To explore managers' perceptions on the role of interpersonal communication to manage peer co-worker conflict in Kenyan NGOs.

## **6.6 STUDY LIMITATIONS**

The major study limitation was attaining access to an NGO in Kenya that was suitable and willing to allow the researcher to conduct the study. The majority of the organisations were reluctant due to fear of scrutiny from an outsider. However, the researcher still managed to line up an NGO which was suitable for the study.

Another limitation was time restraints in that the participants were reluctant towards the interviews thinking that it would consume too much of their time. Nonetheless, they did agree to do the interviews when they were assured that the interviews would not take longer than thirty minutes.

The last limitation was the research approach used for the study. The qualitative case study method was somewhat limited in that only one NGO was studied and thus the information obtained cannot be applied to all the NGOs in Kenya. Nevertheless, the study was more interested in obtaining a deeper understanding of the undertaken subject from the few participants' point of view rather than produce quantifiable items of behaviour from many respondents.

## **6.7 CLOSING REMARKS**

The study at hand attempted to explore the role of interpersonal communication regarding managing peer co-worker conflict in an NGO. The study focused on one NGO in Kenya, namely SKE. The researcher is of the opinion that the findings of this study will be beneficial to the studied NGO, aiding in conflict management among peer co-workers. This case study has raised

awareness of the conflict that occurs between peer co-workers in the workplace. Since organisations need their employees to function to the maximum, the issues that arose in this study should be addressed.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: LETTER TO SILC KENYA, ELDORET

FAITH MORAA OMAYO,  
P.O.BOX 7470,  
ELDORET.  
8<sup>TH</sup> JULY, 2015.

THE PROJECT MANAGER,  
CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF ELDORET, SILC PROJECT,  
ELDORET,  
KENYA.

Dear Sir,

#### RE: REQUEST FOR DATA COLLECTION

I hereby would like to request to be allowed to collect data through conducting face to face interviews with personnel working in your Eldoret office.

I am a postgraduate student at the University of South Africa doing a Master course in Communication Science. The title of my research is *The role of interpersonal communication in managing peer co-worker conflict in a non-governmental organisation: a case study of SILC Kenya, Eldoret*. The purpose of the research is mainly to find out how interpersonal communication can be used by co-workers to manage conflict in the workplace.

I chose your organisation because I believe your personnel will give me sufficient data on my research topic given their working experience in such a big Non-Governmental Organisation and the diverse cultures involved.

I believe this study will be beneficial to me and your organisation as the findings will help us know more about causes of conflict in the workplace and how to manage it better using interpersonal communication. My presumed timeline for data collection is three weeks. Thank you in advance.

Yours Sincerely,  
Faith Moraa Omayo.

## APPENDIX B: LETTER TO PARTICIPANT

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Dear participant,

I am currently studying for a Master of Arts in Communication Science degree in the University of South Africa. I am conducting research as part of my Masters Dissertation requirements. My supervisor is Professor BT Mbatha. I would like to know if you would be willing to take part in the research study. The title of the study is *The role of interpersonal communication in managing peer co-worker conflict in a non-governmental organisation: a case study of SILC Kenya, Eldoret*. The purpose of the research is mainly to find out how interpersonal communication can be used by co-workers to manage conflict in the workplace.

I will conduct face-to-face interviews with you in relation to the title stated above and I will use a voice recorder to capture the interview. Your willingness to participate in the study is voluntary and you are allowed to withdraw from the study at any juncture if you feel uncomfortable. All the information you accord me is strictly confidential and will not be shared with a third party. I intend to use pseudonyms to identify the participants of the study and thus your identity will not be revealed at any point in the study.

I believe this study will also be beneficial to you as an individual as it will help you know more about causes of conflict in the workplace and how to manage it better using interpersonal communication.

Thank you in advance.

Please sign the consent below if you are willing to participate in the study.

I..... (Full name of the participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to

participate in the research project. I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time should I so desire.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT..... DATE.....

## **APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE**

### **SEMI-STRUCTURED FACE TO FACE INTERVIEW GUIDE**

1. Please describe conflict in your own understanding.
2. Comment on the frequency of occurrence of conflicts amongst peer co-workers within this organisation.
3. Comment on the causes of conflict amongst peer co-workers in this organisation.
4. Please comment on the kind of economic and social resources you exchange with your peer co-workers.
5. What is your take on how these exchanges of resources affect interpersonal communication with your peer co-workers?
6. Comment on your perceptions of conflict.
7. Share your experiences on the effects of conflict within your working environment.
8. Share your understanding of interpersonal communication.
9. Comment on whether you engage in interpersonal communication with your peer co-workers.
10. What is your take on the importance of interpersonal communication regarding conflict management?
11. What strategies can be adopted in order to enhance interpersonal communication between you and your peer co-workers?