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This phenomenological study examined the lived experiences of 14 Student Affairs mid-managers. These mid-managers represented a variety of student affairs functional areas including Residence Life, Service Learning, Student Conduct, and Student Union/Activities/Government.

Study participants met the following criteria: (a) mid-managers with at least 3 years of experience supervising full-time professional staff; (b) oversaw a functional area; and (c) exhibited a willingness to openly discuss professional conflicts in their role as supervisor.

The method of gathering data was individual interviews, as noted by the phenomenological nature of the study. The specific research questions for the study were:

1. How have conflict management skills been developed (graduate programs, workshops/conferences, on-the-job experiences) by mid-managers in student affairs?
2. How have these skills been utilized in their role as mid-managers?
3. What is the gap between the “real” state of affairs in higher education conflict management and the ideal as represented by conflict studies models and competency statements offered by Student Affairs related professional organizations?

The following conclusions emerged from the results of the study: (a) lack of formal training both as individuals and as a profession; (b) individual responsibility in the

development of skills; (c) the impact of on-the-job experiences (as a result of insufficient training); and (d) the active exploration of training opportunities outside of the field of student affairs.

Implications for practice as a result of the study are (a) the need to imbed conflict management skills courses into graduate preparation programs; (b) the creation of formalized continued training or professional development opportunities for mid-managers; and (c) the importance of micro- and macro-development of skills throughout the organization as a deterrent for poor conflict management skills within the institutional environment.

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT SKILLS ACQUISITION AND USAGE IN STUDENT
AFFAIRS MID-MANAGERS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

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Approved by

Committee Chair

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To my darling mother, Donna M. James, and my wonderful sister, Toni R. James, you spoil me daily with your love and support. You have always been my biggest fans and cheerleaders.

I am because you are.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation, written by Cherise N. W. James, has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, researchers have highlighted the following skills as those that student affairs professionals perceived to be the most critical for success: fiscal management, conflict management, supervision, and goal setting (Bukard, Cole, Ott, & Stoflet, 2004; Fey & Carpenter, 1996; Herdlein, 2004; Love et al., 2007; Lovell & Kosten, 2000; Lunsford, 1984; D. D. Mills, 1993; Waple, 2006). Competency in staff supervision had consistently been cited as important at all levels within the student affairs profession as it made up a significant portion of professional duties (Dalton, 2003). In their 1999 study, Saunders and Cooper surveyed 151 chief student affairs officers (CSAOs) to determine their perceptions of the most important skills and competencies that new doctoral graduates aspiring to mid-management student affairs roles should possess. The study identified personnel management, leadership, communication, and student contact as essential skills. Research to date has focused primarily on new or senior professionals, leaving a need for research on mid-managers (Blimling, 2002).

According to Mather, Bryan, and Faulkner (2009), although mid-managers comprised the majority of staff in student affairs organizations, they are often the least prepared to manage workplace conflict because of limited training and orientation opportunities. In fact, D. B. Mills (2000) asserted that mid-managers are largely responsible for their own professional growth and development. Due to the bureaucratic

organizational structure within higher education, supervisors are expected to handle the bulk of conflicts that occur, follow established procedures, and use various systems of discipline and control over the distribution of rewards (Warters, 2000). Mid-managers, in their role as supervisors, spend more time negotiating interpersonal and intrapersonal conflicts (Watson & Hoffman, 1996). This phenomenological study aimed to provide mid-managers the opportunity to reflect on their learning experiences around conflict management and supervision skills while exploring the extent to which they gained exposure to formal education or training on conflict management.

Statement of the Problem

The researcher focused the attention of this study on conflict management practice and skills, which aimed to reduce the negative effects of conflict and enhance the positive outcomes for all parties involved (Blake & Mouton, 1964; DeChurch & Marks, 2001; Kuhn & Poole, 2000; Rahim, 2002). Furthermore, the researcher aimed to acknowledge that conflict is customary in human interactions in both personal and professional aspects. Thus, preparation and training of supervisors (or mid-managers) to address conflict concerns becomes imperative. The existence of conflict in organizations has been confirmed. What is in question is whether or how managers in Student Affairs have acquired education and/or training on conflict management.

Within the professional landscape, managers spend more time managing conflict. The effectiveness of individual employees, teams, and entire organizations depends on how interpersonal conflict at work is managed (Tjosvold, 1998). In 2008, the publishers of the Myers-Briggs Assessment and the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument

commissioned a study on workplace conflict and found that American employees spent 2.8 hours per week addressing conflict with one in 10 respondents reporting that they spent 6 hours a week or more dealing with conflict (Hayes, 2008). These statistics highlight that conflict, which is inevitable, makes its presence known within the organizational context. Furthermore, empirical research showed a negative association between relationship conflict, productivity, and satisfaction in groups (Evan, 1965; Gladstein, 1984; Hayes, 2008; Wall & Nolan, 1986). According to findings from Hayes (2008), “27 percent of employees have witnessed conflict morph into a personal attack, while 25 percent say that the avoidance of conflict resulted in sickness or absence from work” (p. 3). Other negative impacts of conflict included decreased job satisfaction, performance, and commitment (De Wit, Greer, & Jehn, 2012), increased stress (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003), increased counterproductive work behaviors (Rispens, Greer, Jehn, & Thatcher, 2011), job stress, illness, absenteeism, and subordinate turnover (Hunter & Thatcher, 2007; Van Dyne, Jehn, & Cummings, 2002).

However, the positive effects of task-focused conflict such as the stimulation of discussion of ideas that helped groups perform better (Jehn, 1995), improvement in decision-making outcomes, and group productivity highlight the need for conflict management strategies that bolstered productive and promising responses to the unavoidable conflict that occurs within the work context. Through their conflict response, superiors not only affected the issue at hand but also defined the superior-subordinate relationship (De Dreu, Evers, Beersma, Kluwer, & Nauta, 2001; de Reuver, 2006). This means that the supervisory conflict strategy affected the subordinate’s sense of trust and

loyalty towards the superior and, to the extent that the superior is perceived as representative of the organization (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson, & Sowa, 1986; Levinson, 1965), the psychological attachment to the organization as a whole (Simons & Peterson, 2000). The subordinate's psychological attachment or commitment to the organization became a critical antecedent of employee behavior overall, thus resulting in either the productive or malproductive outcomes recently discussed. Conflict management is what people who experience conflict intend to do as well as what they actually do (van de Vliert, 1997).

Mid-managers are classified as middle-line managers in the organizational hierarchy between those who perform basic services and those who provide vision and direction for the organization (Mintzberg, 1989). Mid-managers are distinguished by their position on an organizational chart, span of authority, control of resources, and complexity of programs and services supervised (Young, 2007a). Mid-managers have continued to have a growing role within the field of Student Affairs (Mather et al., 2009), yet they are not often studied (Coffey, 2010). Lovell and Kosten's (2000) meta-analysis of 30 years of research on student affairs showed that only 13% of the research focused on mid-level (or mid-manager) professionals. The authors specifically examine the literature on the skills, personal traits, and knowledge of successful student affairs professionals and identify two skills as the most critical: administration and management, and human facilitation (e.g., counseling skills and staff supervision).

Within student affairs there are distinguishable skills and stages that professionals attain in their career (Carpenter & Miller, 1981). Knowing and understanding these skills

and stages assisted in planning for one's own development as a supervisor (DeCoster & Brown, 1983). Professional development—with a focus on the rejuvenation of ideas, skill attainment, and better service to students—allowed mid-managers to continue cultivating these conflict management competencies (Conneely, 1994). However, it was unclear how well higher education preparation programs or professional organizations helped their members to identify, practice, and receive feedback when utilizing these important skills.

There are several governing bodies that provide the field of higher education, and student affairs specifically, sets of professional guidelines. One such governing body is the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS). Currently, CAS is a consortium of 41 higher education associations including ACPA (College Student Educators International) and NASPA (Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education). Both of these organizations have held CAS memberships since 1979. The board of directors consists of two members from each professional association represented. However, each professional association only receives one vote (CAS, 2018). Beyond providing the first opportunity for student affairs administrators and faculty to consider standards in the field, the consortium has inspired researchers to investigate related skill development empirically with an eye on skill development over various points in one's career (CAS, 2003).

Furthermore, to address skill development at all levels (new, mid, and senior), the American College Personnel Association (Love et al., 2007) developed the following set of eight competencies or recognized skill set for successful student affairs practitioners, summarized in its *Document on Professional Competencies*: (1) advising and helping, (2)

assessment, evaluation, and research, (3) ethics, (4) leadership and administration/management, (5) legal foundations, (6) pluralism and inclusion, (7) student learning and development, and (8) teaching. The document delineated each area by giving a brief description of skill development at each of the three levels (basic, intermediate, and advanced) through which student affairs professionals should progress. However, these are aspirational targets, and the extent to which they are operationalized in training or practice is unknown.

The convening of the 2010 ACPA and NASPA joint task force led to the identification of 10 competency areas for student affairs practitioners. ACPA and NASPA serve as the leading professional organizations for student affairs practitioners. The 10 areas, revisited and reaffirmed in 2015, included a range from leadership, organizational and human resources, and ethical professional practices, to advising and helping.

The organizational and human resources competency area in the ACPA/NASPA statement recognized that student affairs professionals grew as managers through challenging themselves to build new skills in the selection, supervision, motivation, and evaluation of staff; resolution of conflict; management of the politics of organizational discourse; and the effective application of strategies and techniques associated with financial resources, facilities management, fundraising, technology, crisis management, risk management, and sustainable resources (Bresciani & Todd, 2010). Furthermore, Tyrell (2014) stated,

the credentialed professional is not truly measured by what they know or what they attended for professional development opportunities. They are measured by their ability to effectively apply their knowledge competencies and skills sets (however acquired) in their interactions with their students, other campus constituents, and external entities. (p. 67)

Thus, conflict management has been listed as an important skill for work in Student Affairs, yet there is little evidence to be found in the scholarly literature, textbooks, or conference proceedings to show how it has been implemented in the field. In order to fully understand this phenomenon at the ground level, a more direct exploration of the experiences of Student Affairs professionals was needed.

The potential for conflict and the need for conflict management skills increase as individuals advance in their career within higher education. Cooper and Boice-Pardee (2011) confirmed,

Conflict mediation skills are also important in the role of supervision, especially as it relates to those in middle manager roles. Middle managers often play an important, yet challenging role within higher education as they often engage campus partners on a wider scale, gain wider context about the political climate and have access to a larger number of stakeholders. Additionally, the position of a middle manager can be a challenging one within a conflict experience. (p. 37)

The lack of formalized professional development in higher education around conflict management (Mather et al., 2009), the amount of time spent resolving conflict, the increased number of mid-manager roles within student affairs, and the limited research on this population provided an ideal intersection for the importance of this study. Despite evidence that such research would be beneficial, few studies have focused on the

development and implementation of conflict management skills in the careers of mid-level managers in student affairs (Bogenshutz, 1987; Young, 1990).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to understand how conflict management skills were developed and utilized by mid-managers within the field of student affairs. This study took a theory to practice approach by comparing the conceptual models available in conflict studies to the lived experiences of student affairs mid-managers. While utilizing the definition of mid-managers provided by Fey and Carpenter (1996), the study specifically focused on mid-managers with a minimum of 3 years of experience supervising full-time professional staff. The field of Student Affairs provides a wealth of examples in which both interpersonal and intrapersonal conflicts abound. Therefore, development in this area was an important focal point (Cheldelin & Lucas, 2004). Those aforementioned examples include the classic conflict between administrators and faculty or the tension that results from large-scale or individual transitions. Thus, supervisory practice that addresses conflict productively enhances the performance of the individual as well as the team (Stewart & Barrick, 2000; Vodosek, 2007).

Research Questions

In an environment where resources are scarce, there is much at stake as departments within higher education are often asked to provide more services with less fiscal and human capital (Warters, 2000). As a mid-manager, the development of conflict resolution skills provides an opportunity to address the resulting tensions in a timely fashion while motivating the group to meet expected goals. The purpose of this study was

to understand how conflict management skills were developed and utilized by mid-managers as supervisors within the field of student affairs. In order to achieve a productive process and resolution of conflict, the researcher recommends that the higher education field begins to move toward an instrumental perspective on conflict, as reflected in the scholarly literature in the conflict studies field, which is not about the person, but more about the goals, productivity, the acknowledgement of power differentials, and the creation of healthy environments where conflict is normalized and addressed, etc. (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). However, in order to reach that ideal situation, we must understand “what is” the current preparation and training experiences in higher education in order to highlight potential gaps. This required a qualitative exploration of the lived experiences of Student Affairs staff members.

The specific research questions for the study were:

1. How have conflict management skills been developed (graduate programs, workshops/conferences, on-the-job experiences) by mid-managers in student affairs?
2. How have these skills been utilized in their role as mid-managers?
3. What is the gap between the “real” state of affairs in higher education conflict management and the ideal as represented by conflict studies models and competency statements offered by Student Affairs related professional organizations?

Significance of the Study

The researcher hoped to affirm the importance of conflict management skills as a professional competency for mid-managers within student affairs. The significance of this study stemmed from the gap in scholarship regarding the use of conflict management skills in higher education.

This study hoped to:

- Highlight and understand student affairs workplace experiences with conflict management in mid-management roles
- Examine the ways in which conflict management skills are currently being developed by mid-managers in student affairs positions, as suggested by ACPA/NASPA (2015)
- Influence the development of graduate preparation program curriculum as it relates to gaining conflict management skills
- Bring frameworks from conflict management theory and practice into the higher education context in order to provide suggestions for improved practice and better conceptualization of addressing conflict scenarios readily available in the Student Affairs practitioner experience

Conflict Management Constructs

The workgroup nature of higher education provided a helpful entry point for discussion regarding conflict resolution skills. A workgroup is a set of three or more people who carry out common tasks in an organization (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2013). While there are three traditions or scholarly perspectives on workgroup conflicts in the

literature (Poole & Garner, 2006), outlined in Table 1, the focus of this study was the instrumental perspective, which centers on the relationship between conflict and its impact on various workgroup outcomes such as member satisfaction, group viability, and workgroup performance.

Table 1

Three Perspectives in Workgroup Conflict

	Instrumental	Developmental	Political
Sources of conflict	Premeditated, strategic activity to achieve one's goals	Challenges that arise during key phases or junctures in a group's development	Dominant groups/ members who oppress subordinate groups/ members
Productive conflict	Helps the group accomplish its goal	Resolves problems, move to higher stage of development	Surfaces and challenges power imbalances, enables multiple voices
Research focus	Group performance	Group's progress through developmental stages	Power bases and deep processes underlying power bases, ideologies
Public versus private conflict	Public conflict	Private conflict	Private conflict
Rational versus nonrational conflict	Rational conflict	Nonrational conflict	Rational conflict, though sometimes blinded by dominant paradigm

Note. Source: Oetzel, J. G., & Ting-Toomey, S. (Eds.). (2013). *The Sage handbook of conflict communication: integrating theory, research, and practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

The instrumental perspective acknowledges that conflict is a natural occurrence on a team, and it can be a useful part of workgroup dynamics focusing more on the

outcome (or performance) and not on individual parties to the conflict. Due to its outcome focus, instrumental perspective research takes into account antecedents as well as moderators and mediators of conflict such as diversity, conflict style, group interaction, group composition, or internal structure, etc. This aspect of the instrumental perspective provided an important connection to organizational conflict models that will be discussed in Chapter II.

The developmental perspective, by contrast, focuses on how the workgroup might be changed (internally or privately) by their encounter with conflict versus how the group might utilize the conflict experience to move towards positive outcomes. The political perspective focuses its attention on the power structures (dominant versus subordinate) that might be at play within a workgroup experience. These power structures could be formal (due to title or position in the organization) or informal (such as a gatekeeper). The research focus within the political perspective is power, underlying power bases, and ideologies associated with the dominant group. Chapter II also offers a short discussion of power, power bases, and the role of power as an important dynamic in conflict.

Organizational Effectiveness

In *Reframing Organizations*, Bolman and Deal (2013) offered the exploration of several organizational frames including (a) a structural frame, (b) a human resources frame, (c) a political frame, and (d) a symbolic frame. Each frame is carefully outlined and defined with a clear understanding of both the pros and cons of implementation. The term frame can also be called a mental model, mindset, or cognitive lens, and refers to a set of ideas or assumptions that guide behavior (Kezar, 2010). The structural frame

focused on the hierarchy and inner workings of the organization itself. Bolman and Deal (2013) provide several examples of organizational structures for exploration such as simple structure, machine bureaucracy, professional bureaucracy, and divisionalized form, while also providing discussion about the pros and cons of each. Beyond the organizational chart, the structural frame points to the tough trade-offs or dilemmas managers may experience within the context of their structure: differentiation versus integration, gap versus overlap, underuse versus overload, and lack of clarity versus lack of creativity, just to name a few. The political frame depicted the organization as an arena of competition for resources, power, and reward. This frame viewed the leader as a politician, while the organization is seen as a place for building coalitions and alliances. Power and the sources of power are entrenched in this particular frame. The symbolic frame delved into the organization's culture, values, mores, policies, branding, and the other ways in which the organization sets itself apart from others.

This study focused on the human resource frame, highlighted in Appendix D, which provided insight into the specific practices that help to invest in the individuals within the organization to engender a productive and efficient team. The human resource frame centered on core assumptions that highlight this linkage:

(1) Organizations exist to serve human needs rather than the converse. (2) People and organizations need each other. Organizations need ideas, energy, and talent; people need careers, salaries, and opportunities. (3) When the fit between individual and system is poor, one or both suffer. Individuals are exploited or exploit the organization—or both become victims. (4) A good fit benefits both. Individuals find meaningful and satisfying work, and organizations get the talent and energy they need to succeed. (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 117)

As a mid-manager, the ability to identify potential disputes, along with the willingness to promptly address concerns, may benefit the individual, workgroup, and the overall performance (Jehn, 1995). According to Poole and Garner (2006), “the common theme in this workgroup conflict literature is that the effect of conflict on outcomes depended on how the workgroup managed conflict” (p. 322). The emphasis on shared values and philosophy allowed for the creation of a highly effective and self-regulating team focused on productivity which helped the group accomplish its predetermined goals. This provided an ideal bridge between the instrumental perspective and the human resources frame for this study. One of the aspects of the human resources frame included developing a shared philosophy for managing people and building systems and practices that implement that philosophy. Furthermore, within this frame people are the most important asset and the center of an organization (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

This human resources framework provides support for hiring the right people and training them well, but also invested in their overall experience. According to Cheldelin and Lucas (2004),

in addition to higher education’s organizational uniqueness and complexity, its context is embedded in a time of challenging resource limitations and enormous economic pressures, where authority and governance structures continue to be scrutinized, and external accountability is increasingly called forth. (p. 3)

Within the realm of student affairs work, collaboration is often inescapable due to limited resources, including financial and human capital, which often increased the potential for conflict. Kabanoff (1985) suggested that even when group members work on the same project, have mutual interests in completing it, and share similar ideas of how to

complete the project, they still experience conflict. According to Alper, Tjosvold, and Law (2000), “teams that are confident they can deal with their conflicts are likely to work productively; teams that doubt their conflict management abilities may become demoralized and ineffectual” (p. 625). If poorly managed, an array of complications can develop at an individual or departmental level within the organizational setting. Within the instrumental perspective, the mid-manager’s ability in creating environments that aid productivity and enable workgroups to confidently respond to conflict engender investment in the people they supervise. According to Burns (2010), “the most powerful influences consisted of deeply human relationships in which two or more people *engage* [emphasis in original] with one another” (p. 11) and thus, for a leader, the “arena of power is no longer the exclusive preserve of a power elite or an establishment or persons clothed with legitimacy. Power is ubiquitous; it permeates human relationships” (p. 15). Similarly, organizational theory has witnessed a fundamental shift from systems thinking to relational learning and the creation of a culture of learning built on relationships (Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, & Flowers, 2007).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study centered on the examination of the potential pathways for attaining conflict management skills and the utilization of those skills within the context of supervision in higher education and visualized in Figure 1. Some of those pathways for consideration included formal learning (i.e., degree programs), while others (e.g., workshops, conferences, and on-the-job experiences) utilized informal learning.

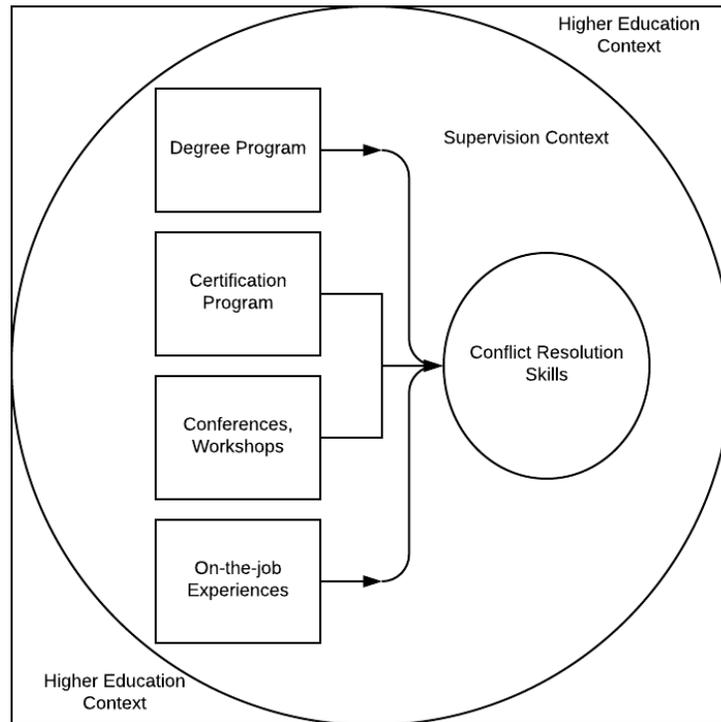


Figure 1. Conflict Management Skill Acquisition and Usage (James, 2018).

Through an exploration of participant experience of conflict management in the student affairs workplace, this study hoped to understand the experience of conflict management skills attainment and utilization by mid-managers and the impact on the department or organization.

As the researcher considered the potentially desired outcomes for what skills are requisite for success as a mid-manager in student affairs, it would be important to highlight the outcomes as determined by ACPA/NASPA (2015). As discussed earlier, ACPA/NASPA's Professional Competencies provide a standard within the field of student affairs for best practices related to continuous professional development. While ACPA/NASPA outlined 10 competency areas, this study focused on the area of

organizational and human resources, which highlighted conflict resolution as an expected skill. Detailed outcomes are provided for each competency area and are characterized in three levels—basic, intermediate, and advanced. The outcomes identified for conflict resolution range from the individual’s ability to describe the premises that underlie conflict and the constructs utilized for facilitating conflict resolution, to managing and facilitating conflict at a level of complexity where multiple entities are often in disagreement with each other and lead groups to effective fair resolution (ACPA/NASPA, 2015). While ACPA and NASPA identify conflict management as a professional competency, there was little research examining how these skills were developed by student affairs practitioners or what their lived experiences of managing conflict in the workplace have been.

Guiding Questions

The following guiding questions informed the researcher’s interest in, development of, and ultimately the creation of the research questions for this study:

1. How are conflict management skills developed by Student Affairs practitioners?
2. What is the relationship between formalized training (or length of professional experience) and the perception of the practitioner’s capacity to manage conflict?
3. Are there specific arenas in which the practitioner feels most/least prepared when managing conflict?

4. How have these conflict management skills been utilized in supervisory relationships?
5. How do mid-managers describe their own competence in utilizing conflict management skills with their staff members?

Definition of Terms

The study utilized the following terms and definitions:

Affective conflict—conflict “generally caused by negative reactions to organizational members” (Jehn, 1997, p. 531) (e.g., personal attacks, racial disharmony, or sexual harassment, etc.).

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)—“any method of dispute resolution other than formal adjudication such as court litigation or administrative proceedings. It involves the use of a wider array of approaches to resolve disputes than the traditional and often more costly methods of adversarial litigation and administrative adjudication” (Costantino & Merchant, 1996, p. 33).

Arbitration—“generic term for a range of dispute resolution processes involving the referral of a dispute to an impartial third party who, after giving the parties an opportunity to present their evidence and arguments, renders a determination in settlement of the dispute” (Yarn, 1999, p. 28).

Conflict—includes three conditions: (a) some kind of expressed struggle between at least two parties, (b) these parties have an interpersonal relationship, and (c) these parties perceive they are getting interference from each other in achieving their goals (Wilmot & Hocker, 2001).

Conflict management—techniques, models, and ideas designed to reduce the negative effects of conflict and enhance the positive outcomes for all parties involved (Blake & Mouton, 1964; DeChurch & Marks, 2001; Kuhn & Poole, 2000; Rahim, 2002).

Conflict mediation—“the intervention in a negotiation or a conflict of an acceptable third party who has limited or no authoritative decision-making power, who assists the involved parties to voluntarily reach a mutually acceptable settlement of the issues in dispute” (Moore, 2003, p. 15).

Conflict resolution—“a marked reduction in social conflict” (Schellenberg, 2014, p. 9).

Interpersonal (or dyadic) conflict—“a conflict between two or more organizational members of the same or different hierarchical levels or units and can include conflicts between superior and subordinate” (Rahim, 2001, p. 23).

Mid-Managers—“individuals who report directly to the senior student affairs officer, oversees at least one functional area and supervise at least one professional staff member” (Fey & Carpenter, 1996, p. 219).

Negotiation—“Bilateral or multilateral process in which parties who differ over a particular issue attempt to reach an agreement or compromise over that issue through communication” (Yarn, 1999, p. 314).

Substantive conflict—“disagreement about tasks, policies, and other business issues” (Jehn, 1997, p. 531).

Supervision—“any relationship where one person has the responsibility to provide leadership, direction, information, motivation, evaluation, or support for one person and more persons” (Schuh & Carlisle, 1991, p. 497).

Limitations

The researcher aimed to focus primarily on the “middle manager” or “mid-manager” role within the realm of Student Affairs practice. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, middle managers are not senior administrators, but they are often called on to manage the base of the organizational pyramid (ranging anywhere from undergraduate and graduate level staff to entry-level professionals). For the purposes of this study, the researcher specifically focused on mid-managers with a minimum of 3 years of experience supervising full-time professional staff. One of the immediate limitations was finding enough and ultimately the right number of participants to complete the study. Second, the researcher had concerns about quickly creating rapport with the participants for them to feel comfortable enough to divulge information about their conflict experiences to identify connections and themes across the sample. The third limitation included the need to account for structural differences (size, etc.) within various institutions regarding who would constitute a mid-manager. The diversity of institution types, sizes, and structures may cause participant experiences to be vastly different in both resource and positional agency. Finally, the researcher’s current place of employment is within an institution of higher education, thus reducing the subject pool from which to recruit participants, which impacted the first limitation identified.

Overview of Dissertation

This chapter introduced the exploration of conflict management skills development by mid-managers within the student affairs and higher education contexts. The proposed conceptual framework (James, 2018) was identified as a grounding to this study. The chapter also highlighted the two constructs (Human Resource Frame and Instrumental Perspective) taken from organizational development and conflict management literature which was used to frame one approach to best practices in conflict management in Student Affairs. The purpose and significance of the study were outlined while making note of the standards concluded by several professional organizations regarding the skills development of student affairs administrators and the lack of research on mid-managers, who are the focus of this study. Finally, the chapter concluded with the purposeful flow of terms and definitions, which highlight the focus or context (supervision) in which conflict might arise, and the ways (mediation, negotiation, arbitration, or alternative dispute resolution, etc.) the conflict might be resolved. While the mechanism of resolution was not the focus of the study, it was important to understand that conflict resolution skills might be described by study participants in ways that required a basic understanding of these terms.

The next two chapters provide further key components of the study. Chapter II reviews the current literature and knowledge. Chapter III follows with an outline of the intended methodology for the study.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of literature for this study centers on concepts from higher education and conflict resolution education. It also incorporates the historical context of conflict research, the unique challenges of the mid-manager role, and examples of interpersonal dyadic conflicts that may arise within the field of higher education, specifically within the supervisory context, and highlights the implications for problems of practice. The review of the literature begins with the historical context of conflict research and ends with one example of a systems approach to conflict management within the higher education context.

Historical Context of Conflict Research

Kezar (2010) states, “the recent illustration by organizational theorists confirms that supervisors are often more successful when their leadership approach and style is tailored to fit the organization” (p. 253). Organizational theorists have only recently become attentive in studying conflict. This interest was supported by the formation of various professional organizations such as the International Association for Conflict Management (founded in 1984) and Conflict Management Division of the Academy of Management (founded in 1936), as well as dedicated academic programs such as Harvard, Northwestern, and George Mason (Rahim, 2001). All of these institutions and

organizations were tasked with providing a strong foundation for teaching, training, research, publication, and development within the field of organizational management.

Furthermore, conflict resolution education (CRE) emerged out of the social justice concerns of the 1960s and 1970s with the work of groups like the Friends Society (Quakers). In the early 1980s, Educators for Social Responsibility organized a national association that later led to the development of the National Association for Mediation in Education (NAME) in 1984. The National Association for Mediation in Education (NAME) subsequently merged with the National Institute for Dispute Resolution and its Conflict Resolution Education Network. Recently, the Conflict Resolution Education Network merged with the Academy of Family Mediators and the Society for Professionals in Dispute Resolution to form the Association for Conflict Resolution. As conflict resolution education evolved, the nature and scope of these efforts have increased. Contemporary conflict resolution education can best be understood by identifying basic program goals, distinctions with related fields, and program models in use (Jones, 2006).

The creation of and predispositions for conflict management styles (tactics or modes) became the dominant focus of organizational conflict research in the 1970s and 1980s. This attention to styles was followed by an evaluation of the success of each style and implications for training (Hall, 1969, 1973, 1986; Putnam & Wilson, 1982; Rahim, 1983a; Ross & DeWine, 1982, 1987; Thomas & Kilmann, 1974). While early research on conflict lacked the multidimensional aspects compared to the current body of work, this early research was largely successful and generated knowledge (Nicotera & Dorsey,

2006). Due to the rise in interest and importance of conflict management skills (e.g., DeWine, 1994), a demand was created for training and research in the industry. This demand prompted scholars to strive to identify successful strategies for managing conflict (e.g., Burke, 1970; Deutsch, 1973; Kilmann & Thomas, 1977; Putnam & Wilson, 1982; Renwick, 1977), and this approach led directly to the preponderance of models of organizational conflict management styles that exemplify the literature from the 1960s through the 1980s. Organizational theorists were not the only discipline interested in exploring the topic of conflict.

Nightingale (1974) showcased the breadth and depth of the fascination with conflict from various disciplines in this quote:

fallen within the purview of the historian, the novelist, the philosopher, and the theologian, and [have] been treated systematically by authors in all of the biological and social sciences. Conflicts between nations, political parties, and ideologies have been examined by the political scientist; conflicts in the marketplace have been examined by the economist; group conflicts of various kinds—familial, racial, religious, and social class—have been investigated by the sociologist; and the struggle for survival by species of differing genetic endowments has been studied by the biologist. (p. 141)

The range of disciplines not only highlight the dynamic and compelling nature of the study of conflict management, but showed the potential for further incorporation of a higher education context within the narrative.

To date, conflict research has focused on the multidimensional aspects of conflict (Pinkley, 1990; Pondy, 1969; Rahim, 1992; Wall & Nolan, 1987), the various types of conflict (Aritzeta, Ayestaran, & Swailes, 2005; De Wit et al., 2012; Jehn, 1995; Jehn & Mannix, 2001), its impact on teams and group decision making (S. G. Cohen & Ledford,

1994; Kirkman & Rosen, 1999; Schweiger, Sandberg, & Ragen, 1986; Spreitzer, 1995), organizational effectiveness (Luthans, Welsh, & Taylor, 1988; Tjosvold & Field, 1984), and multicultural and multigenerational causes of conflict (G. Chen, Liu, & Tjosvold, 2005; Glass, 2007; Godfrey, 1995; Graham, Mintu, & Rogers, 1994; Inkeles & Levinson, 1969; Puffer & McCarthy, 1995; Stewart & Barrick, 2000; Tjosvold, Poon, & Yu, 2005; Volkema, 1998; West, 2002). Each of these terms and phrases, common in the conflict studies literature, are unpacked below to provide deeper contexts.

Multidimensional Aspects of Conflict

There are often binary ways in which conflict is viewed and approached. First is the perspective that conflict is good and even beneficial (Amason, 1996; Amason & Schweiger, 1994; Cosier & Rose, 1977; De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Jehn, 1994, 1995, 1997; Pelled, 1996; Pelled, Eisenhardt, & Xin, 1999; Schweige et al., 1989; Tjosvold, 1991; van de Vliert & De Dreu, 1994). In her multimethod examination of the benefits and detriments of intragroup conflict, Jehn (1995) found moderate levels of task conflict to be constructive in providing the group the opportunity to stimulate discussion, which ultimately resulted in enhanced group performance.

Second is the perspective that conflict is always bad and harmful, especially if it is not managed or resolved well (Jehn, 1995, 1997; Jehn, Chadwick, & Thatcher, 1997; Jehn, Northcraft, & Neale, 1999; Langfred, 2007; Pelled et al., 1999; Rispens, Greer, & Jehn, 2007; Wilhelm, Herd, & Steiner, 1993). Both of these perspectives shared the understanding that conflict is natural and imminent, and thus should be managed accordingly or produced in a controlled fashion. According to Jehn (1997), empirical

research showed a negative association between relationship conflict, productivity, and satisfaction in groups (Evan, 1965; Gladstein, 1984; Wall & Nolan, 1986). Summarily stated, relationship conflicts interfere with task-related effort because members focus on reducing threats, increasing power, and attempting to build cohesion rather than working on the task.

Within the good-bad binary, emotions, feelings, moods, attitudes, and temperaments are often points of debate regarding their usefulness in a conflict situation (George & Brief, 1992; George & Zhou, 2007; Nair, 2008; Pelled et al., 1999; Xin & Pelled, 2003). According to J. R. Cohen (1999), “people frequently try to frame feelings out of the problem. The catch is that unaddressed feelings commonly resurface, leaking or bursting into conversations, inhibiting listening, or corroding relationships or self-esteem” (p. 306). Furthermore, research continues to be developed around emotional or affective attachment toward the organization and its impact on subordinate absenteeism during conflict situation (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Blau, 1986; Gellatly, 1995; Hammer, Landau, & Stern, 1981; Hanish & Hulin, 1991; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Meyer & Allen, 1991; Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982; Sagie, 1998; Somers, 1995).

A full discussion of conflict management skills required the acknowledgment that one’s willingness to address a dispute may be connected to their perception of or past experiences (either personally or professionally) with conflicts. This section highlights the varying perspectives regarding the benefits, disadvantages, and the role of emotion within conflict. Next, we emphasize the research around conflict types, outcomes, and styles.

Conflict Types, Conflict Outcomes, and Conflict Styles

According to De Wit et al. (2012), there are often three main types of conflict that are discussed: substantive (disagreement associated with performance, or tasks related to project or goals of an organization), task conflicts (disagreements regarding strategies, methods, and opinions) and affective (relational conflicts associated with differences of values, ideologies, preferences, attitudes, and temperaments). Of the three types, relationship conflict has been recognized as the most harmful (Jehn, 1995; Jehn & Bendersky, 2003). Recent studies have examined the benefits of organizational conflict and methods for stimulating productive conflict since it is found to result in creative and superior decision-making (Amason, 1996; Amason & Schweiger, 1994; Cosier & Rose, 1977; De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Jehn, 1994, 1995, 1997; Jehn et al., 1997; Pelled, 1996; Pelled et al., 1999; Schweige et al., 1989; Tjosvold, 1991; van de Vliert & De Dreu, 1994).

In much of the previous literature, conflict was generally deemed detrimental to performance, productivity, job satisfaction, and commitment to the organization or team (Blake & Mouton, 1984; De Wit et al., 2012; March & Simon, 1958; Pondy, 1967; Spector & Jex, 1998). Other negative outcomes of conflict included illness and increased absenteeism (Baer, 2006; Giebels & Janssen, 2005), the adverse impact on subordinates' overall well-being due to the mishandling of conflict by supervisors (Tjosvold, 1998; Yukl & Tracey, 1992), sense of trust in supervisor (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Levinson, 1965), and organizational commitment or loyalty (Simons & Peterson, 2000). According to Hayes (2008), "over one-fourth of employees (27%) have been involved in a

workplace disagreement that led to personal insults or attacks, while a similar percentage (25%) have seen conflict lead to sickness and absence” (p. 6). Furthermore, Morgan (1997) states that “in group decision-making the absence of conflict often produces conformity and staleness” (p. 175). Jehn (1997) stated, “although substantive conflict enhanced group performance, like affective conflict, it can diminish group loyalty, workgroup commitment, intent to stay in the present organization, and satisfaction” (p. 532). Thus, it is no surprise that today’s managers and employees still overwhelmingly view conflict as negative and something to be avoided or immediately resolved (Losey, 1994; Stone, 1995).

The current study focused on interpersonal (or dyadic) conflicts, which refers to conflict between two or more organizational members of the same or different hierarchical levels or units and can include conflicts between superior and subordinate (Rahim, 2001). Schlaerth, Ensari, and Christian (2013) stated the following:

The responsibility of resolving and mitigating conflicts in organizations is typically given to supervisors because (a) supervisors are assumed to have a significant role to play in reframing an organization’s positive value orientation (Weider-Hatfield & Hatfield, 1995); (b) by the nature of their roles and responsibilities, supervisors have more opportunities to get training on how to tackle sensitive issues, about conflict management, group dynamics, or problem-solving skills; (c) conflict management skills of leaders improve as they get more experience in dealing with conflicts. (p. 128)

Interpersonal conflict or disagreements can occur in a variety of different ways, but this current study focused on manifestations of interpersonal conflict between supervisor (specifically mid-managers in Student Affairs) and subordinate. Game theory (von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1944) is often a helpful tool for discussing interpersonal

conflict. The most frequently used game theory example is the Prisoner's Dilemma (PD) game (Luce & Raiffa, 1957) which described the hypothetical potential outcomes for two individuals suspected of committing a serious crime and subsequently questioned separately. The Prisoner's Dilemma payoff matrix provides four potential outcomes based on the two players' decisions to independently confess or not confess to the crime. The focus on outcome in the "dilemma" or "conflict" is the main thread in which the theory to practice approach will continue later.

Conflict Dynamics and Models

While conflicts between supervisor and subordinate can be much more compounded, the game theory approach and payoff matrix provided a helpful understanding of what options might be explored (likely based on conflict styles and desired outcomes) or what dynamics might be present within an interpersonal conflict. Dynamics to consider include the source of the conflict (or antecedent conditions), behavioral changes, manifested styles or selected rules of engagement when dealing with or experiencing conflict, and process (both formally and informally) with managing conflict. According to Costantino and Merchant (1996), one's attitude, communication style, and values can impact how a person deals with conflict. One's perception may derail the current overall experience and impact the possibility of future collaboration which heightens the importance of addressing the multidimensional aspects of conflict. Additionally, mood theory suggests that both positive and negative moods play a significant role in influencing people's attitudes and behaviors (Ashkanasy, Hartel, & Daus, 2002; Bower, 1981; Costa & McCrae, 1980; George & Brief, 1992; George &

Zhou, 2007; Warr, Barter, & Brownbridge, 1983; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1984, 1988).

Research on interpersonal conflict has often focused on behavioral characteristics, often referred to as conflict styles. One model that is often utilized or referenced is the Thomas-Kilmann (1974) model, which includes the following five styles: collaborating, accommodating, avoiding, competing, and compromising. These five dimensions are sometimes described based upon their win-lose potential. The researcher selected to highlight this specific model as it is easily relatable (both in visual depiction and terminology) and explained to the layperson while also providing an ideal foundation for the intended theory to practice approach.

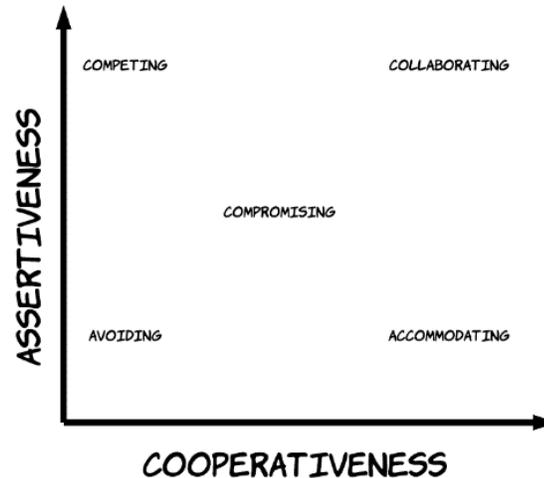


Figure 2. Thomas-Kilmann Model. Source: Thomas, K. W., & Kilmann, R. H. (1974). *Thomas-Kilmann conflict mode instrument*. Tuxedo, NY: Xicom.

The measure of assertiveness runs along the *y-axis* while the measure of cooperativeness runs along the *x-axis*. Assertiveness is the extent to which one person attempts to satisfy their own concerns while cooperativeness is the extent to which they

attempt to satisfy the other party's concern. Avoiding (lose-win) remains close to where y and x meet, while competing (win-lose) can be found at the highest point on the y -axis (*assertiveness*) and accommodating (lose-win) is at the highest point on the x -axis (*cooperativeness*). Compromising (I win some and you win some, or lose-lose) is found in the middle of the x and y plane while collaborating (win-win) stands opposite to avoidance and is thus highest in assertiveness and cooperativeness. This approach to conflict studies provides the opportunity for individual assessment of style or modes while taking into account the potential approaches of individuals in dyads (supervisor/supervisee), as well as dynamics within a group or team setting.

While there is a wide variety of models, these researchers have posited two-style models (Deutsch, 1949, 1990; Knudson, Sommers, & Golding, 1980; Tjosvold, 1990), three-style models (Billingham & Sack, 1987; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Putnam & Wilson, 1982; Rands, Levinger, & Mellinger, 1981), four-style models (Kurdek, 1994; Pruitt, 1983), and five-style models (Blake & Mouton, 1964; Follett, 1940; Rahim, 1983a; Thomas, 1976). Weider-Hatfield (1988) concluded that “although the conflict literature has historically embraced the ‘five-style’ paradigm, recent evidence indicates that individuals might select among three, not five, distinct conflict styles” (p. 364). In their later work, Hocker and Wilmot (1991) concluded after a literature review that “conflict styles cluster similarly to conflict tactics—into three types: (1) avoidance, (2) competitive (distributive) and (3) collaborative (integrative)” (p. 119).

Supervision

Supervision Models

Staff supervision is one of the most complex activities for which organizational leaders are responsible, and certain skills and knowledge about staff development are required for effective supervision (Winston & Creamer, 1997). Supervision models provide a beneficial landscape for our discussion, as a myriad of fields such as clinical counseling, higher education, student affairs, organizational development, and the like have turned their attention to supervision skills (Behling, Curtis, & Foster, 1988; Bernard & Goodyear, 1998; Holloway & Wolleat, 1981; Winston & Creamer, 1997). Similar to conflict styles, a supervisor's philosophy of their supervisory style could tremendously impact their subordinate's work environment and overall experience. For the purpose of this study, only a few models are highlighted. The developmental underpinnings of these models provided a helpful bridge to the higher educational context.

The **Littrell, Lee-Borden, and Lorenz Model (1979)**: Although not based on a formal developmental theory, Littrell, Lee-Borden, and Lorenz (1979) proposed a supervision model that has been characterized as developmental (Bernard & Goodyear, 1998; Stoltenberg & Delworth, 1987) in that it described how supervisors foster change and increase responsibility in supervisees over the course of four sequential stages. Supervisors are directed to match their behavior to the changing developmental needs of trainees. The supervisor is encouraged to assume the role of teacher, counselor, or consultant based upon the personal and professional needs of the supervisee over time. The Littrell et al. (1979) model provided a basic developmental approach that addressed

the sequential stages of the supervision process and the adjusting roles of supervisors in each stage. Relationship building, goal setting, and contracting characterized the first stage of the model. In the second stage, the supervisor moved between counselor and teacher. The third stage shifted the supervisor from teacher to consultant while the trainee increased in self-confidence. In the fourth stage, the supervisor remained in the consultant role where necessary as the trainees began to take the lead in their own learning and training experience (Bernard & Goodyear, 1998)

The **Discrimination Model** combined supervisor roles (i.e., teacher, counselor, and consultant) with three foci for supervision: (a) intervention skills, (b) conceptualization skills, and (c) personalization skills of the trainee. Any of the three roles may be used with each of the three foci depending on the situational needs of the trainee. Supervisors discriminated among roles and foci across sessions as well as within sessions. The purpose of the discrimination model was to give supervisors a cognitive map that tracked the focus of supervision and determined the best supervisory approach for accomplishing supervision goals (Bernard, 1979, 1997).

The **Synergistic Supervision** approach enhanced the personal and professional development of entry-level professionals. The synergistic approach to supervision focused on the creation of open lines of communication, building trusting relationships, the performance of supervisory feedback and appraisal, the identification of the professional aspirations of staff, and the knowledge and skills necessary for advancement (Winston & Creamer, 1998). Synergistic staff supervision focused on a holistic approach to supervision. Winston and Creamer (1997) concluded that this approach related to the

“(a) discussion of exemplary performance, (b) discussion of long-term career goals, (c) discussion of inadequate performance, (d) frequency of informal performance appraisals, and € discussion of personal attitudes” (pp. 42–43). This approach to supervision provided supervisors the opportunity to engage their new professional staff members in orientation and socialization processes that should reduce job dissatisfaction and attrition among new professionals.

Each of these supervisory models centers on the supervisor’s ability to be flexible in their approach with the supervisee in mind. In a conflict situation, the supervisor has the opportunity to provide a collaborative environment that would allow their supervisee to be a part of the problem-solving and conflict resolution process. The supervisor’s approach to conflict management due to the power differential within the dyad would likely be a factor in the payoff matrix resulting in greater satisfaction, effectiveness of group members, and increased organizational commitment or stark decrease in the aforementioned traits (Aram, Morgan, & Esbeck, 1971; Misquita, 1998; Weider-Hatfield & Hatfield, 1995). Thus, process or approach (as well as attitudes and capabilities of the superior) become very important, especially to the subordinate experience or the conflict aftermath. These models, however, do not reflect the duality and responsibility of supervisees in their developmental journey. Unlike synergistic supervision, the earlier models solidified the notion that supervision and development are things that happen *to* supervisees versus *with* them. The movement towards holistic supervision taking into account the whole person provided the ideal opportunity to consider the role of difficult conversations in supervisory relationships.

Difficult Conversations: Creating an Environment for Development

Mid-managers are tasked with completing performance evaluations, engaging in difficult conversations, or participating in what McNichol (2015) calls “crossroads conversations,” a “face-to-face exchange in which the supervisor lays out the reality that things aren’t working out” (p. 34). Despite the regularity of this task, supervisors may lack confidence in their ability to share performance missteps with their supervisees for a number of reasons. They may also have had negative experiences with receiving feedback from their own supervisors, thus fearing the possibility of making similar mistakes. According to Weitzel (2011), managers often commit 10 common mistakes when providing feedback to their supervisees:

1. The feedback judges individuals, not actions.
2. The feedback is vague.
3. The feedback speaks for others.
4. Negative feedback gets sandwiched between positive messages.
5. The feedback is exaggerated with generalities.
6. The feedback psychoanalyzes the motives behind the behavior.
7. The feedback goes on too long.
8. The feedback contains an implied threat.
9. The feedback uses inappropriate humor.
10. The feedback is a question, not a statement. (pp. 9–11)

These common supervisory missteps during difficult conversations can set an unintentional tone for the supervisee and their long-term experience. Supervisees may

begin to question their overall performance or ability to be successful (when the identification of the mistake is vague), their team (if the supervisor speaks to examples they have not personally witnessed), or their trust in their supervisor (if task feedback is paired with value judgements or psychoanalysis). Therefore, feedback conversations should be seen as the foundation of the dyad relationship.

Theory to Practice

An exploration of conflict within supervision would not be complete without the utilization of examples in which successful or unsuccessful conflict resolution could impact the overall experience within the student affairs context. For this example, we will utilize the rich supervisory environment of the residence life function. The director role may provide the opportunity to supervise five full-time professional staff who hold a range of educational degrees, their years of experience vary, and their tenure within the department range from three months to 10 years. The director has generally felt positive about their sense of the work environment and the perceived experience of the individuals they supervise.

In the initial conversations with their supervisees, one of the many expectations that was outlined was timeliness as it relates to meeting attendance and completion of administrative functions, as well as the provision of key information that may impact daily work such as large student incidents which could make their way to the President's office. Throughout the semester, the supervisor has noticed that one of their supervisees, Shannon, has been consistently late to meetings, and does not respond in a timely fashion when it comes to email and other correspondence. The supervisor has overheard

members of their team complain about the “double standard” that has occurred as it relates Shannon’s behavior or performance and the way in which they are being supervised.

The supervisor in this experience has several options that could be explored in order to confront the issue at hand. First, they could address the underperformance exhibited by Shannon in a direct, open, and honest one-on-one conversation. This initial conversation does not need to be punitive in nature as the supervisor has neither provided Shannon notice of her unmet expectations nor a chance for changed behavior to be observed. During this conversation the supervisor would do as Weitzel (2011) described when providing effective feedback characterized by capturing the situation—describing the behavior and explaining the impact. These specific feedback directives allow Shannon the opportunity to understand the concern without feeling blamed, while also creating a space that would motivate change to begin. Second, the supervisor might want to take the time within the larger group to reiterate their expectations (not just about timeliness), but other items that either have come up in recent weeks or performance that has been on the decline. Stone, Patton, and Heen (1999) posited that within most difficult conversations there are in fact not one, but three essential conversations: a “what happened?” conversation, a “feelings” conversation, and an “identity” conversation. The authors suggested that in the “what happened?” conversation discussants should explore contribution, a concept they see as distinct from fault. Rather than focusing on who is to blame, each participant is able to consider how they may have contributed to the predicament.

Imagine that during this difficult conversation, the supervisor discovered that Shannon recently became the sole caregiver for an immediate family member who was hospitalized after a serious car accident. Her tardiness is a direct result of needing to take care of her own family at home, before heading to the relative's house to get them out of bed and ready for their day now that they have been released from the hospital. While Shannon's tardiness is the immediate issue and the reason for this discussion, the supervisor's initial ability to actively listen and hear Shannon's perspective now makes the supervisor aware that he or she had not set clear expectations regarding how important details like this (such as family illness or injury) could be or should be shared prior to this escalation. In the stated example, the supervisor has acknowledged both the individual performance concerns as well as what could be the early stages of increased negative group dynamics. Additionally, the supervisor's emotional intelligence and ability to acknowledge the feelings while discussing the facts surrounding the reason for the conversation will be important. Emotional intelligence will be discussed later in this chapter.

Farrell (2015) offered the following suggestions and advice for and completion of difficult conversations:

1. Examine the situation to consider the core issue(s).
2. Ensure that the issues and expectations are very clear.
3. Recognize that difficult conversations are emotional. The leader needs to be prepared to manage his or her emotions being sure to remain professional and polite throughout the conversation.
4. Timeliness and setting of the conversation will impact results.
5. Successful conversations allow the leader to place the problem within a broader context (i.e., impact on individuals, the team, or the larger organization).

6. Beyond active listening, the leader should be prepared to ask open-ended questions that allow the gathering of additional information and specifically the supervisee's perspective.
7. If the situation warrants it, look for a resolution in which both manager and employee agree.
8. The supervisor should document the conversation and expectations. (pp. 305–309)

Furthermore, imagine that if the supervisor in this example informed Shannon that they were addressing a concern brought to them by others on the team (with or without personally witnessing this behavior), this would negatively impact Shannon's perspective of her team members who neglected to directly address their concerns with her. If the team has made claims of valuing open communication, this would be Shannon's first indicator that this may not be a true value of the team or organization. The supervisor's ability to provide an attentive and approachable presence (which includes asking open-ended questions as suggested above) creates an environment of care and trust, thus enhancing Shannon's trust of her supervisor and emotional attachment to the larger organization.

This larger conversation also allows the supervisor to clarify any perceived miscommunication about overall expectations, which can only have a positive impact. Both of these conversations, with Shannon and the larger group, were necessary and established the supervisor's commitment to the team. Maxwell (2001) states that the "Law of Countability," or one's ability to be counted on (within a team context), is clearest when the stakes are high. Teammates must be able to count on each other when it counts, not just during the easy times.

Barr (2013) notes that while having difficult conversations about behavior is not easy to master, “it is one of those skills every manager needs to acquire” (p. 85). Difficult conversations provide an opportunity to increase morale, develop collaboration, and foster a positive workplace. If the supervisor were to allow this issue or concern to be unaddressed, this would impact the ways in which the team would work together and their level of trust (or even loyalty) in the supervisor as a leader. To some subordinates, the supervisor’s unwillingness to address a member of the team who is not meeting the supervisor’s expressed expectation communicates disinterest in their development or the overall performance of the whole team (Barr, 2013; Farrell, 2015; Winston & Creamer, 1997, 1998). This perception will only create diminished morale, decreased commitment, and general underperformance. Honest feedback provides important benefits for the supervisee. Cloke and Goldsmith (2003) affirmed that “when given honest coaching, mentoring, or feedback by colleagues, or when we receive a performance evaluation or assessment that can make it possible for us to identify what we can do better, clarify our goals, and develop the strategies and skills we need to succeed” (p. 20).

Additionally, this unwillingness to address Shannon’s comportment or addressing performance in an ineffective way directly creates what Argyris (1986) would consider ‘skilled incompetence,’ whereby managers use practiced routine behavior (skill, such as feedback conversations that are ineffective) to produce what they do not intend (incompetence or affirmed bad behavior or poor performance that goes unaddressed). We have all seen a scenario like this play out in various organizations. Someone (like Shannon) is given the opportunity to remain in place or be promoted into higher roles

while continuing to not meet expectations. In this scenario and scenarios similar to this one, the supervisor is doing a disservice to both Shannon and the individuals directly or indirectly impacted by her work. While aiming to avoid conflict or rock the boat, the supervisor in this situation enabled Shannon's conduct by not providing her with the appropriate and immediate feedback that would allow her to cure her behavior.

Shannon's performance (or others on the team) may even decline due to the lack of expressed and reaffirmed boundaries or expectations. Shannon (or team members) neither have the opportunity to feel empowered as participants in their own development nor the chance to create a self-regulated or self-managed team. This case example allowed for the incorporation of experiential approaches that show how student affairs practitioners could move from theory and competencies to practice and skills development.

Rahim (2001) presented the following model (see Figure 3) of Organizational Conflict based on a lengthy review of literature on organizational conflict as a process that illustrated the opportunity for analysis and intervention. The model encouraged the interventionist (supervisor, mediator, arbitrator, etc.) to explore all of the dynamics associated with a conflict situation. Some of those dynamics included the beginning of the conflict (or antecedent conditions that led to the conflict); the process (in resolving the conflict such as mediation, arbitration, etc.); the demographics (such as race, gender, age, educational attainment, etc.); structural; behavioral (or attitude) changes within the team, department, or organization; structural formations (such as bureaucracy); decision process (such as integrative or dominating styles); and the resulting conflict aftermath

(such as avoidance or withdrawal). These are some of the multidimensional aspects of conflict, which require a multi-frame approach to manage conflict effectively.

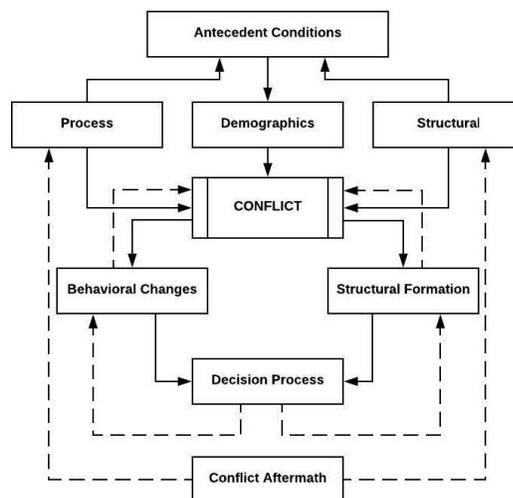


Figure 3. A Model of Organizational Conflict. Source: Rahim, M. A. (2001). *Managing conflict in organizations*, Greenwood Publishing Group, New Brunswick (U.S.A.).

Utilizing Rahim's model, the supervisor in the Shannon example would explore the antecedent conditions to determine what has happened, what expectations have been expressed, and specific examples of Shannon falling short of those expectations. The supervisor would continue to explore the demographics of the group as well as the processes involved with addressing performance concerns. The behavioral changes in this example might be the ways in which Shannon's co-workers have engaged with Shannon individually as well as within the team overall. The supervisor's approach or crossroads conversation with Shannon in the decision process may determine the gravity of the conflict aftermath between both Shannon and supervisor and the rest of the team.

According to Goleman (1998), those who can manage conflict effectively are “the kind of peacemakers vital to any organization” (p. 180). Some organizations or institutions may offer subordinates the opportunity to go to a higher-level superior or committee to discuss grievances. Rahim et al. (2002) found that subordinates were likely to use more problem solving and fewer bargaining strategies when dealing with conflict. Within the team or workgroup dynamics, the impetus of control such as vertical (or top down) control versus concertive or horizontal (or among and across group) control may hinder the subordinate’s perceived agency in articulating concerns or pursuing the addressing of grievances (Barker, 1993; Barker, Melville, & Packanowsky, 1993; Sewell, 1998; Tompkins & Cheney, 1985). Concertive or horizontal control is described as an opportunity where people work via cultural norms rather than bureaucratic rules. Workers within a concertive control environment develop their own means for control, which was seen as participative, decentralized, and more democratic in nature (Baker, 1993).

Multicultural and Multigenerational Causes of Conflict

Along with the dimensions listed in Figure 3, there are other conflict dynamics that required attention in order to provide a multidimensional approach to conflict management within the organizational setting, such as diversity, power, and bases of power. According to Poole and Garner (2006), a large body of research is concerned with diversity in workgroups, and a major theme is diversity and conflict. Diversity is a common source of conflict in workgroups, and most reviews of diversity in teams make reference to conflict or potential conflict (e.g., Larkey, 1996). In workgroup research, diversity has been conceptualized both in terms of observable characteristics such as

gender, age, and race, and also in terms of underlying characteristics such as beliefs, perspectives, values, functional specialty, profession, and experience (Oetzel, 2002).

While the overall purpose of this study did not focus on diversity specifically, the researcher acknowledged that it is one factor that should be considered when discussing and analyzing conflict situations. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the exploration of conflict dynamics may require the supervisor to look beyond the conflict moment and include various pieces of information such as group and individual diversity, as well as antecedent conditions, behavioral changes, manifested styles, or selected rules of engagement when dealing with or experiencing conflict, and identified process (both formally and informally) when attempting to manage conflict.

Role of Power

Another dynamic within a conflict scenario that required attention is the role of power and the effects of bases of power. A supervisor's ability to decipher which approach or style is appropriate or inappropriate for each situation so that their goals are effectively attained is an important skill. This approach to conflict management is known as contingency or situational theories of leadership (Rahim, 2001). According to Cloke (2001),

a significant danger in mediating external conflicts arises when we confront parties who are committed to using power as a means of resolving disputes. Power is inherently adversarial and dangerous in conflict, not only because it is harmful to those it attacks, but because it is addictive and corrupting to those it protects. (p. 140)

Within a supervisor-subordinate or dyadic conflict, there has been much research done to focus on the effects of bases of power (French & Raven, 1959; Raven & Kruglanski, 1970; Stern & Gorman, 1969). In his review of power in educational organizations, Robbins (1974) concluded that “low and moderate levels of power . . . can assist in improving coordination and, therefore, work to reduce conflict. But where power is excessive, as perceived by a less powerful group, one may expect it to be challenged, causing increased conflict” (p. 48). Bases of power include coercive, reward, expert, legitimate, and referent. Birnbaum (1988) noted that normative organizations, such as colleges and universities, rely on referent and expert power rather than coercive power (prisons), reward power (increased salary), or legitimate power (businesses). Referent power results from the willingness to be influenced by another person because of one’s identification with this person. Expert power is present when one person allows himself or herself to be influenced because the other person has some special knowledge or expertise he or she can offer the group (Kezar, 2010).

Systems Approach to Conflict

As noted in Chapter I, Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) is

any method of dispute resolution other than formal adjudication such as court litigation or administrative proceedings. ADR is not a new approach but rather an alternative—characterized by common sense and flexibility. It involved the use of a wider array of approaches to resolve disputes than the traditional and often more costly methods of adversarial litigation and administrative adjudication. (Costantino & Merchant, 1996, p. 33)

Conflict, if handled appropriately, is an important vehicle through which the work of organizations gets accomplished (Folger, Poole, & Stutman, 2005). Effective conflict

transformation systems or procedures may provide the opportunity to potentially avoid litigation in some conflict situations. According to Kaplin and Lee (1997),

for internal campus disputes (such as between superior and subordinate), internal grievance processes and hearing panels are also important ADR mechanisms and may frequently constitute remedies that, under the exhaustion doctrine, disputants must utilize before resorting to court. (p. 36)

Higher education administrators are charged with the cultivation of the following proficiencies: emotional intelligence, listening, conflict management, team building, negotiation, networking, and professionalism (Lafreniere & Longman, 2008; Spendlove, 2007). The given complexity of the organizational environment calls for tools such as conflict management skills (Tjosvold, 1985, 1987). This requires a sense of cohesiveness, trust created around high performance standards, and commitment to common goals in order for a group of individuals to become a team (Shockley-Zalabak, 2006; Tuckman & Jensen, 1977). Rahim (2001) notes the following:

Negotiation skills are essential for managing interpersonal, intragroup, and intergroup conflicts. Since managers spend more than one-fifth of their time dealing with conflict, they need to learn how to negotiate effectively. Sometimes they are required to negotiate with their superiors, subordinates, and peers, and, at other times, they are required to mediate conflict between their subordinates. (p. 123)

The group will benefit from the supervisor's ability to help others through emotional or tense situations, tactfully bringing disagreements into the open and finding solutions all can endorse (Jehn, 1995).

An initial review of the literature confirmed that there are many different benefits to the successful management of conflicts within the workplace such as increased morale (S. G. Cohen & Ledford, 1994; Kirkman & Rosen, 1999; Schweiger et al., 1986; Spreitzer, 1995), creation of a more effective or efficient team, and movement from competition or conflict to collaboration (Luthans et al., 1988; Tjosvold & Field, 1984), stronger newly formed or reinvigorated relationships, a decrease in the possibility of litigation, and greater satisfaction and team effectiveness as a result of the utilization of problems-focused solutions (Aram et al., 1971). The use of conflict transformation skills truly opened the door to problem solving (Lederach, 2003). Oftentimes each party is unable to see beyond the conflict; thus, mediation provided opportunity for creative problem solving. Whyte (1967) stated the functions of organizational conflict succinctly:

Harmony is an undesirable goal for the functioning of an organization. The objective should not be to build a harmonious organization, but to build an organization capable of recognizing the problems it faces and developing ways of solving these problems. Since conflicts are an inevitable part of organizational life, it is important that conflict resolution procedures be built into the design of organizations. (p. 25)

Emotional Intelligence Research

A supervisor who possesses emotional intelligence, skills in listening, and conflict management creates space for a high-performing group with positive morale as well as an openness for creativity and innovation (M. Chen, 2006; Jehn, 1995; Hirschman, 2001; McKenzie, 2002). Pre-existing evidence of emotional intelligence by the supervisor provided the most potential for trainings about emotional intelligence to be effective (Cherniss & Adler, 2000). The focus on and the need for emotional intelligence in

organizational leadership has often been seen as a greater predictor of professional success versus intelligence testing (Caruso & Wolfe, 2004; Cherniss, 2000; Goleman, 1995; Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002; Salovey & Mayer, 1990) and thus provided an ideal bridge for this research. Schlaerth et al. (2013) completed a meta-analysis review of the relationship between emotional intelligence and leaders' constructive conflict management and concluded that "confronting the conflict using positive, functional, and constructive approaches yielded outcomes that benefit both the individual and the organization as a whole" (p. 133).

Tools that gauge emotional intelligence such as BarOn EQi and the EQ-360 have been helpful in the promotion of both individual and group assessment to highlight development areas. While all 15 EQi competencies potentially relate to success in resolving conflict, the seven that were found to be the most influential in conflict resolution at collaborative growth are self-regard, emotional self-awareness, assertiveness, empathy, impulse control, reality testing, and optimism (Hughes, Thompson, & Terrell, 2009).

The Emotional and Social Competency Inventory (ESCI) is one example of the ways in which emotional intelligence within organizational leadership has been assessed. The ESCI is a 360-degree survey designed to assess 12 competencies that differentiate outstanding from average performers. The ESCI measures the demonstration of individuals' behaviors, through their perceptions and those of their raters, making it distinct from measures of Emotional Intelligence (EI) that assessed ability or personality preferences. Emotional Intelligence enables a supervisor to manage their emotions, adjust

to stressors, and cope with organizational changes that occur (Lopes, Grewal, Kadis, Gall, & Salovey, 2006). The use of assessment tools such as the Emotional and Social Competency Inventory (ESCI), would foster an increased self-awareness of skills. The 12-point scale included the measurement of leadership components such as emotional self-awareness, empathy, achievement awareness, and conflict management (see Figure 4). While the study provided participants the opportunity to assess their own competency of their conflict management skills, the ESCI is one tool some higher educational organizations have used to assess their leader's skills.

Emotional Self-Awareness	Recognizing one's emotions and their effects
Emotional Self-Control	Keeping disruptive emotions and impulses in check
Adaptability	Flexibility in handling change
Achievement Orientation	Striving to improve or meeting a standard of excellence
Positive Outlook	Persistence in pursuing goals despite obstacles and setbacks
Empathy	Sensing others' feelings and perspectives, and taking an active interest in their concerns
Organizational Awareness	Reading a group's emotional currents and power relationships
Coach and Mentor	Sensing others' development needs and bolstering their abilities
Inspirational Leadership	Inspiring and guiding individuals and groups
Influence	Wielding effective tactics for persuasion
Conflict Management	Negotiating and resolving disagreements
Teamwork	Working with others toward shared goals. Creating group synergy in pursuing collective goals

Figure 4. Emotional and Social Competency Inventory (ESCI). Source: Emotional and Social Competency Inventory (ESCI). (n.d.). Retrieved from http://www.eiconsortium.org/measures/eci_360.html

The desire of this study was to acknowledge that conflict is a natural occurrence and function within organizations; thus, the skills for management are appropriate for professionals working in higher education. From the developmental perspective discussed in Chapter I, conflict was seen as a normal part of the growth process, effective conflict management required the organization to deal with the current issue at hand, and member satisfaction came when the issue was addressed and put to rest.

Organizational Development, Conflict Management, and Higher Education

As noted in Chapter I, mid-managers are individuals who report directly to the senior student affairs officer and oversee at least one functional area or supervise at least one professional staff member (Fey & Carpenter, 1996). The role of the supervisor can often be the hardest, yet most rewarding experience faced by a mid-manager (Dalton, 2003; D. B. Mills, 2000). Morgan (1997) urged leaders to make conflict useful versus allowing it to debilitate their team or organization from productivity and necessary change or innovation. Furthermore, the suppression of conflict drove the conversation to private spaces in which subordinates feel most comfortable with sharing, but lost the opportunity for real issues to be discussed and thoughtfully addressed.

D. B. Mills (2009) noted that mid-managers are often asked to interpret direction and priorities to frontline employees, while communicating frontline concerns to leadership. This middle position may place them in conflict scenarios that could require them to “manage up.” The skill to manage up may seem more urgent to some mid-managers due to the political environments in which they may find themselves. Utilizing Shannon’s story, her supervisor now finds him or herself attempting to address a concern

(absence or tardiness due to a change in personal role) where there might not be a set policy. The supervisor's effort to manage up now comes in the form of advocacy as he or she explores the opportunity for policy creation which requires the buy-in of the Dean and potentially Human Resources. Managing up can certainly take other forms within the span of the mid-manager experience, but the principles for difficult conversations provided by Farrell (2015) and Weitzel (2011) are helpful in navigating these "managing up" moments. The researcher openly acknowledges the obvious shift in power when attempting to "manage up" versus "managing down," which should not be underestimated in the completion of this conversation.

According to Cooper and Boice-Pardee (2011), "successfully mediating conflict can also boost mid-managers' confidence, thereby making them more effective as leaders in student affairs" (p. 41). Beyond the obvious challenges with supervising personnel, mid-managers may also need to respond to conflicts related to fiscal management (Frunzi & Halloran, 1991), legal threats (Gajga, 2009), and role ambiguity (Ellis & Moon, 1991; Kuh & Whitt, 1988; D. B. Mills, 2000; Oblander, 2006). The unique needs for support (Ackerman, 2007; Ellis & Moon, 1991; Scott, 1978; Young, 1990), the absence of orientation, and other support mechanisms (Winston & Creamer, 1997), as well as the high potential for conflict within their role (Cooper & Boice-Pardee, 2011) provided an ideal criterion for the study to focus on mid-managers. Kezar (2010) asserted that "being a good leader requires engaging in the ambiguity and complexity of organizations, being willing to learn and grow as a leader, and the ability to embrace creative and non-mechanistic solutions to problems" (p. 249).

The field of higher education has benefited from the research surrounding the need for professional development opportunities, skills training, and competency attainment (Carpenter, 2003; Carpenter & Miller, 1981; Conneely, 1994; DeCoster & Brown, 1983; Mather et al., 2009; D. B. Mills, 2000). Scott (2000) identified a wide range of skills that middle managers should possess, including fiscal management, professional staff supervision, *conflict resolution*, ability to advise student leaders, career mobility, visioning, networking, and more. According to Mather et al. (2009), although mid-managers directly supervise the majority of staff in student affairs organizations, they are often the least prepared to manage workplace conflict because of limited training and orientation opportunities. In fact, D. B. Mills (2000) asserted that middle managers are largely responsible for their own professional growth and development. This highlights the disparity between desired competencies and professional development opportunities surrounding conflict management skills training. Another challenge in skills development might include the lack of resources available to the supervisor or the lack of awareness of potential resources that could be utilized in a dyad (or interpersonal) conflict. One such resource could be the University's Ombudsman, who is charged with maintaining an unbiased presence in conflict situations. The Ombudsman role (discussed next) provides one example of a well-functioning conflict management program in higher education.

The Ombudsman: The Formal Mediator and Higher Education

Higher education in the United States originated in 1636 with the founding of Harvard College as the first chartered institution. Within the span of 200 years, several

institutions would be founded and chartered under new names with philanthropic ties to Presidents and captains of industry such as John D. Rockefeller (American oil industry business magnate) and Andrew Carnegie (American steel industry magnate). Despite this longstanding history of higher education in this country, the inclusion of conflict management is a recent practice. The first ombudsman position in the U.S. government was established in Nassau County, New York in 1966. In 1967, Hawaii (which established statehood in 1959) became the first North American state to establish an ombudsman position, while Alberta became the first Canadian province to do so in the same year. This is in stark comparison to Sweden, which established its first ombudsman position within its government in 1809. Eastern Montana College was the first institution of higher education in the United States to appoint an ombudsman in 1966. The first major U.S. university to establish an ombudsman office was Michigan State University in 1967 (Stieber, 2000).

As previously discussed, Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) is one example of a systems approach to conflict management where, if used effectively, the ombudsman could play an integral role. Higher education institutions have welcomed the use of an ombudsman (or a university mediator) to address the grievances of internal constituents such as students, faculty, and staff, as well as external constituents such as parents, contractors, and vendors (Rahim, 2001). The idea of utilizing a University Ombudsman took off in the 1960s and 1970s which were seen as a time of social and political unrest and an opportunity to restore civility to the academy (Stieber, 2000). The inclusion of the university ombudsman is also seen as the change to provide “motivation, skills, and

resources” for continuous problem solving in times of change, within a dispute resolution system (Ury, Brett, & Goldberg, 1993, p. xv). While the academe had not initially been quick to accept ADR, the potential to reduce litigation costs and to resolve disputes, if possible, in a less adversarial manner could not be ignored (Kaplin & Lee, 2007). Ting-Toomey and Oetzel (2001) suggested that successful mediators possess the ability to manage their personal judgements in a way that enables all parties to feel respected; possessing mindfulness and “giving face” to those involved will support the creation of a respectful environment (p. 187). Furthermore, while evaluating capacity and need for the creation of a formal conflict resolution system, Blackard (2001) suggested that organizations ask themselves the following questions:

1. Is the organization large enough to justify a conflict resolution system?
2. What is appropriate for the organization’s culture?
3. Does the level of conflict justify a conflict management system? (pp. 61–62).

While there are many benefits to utilization of conflict resolution or ADR skills in the context of higher education or student affairs, there are still many challenges that need to be considered such as one’s perceived preparation for managing conflict, lack of awareness of campus resources, or conflicting political priorities. Even when conflict resolution resources are made available, there may still be a variety of reasons for which these resources are not utilized. First, the disputants may be concerned with confidentiality if attempting to report a grievance or conflict with their supervisor. Second, disputants may believe that the process of mediation may not be helpful or necessary for their specific conflict. The individuals may even view their dispute as a

small issue without realizing the future impact of their decision to avoid the conflict.

Alcover (2009) concluded that “the special characteristics of university context make it necessary to consider and evaluate elements that may have a bearing on the effectiveness of the process and outcomes of the mediation” (p. 275). Second, the initiating party may believe that they do not have the appropriate power, knowledge, or support they might need to resolve the conflict.

The simple, generalizable lesson is that an organization may be incur unsustainable cost from conflict, but may still not be able to initiate a design intervention without an alignment of the right circumstances with people who have the knowledge, motivation, and authority to initiate substantial systematic change. (Yarn, 2014, p. 95)

Conflict resolution skills or alternative dispute resolution techniques can be used in isolation for specific instances. However, an effective system of management to report grievances should be established to provide consistency and longevity.

As mentioned in Chapter I, the Four Frames work by Bolman and Deal (2013) provided a framework for analysis of the higher education environment in a similar way.

Institutions of higher education are communities that should encourage collegiality, trustworthiness, and collaboration. The resolution of campus conflicts should improve the atmosphere for learning, teaching, research and service; it should maximize benefits and minimize costs; it should stress individual and institutional responsibility; respect, collaboration, and accountability; it should embody principles of fairness, equity, and accessibility; and it should serve the community-at-large by providing students with collaborative skills and instilling a sense of personal responsibility that make good citizens and effective leaders. (University System of Georgia, 1995, p. 2)

Kezar (2010) urged higher education leaders to pursue multi-frame thinking in order to gain awareness of the various subsystems operating so as to avoid being guided by unacknowledged bias from a single-frame approach. The diversity of potential stakeholders (students, faculty, staff, etc.) within higher education, their unique perspectives, and varied levels of power provide ample opportunity for conflict to occur, thus requiring a multidimensional approach. Alcover (2009) concluded that

University and academia are, due to its nature, its structure and its inside relationships, a perfect breeding ground for conflicts, disputes, problems, and grievances. In these settings, mediation is one of the dispute resolution mechanisms most used by University Ombudsperson. (p. 275)

This chapter provided the reader with important historical perspectives related to both conflict management and higher education research while incorporating the context of supervision as an opportunity for exercising conflict management competencies. The topic of difficult conversations or crossroads conversations highlighted a specific example of a routine supervisory task (feedback) that could hinder development and commitment to the organization if done poorly. The resources offered throughout the chapter provided the opportunity to bring theory to life through practice. As noted in Chapter I, the researcher hoped to identify the ways in which conflict management skills are attained (via graduate preparation programs, on-the-job experiences, or workshops and conferences) and utilized; thus, the examples and resources provided in this chapter aimed to deepen the discussion which will incorporate participant experiences, thematic reflections, and perceptions of competence in Chapter IV. Finally, the chapter concluded

by highlighting the historical context and creation of a key role that provides a systems approach to conflict within higher education.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

Introduction

This chapter includes the methods for data collection and highlights the reason for selecting a phenomenological design for this study. Chapter III also describes the process of selecting the participants for the study while remaining within the standards established by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Next, the process for addressing credibility and trustworthiness are discussed. Finally, the procedures for data collection, interview techniques, and protocols that were employed to conduct participant interviews are included.

Restated Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of the study was to explore the relationship between how conflict management skills are developed (graduate programs, workshops/conferences, on-the-job experiences) and utilized in supervisory experiences among mid-managers in higher education (e.g., in addressing supervisor-subordinate (dyad) conflicts). Mid-managers are the “experts” in their lived experiences. Thus, this study aimed to identify the realities of their experiences with conflict management and the gaps between the professional competencies and skills acquisition.

The specific research questions for this study were:

1. How have conflict management skills been developed (graduate programs, workshops/conferences, on-the-job experiences) by mid-managers in student affairs?
2. How have these skills been utilized in their role as mid-managers?
3. What is the gap between the “real” state of affairs in higher education conflict management and the ideal as represented by conflict studies models and competency statements offered by Student Affairs related professional organizations?

This chapter highlights the researcher’s selected methodology and discusses the identified approach to data analysis as well as an outline of the procedures (participant selection, data collection, and data management) associated with this study.

Methodology

Researcher’s Subjectivity

The researcher’s paradigm is one that connects to both a constructivist (Moustakas, 1994) and critical/feminist approach whose worldview is steeped in the belief that multiple realities or narratives are always constructed; knowledge is both co-constructed and subjective. Within a dyad, or supervisor-supervisee conflict, the idea of “the third conversation” by Stone et al. (1999) comes to mind. As a reminder, Stone et al. posited that there are three essential conversations happening in a conflict scenario: a “what happened?” conversation, a “feelings” conversation, and an “identity” conversation. The authors suggest that in the “what happened?” conversation discussants

should explore contribution, a concept they see as distinct from fault. Rather than focusing on who is to blame, participants are able to consider how they may have contributed to the predicament. It is possible that both conversations are true, and that there is also a third story that also encapsulates the conflict.

The critical/feminist approach works to challenge existing power structures and promote resistance (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Fay, 1987; Heron & Reason, 1997; Kemmis & Wilkinson, 1998). In this same vein, it is important that power structures be acknowledged and ways in which grievances can be reported and addressed, such as the use of an Ombudsman or formalized ADR process, be considered. While the power structure in a hierarchical dyad is clear, the critical approach seeks to uncover the opportunity to create a just system that provide checks and balances to these traditionally oppressive systems within a supervisory structure. These paradigms connected well with this focus on conflict management education and the need to address conflict from a systems approach.

“In qualitative work, it is understood that the act of studying a social phenomenon influences the enactment of that phenomenon. Researchers are a part of the world they study; the knower and the known are taken to be inseparable” (Hatch, 2002, p. 10). As my research involved the examination of the acquisition and utilization of conflict management skills by mid-managers in higher education, it was important to begin by addressing my own subjectivity within this study. Peshkin (1988) defines “subjectivity” as the “amalgam of the persuasion that stem from the circumstances of one’s class, status and values interacting with the particulars of one’s object of investigation” (p. 17).

Additionally, Patton (2002) asserted that heuristic inquiry requires personal and intense experience with the phenomenon by the researcher, thus providing adequate support for the methodological direction. My subjectivity as the researcher was colored by both educational training and on-the-job experience garnered through the honing my own conflict management skill. While these skills were helpful in many of my professional experiences, I found them to be most helpful in my various roles specifically with supervisory responsibility. I welcomed any chance to practice these skills on a regular basis.

My journey into the world of conflict management began during my completion of my Master's in College Student Affairs, which included an emphasis in Conflict Resolution from Nova Southeastern University (NSU). I share this specific institutional detail as NSU has played a vital role in my belief, as a student affairs practitioner, in the importance of conflict management in the field of higher education. McKay (2012) stated the following regarding the founding of the NSU program:

It is during this last stage [1986 to the present] that most of the current graduate programs in conflict resolution were established, including the program at Nova Southeastern University (NSU). The Department of Conflict Analysis and Resolution (DCAR) at NSU was founded in 1992 as the Department of Dispute Resolution (DDR) in what was then the School of Social and Systemic Studies (SSS). Later SSS changed its name to the Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences (SHSS). The department had graduate certificate and master's degree programs, and in 1994 a doctoral degree program was added, the second Ph.D. program in conflict resolution in the US. The DCAR programs were designed to be multidisciplinary to meet the needs of students across the US and around the world. In 1999 the department launched the first online doctoral program in conflict resolution. (p. 103)

As a student in a higher education Ph.D. program who has completed a concentration in peace and conflict studies, I recognize my own personal investment and passion for this topic of exploration. Due to my commitment to this important area of research, I believe it is an obligation and a privilege to help empower colleagues and fellow practitioners to the best of my ability. This opportunity for empowerment starts with understanding my own attributes as a human, a practitioner, and a researcher; knowing what limitations I inherently face; and believing in my ability and credibility to address such a complex social issue within the field of higher education. This is also the reason I have retained membership to the International Ombudsman Association.

My professional organization experience, including involvement and membership, have spanned the majority of my educational and professional careers with NASPA (the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators) being the longest tenure of my organizational membership. My NASPA journey began as a junior undergraduate student at the University of Florida when I participated in the NASPA Undergraduate Fellows Program (NUFP) and was paired with a full-time housing professional who served as my mentor for 2 years. The mission of NUFP is to increase the number of historically disenfranchised and underrepresented professionals in student affairs and/or higher education, including but not limited to those of racial and ethnic-minority background; those having a disability; and those identifying as LGBTQ. Mentors is not required to share any of those identities with their mentee, but commit to providing formalized mentoring through regular one-on-one meetings and providing opportunities for continued guidance through education and career exploration. I am still

in touch with my NUFP mentor who helped me finalize my decision to attend NSU. My connection to NASPA was further deepened by the fact that one of my committee members, Henrietta (Penny) Rue, currently serves as NASPA's Board Chair and is also the Vice President for Campus Life at my current institution of employment.

Qualitative Research Methodology

The exploration of this topic was completed with the utilization of a qualitative research methodology (i.e., phenomenology). Qualitative research focuses on the study of issues in depth and detail, and tends to center on how people make meaning out of their experiences.

Three characteristics of qualitative methodology are (a) naturalistic approach, or studying real-world situations; (b) an emergent design and flexibility, pursuing paths of discovery as they arise; and (c) purposeful sampling, where the sampling is aimed at insight about the research question, not necessarily generalizable to the population, and participants are chosen according to specific, purposeful criteria. (Patton, 2002, p. 40)

This methodology was selected for a number of reasons including the opportunity to interact with participants, listen to participants, and make meaning of their experiences of conflict management skill acquisition and practice. The study aimed to highlight "theory-to-practice" or "theory-in-use" (Reason & Kimball, 2012, p. 363) opportunities, thus creating a need to hear from current mid-managers as they reflect upon their own education, training, and real-life conflict scenarios. Qualitative research is the means for exploring and understanding the meaning of individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2007), especially when little is already known about the phenomenon. This type of study allowed for the collection of multi-layered information

(background, context, and history), ideal for interpretation and gathering the “essence” of the phenomenon. It is these realities generated by the lived experience, as Seidman (2013) posited, telling stories in a meaning-making process where people select details of their experience.

An additional characteristic of qualitative research entails the practice of inductive and deductive data analysis that structures the research into appropriate themes. The inductive flow clusters related themes and data points, while the deductive process involved the researcher reviewing data to see if further evidence was required to support the established themes (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). This study utilized an inductive method to cluster related themes in order to provide a cohesive narrative of participant lived experiences through imaginative variation.

The phenomenological technique of imaginative variation was identified by Husserl (1936/1970) as conducive to elucidating the manner in which phenomena appear to consciousness. The use of this approach allowed the study participants to place themselves into a situation that involved workplace conflict and describe how they might behave or respond to elicit a highly detailed experiential account of the phenomenon (Patton, 2002).

Prior to the recruitment process of participants, the researcher completed a cognitive interview with a Student Affairs mid-manager who would meet all of the requirements for participation. While this person was not a participant in the study, the goal and purpose of the cognitive interview was to sharpen the quality of the interview questions. The mid-manager was asked to think through the type of information she

would want to share, evaluate her comfort level in rapport with the interviewer, and what, if any improvements were needed to the clarity of wording and tempo of the interview experience. The cognitive interview process allowed the researcher to make organizational adjustments to the semi-structured interview prompts that provided a more natural transition based on the feedback of the interviewee. Additionally, the interviewee made suggestions related to wording of some questions that helped minimize the potential for confusion as well as provided critical feedback about questions that should remain that would provide key data points for consideration.

Participants in this study were interviewed and asked to share their experiences with conflict management skills and supervision as mid-managers within the field of Student Affairs. The use of this form of data collection allowed the researcher to absorb rich descriptions of people's interactions, perspectives, beliefs, and experiences in order to describe the phenomenon at hand (Krathwohl, 1998).

Phenomenology

The phenomenological methodology is anchored in an interpretive model where reality is socially constructed, and the researcher is interested in understanding how people make meaning of their experiences. The most appropriate methodology of gathering the details of how participants are making meaning of these lived experiences would be through phenomenological research. The exploration of paradigms required addressing the ontological question (What is the nature of the real world? or reality?), the epistemological question(s) (What can be known, and what is the relationship of the knower to what is known?), and the methodological question (How is knowledge

gained?). Finally, how can one inquire objectively so that findings correspond to reality? (Patton, 2015). The researcher falls in line with a constructivist paradigm whose ontology (multiple realities are constructed), epistemology (where researcher and participants co-construct understandings), and knowledge are gained via phenomenological means.

Another tenet of qualitative research that is salient to the current study involved the researcher understanding the interpretation the participants have made and their own subjectivity or bias in the study. The researcher's own experiences as a mid-manager in student affairs was the impetus for this study; thus, every attempt was made to acknowledge and control for subjectivity and bias through bracketing. Bracketing (or *epoche*) is the process where "the researcher engages in to remove, or at least become aware of prejudices, viewpoints or assumptions regarding the phenomenon under investigation" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2009, p. 199).

This final assumption is a summation of human nature or the relationship between individuals and the environment. Heidegger (1988) suggested that individuals are "always already in an enviroing world" (p. 164), "implying that everyone exists in a culturally and historically conditioned environment from which they cannot step outside. Existence is always set against a background that contextualizes experience" (Gill, 2014, p. 130). "To know and understand the nature, meanings, and essences of any human experience, one depends on the internal frame of reference of the person who has had, is having, or will have the experience" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 26). The constantly changing workforce and the constantly changing landscape of higher education specifically validated these ideals.

Phenomenological Interviews

The research method used for this study was of a phenomenological design. This method hails from psychological and philosophical origins (Giorgi, 1997; Moustakas, 1994) “in which the researcher describes the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by the participants” (Creswell, 2013, p. 13). A phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon, in this case, conflict management in the student affairs workplace. Gallagher and Zahavi (2008) stated,

Phenomenology has as its goal, not a description of idiosyncratic experience—‘here and now, this is just what I experience’—rather, it attempts to capture the invariant structures of experience. In this sense, it is more like science than like psychotherapy. (p. 28)

In short, phenomenology hopes to answer the following undergirded question: “What is the meaning, structure, and the essence of the lived experience of this phenomenon for this person or group of people?” Phenomenologists focus on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon, such as workplace conflict. The basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence—a “grasp of the very nature of the thing” (van Manen, 1990, p. 177). To this end, qualitative researchers identify a phenomenon—an “object” of human experience (van Manen, 1990, p. 163). This phenomenon would be studied through heuristic inquiry, which attempts to discover the nature and meaning of the phenomenon through internal pathways of self—using the processes of self-reflection, exploration, and elucidation—of the nature of the

phenomenon that is being studied (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985). The subjective nature of this study called for the use of in-depth semi-structured interviews as the best process for data collection.

The purpose of calling upon phenomenology in this study was to consider the individual conflict management experiences of mid-managers in student affairs and the ways in which themes and commonalities can be summarized across multiple participants to a point of saturation. According to Creswell (2013), “saturation can be defined as the point in data collection when the researcher gathers data from participants and the collection of data from *new* participants does not add substantially to the codes or themes being developed” (p. 77). This provides the chance to determine potential gaps or opportunity within the realm of education, training, and practice, which can only be identified and studied by allowing real world experiences to become known.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and Semi-structured Interview

This study specifically utilized Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) for design and coding, which aimed to “explore in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world” (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 53). The researcher used semi-structured interviews with participants to explore each individual’s lived experience within the context of the environment they inhabit. These individual semi-structured interviews were primarily completed via video conferencing technology (GoogleMeet, etc.) as their method of communication. This form of semi-structured interviewing “allows the researcher and participant to engage in a dialogue whereby initial questions are modified in the light of the participants’ responses and the

investigator is able to probe interesting and important areas which arise” (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 57). As a result of the semi-structured approach, the interview was guided versus dictated by the interview protocol (see Appendix C). IPA’s focus on the individual’s perception of their account in an event or experience made it an ideal selection for this study as it provided the participant the opportunity for reflection. Additionally, the semi-structured nature of IPA also allowed for the inclusion of new information via the progression of the conversation that might not be explored if it veered too far from the reach of the structured interview model.

The cursory state of knowledge of conflict management in the student affairs mid-manager’s supervisory experience provided a rich exploration for expansion. The semi-structured interview provided opportunity for a shared understanding of the topic between researcher (conflict management expert in the study) and the participant (expert in their lived experiences), thus required appropriate attention. In an interview, one studies another subject, which means that two autonomous subjects, capable of producing accounts of themselves and their worlds, interact together in an ever-developing conversation. In order to generate the knowledge sought for in the interview, the interviewer should assume a second-person perspective. This means taking up an empathic position whereby that experience and understanding of interviewer and interviewee resonate (Varela & Shear, 1999). According to Zahavi (2008), the prime point of a second-person perspective is that of “reciprocity”: perhaps the unique feature of the second-person perspective is not the action part, is not the fact that one is aware of others’ mental states because of engaging and interacting with them, but is rather the

issue of reciprocity (de Bruin & Kästner, 2012; Fuchs, 2013). The researcher intended to speak directly and individually with mid-managers who provided rich insight into the area of supervision and conflict management as a desired competence. Smith and Osborn (2008) highlighted this two-stage interpretation or double heuristic where the participants are trying to make sense of their world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world.

Type of Design

The researcher utilized a semi-structured interview as the research design in an effort to gather deep information about individual experiences with the greater hope of identifying themes across participant responses. The interview protocol (see Appendix C) was generated by the researcher in reflection on the research questions of the study and the conceptual model (James, 2018).

The following **Guiding Questions** were used to operationalize the interview protocol (see Appendix C):

1. How are conflict management skills developed by Student Affairs practitioners?
2. What is the relationship between formalized training (or length of professional experience) and the perception of the practitioner's capacity to manage conflict?
3. Are there specific arenas in which the practitioner feels most/least prepared when managing conflict?

4. How have these conflict management skills been utilized in supervisory relationships?
5. How do mid-managers describe their own competence in utilizing conflict management skills with their staff members?

Researcher's Role

The researcher's role in this process was to provide an open space for conversation about a topic that can, at times, be challenging for individuals to speak candidly. The capacity to be reflective, to keep track of one's influence on a setting, to bracket one's biases, and to monitor one's emotional responses are the same capacities that allow researchers to get close enough to human action to understand what is occurring (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Walsh, Tobin, & Graue, 1993). Some of the conversations took interesting or unexpected turns, but it was the researcher's goal to maintain consistency in experience for all participants. The researcher created the interview protocol, completed the participant recruitment process, conducted the interview, was the primary coder, and completed analysis write-up. In an effort to ensure the quality of the data and balance out the researcher's involvement, there was an external auditor, a consulting coding team, and bracketing to check for assumptions, etc.

Procedures

Process

Prior to recruiting participants for the study, the researcher sought approval through the University of North Carolina at Greensboro's Institutional Review Board to conduct the study (see Appendix A).

Participants

The target population for this study were individuals in higher education within the “mid-manager” role that is often summarized as “individuals who report directly to the senior student affairs officer, oversee at least one functional area or supervising at least one professional staff member” (Fey & Carpenter, 1996, p. 219). For the purposes of this study, the researcher specifically focused on mid-managers with a minimum of 3 years of experience supervising full-time professional staff in order to examine the phenomenon of conflict management in student affairs from multiple points of view to come to a fuller understanding of the phenomenon. The researcher interviewed 14 individuals from a variety of institutional types and student affairs functional areas. Mid-managers were specifically selected as the subject of this study due to their unique organizational positioning and challenges they face, the increased utilization of these roles in student affairs, and the limited research focused on this population and their development.

Demographics

Prior to the interviews, participants completed a screening questionnaire that included demographic questions (see Appendix B). These questions were used to help determine their years of experience (both within the field of higher education and supervising full-time professionals), their highest level of degree completion, the number of direct reports or subordinates, and their current functional area (residence life, student conduct, campus recreation, orientation, student activities, etc.). Other details that were of interest were their personal demographics such as age range, gender, and race, as well as

the demographics of the current context of their work environment such as the size of their institution, public versus private, and their university's classification (liberal arts, religious, secular, research). These will be reported in Chapter IV.

Data Collection Techniques

Sampling. The researcher pursued a convenience sampling via a brief screening questionnaire by utilizing social media outreach to participants on the national level via professional organizations such as the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) and the American College Personnel Association (ACPA). The brief screening tool included questions about participant work experience, education, training, or educational experiences related to conflict management and a yes or no question about their willingness to discuss professional examples of supervisor-supervisee conflicts. The screening questionnaire was utilized to gather information from potential participants while also eliminated those that who did not meet the criteria for participation, such as not enough years of experience supervising full-time staff or limited exposure to and examples of dyad conflicts. Additionally, participant recruitment efforts were made informally through higher education and student affairs social networks. The researcher hoped that the sample would include members from several state and regional professional organizations including Southern Association for College Student Affairs (SACSA), the Southeastern Association of Housing Officers (SEAHO), the North Carolina College Personnel Association (NCCPA) and the North Carolina Housing Officers (NCHO). Since there was a desire to find trends that speak to differences in functional-area preparation, the researcher intended to diversify their reach

in gathering participants. This aspiration for diversification of functional areas can be seen in the participation recruitment process.

Managing and Recording Data

In an effort to provide assurance of confidentiality, the researcher and the participants were never referred to by name within the interview experience, thus the participant's identity was only known to the researcher. The sensitive nature of conflict and the interconnected nature of Student Affairs practitioners at the same or universities within close proximity supported the decision to retain participant confidentiality. The researcher stored both electronic records and voice recordings on a password-protected laptop. An approved transcription company transcribed the recordings. Hard copy transcripts were stored in a locked home office cabinet to which only the researcher had access. Since participant names were never included in the interview recording, there was no concern that identifiable information (such as institutional names or names of colleagues in conflict) would be connected with either transcripts or recordings.

Data Analysis and Procedures

The researcher utilized Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to code the interview transcripts to determine themes or any shared perspectives among the participants, as well as surprising nuances that emerged during the interview experience (Smith & Osborn, 2008). The researcher incorporated the IPA steps as follows:

1. The transcript was read a number of times with the left margin used to annotate interesting and significant about what the participant said;

2. Next, the right-handed margin was used to document emerging theme titles, which moved the response to a higher level of abstraction;
3. The emergent themes were listed on a sheet of paper and connections between both made;
4. The researcher attempted to make sense of the connections between themes by utilizing more analytical or theoretical ordering; and
5. Finally, a table of these was produced and ordered coherently.

Data analysis was a complex process that involved moving back and forth between concrete portions of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, and between description and interpretation. These meanings, understandings, or insights constitute the findings of a study (Merriam, 1998).

The researcher utilized a voice recorder application during the individual semi-structured interviews; the recordings were then transcribed by an external company. Recording the interview allowed the researcher the opportunity to take observational notes such as body language, tone, gesturing, or change in demeanor throughout the interview. Upon receiving the final transcript, the researcher made a first review attempting to annotate and identify interesting or significant commentary shared by multiple participants. Independently, a second coder completed a review of the transcript, reading it multiple times to first provide a free textual analysis. This freedom from “rules” allowed for the opportunity to move through the text determining what should be summarized and paraphrased, or identifying other connections. The independent

transcript review and coding process provided space for noting similarities, differences, echoes, amplifications, and contradictions in what a participant said.

A second review of the transcript allowed the researcher to note any unique or outlier comments as well as transform initial notes into concise phrasing. This provided a higher level of abstraction, capturing the essential quality of what was expressed, but still from the participant perspective, not involving interpretation from the researcher. The audio recording of the interview experience also allowed the researcher to listen to each interview multiple times throughout the data analysis period to make note of conversational nuances, such as long pauses or elevated tone, which might not have been immediately clear while completing the interview. The researcher then moved forward in the coding process to identify emergent themes in the initial codes of the narrative.

Next, the emergent themes were outlined in a reasonable and ordered fashion to help identify connections between them, moving the response to a higher level of abstraction in hopes of invoking more psychological terminology (Smith & Osborn, 2008). These were the superordinate themes:

1. Lack of formal training
2. Development is self-created
3. Multi-disciplinary approach to the development of skills
4. Multi-layered environments (students, faculty & staff)
5. Varied levels of confidence about their own skills among participants
6. Minimal examples of confidence in the competence of colleagues
7. Culture of avoidance/Creation of toxic environments

The researcher reviewed the notes taken during each interview where observations were noted for potential themes.

As superordinate themes emerged, the researcher worked to link together individual realities to create a shared storyline to highlight the meaning of the phenomenon. “Devising categories is largely an intuitive process, but it is also systematic and informed by the study’s purpose, the investigator’s orientation and knowledge, and the meanings made explicit by the participants themselves” (Merriam, 1998, p. 179). The researcher embedded a member check approach within the interview experience by reframing participant responses along the way to affirm accuracy (“So, what you said was X. Is that right?”).

After the completion of the transcription review and coding process, the coding consultants met separately with the researcher (primary coder) to discuss themes they discovered independently in the data. Each of those meetings consisted of a discussion around emergent and superordinate themes for each interview, coming to consensus about the meaning, logic, and structure of what had been captured. Finally, the researcher sought the assistance of an external auditor to review transcripts, codes, and themes to ensure alignment with final summary or identify any gaps.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

Qualitative research has its own set of procedures for establishing credibility and trustworthiness. Creswell (2003) suggested using at least one of the following strategies to check accuracy of qualitative research findings: (a) triangulation; (b) member-checking; (c) use of meaningful, rich, thick description to communicate the data

collection; (d) clarify any bias the researcher may bring to the study; (e) provide any negative or discrepant information; (f) spend prolonged time in the environment being studied; (g) use peer debriefing to enhance accuracy; and (h) use an external auditor to review. The strategies utilized in the current study included member checking. The researcher also made use of rich, thick description provided in Chapter IV to allow readers access to the data to draw their own interpretations. Finally, negative case analysis (conflicts that were not well resolved) and positive case analysis (conflicts that were well resolved) were both incorporated to gain multiple perspectives on the phenomenon of conflict management. These strategies provided the researcher the opportunity to have more confidence in the results of the process of inquiry.

While qualitative research has its benefits, the methods applied to enhancing the rigor of the research process look different from a quantitative study. According to Creswell (2007), rigor means that the researcher validates the accuracy of the account using multiple procedures, such as member checking, completing a cognitive interview as a pilot to improve the data collection process, or using peer or external auditors of the accounts.

The researcher used the following research strategies in the current study: bracketing, cognitive interview pre-recruitment, a coding team, member checking within the interview experience, and an external auditor. First, the researcher utilized bracketing in which the investigator's experiences are set aside in order to offer an unbiased perspective of the phenomenon being studied. According to Creswell (2007), bracketing is one of a few approaches to providing verification and validity to one's research.

Bracketing subjectivity also required the researcher to ensure that she remained true to the words, terms, and phrases participants used, especially if there were actual conflict management terms that would more specifically describe the participants' experience. Second, a cognitive interview with a non-study participant was completed. Third, the researcher summarized what had been said during the interview process and allowed the participants the opportunity to offer any clarifying context or support of the previously stated information. Forth, the researcher also utilized a co-coder who worked independently before coming together to share notes and commonalities among the determined themes. The independent use of a coding team also allowed the opportunity to bracket researcher subjectivity. An external audit was completed by a professional colleague who had no previous association with the research.

The focus of this chapter was the identified methodological structure of the study, the process for research, and the rationale for the selection of the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Additionally, the protocol for research including site, sample selection, and data management were discussed. The next chapter provides the findings associated with this study, a summary of analysis and key themes, and a discussion of the identified themes.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter begins with a review of the study's purpose, protocol, and participant profiles. Recommendations presented in this chapter are as the participants interviewed prescribed them. The researcher offers additional recommendations in the next chapter.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to understand how conflict management skills were developed and utilized by mid-managers within the field of student affairs. This study took a theory to practice approach, by comparing the conceptual models available in conflict studies to the lived experiences of student affairs mid-managers. While utilizing the definition of mid-managers provided by Fey and Carpenter (1996), the study specifically focused on mid-managers with a minimum three years of experience supervising full-time professional staff. The research discovery process included the goal of better understanding not only how conflict management skills are gained, but also how they are used by mid-managers as well as the challenges that have impacted the potential of improving these skills. The participant interview process provided the opportunity for individuals to share their stories and experiences openly, per the phenomenological framework of the study. The researcher centered the conversation by reminding participants that they could share what they wanted or needed in order to make their

point: there was no expectation that every detail of the scenario be shared unless they were comfortable with it or found it necessary.

As highlighted by the phenomenological exercise that will be discussed later in this chapter, the field of Student Affairs provides a wealth of examples in which both interpersonal and intrapersonal conflicts abound. Therefore, development of conflict management strategies, tools, and techniques were an important focal point (Cheldelin & Lucas, 2004). Those examples specific to the study participants will be the phenomenon under investigation. The findings of the study were underpinned by the high potential of dyadic conflict within the field of student affairs. Thus, supervisory practice that address conflict productively enhance the performance of the individual as well as the team (Stewart & Barrick, 2000; Vodosek, 2007).

Research Questions

The specific research questions for the study were:

1. How have conflict management skills been developed (graduate programs, workshops/conferences, on-the-job experiences) by mid-managers in student affairs?
2. How have these skills been utilized in their role as mid-managers?
3. What is the gap between the “real” state of affairs in higher education conflict management and the ideal as represented by conflict studies models and competency statements offered by Student Affairs related professional organizations?

Participants

Through purposeful sampling employing a phenomenological design, 14 human subjects responded to the recruitment calls to participate in the research. While 19 individuals completed the prescreening survey in its entirety, additional considerations were utilized in the selection of the final participants such as availability of time, willingness to contribute, and being representative of the variety of mid-manager roles held with the Student Affairs field. Ultimately, individuals who met the criteria below were selected to participate:

- Mid-managers with at least 3 years of experience supervising full-time professional staff;
- Someone who oversees a functional area would be beneficial, but not necessary;
- Willingness to openly discuss professional conflicts in their role as supervisor.

Gender. The participants who contributed to the study included two males (14.3%) and 12 females (85.7%). The following graph (Figure 5) depicts the demographic data based on gender of the Student Affairs mid-managers who participated in the study. This higher response rate among female participants is also in line with the profession's demographics. According to Bauer-Wolf (2018), the College and University Professional Association (CUPA) reported that 71% of Student Affairs positions are held by women, while 20% of positions in the profession are held by white men. Furthermore, White men make up 33% of the leadership roles, while 56% of the leadership roles are occupied by women.

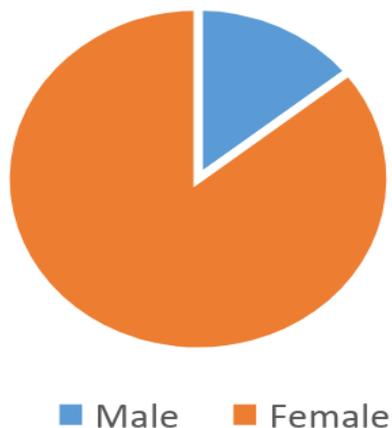


Figure 5. Participant Gender Demographic Data.

Race and ethnicity. The participants who contributed to the study identified themselves racially/ethnically as Black or African American ($n=2$; 14.3%), Hispanic or Latino/a ($n=1$; 7.1%), and White ($n=11$; 78.6%). The following graph (Figure 6) depicts the demographic data based on race and ethnicity of the participants in the study.

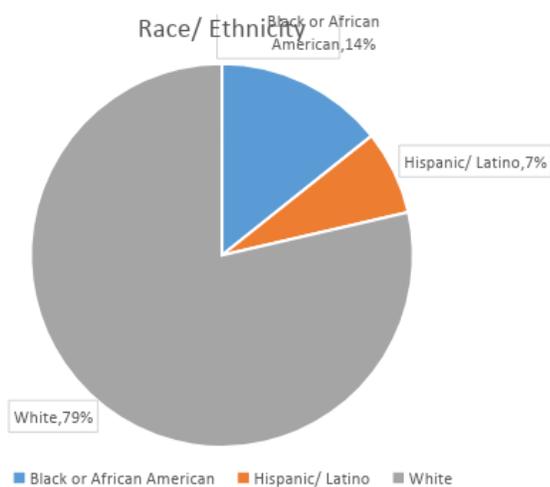


Figure 6. Race and Ethnicity Demographic Data.

Age. The participants represented an age range between 25 and 54+ years. Six participants (43%) identified themselves as being between 25 and 34. Seven participants (50%) noted that they were between 35 and 44 years of age. One participant (7%) identified themselves as being 54+. The following graph (Figure 7) depicts the demographic data based on the age of the participants.

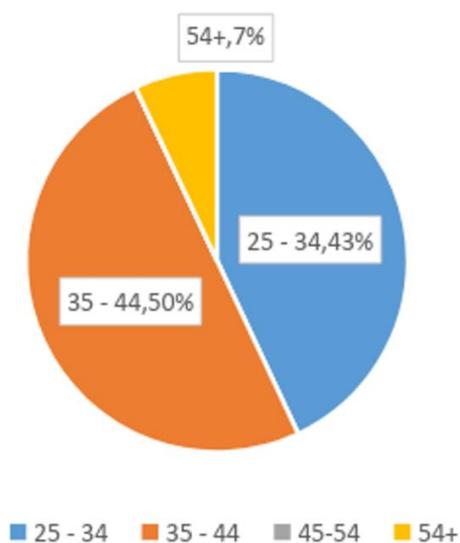


Figure 7. Age Demographic Data.

Student affairs functional areas. Participants were asked to identify the student affairs functional area they were currently working in by selecting from a list of 13 items including the option of selecting “other.” The following chart (Figure 8) depicts the range of student affairs functional areas represented in the study.

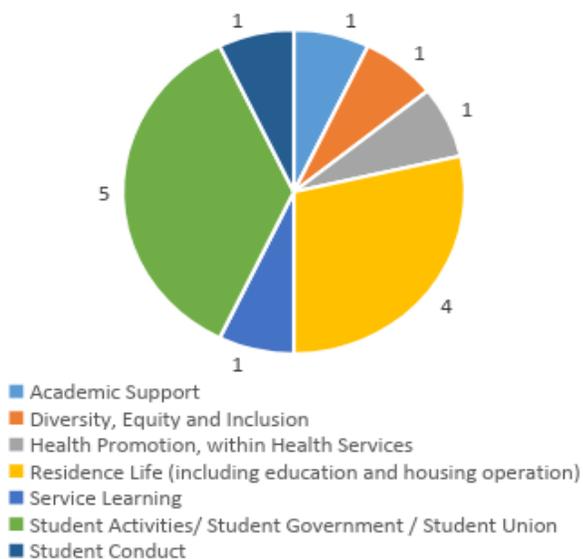


Figure 8. Functional Areas Represented.

When asked, “Prior to this study, how familiar were you with the ACPA/NASPA competencies (specifically those associated with personnel management, including conflict management skills)?” the 14 participants responded as such: Not knowledgeable at all ($n=1$; 7%), Slightly knowledgeable ($n=1$; 7%), Moderately knowledgeable ($n=9$ or 64%) and Very knowledgeable ($n=3$ or 22%). When asked, “How often do you deal with workplace conflict in your supervisory role?” the 14 participants responded as such: Sometimes ($n=8$ or 57%), About half the time ($n=5$ or 36%), and Most of the time ($n=1$ or 7%). Three of the 14 participants (22%) reported having formal training in conflict management through their masters or doctoral degree programs. Other formal training responses included conferences, professional institutes, multi-day training sessions, or certificate programs. The participants reflected a variety of academic training including Counseling, College Student Personnel, English, Mass Communications, Public Health, and Sociology.

Table 2

Participants in Summation

#	Name	Gender	Race/ Ethnicity	Current Job Function	Reported familiarity with ACPA/NASPA Competencies	Master's Degree/ Concentration
1	Lucia	Female	Hispanic/ Latina	Student Activities/ Student Government/ Student Union	Very knowledgeable	College Student Affairs, concentration in Conflict Resolution
2	Grace**	Female	Black/ African American	Student Conduct	Very knowledgeable	MA (Mass Comm.) PhD in Conflict Analysis and Resolution with a certificate in College Student Personnel Administration
3	Lisa	Female	White	Diversity, Equity and Inclusion	Moderately knowledgeable	MA (English), MFA (Creative Writing)
4	Jennifer	Female	White	Residence Life	Moderately knowledgeable	MSED Literacy Birth-Adult
5	Alex**	Male	White	Residence Life	Moderately knowledgeable	College Student Affairs, concentration in Conflict Resolution
6	Susan*	Female	White	Student Activities/ Involvement/St udent Government/St udent Union	Moderately knowledgeable	Counseling and College Student Development
7	Karen*	Female	White	Student Activities/ Involvement/St udent Government /Student Union	Slightly knowledgeable	Higher Education

Table 2

Cont.

#	Name	Gender	Race/ Ethnicity	Current Job Function	Reported familiarity with ACPA/NASPA Competencies	Master's Degree/ Concentration
8	Adah	Female	White	Residence Life	Moderately knowledgeable	Higher Education
9	Stella**	Female	White	Health Promotion, within Health Services	Not knowledgeable at all	Public Health, with a focus on Community Health Education
10	Amber	Female	White	Academic Support	Moderately knowledgeable	Counseling based program (CACREP), focus in College Student Personnel
11	Meredith**	Female	White	Service Learning	Moderately knowledgeable	M.Ed. in Curriculum Design
12	John	Male	White	Student Activities/ Involvement/ Student Government /Student Union	Moderately knowledgeable	MA in College Student Personnel
13	Bailey*	Female	White	Student Activities/ Involvement/ Student Government/ Student Union	Very knowledgeable	MA in student affairs administration
14	Semona	Female	Black/ African American	Residence Life	Moderately knowledgeable	MBA, MA Educational Leadership

Note. * denote currently pursuing a PhD or EdD; ** denotes holds a PhD or EdD

Identifying Themes

Themes emerged from the data collected from the brief pre-survey and the phenomenological interviews/transcripts. Participants were invited to freely speak about their experiences as it relates to conflict management skills acquisition and usage specifically within their work or supervisory context. The interview process reflected the participants' own words, feelings, beliefs, and perceptions of their experiences as mid-managers in student affairs. Furthermore, the researcher allowed opportunity for participants to provide examples and context that would ultimately be incorporated in the study themes. After conducting 14 interviews herself and then reviewing the transcripts, the researcher observed the repetition of ideas across multiple participants was occurring. She suspended interviewing and asked coding team members to assess the level of saturation of the data, which they confirmed.

The first aim of this research was to gain an understanding of conflict management skills development by student affairs mid-managers and drawn partially from the screening survey questions and the interview responses. The participants of this study provided myriad responses, most of which trended toward the lack of formalized and in-depth training opportunities in conflict management, regardless of the academic discipline of their graduate degrees. While several of the participants identified themselves as having academic qualifications related to conflict management through their graduate programs, they were within the numerical minority.

Research Question 1: How have conflict management skills been developed (graduate programs, workshops/conferences, on-the-job experiences) by mid-managers in student affairs?

Table 3

Research Question 1 Themes and Subthemes

Theme(s)	Subtheme(s)
Lack of formal training	
Individual responsibility in skills development	
Impact of on-the-job experiences (as a result of insufficient training)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Culture of avoidance</i> 2. <i>Creation of toxic environments</i> 3. <i>Focus on Relationships over skills development</i> 4. <i>Communication—unproductive</i> 5. <i>Demographics (such as race and gender) do matter</i>
Active exploration of training opportunities outside of the field of student affairs	

The main themes that were highlighted in participant experiences were:

1. Lack of formal training both as individuals and as a profession;
2. Individual responsibility in the development of skills;
3. The impact of on-the-job experiences (as a result of insufficient training); and
4. The active exploration of training opportunities outside of the field of student affairs.

Of the 14 participants, three (Lucia, Grace, and Alex) affirmed formalized education in conflict management skills. Their preparation has served these participants well and will be highlighted throughout the study. They will also offer a stark contrast to the lack of formal preparation reflected by other participants.

Lack of Formal Training

Formal training or education in this study is being defined as development gained through regimented or accredited experience such as the attainment of a degree, certificate program or certificate of participation in a multi-day institute via a professional organization. The lack of formal training was not only evident in the survey responses from the participants, but in the stories they shared in the interviews. Several participants highlighted their lack of training, experiences which they felt the most unprepared in managing, and moments in which they recognized that they were often responding to circumstances that were intensified by the lack of formal training around conflict management within their immediate work environments. Meredith, stated the following in reflecting on her general training experiences:

I never had formal training in conflict management as a supervisor. I remember becoming a supervisor fairly young in my professional career. I was already in a role and then the decision to reorganize and have someone report to me was made. There was never a conversation with me about, you know, the skill sets that will be required or what being a supervisor looks like.

Lucia offered the following reflection in summarizing the state of mid-manager skills development: “You’d be surprised how many folks have gotten to a mid-manager role and they have never had to truly develop that skill [conflict management]. They’ve just

sort of like rode the wave or been very fortunate.” Other participants like Lisa, Amber, and Adah used terms such as ‘trial by fire,’ ‘organic process,’ or ‘experiential learning’ when describing their development of conflict management skills as mid-managers. Susan summarized her conflict management skill development as “exponential” due to her experiences working with challenging staff. She stated, “I’ve been challenged in many different ways, not necessarily in a way that my team didn’t have faith in my abilities, but they had curiosity about or questioned some of the things that I was maybe trying to do and it created a little bit of push back.”

Mid-managers are being asked to manage complex environments in Student Affairs with little to no formal training. Jennifer stated this best:

I do not have an educational background or masters in Student Affairs, but I have been surprised that those that have a masters in higher ed programs aren’t being required to have conflict management or supervision training. I think these are the topics we should really talk about in graduate programs.

In addition to reflecting on their graduate training programs, participants were asked via prescreening, “please identify any formal or informal training or practical experiences you have had or received related to the topic of conflict management? (Please select all that apply)” (see Figure 9 for results).

Participants were given the chance to ‘select all that apply’ to this question related to formal, informal and practical experiences. The ‘degree program’ choice was selected three times, thus our three participants who had formal degrees in the area of conflict management include Alex, Grace, and Lucia. Three participants selected ‘other’ and described these experiences as consultation with Human Resources, completing a

management development training through their University or completing a selection of courses via their undergraduate or graduate program associated with Human Resource development.

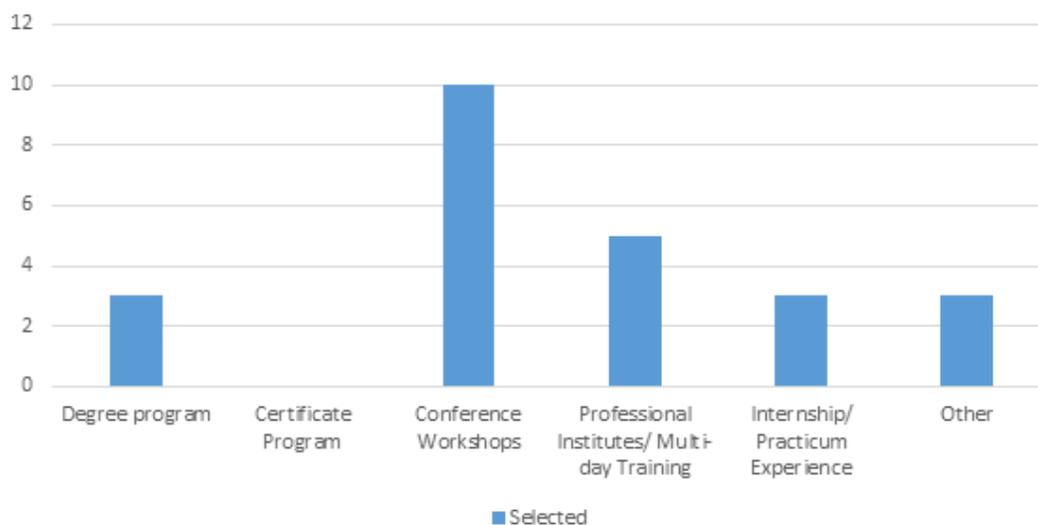


Figure 9. Formal, Informal, or Practical Training Experiences.

While many of the participants ($n=10$; 71.4%) did have access to conference workshops and other brief professional development opportunities, the weakness of that type of training is the infrequent nature in which these workshops specific to conflict management are provided. As reported by some participants, these trainings may not actually develop skills or meet the outcomes as described in their workshop summary. These one-off experiences can be beneficial, but short sighted as it does not address the multi-layered concerns that can be brought about when conflict arises and more importantly when it is avoided or not addressed in a skillful manner as highlighted in the scenarios brought forth by several of the participants. Participants such as Meredith saw

the need to imbed both training and evaluation of skills into the academic preparation programs and the post-masters work experience:

I just find it really interesting that there isn't more conflict management required as part of a higher ed program. I think that at the very least there should be within a higher ed master's program. There should be a conflict management communication styles, kind of intercultural communication piece like a course around that for people. I also think that we could build it into performance evaluations where we're able to kind of talk through for supervisors their conflict management abilities and it would be helpful to have some competency-based learning around that where we could understand like these are the areas that we're hoping to build competence and maybe even have that as part of like something that we consider in our national associations.

Whereas these brief or one-off training opportunities were selected in the prescreening, they were not emphasized to a great extent in the interviews. It is possible that brief training does not fully equip a person in the moment when they are confronted with a conflict in the workplace, and therefore did not come to mind as participants were describing their experiences.

Individual Responsibility in Skill Development

In this study, individual responsibility in skill development is used to refer to the ways participants had to take initiative themselves to fill gaps in their training.

Participants reported experiencing toxic environments due to avoidance or the lack of sufficient skills, and the growing need to engage resources from other fields in their search for developmental opportunities. One participant, Semona, compared the mid-manager transition to a sophomore experience in that one is given the opportunity to move forward, but sometimes without all of the information needed to feel prepared for the next chapter which often includes a greater level of responsibility and supervision.

“The middle manager we’re kind of left to figure it out and we’re the people that just kind of wander and we pick up these nuggets and then there’s no one putting the nuggets together on how to help each other because we’re all just figuring it out,” stated Semona. This sophomore comparison is akin to the problem highlighted in Chapter II in which a heightened level of attention is given to entry-level and chief student affairs officers, while minimum research and training is provided to mid-managers. As a result of this lack of formalized training and seen in the themes or sub themes in Table 3, participants reflected on their increased involvement in creating their own developmental opportunities, such as participating in seeking out leadership programs, attending conferences, joining social media networks dedicated to student affairs or higher education, and reading books or articles.

As stated in previous chapters, mid-managers are often given responsibility for their own professional development (Cooper & Boice-Pardee, 2011; D. B. Mills, 2000). There was a repeated call within the participant interviews for more comprehensive developmental opportunities that would equip mid-managers with the skills necessary to navigate their ever-complex world. Mid-level managers in student affairs vacillate between the world of the chief student affairs officer (CSAOs) and the entry-level staff members they supervise by managing information, services, and programs of the departments they lead (D. B. Mills, 2000). The multi-layered experiences of mid-managers such as working with students, staff and faculty results in the need to both model productive skills with students while also being able to address intrapersonal, interpersonal, intergroup and intragroup conflicts. Meredith said,

I think that conflict management [in Student Affairs] is so multi-layered because you have a workplace that involves student workers, graduate students, professional staff, different levels of supervision. I think sometimes that can make it challenging because student affairs is such a relational place that I think sometimes that issue of conflict management can be hard to navigate.

Participants articulated limited support or mentorship from immediate supervisors or upper management related to navigating conflict scenarios. Stella stated,

I had come to student affairs from the faculty side and I was brought into a situation where there are a lot of staff who had a lot of conflict with each other. And so my first experience in student affairs was being brought in with the idea of us trying to figure out how to manage all this conflict.

Stella was not alone in this reflection. Karen stated,

I find myself not having great mentorship and not having great leadership I think in terms of helping me navigate conflict, but then also helping set that expectation for my staff. So it's really just been learning as I go, make a lot of mistakes and try not to repeat them in the future.

For many the lack of formal training resulted in creating their own developmental experiences that would allow them to gain the necessary or minimal skills to manage conflict scenarios. Several study participants identified conference and professional institute attendance as one way they worked to develop their conflict management skills throughout the years. However, those that have been fortunate enough to attend these workshops stated that they sometimes found these sessions lacking in practicality or relevance to the student affairs experience. Lisa stated, "I've never been to a workshop or training around this that I actually found particularly useful. It feels like it's kind of like

prepackaged in a box approach to thinking about these things.” Furthermore, Amber stated,

I may choose to go to a session about it [conflict and supervision]. But that’s at a conference, so it’s not necessarily grounded in my context. Um, I may be choosing to go to it, but my supervisor, coworkers or the people I supervise aren't necessarily also getting that exact same training.

When asked about resources used to overcome the lack of formalized training, Susan stated, “I’ve invested a lot of time and a lot of my professional development budget into attending those [conflict management and leadership] trainings over the last year and a half.” Susan reported seeking out external development programs after finding that the opportunities within Student Affairs organizations to be woefully absent or underdeveloped. Susan was not alone in this sentiment. Participants reported that training around relevant topics such as conflict management or supervision are few and often not as helpful as would be desired given the importance both competencies play within the profession. Meredith stated, “I never had any training from my graduate program, so for me I think I learned a lot by watching other supervisors that I’ve had but also other supervisors in the workplace that I could think of as mentors, and honestly a lot of examples of what not to do.”

Participants spoke about other informal resources beyond conference or workshop attendance for developing their conflict management skills within a supervisory context. The resources that were mentioned by the study participants included books, articles, blogs, social media communities especially those dedicated to student affairs work. “I’ve honestly learned a lot reading the student affairs Facebook page. I really feel like, you

know, that just the ways in which people talk about their experiences, either how they reacted to their supervisors or the folks in the hierarchy above them or folks who bring their concerns to the page and sort of crowd source responses,” said Stella.

When asked, ‘what methods or modes they would recommend for training conflict management skills to mid-managers,’ participants identified the following:

1. use of real-life case studies or scenarios;
2. multimedia presentations;
3. use of pop culture references or examples;
4. creation of round table spaces to share stories that would offer solution; and
5. opportunities for role play and reflection.

While several participants hated the idea of role play, they were also quick to admit that the method allowed workshop attendees to identify ways in which they might address a certain issue without disclosing their institution or specific individuals within the conflict example.

Impact of On-the-job Experiences

While research questions two and three provide an ideal opportunity to discuss this in depth, several participants highlighted sentiments of feeling unprepared for the conflicts that they might face as mid-managers while also contending with the underdeveloped conflict management skills reflected in their colleagues. On-the-job development in this study refer to moments in the participant’s day-to-day experiences that provide informal insights on productive or maladaptive ways to manage conflict. As per Table 3, there were five subthemes in this section, including a culture of conflict

avoidance, creation of toxic environments, focus on relationships over skills development, unproductive communication and demographics (such as race and gender) do matter. Susan affirmed, “the negative experiences [in conflict] I had from some supervisors definitely impacted me.” It is important to highlight these on-the-job experiences, both positive and negative, which underscored the ways mid-managers developed or sharpened their conflict skills. Due to the complexity and multi-layered nature of conflict, it is important to acknowledge that some of these experiences of skill development and skill implementation or usage may be intertwined or not easily separated.

Culture of avoidance. Several participants highlighted their personal experiences with navigating people and environments engaged in conflict avoidant behaviors. Karen shared the following impact of watching a colleague navigate a conflict avoidant environment:

This past summer we had 10 vacancies, which is a lot in our very small division. It was really a result of a series of conflict avoidance and conflict mismanagement. An individual was reported to HR multiple times during the time that they were here, and HR would address the situation because HR has to. However, our supervisor never once approached the person or put them on a performance plan or gave, any sort of feedback and just avoided it. The result was that that person felt unsupported, really challenged professionally because the supervisor wasn't supportive, but also really it felt like everyone on campus was out to get them so they left. And it's unfortunate because that person was very skilled in their field and did a really good job and left a huge gaping hole when they left.

In this example, the unit lost a key member because the supervisor relinquished the opportunity to provide key performance feedback. While Karen was not specific about

why this individual was reported to HR, it was clear in her tone and demeanor that perhaps the concerns were repairable and not a circumstance that could performance or behaviors that could not be cured.

Some participants even openly reflected on the role they played in avoiding conflicts even in moments where the conflict was uncertain. Bailey, for example, discussed her experience with navigating a situation on her staff team that she described as ‘weird bullying behavior’ within a ‘dysfunctional family environment.’ When asked to reflect back on the experience, Bailey stated, “looking back now, I should have addressed that sooner. I tried to pick my battles, but I just avoided it. I was like, that was just too weird and I don't exactly know how. I don't exactly have a script for that.”

In reflecting on the lessons she learned after attempting to avoid a conflict situation, Adah shared the following:

I was conflict avoidant and really made me think a lot about how I perpetuated this conflict by not addressing it. That’s something I'm really conscious of now. If I have a conflict that I should be addressing it or if I think that so and so thinks this, I should quit making assumptions about what other people are thinking or trying to do or intending because that's me writing my own story onto them, which is almost never right.

Lucia offers this important charge for Student Affairs practitioners:

When I think of student affairs, it's one of those things where every day there's going to be a conflict and how you navigate through is going to make the difference between the professional that really is willing to step up and take ownership of their own actions and sort of hold others accountable and all that. So I, I think that it's inevitable to face conflict. I think those who know how to face it confidently succeed more than those who sort of shy away or find themselves always trying to avoid conflict.

The navigation of conflict avoidant environments can be challenging for mid-manager. While they hold leadership roles, they may be supervised by individuals in upper management who have underdeveloped skills or are also conflict avoidant. This cycle of avoidance may lead to toxic environments which came up multiple times throughout several of the participant interviews in this study. For some participants, such as Stella and Lisa for example, it resulted in them making the decision to remove themselves from this environment.

Creation of toxic environments and focus on relationships over skills

development. Two subthemes are addressed in this section: toxic environments and focus on relationships over skills development. These two themes will be discussed together as the summary of participant experiences often reflected that they went hand-in-hand. Toxic environments are defined as work environments in which team members are navigating both political and interpersonal dynamics in maladaptive ways which may cause distrust, diminish collaboration, and derail efforts to achieve shared goals. Focus on relationships over skills development seems contrary to what may occur in a toxic environment. However, the examples provided by participants, highlighted ways in which colleagues or those in supervisory roles sacrificed developmental moment for “being liked.” Navigating conflict can be difficult especially in environments that are conflict adverse and most focused on relationship over resolution. In departments that might consider themselves ‘familial’ environments, conflict can be seen as even more detrimental to the harmony and relationships one hopes to retain. This was one more theme highlighted in the study participant experiences. As mentioned earlier in the

chapter, Student Affairs roles and functions often include long hours, close, and extended work in close environments. This blurred line between professional and personal relationships may blind Student Affairs practitioners from recognizing the creation of toxic environments, the unwillingness to address conflict or maladaptive behaviors due to the focus on relationships. Grace stated, “I work with individuals where the personal relationship was more important than the professional work.”

Study participants shared frustrations with managing or experiencing toxic environments and individuals. Stella, for example, inherited a department that was already experiencing a high level of dysfunction. While she pursued opportunities to receive managerial coaching, the causes of the conflict were long standing with deep unaddressed roots. Stella stated, “at the time I was spending so much time on conflict management that the work wasn’t getting done, and that was reflecting continuously reflecting poorly on the department I was supposed to be running.”

In Stella’s case, this was a departmental-level issue. For some participants, like Lisa, the concerns could be narrowed to one or two individuals. Lisa shared the following while reflecting on her experience:

I had an employee once who, like really wanted to be toxic, if that makes sense. When you’re talking to someone about conflict and you want them to think about the impact on themselves, on the team, on their work and you have someone who genuinely doesn’t care about any of that, which was what I was experiencing with one employee. I still don’t know how I would address that meaningfully.

Lisa was not alone in feeling unprepared to address interpersonal conflicts that went beyond what might be deemed as performance concerns. For example, Amber reflected on her experience of inheriting a new staff member after two units merged:

I'm very different than her former supervisor and so it was a huge shift in expectations and office culture. I tried to just let her have time. I gave her my expectations that I would give a new employee I'm onboarding, but she just continued to not meet expectations in very small ways. It didn't feel like something I needed to formally document. It wasn't egregious errors. It was often a lot of little office cultural things, it didn't seem like it was something worth talking to her about because they were minor.

After allowing small or tiny things to build up over months, Amber stated, "my fear had been of hurting her feelings early on and making her feel more outside of the team when really that the fear only grew because for months she outside of the team and I didn't know why."

Communication: Unproductive. Participants described working in hostile environments which colleagues felt comfortable engaging in aggressive, demeaning, and unproductive communication. The conversations were no longer about solving 'the problem,' but instead about winning the argument. Karen stated,

I'm happy to have conversation. I'm happy to engage as long as people want, what I don't like . . . I do not enjoy debates, I don't enjoy that, that sort of environment. If I get this sense that someone is going to turn it into a debate and less of a conversation, to me, there's a pretty big difference between the two. I tend to shut down and then I just, I listen, but then I don't participate, and so I just don't do well in that sort of environment. I also don't do well with someone who's really super aggressive.

Interdepartmental conflicts provided another crop of conflicts due to unproductive communication. In describing her experience with unproductive communication, Susan shared the challenges that her department had while working with another unit to complete a core job function:

I started hearing from people that the director was being really demanding and coming back at us like we didn't do anything to try and help them or meet them part way. The director started coming to me saying that they feel so betrayed, why aren't they talking to me about what is happening? And ultimately they just kept going back and forth. They don't meet in person, they do everything over email. It's just not effective or helpful. And, yeah, just a conflict that did not end well.

In her reflection of an interdepartmental conflict, Amber stated the following:

I had a staff member who was in a conflict with a campus partner and they didn't have the bigger picture of what was going on in that office. And so just tried to recognize that difference of information, shared what I can to at least remove some of the fear that's like, okay, you feel this way. I feel that way. Ultimately, it's defining who the decision maker is, if it's me, if it's them, if it's neither of us.

In some cases, the unproductive communication was done in public settings such as the example shared by Alex and discussed later in this chapter. Meredith also offered an example in which her department head publicly criticized the work of a colleague representing their unit as a member of a University committee. Despite many attempts to include the director in the proposal review process, the colleague was left to forge ahead with the committee work, and was ultimately chastised publicly when the proposal was presented to the larger University community. The impact of this experience was felt by the individual as well as the rest of the department members. Meredith stated the following as she reflected on the departmental impact:

The interpersonal dynamics within the office were such that there was a lot of fear and a lot of just avoidance behavior happening and so people kind of developed these little pairs like, you know, dyads and triads to kind of just have their own little groups that they would talk to each other and feel like they had some trust there, but not in the larger team dynamic.

Meredith's example is extreme, but the participants more broadly shared the ways in which unproductive communication has hindered their overall experiences both in gaining productive skills as well as in protecting themselves in circumstances they may not be able to manage due to power differentials.

Finally, the semi-structured and phenomenological nature of the interview experience also provided participants the opportunity to reflect on their learning through difficult experiences. Grace offers this counter culture reflection:

I've tried to foster the relationship between our two departments because I understand that one of the people I supervise has two supervisors, and that could be a conflict in itself. I've been in that situation so I do try to make sure they are all part of the discussions I have as a group.

Meredith's years of professional experience and self-awareness has provided her the opportunity to share what she has learned in her reflection regarding her efforts in creating productive environments for communication:

I'm aware that members of my team have different communication styles. I'm very direct or try, you know, try to be very direct. There are some members of my team that are more indirect. I recognize that sometimes my directness might be a bit disarming for them so I try to think through, you know, bringing up something and saying, I don't want to talk about this right now. I want to talk about this in our one on one meetings or, and giving them some time to process and reflect.

The recognition and importance of differing perspectives brings us to the next subtheme in discussing the impact of on-the-job experiences. The participants in the study highlighted moments in which demographics of one or both parties were relevant in the navigation of the conflict or in their pursuit of skill building.

Demographics matter. While mentorship in skills development seemed to be minimal in the overall experiences of the participants in the study, several highlighted the proactive ways in which they sought mentorships or paid keen attention to leaders that reflected their identities. The demographic categories that were most often reflected on in this study were race and sex. Grace shared the following in her reflection of her skills development:

As a black woman seeing another black woman do that [manage conflict] in that type of [political] space, it was something I definitely realize I took for granted. She's probably the main person I learned from and still continue to learn, because we now do similar jobs. She just amazed me, just watching her work in that space.

Grace was not alone in seeking or actively observing other women for skills development cues. Meredith stated, "the examples that come to mind for me are women who have been able to stay true to themselves, have integrity in what they do, communicate directly, and address issues or problems that they see." As a non-minority, Meredith also highlighted her efforts to actively observe and engage moments of development from women who were from underrepresented groups. Meredith stated the following:

I think also learning kind of what it means to be a leader and a woman leader and what that looks like and how that's even different for me or for some of my colleagues who are women of color in particular or who are, um, you know, navigating other maybe more marginalized identities and just watching what that

looks like in different context. I think has been really important in my development as a professional.

Research Questions 2 and 3 provide additional opportunity to unpack the ways in which demographics have mattered in the experiences of the mid-managers in the study.

Looking Beyond Student Affairs

Finally, due to the lack of formal training opportunities within the profession several participants reflected on their efforts to seek developmental opportunities outside of the field of student affairs. Semona summarized her efforts in exploring developmental avenues outside the field:

I've looked at the counseling world, health promotion and wellness areas especially because I think they have a good grasp on how to deal with conflict. These areas also provide an opportunity for reflection and self-care that comes with conflict that we always forget because we want to solve the problem, but not think about the solution or the root of the problem.

Lisa shared her development in facilitation skills through a Social Justice lens:

I think that as it relates to conflict, one specific thing that I bring to it that strongly impacts how I do it has to do with the fact that I develop and facilitate a whole lot of workshops for students, staff, faculty, administrators on Social Justice Education and Equity and, and sort of like an anti-oppression framework. And so in those spaces, I wouldn't call it conflict management, but there's a lot of ways in which, problematic questions or comments come up that have to be managed as far as like, thinking about impact and unpacking privilege and power and until there's a space in which I'm doing that all the time and the skills transfer very much into conflict management and other kinds of facilitated dialogues that I do in my role.

Other participants such as Grace and Lisa utilized areas such as restorative justice and court mediation trainings to bolster their skills in conflict management.

There was also an understanding that not all of the outside resources offered the appropriate answers. For example, Amber identified the use of business articles as a space for developing supervision acumen, but the conversation of providing financial incentives to boost staff morale was unrealistic in her fiscal reality.

Through the exploration of Research Question 1, the researcher learned that student affairs professionals within this participant group are gaining conflict management skills in mostly informal ways. While a small subset of this participant pool noted formal training through academic curricula, a majority identified their training as self-directed through conferences, workshops, articles, and books. Research Question 1 aimed to understand the ways in which conflict management skills were gained by Student Affairs mid-managers. Through the conceptual framework provided by the researcher in Chapter II, the study affirmed the multiple ways in which mid-managers acquired skills: formally through degree and certificate programs as well as informally via on-the-job experiences and professional development.

Skill Utilization in the Real and Ideal

Research Question 2: How have these skills been utilized in their role as mid-managers?

Research Question 3: What is the gap between the “real” state of affairs in higher education conflict management and the ideal as represented by conflict studies models and competency statements?

Research Question 2 highlighted ways in which these mid-managers in student affairs have found themselves utilizing the skills they had developed; one can now see

that skill development was less structured and consistent in pre-professional training than might be ideal. Thus, the findings related to Research Question 2 and Research Question 3 will be grouped together in this chapter due to the intertwined nature of participant reflections which were incapable of removing skills usage from the gaps in skills development. The researcher gained critical understanding of about the gaps in training than the ways that formal training fully informed the skills and implementation of the participants, with just a few exceptions. Rather than pointing to their previous opportunities for skill development (which were uneven in most cases) as the best way to understand their skill utilization, the researcher will use Rahim's (2001) Model of Organizational Conflict as a representation of "the ideal" to overlay the real-life conflict management scenarios as described by the participants in the study. Thus, the efforts at skill utilization described by the participants were on an earlier point in the developmental learning curve, and Research Question 2 provided the opportunity to return to the ACPA/NASPA competency statements discussion while making connections to models and concepts in the conflict management literature. This section will center the terms and definitions of the Rahim model followed by opportunities to highlight examples and narratives by the study participants. As such, the coding of the research data highlighted the themes shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Themes—Phenomenological Exercise (Rahim Model Terms)

Rahim Model Term	Study Participant Themes
Antecedent Conditions	Working within a culture of avoidance (institutionally and within a profession that tends to be conflict averse)
Process	Restorative Circle Creation and implementation of a supervision plan
Demographics	Race & Gender
Structural	Use of University Resources
Conflict	<p>The participants shared examples of dealing with the following conflicts within their role as mid-managers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Managing conflict both above and below their position ● Learning how to or failing to address staff personal behavior (versus staff work performance) ● Witnessing personal (verbal) attacks and criticism in public arenas ● Experiencing racist (and sexist) verbal comments by colleague(s) ● Inconsistent support from University resources (Human Resources) ● Poor conflict management causing the creation of toxic work environments, resulting in staff turnover ● Poor or unproductive lines of communication ● Focus on maintaining harmonious relationships versus addressing the conflict ● Addressing staff morale and staff dynamics ● Managing former colleagues ● Supporting or managing the aftermath of a decision they did not make

Table 4

Cont.

Rahim Model Term	Study Participant Themes
Behavioral Changes	Avoidance Impact of fear and paranoia
Structure Formation	To engage or not to engage
Decision Process	Fight or flight
Conflict Aftermath	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Toeing the line ● Managing Staff Turnover and Morale

Rahim's (2001) Model of Organizational Conflict

One of the elements of this study included a phenomenological exercise in which participants were asked to share an example of a time when conflict was managed well or not managed well. Since one of the aspects of informal training in Student Affairs work includes on-the-job learning, the researcher was keen to understand what examples these particular practitioners had made note of in their learning environments. The participants were asked to specifically describe examples of conflicts that they had observed, yet were not responsible for managing. The participants shared examples of dealing with the following conflicts within their role as mid-managers in Student Affairs:

- Managing conflict both above and below their position
- Learning how to or failing to address staff personal behavior (versus staff work performance)
- Witnessing personal (verbal) attacks and criticism in public arenas
- Experiencing racist (and sexist) verbal comments by colleague(s)

- Inconsistent support from University resources (Human Resources)
- Poor conflict management causing the creation of toxic work environments, resulting in staff turnover
- Poor or unproductive lines of communication
- Focus on maintaining harmonious relationships versus addressing the conflict
- Addressing staff morale and staff dynamics
- Supervising former colleagues
- Supporting or managing the aftermath of a decision they did not make

The researcher found Rahim's (2001) Model of Organizational Conflict to be an ideal model for analyzing these conflict examples within the participants learning experiences. Rahim's (2001) Model of Organizational Conflict illustrated in Figure 3 includes several considerations: antecedent conditions, process, demographics, structural, behavioral changes, structural formation, decision process and conflict aftermath. These will be described and defined in the subsequent paragraphs.

Sources or antecedent conditions are often utilized to classify conflict (Rahim, 2001). There are a number of sources that may provide a starting point of conflict such as the lack of congruency of values, goals, affective, substantive, tasks, etc. In Student Affairs, part of the antecedent conditions may include previous working relationships, which may include evening and weekend environments that don't adhere to normal workplace boundaries. For Student Affairs functions such as Residence Life, this work/life dynamic can be even more blurred as participants are often required to live on or near campus at various stages in their career thus minimizing the lack of physical

separation from work and home or private life. Participants also alluded to conflict aversion within the Student Affairs profession, which is often populated with “people pleasers” who have had little training in conflict management.

Process and structural are two approaches to the intervention of conflict (Rahim & Bonoma, 1979). The **process** focuses on managing the conflict in the most effective or efficient way by working to improve the party’s conflict management style. This improvement of the party’s conflict management style includes the ability to flex between multiple styles as warranted by the conflict at hand. Some processes within an organizational context include leadership, decision making, and communication. This process might include addressing the structural obstacles that hinder resolution. Process and structure must be integrated in order for the organizational goals to be accomplished. **Structural** refers to the stable arrangement of task, technological, and other factors that allow organizational members to work together effectively. Furthermore, the structural approach is focused on improving the organization’s effectiveness by considering relevant changes to its structural design, procedures, reward systems, and hierarchy.

Demographics such as race, gender, age, educational attainment can impact the conflict. Gender and race came up on several occasions within the reflection of participant stories. Race was highlighted by several participants and will be discussed in depth later in this chapter. As it relates to gender, Bailey shared the following reflection about her experiences with female identified mid-managers:

Conflict has been much more of an issue in my career as of late particularly between women. I think part of it is like there's only there might be only 10 of us in this row, right. But there's only one boss. I don't know if they're like gunning

for that job or what it is, but it's been much more vicious than I had ever experienced in any of my other previous jobs before.

All of these variables are influences prior to the conflict (see Rahim model on p. 42).

The model accounts for both **behavioral changes** and **structural formation** after the conflict has occurred (Rahim, 2001). These behavioral changes might be implicit or explicit, such as a change in attitude towards the other party or physically avoiding interaction. They may also be constructive responses or maladaptive responses to the conflict. **Structural formation** is the place in the aftermath of the conflict experience where one or both parties create 'rules of engagement' such as only interacting in public or when required, communicating only via electronic means or calling on pre-existing rules for interaction as members of the organization (in meetings, committee work, etc.). This is the place in which free exchange of information can be derailed resulting in potentially ineffective approaches to meeting organizational goals. On the other hand, one positive structural change post-conflict would be the creation of a grievance policy and a neutral party, such as an Ombudsman, responsible for hearing and investigating grievances.

The **decision process** in the model (Rahim, 2001) highlights the intensification of a conflict and what might be considered the 'conflict crossroads.' This is the space in which parties might call upon their problem-solving skills or find themselves at an impasse both attempting to dig in their heels for the 'win.' The conflict aftermath can be both positive or negative. Should the parties find ways to come to a win-win resolution, they may strengthen their ability to work together in the future with new skills and

knowledge from the experience. If an impasse is reached or one party utilizes their power to make a decision that the other has to accept, the aftermath may take a variety of less constructive forms. The lack of conflict management training and conflict aversion that may be common in Student Affairs, could make an impasse more likely than a successful resolution.

These multi-layered considerations in the Rahim (2001) model provide a clear reminder that the conflict should not be taken at face value as there are root causes that may create the perfect conditions for a conflict to escalate. The model not only explores the dynamics during the conflict moment, but also provides an opportunity to consider what led to the conflict and the ways in which perception impacts behavior and the parties' willingness to engage in both present and future conflicts. The perceptual distortion, as Rahim (2001) calls it, may cause parties to increase their tactics to win and decrease their interest in resolution pushing the disputants further apart. An appropriate next step in the process could be for supervisors to engage a neutral third party or consult the University's grievance policy. This might also be the moment in which both parties share independent feedback post-resolution about their experiences with the grievance process or policy. Policies are helpful, but they are strengthened when they are tested against real life experiences. This is one way in which process, as dictated by the grievance policy, or the structural, through the creation of a neutral party role could impact the overall conflict experience.

Furthermore, the Rahim's (2001) model highlights how the power dynamics between the conflict parties might impact behavior, decision process, and overall

outcome. The ‘decision process’ in the model especially in dyad conflicts may amplify the perceptual distortion experienced by subordinates as they become more keenly aware of their powerlessness. This is particularly challenging in organizations that lack formal grievance processes and procedures. The researcher hoped that the use of phenomenological inquiry would help to shed light on the real experiences of mid-managers and the circumstances they have had to utilize conflict management skills. The narratives provided by our participants highlight the gap between what “should be” and what is in terms of conflict management in Student Affairs. In the following paragraphs, the participants experiences, which emerged in the interviews and coding process, will be organized and presented via the categories of Rahim’s (2001) model.

Conflict Avoidant Culture (Antecedent Conditions)

Several participants noted a “culture of avoidance” within the field of student affairs. Even when attempting to address the situation head on, such as in Grace’s example mentioned earlier, mid-managers are occupying spaces that have nurtured avoidant behaviors in colleagues and at higher levels within the organization. Karen highlights this culture of avoidance within student affairs:

The first thing that comes to mind is a bit cynical, but it’s avoidance. I think in any industry you’re going to have the need to manage conflict. In student affairs, I think because we’re so people focused that we just want to make everyone happy and feel good and sometimes that means we don’t want to address the conflict that arises.

Lisa highlighted this avoidance culture and the potential impact on student learning and development:

In my experience within student affairs, I've found that there's a culture of avoidance which creates toxicity. I think until we intentionally start naming and addressing our own baggage, how do we engage students in thinking about how they should show up when we show up in problematic ways.

It is in these occurrences of being forced to ignore or avoid conflict moments that mid-managers reported experiencing the most toxic environments. What was clear in participant stories was that despite any level of perceived confidence in managing conflict situations, they were reporting stories of being encouraged to avoid or ignore conflict moments, being impacted by, having to respond to or deal with the ill-managed conflict or toxic environments created by others. Lisa stated,

I spent four years saying this in every space I could before I left my last institution and then it was clear no one wanted to hear it. The toxicity just kept amplifying and it's like, I don't even know what to do with that. Like you're well aware of your own crap and you're just gonna keep letting it get worse.

Lisa ultimately made the decision to leave her institution after her many attempts to diminish the culture of avoidance she witnessed.

One of Lucia's reflections offered the ideal as she considered her response to a conflict moment with a fellow committee member:

I asked her to come visit me in my office and I told her, I want to hear from you about what's going on. She shared with me on sort of where she felt that I was being too flexible or too lenient. So I sort of asked like, okay, so then let's look at the bigger picture. Where do you want to step up? Where do you think that we could improve?

This counter culture reflection highlights the rich product of Lucia's formalized training, maturity, and attention to the multidimensional view of conflict.

Restorative Circle (Process)

As discussed earlier in the chapter, **process** focuses on managing the conflict in the most effective or efficient way by working to improve the party's conflict management style. Some processes within an organizational context include leadership, decision making, and communication. This process engagement might include addressing the structural obstacles that hinder resolution.

Process can be formal or informal with the overarching goal of addressing the conflict at hand as well as the root causes of the conflict. While reflecting on her experience as a mid-manager, Lisa, discussed an experience in which she was able to participate in an impromptu restorative circle during a staff retreat which included all levels of University leadership as well as the Vice Provost. Lisa stated,

It was just a hot mess of dysfunction to be perfectly honest. In that space a number of us were trying to name that to try to create space where we really wanted to process and dig into that. There was a facilitator who was absolutely terrible and at one point we just said, this is not helping us. We had another person who had a lot of training, who was a new employee that has a lot of training around restorative justice and ended up kind of leading an impromptu restorative circle with everyone in the room. That was a really powerful experience where for the first time in the entire time I'd worked at the institution, people were saying that they felt heard and affirmed and what their experience was of conflict and tension.

Lisa was not alone in her experience with participating in a similar process that allowed individuals to share concerns openly. Adah shared her observation of a conflict that was managed well or 'good enough' which required multiple meetings with all parties involved. Adah stated,

Nobody came in saying that this was going to be an overnight fix. I think that people recalibrated their expectations of each other, which was part of the problem. I think there were some expectations that were out of line and that people weren't all on the same page. There were also lots of like personal relationships and professional relationships that were kind of getting wires crossed and I think that was one of the first things that they addressed, which was really good.

Amber shared her reflection of watching as a colleague navigated political waters while attempting to fulfill a task-oriented goal. The colleague engaged their facilitation and negotiation skills to create buy-in for both the new product that was being utilized as well as the effort that would be required to create protocols for use. As a result of the colleague's efforts, Amber stated, "we came back together and I felt like because she represented everyone's concerns and hopes for this new tool, it helped the conversation gets started. The other leaders were able to push forward."

While participants recognized that the restorative circle experience or other mediation moments would not solve the concern overnight, it brought hope for what might come. Lisa, for example, stated the following:

That [restorative circle] laid the groundwork for a lot of follow-up smaller circles that occurred later, and so I think the supervisors recognized that they can't avoid engaging with us any longer. We had to create a space for people to air this and talk through. It helped. I think people feel like we were finally going to address it and figure out a way to move forward collectively.

Race/Ethnicity and Gender (Demographics)

Race/ethnicity was a relevant demographic factor for several of the examples provided by participants. Two participants (Grace and Semona) recounted experiences of having their racial identities attacked and feeling unsupported or unprotected by their

supervisors and ultimately their institutions. In one example provided by Grace, a noose was found on campus on the statue of the institution's first black student. Grace stated, "One year, there was a lot of things going on that were related to identities being attacked and people felt uncomfortable, not feeling safe and in particular staff of color. We were feeling unsupported by this particular supervisor because they would never address things that were happening right in front of them at staff meeting." She later highlighted that no one in her department leadership checked in with the staff, not even with the staff of color that might be most impacted by the national context and a real example of racial tensions on their campus. She brought up the topic in a staff meeting, but was ignored by her supervisor who had on multiple occasions declared his dislike of conflict.

In another example, Semona shared her experience with being called a racially derogatory term by a White male colleague in public on multiple occasions 'to deride, to describe, or to bring attention to me in a room. It was never one-on-one. It was always in audience of others,' stated Semona. When asked to discuss the cost, Semona stated, "the cost of that was my own mental stability at the job as well as my performance because I was just struggling to work there every day because it was an everyday occurrence. It was a hostile working environment."

As highlighted by Rahim's (2001) model, demographics of the parties involved are to be considered in order to understand the whole picture. The examples provided by both Grace and Semona underscore the connection of identity, specifically race, as part of the whole. Furthermore, the exploration of the examples provided by Grace and Semona should not be separated from the backdrop of the national and local context which

included multiple examples of unarmed Black or African American people being killed, usually at the hands of law enforcement. This larger context (campus, community, state, region, country) can amplify the feelings of an individual in a conflict as it becomes part of a greater experience of trauma, retraumatization, and the increase of racial battle fatigue. This particular time frame in the national stage was the backdrop to Grace's experience on her campus.

According to WBUR (2016, July 11), this is a timeline of the shooting cases that gained notoriety in recent years:

- Eric Garner (July 17, 2014) - Staten Island, NY (Age at death - 43)
- Michael Brown (August 9, 2014) - Ferguson, MO (Age at death - 18)
- Laquan McDonald (October 20, 2014) - Chicago, IL (Age at death - 17)
- Tamir Rice (November 23, 2014) - Cleveland, OH (Age at death - 12)
- Walter Scott (April 4, 2015) - North Charleston, SC (Age at death - 50)
- Freddie Gray (April 12, 2015) - Baltimore, MD (Age at death - 25)

It should also be noted that on June 17, 2015 Dylann Roof claimed the lives of nine Black parishioners at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina:

- Horowitz, Corasaniti, and Southall (2018), January 19, 2018
- Sandra Bland (July 10, 2015) - Prairie View, TX (Age at death – 28)
- Alton Sterling (July 5, 2016) - Baton Rouge, LA (Age at death – 37)
- Philando Castile (July 6, 2016) - Falcon Heights, MN (Age at death – 32)

WBUR (2016).

It is important to note that the list above is not an exhaustive one and could not possibly represent the numerous lives lost, but used as a starting point to highlight the national narrative and the potential impact on individuals of color. In several of these deaths, the police officers were never charged and were simply placed on administrative leave. Campus communities are not immune to the impact of these events, which can cause stress and frustration in the student body that Student Affairs staff members are often called upon to address in addition to their everyday work. For staff of color working in Student Affairs, this re-traumatization often goes unaddressed or unacknowledged as they are called to support, respond to and empathize with students while diminishing the personal impact of the incident.

Another participant, Stella, talked about “dealing with conflict related to bullying based on identity.” While the researcher was unable to gather more specific details associated with the scenario, Stella shared the following insight:

It [conflict] also seemed to be about folks’ trauma that they were bringing into the workplace. Conflict almost as a manifestation of something much deeper like trauma where it’s not just that folks have different opinions but that their sort of reactions to each other are based in like traumatic responses trigger that conflict on a more surface level. So yeah, we’re fighting about whether or not we should put out cookies, but it’s not the cookies that matter, it’s like the deep trauma that is causing someone to feel like any action the other person takes is an assault on their personhood.

As a woman of color, Lucia highlighted her sensitivity of perception as she considered her response to a conflict moment with a fellow committee member:

Two women of color bickering in a committee meeting, we didn’t need it. It was unnecessary. I think in that way I could have walked away or I could have gotten

her in trouble because I could have also gone to her supervisor and said she's being inappropriate and unprofessional and they would have listened to me. But, I also knew that if I did that I was going to cut opportunities from her moving forward that I just was not willing to do because you quickly get cut for opportunities when someone hears you're not professional.

Conflict is not one dimensional, thus the model recognizes the multidimensionality of the human experience. As women of color, Grace and Semona were seeing the devaluing of Black and Brown lives both on the national stage as well as within their campus experiences.

Use of University Resources (Structural)

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, **structural** refers to the stable arrangement of task, technological, and other factors that allow organizational members to work together effectively. The structural approach is focused on improving the organization's effectiveness by considering relevant changes to its structural design, procedures, reward systems, and hierarchy. This "avoidance culture" as discussed in the antecedent conditions signifies the need for systems and structures that would assist in providing healthy support for addressing conflict situations. Chapter II highlighted formalized structures for reporting or working through grievances such as through the Ombudsman's office. Some participants shared their experiences with attempting to address their conflict challenges through formalized challenges such as their Ombudsman or via Human Resources.

The ideal, as discussed by several conflict models, identifies a clear and formal process for addressing grievances should one of both parties find themselves unable to skillfully address concerns. This structural university resources should be in place and

known before conflicts arise, and also utilized when conflicts do occur. Participants identified external departments such as human resources and University Ombudsman reporting drastic experiences with each resource. All of the participants who utilized human resources found that this approach was less helpful due to the perceived punitive responses that were focused on discipline and compliance over development. When asked about her experience with her Human Resources department, Lisa exclaimed, “it was a very one size fits all bureaucratic conversation versus a let's talk about specific individuals. And so it was very impersonal and didn't help.” Additionally, Bailey recounts her experience while attending a training session facilitated by Human Resources colleagues after experiencing a point of conflict during the question and answer segment:

It was a good legitimate question [asked] of one of the human resources persons in the workshop and well the human resources person did not like being questioned. It was not a disrespectful question, but they did not like being questioned. And so they really shut it down in a disrespectful way, like in a how dare you sort of thing.

These two examples highlight moments in which the resources that were expected to be skilled in addressing conflict scenarios fell short and did more harm. Bailey stated “goodwill was lost and it remains lost, you know, like that person is no longer credible to many of the people that were in the room at that time.” On the contrary, Adah reported much success and support in the utilization of her Ombudsman office. Adah said,

I actually ended up working with the ombuds office, which until then I don't know if I ever really knew what the ombud did, but they were, that was one of the

best things I ever did. I had no idea how instrumental they can be in helping solve complex and they were fantastic.

While the results for utilizing these University resources were mixed, several participants identified Human Resources as one University resource they might consider using, if necessary, for addressing a conflict. Participant responses also identified trends in what might be considered typical reactions during conflict moments—fight or flight. In some of the imaginative inquiry scenarios provided, participants highlighted challenging moments in which they either made these decisions or observed others ultimately make the choice to fight or flight. It is important to note that participants did not provide clarity on whether the decision to depart (or flight) was made after unsuccessful experiences with University resources. However, the impact of staff turnover was identified as a real cost of conflict by several participants in their reflection and requires further discussion.

Examples of Conflicts in Student Affairs

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, participants shared examples of dealing with the specific conflicts within their role as mid-managers. These examples were discussed and highlighted throughout the review of Research Questions 2 and 3. As noted in Table 1, conflicts cited by participants included:

- Managing conflict both above and below their position
- Learning how to or failing to address staff personal behavior (versus staff work performance)
- Witnessing personal (verbal) attacks and criticism in public arenas
- Experiencing racist (and sexist) verbal comments by colleague(s)

- Inconsistent support from University resources (Human Resources)
- Poor conflict management causing the creation of toxic work environments, resulting in staff turnover
- Poor or unproductive lines of communication
- Focus on maintaining harmonious relationships versus addressing the conflict
- Addressing staff morale and staff dynamics
- Managing former colleagues
- Supporting or managing the aftermath of a decision they did not make

These examples of conflicts include both emotionally charged experiences (e.g., racism and personal attacks) and structurally difficult situations (e.g., managing the aftermath, addressing staff dynamics). While those types of conflicts could be experienced in almost any workplace, the participants pointed to specific aspects of being a mid-manager in the Student Affairs workplace (e.g., working within an avoidance culture, focus on relationship, etc.) that made these examples harder to manage.

Interpersonal Behavior Changes/Structural Formation

A conflict moment can impact the behaviors of both parties as well as the individuals around them. In describing one of the more tenuous conflict moments which involved two members of their leadership yelling at each other during a staff meeting, Alex stated, “the director of residence life ended up leaving the room and it was awkwardly danced around for the next few weeks.” One of the parties ultimately left the University, but the impact of that moment was pivotal for all that were present and those that would quickly become aware of it.

As noted by Meredith's reflection earlier in the chapter, behavior change such as the ways in which teams engage with each other might be as a result of fear or paranoia.

Meredith stated,

If this [public rebuke] could happen to this member of our team, then it could happen to any of us and not really knowing what's being said about you behind your back. If this is going to be done for one member of the seemingly done for anyone. I think the sense of like, paranoia, I think also this sense that, you never quite knew. You were never quite sure like what might happen in public and just to kind of brace yourself for that.

While these participants may have aimed to protect themselves from the other party, their behavior changes did not always have the most effective results. Adah shared her conflict experience after a friend and colleague 'called her out' for ignoring the rift. Adah stated, "I think I wasn't being as upfront as I needed to be and I also was making assumptions about what she thought and I think she was making assumptions about I thought and that really damaged our relationship."

As a reminder, **structural formation** is the place in the conflict experience where one or both parties create 'rules of engagement' for their interaction. Semona reflected on her own experiences and shared, "I had to separate myself and really advocate to not have time in the office when that person was around because I could not get work done."

While she made efforts to engage her immediate supervisor and ultimately their department head, there was no response and the individual left the institution on their own with no consequence or acknowledgement of wrongdoing. This lack of support and acknowledgment by upper leadership caused Semona to make her own 'rules of engagement' (or nonengagement).

Structural formation can also aid in learning new ways to engage. In one example, Alex shared a reflection of his efforts to coach a young staff member through a conflict laden electronic interaction with another staff member. When the young staffer again found himself in the same situation, he told Alex,

I intentionally stopped the exchange and I went and talked to them. I have found that the verbal exchange is the more productive way to communicate with him. So whether I pick up the phone or I go see the individual in person, that's the way we intend to work it out rather than just exchange emails.

Alex's formal training, comfort in addressing conflict, and supporting young staff in their development shows the immediate impact of formalized conflict management skills.

Fight or Flight (Decision Process)

Participants in the study also shared stories of personally making the 'flight' decision from their jobs or watching others leave untenable situations due to conflict. For practitioners in Residence Life, this decision can be even more challenging as their employment is often tied to where they live, their community of support, and in some cases their social life. When asked about the culture of avoidance as reflected in student affairs and the impact of conflict scenarios she experienced, Grace stated, "it showed me that avoidance does not breed harmony. The conflict was never addressed and it only leaves individuals feeling unsupported until they eventually leave."

Stella shared her inheritance of a department that had been riddled with conflict. Her supervisor hoped that her transition from an academic department would provide the opportunity for a clean slate for her as well as for the full-time staff. Unfortunately, this was not the case as Stella shared pointedly:

I had been in the job for a couple of years. I was getting hives every day, like from stress. I just wasn't in a place where I could deal with it. Um, and so while the cost was I left the job, I mean, it wasn't that only one conflict that sent me out. But it was that type of conflict over and over where no one trusted each other and I had no one to go to because I couldn't trust anyone and everyone was talking behind each other's backs and I was like, this place is not a place I can be in anymore. And so maybe I was the person to turn that department around, but I wasn't going to stay there long enough to figure that out.

Stella made the ultimate decision to remove herself from a conflict scenario that seemed beyond her control while acknowledging the real impact had she continued to remain in place.

As mentioned in Chapter II, extensive and extended conflict can have multi-layered impact on those experiencing it. Decision making is a key crossroads in conflict situations, regardless of who makes the decision and how the decision is made.

Participants engaged in making other decisions such as how they might manage their own positional authority to create productive environments for communication. They also shared the decision to actively create supervision statements that summarized how their team would navigate conflict in the future. Additionally, some participants articulated moments in which they made the decision to avoid the conflict altogether.

Toeing the Line, Managing Staff Turnover and Morale (Conflict Aftermath)

The conflict aftermath is the residual effect of the resolution or minimization of conflict. As noted earlier, the conflict aftermath can be both positive or negative. It is the direct result of the impact the conflict will have on the immediate parties. Filley (1975) calls it the "legacy left by conflict affecting future relations and attitudes toward each other" (p. 17). Participants shared their struggles with identifying examples of conflict

scenarios being managed *well*. Many could most easily identify scenarios where conflict was managed so poorly the conflict aftermath resulted in staff departure, low morale, and even verbal altercations. In describing the aftermath of one such example, Adah shared the following:

I think the cost was some of the integrity of the department. I think the reputation, like honestly I would have a hard time telling people they should go work there now and that was years ago and I wasn't even the one who was impacted, but I saw the way that it played out and I think that it wasn't even ultimately about the decision that was made. It was about the *way* it was made. And that's hard too because I could see why they were doing that and I think some of the problems were just that it wasn't done well. Um, and with care and with empathy and I think that they still are struggling with how to recruit and retain people and morale issues because that is still lingering there.

Participants struggled to manage the aftermath of decisions that were either not theirs or not theirs to make. In some circumstances, participants were feeling the need to “toe the line” following decisions that impacted them or their staff. Toeing the line in this study refers to the mid-manager’s attempt to balance the expectations of their supervisor or upper administration, while also supporting the impacted staff. It was clear that support did not always come in the form of changing the decision, but often in the form of helping the staff to understand and navigate the impact of the decision. Adah, for example, was left to manage and motivate 15 full-time staff members for several months despite being informed in March that their contracts were ending in May. Adah shared her struggles with keeping the staff motivated, remaining impartial, while also feeling complete empathy for her team and the circumstances they were now in that were outside of their control. She reflected a sense of “caught in the middle” between good people, a

challenging decision, and poorly executed communication plan by the leadership of her department.

Semona reflected on her own development in managing post-conflict decisions that impacted her staff. She stated the following in response to navigating the aftermath of those post-conflict decisions:

I think for me it's still a work in progress. I own a lot of the decisions and the conflicts that my staff may have with me. I own my choices and where the choice may not have been mine, but maybe someone above me made the choice. I don't say, 'oh, so the boss told me to do this and that's why we have to do this.' It's more like 'this is what it has to be, but let me walk you through the larger understanding of these choices.'

For Semona and other mid-managers, there was a clear understanding that they are not always in the place to make the decision, but they are most often responsible for managing the impact the decisions might make on the people they supervise.

Professional Association Competencies: Gap between Ideal and Reality

The ACPA/NASPA competencies anchored the researcher's exploration into the topic of conflict management acquisition and usage, and represent one version of the "ideals" of conflict management. The ACPA/NASPA outcomes identified for conflict resolution range from the individual's ability to describe the premises that underlie conflict and the constructs utilized for facilitating conflict resolution, to managing and facilitating conflict at a level of complexity where multiple entities are often in disagreement with each other and lead groups to effective fair resolution (ACPA/NASPA, 2015).

The 14 participants in this research ranged in formal and informal training, academic backgrounds, years of experience, and functional areas. However, nine of the 14 earned master's degrees in programs that could be seen as student affairs relevant (Counseling, College Student Affairs, Higher Education, etc.) Two of the nine master's degree earners (Lucia and Alex) reflected formalized experience in conflict. Grace's PhD program reflected this formal academic training. Within the context of this particular participant pool, it seems that those with master's degrees in student affairs relevant were not more prepared in managing conflict scenarios than their non-student affairs programs. The exceptions seemed to be Lucia, Alex and Grace who reflected a range of experiences that articulated their formal training and their own personal growth in their skills. Lucia stated,

I accepted a postgraduate role at an institution and with a residence life department that made you write a four-page supervisory plan. I continuously revisit that every time I go into a new role to sort of see like, okay, based on my past experience now, what is different from that initial post Grad, fresh out of Grad school, enthusiastic about everything.

Lucia's supervisory plan also included expectations of her staff and how conflict would be addressed.

While individuals like Lucia were also clear to highlight that their responses were not always perfect, their years of working experience in addition to formalized training provided rich moments and opportunity to not only reflect on their own theory to practice moments, but produced the chance to teach along the way. Lucia emphasized this in her reflection:

I have gotten into a place where I will break down conflict on like a step one basis. So for our student staff this past semester, I did a half hour session and it was just identifying your conflict style. That was it. And I feel like that is where you plant the seed and little by little you start building that skill and folks, you start getting them to a place where it's like, oh, you know what, I want to learn how to do this better.

Other participants like Karen, Lisa and Jennifer reflected on their own chances for learning and teaching where the opportunity presented itself. While the conflict might not directly be theirs to manage, they have identified ways to coach their staff to have or to facilitate difficult conversations in an effort to increase skill building on their team. Lisa stated, "I've actually helped talk staff through strategies for dealing with conflict, like with students that they're helping support or organizations they are working with or with other teams." Both participants confirmed that they have participated in informal training opportunities such as workshops and conferences, but have continued to remain aware of and motivated to develop their skills and those of their team. "It's more about helping them develop those skills to manage the conflict. Because if I don't force them to do that, then they're going to be able to skirt it and walk around it. And avoided forever and that's not going to help them in the future," stated Karen.

This study explored the development and utilization of conflict management skills in student affairs mid-managers. The study was guided by the following three research questions:

1. How have conflict management skills been developed (graduate programs, workshops/conferences, on-the-job experiences) by mid-managers in student affairs?

2. How have these skills been utilized in their role as mid-managers? And
3. What is the gap between the “real” state of affairs in higher education conflict management and the ideal as represented by conflict studies models and competency statements offered by Student Affairs related professional organizations?

The use of a phenomenological method provided the opportunity to center participant narratives around conflict management skills acquisition and usage in their experiences as mid-managers in student affairs. The chapter aimed to highlight how skills were being acquired and the scenarios in which student affairs mid-managers found themselves utilizing these skill sets. In Chapter V the researcher offers discussion, implications for practice, and identify opportunities for future research.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This final chapter begins with the purpose of the study and reminder of the associated research questions. The chapter continues with highlighting the resulting conclusions, interpretations, implications drawn from the findings of the phenomenological study of 14 student affairs mid-managers. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future study.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of the study was to understand the acquisition and utilization of conflict management skills by student affairs mid-managers. The specific research questions for the study were:

1. How have conflict management skills been developed (graduate programs, workshops/conferences, on-the-job experiences) by mid-managers in student affairs?
2. How have these skills been utilized in their role as mid-managers?
3. What is the gap between the “real” state of affairs in higher education conflict management and the ideal as represented by conflict studies models and competency statements offered by Student Affairs related professional organizations?

The phenomenological nature of the study aimed to gather the stories and experiences that would highlight the real state of the conflict management skills of mid-managers within the field of student affairs as reflected by the selected participants. Furthermore, the researcher sought to move beyond these experiences to offer insight for practice and future research.

Theoretical Framework

The conceptual framework for this study centered on the examination of the potential pathways for attaining conflict management skills and the utilization of those skills within the context of supervision in higher education and visualized in Figure 1. Some of those pathways for consideration included formal learning (i.e., degree programs), while others (e.g., workshops, conferences, and on-the-job experiences) utilized informal learning. Through the exploration of participant experience of conflict management in the student affairs workplace, this study aimed to understand the experience of conflict management skills attainment and utilization by mid-managers and the impact on the department or organization.

Summary of Findings

The findings of the current study are consistent with the literature reviewed in Chapter II in that participants reflected the importance of conflict management and supervision as professional competencies, while experiencing a heightened awareness of their lack of preparation. The three research questions in this study were intended to focus on conflict management skills acquisition and utilization by mid-managers in student affairs. The main themes that were highlighted in participant experiences in

response to Research Question 1 were (a) lack of formal training both as individuals and as a profession; (b) individual responsibility in the development of skills; (c) the impact of on-the-job experiences (as a result of insufficient training); and (d) the active exploration of training opportunities outside of the field of student affairs.

The scenarios participants found themselves utilizing their conflict management skills in response to Research Question 2 were (a) managing conflict both above and below; (b) learning how to or failing to address staff behavior (versus staff performance); (c) witnessing personal (verbal) attacks and criticism in public arenas; (d) experiencing racist (and sexist) verbal comments by colleague(s); (e) inconsistent support from University resources (Human Resources); (f) poor conflict management causing the creation of toxic environments resulting in staff turnover; (g) poor or unproductive lines of communication; (h) focus on maintaining harmonious relationships versus addressing the conflict; (i) addressing staff morale and staff dynamics; (j) supervising former colleagues; and (k) supporting or managing the aftermath of a decision they did not make.

In response to Research Question 3, it was important to reflect on the general tone which identified the lack of formal training and the burden placed on mid-managers to create their own professional development opportunities. Furthermore, mid-managers reflected on their use of University resources, such as Human Resources or Ombudsman, while engaging in conflict experiences. The results of these interactions were mixed, as reported by the participants, but it was relevant to recognize both their awareness of and experiences with these University resources. Chapter II identified the Ombudsman role as

one option for the inclusion of a formal grievance process. Every institution does not have an Ombudsman, but every institution does have a Human Resources department. The mixed reviews of the participants regarding their human resources experiences warrants attention as these are often the professionals hired to hear, investigate and respond to grievances.

The researcher sought to amplify the voices of participants in an effort to highlight the true experiences of mid-managers, the challenges they face as practitioners, and the important weight of conflict management as a professional competency. Despite the weight of this competency, the participants echoed the lack of preparation and the required effort on their parts to develop their own skills in this area. Furthermore, their narratives of watching others navigate conflict poorly impacted their overall skill development, utilization, and in some cases heightened avoidance behaviors within their work environments. The researcher experienced several insights during the process of completing this study that would be important for practitioners, both in senior level roles and mid-manager positions, to consider.

First, *active communication and listening matters*. Throughout the study, participants emphasized their observations and their experiences with poor communication and the impact it made on their overall work environment. In the most extreme examples of unhealthy communication as shared by Alex, Meredith, and Semon, the shock was experienced both on the individual level as well as within the team. The participants highlighted examples of hostile/aggressive, silent, and passive communication patterns. Conflict moments within the team exacerbated previously

damaged or ineffective communication structures within the work environment. The creation of a healthy team dynamic begins with the leader or supervisor and is supported by the individual members of the team. All members of this symbiotic relationship should be prepared to articulate and model healthy communication before, during, and after a conflict. Communication should offer an assertive, yet reasonable tone focused on mutually identified standards and goals. Communication and listening are also symbiotic and should work in tandem to create a healthy and trusting environment.

Mid-managers, upper administration, and Human Resource professionals should also model healthy civil discourse for entry level professionals. As noted by the participants in the study, the loss of goodwill after poorly managed conflict can cause a ripple effect around the institution and create moments of distrust, diminished desire to collaborate across departments, and challenges with meeting goals. The expectations expressed and modeled by the departmental leadership should include the support of feedback moments that are both formal or informal. Formal moments should include an opportunity for all parties to provide feedback about processes, environmental dynamics, challenges, and leadership. If the team has been successful at building trust among its members, the potential for formal feedback to take place in person might be easily feasible. Informal feedback moments might take place in one-on-ones, team meetings, or at the conclusion of a program, initiative, or process.

Second, *identities matter*. Several of the study participants named very specific examples in which identities were relevant to the conflict. First, Grace, Semona, and Stella provided examples of identities being attacked. Second, Meredith and Grace shared

moments where they sought out women leaders as opportunities to learn from individuals that reflected their identities. Third, Lucia, a woman of color, highlighted her conscious attention to the perception of others as she navigated a conflict with another woman of color. Grace and Semona shed light on the trauma and retraumatization of persons of color while navigating the world of work against the backdrop of tumultuous times on the national stage. It is imperative that colleagues holding non-marginalized identities recognize and believe that local and national headlines have the potential to cause trauma and fatigue for persons of color. As professionals called to support students in their development, often in their most challenging moments, one must also recognize the impact of actions despite the intentions.

Third, *actions matter, and words do, too*. While I was uncertain about what kinds of stories participants would share, I had no idea that they would be willing to entrust this researcher with some of the most challenging moments of their professional experience to date. It is disheartening to hear that the profession I fell in love with as an undergraduate student who was impacted by the care and support of professionals focused on my development, also includes individuals who have created harmful moments that lack cultural competency, enlightenment, and care the profession claims to espouse. The actions of some cannot be a reflection of all, but the ways in which our profession steps up to address the lack of formalized conflict management skills should impact these moments. The stigma associated with conflict ignores the potential benefit of successfully navigating conflict moments. Conflicts are a natural part of working with people. The

better the profession becomes at preparing professionals to expect to engage with conflict and be ready to do this work, the better we will be at supporting students and each other.

Structure *and* process matter. Study participants shared their experiences with toxic environments, navigating conflict within a profession focused on relationships over skills development, and feeling the impact of a culture of avoidance. According to De Wit et al. (2012), there are often three main types of conflict that are discussed: substantive (disagreement associated with performance, or tasks related to project or goals of an organization), task conflicts (disagreements regarding strategies, methods, and opinions) and affective (relational conflicts associated with differences of values, ideologies, preferences, attitudes, and temperaments). Of the three types, relationship conflict has been recognized as the most harmful (Jehn, 1995; Jehn & Bendersky, 2003). If relationship conflict is seen as the most harmful by conflict management experts, student affairs practitioners must be trained to successfully and productively address this type of conflict as well. Due to the often-blurred lines of professional and personal, this charge feels more urgent for Student Affairs in particular. The participant narrative examples of addressing only one side of a conflict (process or structure) proved to be ineffective. For example, Lisa's experience with engaging Human Resources was met with disappointment due to their focus on punitive and impersonal responses to conflict. The balance of process and structure creates a learning environment that aims to create an effective organization focused on work, task, production as well as emphasis on honest and open feedback.

Training, experience, and maturity are an excellent recipe for managing professional conflicts. Chapter II highlighted various supervision models such as The Littrell et al. (1979) Model, Synergistic Supervision, and the Discrimination Model. Chapter IV highlighted the many ways in which the skilled and well-trained participants in the study navigated conflict within their supervisory experience as mid-managers. As a reminder, the synergistic approach to supervision focused on the creation of open lines of communication, building trusting relationships, the performance of supervisory feedback and appraisal, the identification of the professional aspirations of staff, and the knowledge and skills necessary for advancement (Winston & Creamer, 1998).

There were a few behaviors exemplified by our trained practitioners that specifically point to the “ideal” in conflict management training and practice. First was the intentional creation and communication of expectations. Within a staff team dynamic, it is important to help the group understand values, goals, and the ways in which they should work together. It is much easier to hold individuals accountable if they understand what is expected of them. It is also easier to reward, incentivize, or motivate if team members understand what behaviors or goals are important. Second, acknowledge the learning that occurred on both sides of the table. Participants who approached challenging conversations with an eye towards development, prepared to listen, and focused on gaining the perspective of the other were more successful in addressing challenging conflict moments. Finally, removing the personal from the professional. As highlighted by Rahim (2002), participants who were able to focus on solving the problem (versus solving the person) experienced success in navigating interpersonal conflict

moments. While training does not always correct for human error, it does heighten awareness of dynamics such as power differentials, conflict styles, and maladaptive responses to conflict moments. This is where the gap between real and ideal truly begins to close.

Limitations

First, the study was limited to the experiences of 14 mid-managers in 14 colleges and universities representing the Southeast (Alex, Lucia, Meredith, and Semona) Midwest (Amber, Bailey, Karen, and Susan) Northeast (Adah, Jennifer, Lisa, and Stella) and West (Grace, John) regions of the United States. Second, due to the focus on mid-managers, the findings may not be applicable to new professionals or SSAOs/ CSAOs in higher education. Third, the study did not include the supervisees of the participants which would have provided an additional insight into perception of conflict management skills by the mid-managers versus reality of experiences by the subordinates. Fourth, the study included a majority of female participants, which is consistent with the Student Affairs workforce, but still limits our understanding of male experiences of conflict management. Fifth, the small number of racially diverse participants within the study may impact the results. If there was an opportunity to replicate this study, the findings may or may not be the same. Additionally, the researcher's use of personal and professional social media networks as one way to recruit participants created the potential for selected participants to be known personally or professionally by the researcher. However, the re-sharing of the research invitation post by approximately 25 people resulted in a larger degree of separation from the researcher. Of the 14 participants, only

three were previously known to the researcher. Finally, the researcher is a mid-manager whose graduate preparation program included formal conflict management classes (mediation, negotiation, facilitation, etc.) which may have introduced bias in the interpretation of the data. All necessary precautions were taken to ensure that I remained objective both in data collection and interpretation.

Implications for Practice

The coding of participant interviews revealed the following themes that should be highlighted as implications for practice. Those themes are (a) the need to imbed conflict management skills courses into graduate preparation programs; (b) the creation of formalized continued training or professional development opportunities (in conflict management and supervision skills) for mid-managers; and (c) the importance of micro and macro development of skills throughout the organization as a deterrent for poor conflict management skills within the institutional environment.

First, it would be imperative to address the gap between desired competency and preparation by building out strategic training efforts via graduate preparation programs and certifications through professional organizations. There is a need for the adoption of conflict management skills courses into graduate preparation program curriculum (as the best way to provide a broad foundation of skills in this area and not have to rely on the employee's initiative to seek out additional training). Conflict management skills should be developed through regular practice in safe, low stakes environments such as within the academe. Graduate preparation programs are called to provide theory-to-practice opportunity through readings, discussions and assignments as well as practicum and

internships that offer hands on experiences focused on skills development. One current example of conflict management skills immersion in a graduation preparation program can be found at Nova Southeastern University. The University's College Student Affairs program offers a curriculum which includes training and experience in negotiation, facilitation, and mediation. NSU also offers a Ph.D. in Conflict Analysis and Resolution which allows doctoral students interested in working in the collegiate arena to gain a certificate in College Student Personnel Administration. The curriculum includes some of the following courses:

- Communication Dynamics in Dispute Resolution: The Human Factor
- Mediation Theory and Practice
- Facilitation Theory and Practice

According to the NSU website, in reference to the Communication Dynamics in Dispute Resolution (CSPA 5040) course:

This course presents communication theories relevant to conflict resolution as well as theories about understanding, analyzing, and managing conflict. The course focuses on the human and emotional aspects of conflict, and includes the influence of gender and culture. This course is pragmatic as well as theoretical, and presents communication and conflict resolution models in a practice-based approach. (NSU, 2019, "Courses," para. 7)

Furthermore, graduate assistantship experiences are also key in connection opportunities to bridge theory to practice moments. When participants were asked about methods/modes for training and developing conflict management skills, several mentioned the importance of providing realistic opportunities and examples. Those realistic experiences

could be in the form of case studies, role play with the incorporation of technology and pop culture.

As highlighted in previous chapters, conflict within the organizational context has productive as well as destructive potentials. Some of the functional outcomes of conflict include stimulation of innovation, improvement of decision-making, discovery of alternative and synergistic solutions, and enhanced performance by individuals and groups. Some of the dysfunctional outcomes of conflict in an organization include reduced communication between individuals and groups, creation of a climate of distrust, reduced job performance, increased resistance to change and decreased organizational commitment and loyalty (Assael, 1969; De Dreu & van de Vliert, 1997; Deutsch, 1969; Jehn, 1997; Kelly & Kelly, 1998; Pelled et al., 1999).

While it can be easy to be bogged down by theory, they provide an important foundation for strengthening skills and the ability to envision multilayered responses to conflict. It is difficult to normalize the existence of conflict without recognizing the productive potential it offers. Graduate preparation programs should offer students the opportunity to delve into theory, understand the history of conflict management, as well as practice these new skills with their classmates under the support of a trained faculty member. Furthermore, conflict management courses should highlight the impact of communication styles, the importance of effective supervision, and racial/cultural context, as well as perspectives of sexual orientation, gender, and gender expression.

Second, the importance of creating formalized continued training or professional development opportunities for mid-managers working in Student Affairs cannot be over-

emphasized. The incorporation of conflict management theory and practice in graduate preparation programs is an important first step, but continued training and development within this skill area is paramount, especially because not everyone hired in Student Affairs has graduated from the same kind of training program. Student affairs practitioners will face different and more complicated conflicts as they progress in their career, thus the training opportunities must also match their career progression. This would represent the ideal vision of conflict management within higher education which takes into account real experiences to produce effective processes for reporting and managing conflict both within one's unit and within the larger University setting.

Supervision is another important professional competency for Student Affairs practitioners, but one that is not often directly cultivated in training programs. As highlighted in the participant narratives, mid-managers are working in environments in which the culture of avoidance has been solidified by upper management and in which they are under-prepared with conflict management tools. Supervisors could be better armed with knowledge of supervision models, such as those mentioned in Chapter II, as well as other tools for effective practice so that when conflict arises, it can be managed with a productive outcome. Additionally, supervisors could utilize both the structural responses to conflict and the process responses to conflict, as reflected in Rahim's (2001) model. Moreover, decision-making skills and conflict management behaviors are needed. This permeation of underdeveloped skills throughout the organization leads to the last implication for practice. The participant stories emphasized that the ability to both

manage above and below will be imperative to their success in these types of environments.

According to Mather, Bryan, and Faulkner (2009), although mid-managers comprised the majority of staff in student affairs organizations, they are often the least prepared to manage workplace conflict because of limited training in supervision and conflict management models and orientation opportunities. In fact, D. B. Mills (2000) asserted that mid-managers are largely responsible for their own professional growth and development. Due to the bureaucratic organizational structure within higher education, supervisors are expected to handle the bulk of conflicts that occur, follow established procedures, and use various systems of discipline and control over the distribution of rewards (Warters, 2000).

The participants of this study highlighted the negative work environments that were created in their specific experiences by weak or underdeveloped conflict management skills. Thus, it is imperative that training and development be done at all layers of the institutional environment. According to Rahim (2002), there are three criteria for effective conflict management strategy: (a) organizational learning and effectiveness; (b) needs of stakeholders; and (c) ethics. Organizational learning and effectiveness under this perspective is focused on the long-term while enhancing critical and innovative thinking that diagnose and intervene skillfully. The balance of stakeholder needs should also include the design of ethical responses to conflict.

Furthermore, Rahim (2002) reminds managers to (a) separate the people from the problem; (b) focus on interests, not positions; (c) invent creative options for mutual gain;

and (d) insist on using objective criteria. Each of these insights will be discussed in turn. As a supervisor, one is called to advocate for staff for resources, development, or provide a space for neutrality. This focus on neutrality provides supervisors the opportunity to address performance and behavior concerns equitably. Lucia shared her practice of providing her staff with a written document outlining her supervisory philosophy. This practice highlights her effort to be clear about her expectations for them as individuals as well as for their team. During conflict moments, it is easier for Lucia to ‘separate the people from the problem,’ because they have already made agreements as a team about how conflict will be handled and what each person’s job role should be.

Amber’s example of watching a colleague navigate the on-boarding of new software requiring cross-division agreement provided a healthy example of facilitation and negotiation skills assisting professionals in their efforts to focus on interests and move beyond positions. While each department saw their position in the on-boarding process of this software as important, the colleague was able to help them find shared interests which ultimately provided the foundation for future efforts. Amber highlighted the importance this colleague also placed on creating opportunities to periodically check in which solidified the mutual investment in the final product.

Several narratives in Chapter IV highlighted the ‘the absentee or avoidance supervisor.’ The supervisor in Semona’s reflection was one more example of a conflict avoidant leader. As such, Semona had to engage her own plan and resources to create a safe space for herself. By desiring to remain out of the conflict, he missed the opportunity to advocate for her. They ignored the chance to provide the individual in question a

developmental moment by directly addressing the issue head-on. They also missed their own opportunity to grow in their ability to have a ‘crossroads conversation.’ The negative perception of conflict caused the supervisor in this scenario to miss the opportunity for mutual learning gains for both himself and his staff members.

Finally, the use of ‘objective criteria’ can also include the clear and early communication of staff or team expectations as well as providing a healthy awareness of how grievances will be addressed formally or informally on a team. For example, Adah stated,

I tell them if I’m doing something that you’re not happy about, tell me, I can handle it. You’re not going to hurt my feelings. I’m not going to cry myself to sleep because you came in and gave me feedback like I’ll be fine. And so I think that they really take that to heart and they do not hesitate to give me feedback. I think that’s also a sign of trust and feeling like they can do that.

Other examples of using objective criteria include a supervisor’s practice in returning to the supervisee’s job descriptions during moments of underperformance. Since the job description is the first point of communicated expectations, it provides the ideal road map for both supervisee and supervisor.

This emphasis on embedding formal education, training, and evaluation promotes the potential for movement towards the aspirations of the ACPA/NASPA competencies highlighted under “supervision, communication, and conflict resolution.” According to (ACPA/NASPA, 2015), student affairs professionals are charged to

know scholarly literature and best practices related to supervision, conflict, and management. Ability to supervise others using a variety of techniques and communication styles; negotiate with others to resolve conflict; forecast needs of

the organization. Dispositions to guide and critique the work of others; to accept conflict as normal; to engage in resolution strategies. (p. 22)

If student affairs mid-managers are called to know scholarly literature and utilize best practices, it would be important to begin in their master's preparation programs to provide a solid foundation to assist them in rising to this expectation.

The third implication for practice is that the impact of poor skills on institutional environments requires both micro and macro development. Micro development may include the inclusion of training opportunities for individuals. The participants recommended the following as it relates to modes or methods of skills training: (a) use of real life case studies or scenarios; (b) multimedia presentations; (c) use of pop culture references or examples; (d) creation of round table spaces to share stories that would offer solution; and (e) opportunities for role play and reflection. Macro-development should include the creation, adaption, or review of policies and procedures related to addressing employee grievances. The participants of this study provided numerous examples of the impact of negative moments in their professional careers that were the result of conflicts being mismanaged or completely ignored. While it is imperative that Student Affairs professionals in mid-manager roles learn and engage their conflict management skills, it is equally important that those above affirm the importance of addressing conflict as it arises, and before it is able to fester. The use of exit interviews is one practical example for those in upper management to gauge the health of their organization, as well as prepare the members of their team to make the necessary process and structural changes. Members of upper management may also consider the

opportunity to engage outside consultants skilled in facilitation to lead multi-day or multi-opportunity conversations with their departments or units to help address challenges in communication, decision making, performance, or efforts in collaboration among their team.

Focus on both micro and macro development of conflict management skills also requires the effort to create, amend, or bring greater awareness to the grievance process. The multilayered conflict experiences of mid-managers as they manage above and below requires systematic attention (training for the individual, the team, the department and units across the University). This implication may require a deeper exploration of human resources best practices within higher education environments. One action that should be considered and easily incorporated into practice would be the consistent and equitable use of “exit interviews.” Several participants in this study shared fight or flight stories in which they or someone they knew chose to leave their position due to ill-managed conflict. While it is hard to speculate on the true financial cost of replacing an employee, all of the participants quickly named staff turnover as one cost of conflict in their experience.

The incorporation of exit interviews into an employee’s resignation process offers the University’s Human Resources department invaluable information that might allow them to create policies, procedures and offer sound advice for units across the University. It would be important to report findings annually in the aggregate to glean broad trends for unit hiring managers to adjust internal processes and procedures. Urgent concerns should be addressed immediately, directly, and in a confidential manner with the

department or unit in question. The focus on interviewing employees as they exit their positions provides a low risk environment which might be contrary to the work environments from which they are choosing to depart.

The invitation for an exit interview should be made prior to the official accepting of a resignation, and completed on the last day of employment, and executed by the University's Human Resources department versus the subordinate's unit of employment or an appropriate designee as determined by the University. The exit interview effort may also raise awareness to the root causes of high turnover within specific departments or units. At the department level, efforts should be made to create avenues for feedback across the organization versus just top down. An environmental scan should be thoughtfully conducted by a neutral or external party to provide subordinated a space for sharing constructive feedback focused on shared goals.

Recommendations for Future Research

The themes and subthemes identified in the study provided the context needed to explain the recommendations for future research:

- There is little research and literature available regarding the use of conflict management within a student affairs and supervisory context. As noted by several of the participants, the examples of poor conflict management skills abound within their experiences as they are called to manage from the middle.
- There is a gap between desired competencies and formalized preparation within the field of student affairs. One participant, Semona, particularly described the transition into mid-manager roles as feeling "sophomoric" with

more attention paid to entry level and senior level practitioners and less to mid-managers. While it is important to communicate the need for these skills as participants reflected countless examples of ways in which these skills have been or would be beneficial, they have also easily recounted the moments in which conflicts were not handled well due to insufficient skills.

- Movement from conflict management to conflict transformation and normalization would be useful within Higher Education and Student Affairs. According to Schrage, Giacomini, and Stoner (2009), the transformative approach focuses on the relationship of the parties in conflict versus the conflict itself. Furthermore, resolving the conflict becomes a secondary focus to the learning that occurs as parties as both parties feel more empowered to define the problem from their perspective with the potential of identifying mutually agreeable solutions. Chapter II highlighted both the challenges and the positive outcomes of conflict within work groups. Chapter IV highlighted the stories of participants who described higher education and their student affairs experience as being members of “conflict avoidant” environments. Thus, future research should focus on moving the profession from conflict avoidance to seeing conflict as normal and productive part of healthy work environments.
- There should be attention given to studies on bullying and bullying behavior - pertinent in supervisor/ supervisee conflicts. Retaliation can be a real concern for subordinates experiencing a dyadic conflict. This is the reason many

choose to be silent in conflict often opting to leave the organization taking their knowledge and skills with them. The information that they hold regarding the organizational wellness is invaluable which leads to the next recommendation.

- The impact of power and social identity status as a mediating effect on subordinate conflict style response and job performance is important. As discussed in Chapter I, the dyadic relationship can be a symbiotic one which often requires a delicate balance and focused attention to the conducive aspect of the relationship. If the power or hierarchical dynamic is left unchecked with no opportunity or structure to report grievances, this fragile interdependence becomes impacted by the conflict experience. This is worth further exploration via research with close attention to social identities that were not mentioned in the current study, including sexual orientation, social class, religion, and country of origin.

Conclusion

The field of higher education and student affairs will continue to diversify in every aspect: race/ethnicity, generationally, sexual orientation, gender representation, politically, and socioeconomically. This growing diversification will continue to prove to be the ideal breeding ground for conflict (or for transformation), both interpersonally and intrapersonally. The profession's ability to recruit, develop, and retain student affairs practitioners that are both knowledgeable of student development theory as well as professionally prepared to manage conflict will yield growth and longevity. Instead,

student Affairs professionals are opting the exit the field due to negative experiences with conflict for which they were underprepared.

The stories and experiences of the participants in this study varied, but there was a consistent call for formalized training, better professional development opportunities, and continued support for learning conflict management skills with an eye for supervision. Participants acknowledged that their on-the-job training often came at the risk of learning from ill-managed conflict. Furthermore, those conflict moments were the easiest to remember sometimes many years later.

This study, which focused on student affairs mid-managers their acquisition and usage of conflict management skills, provided a helpful insight into the sources and impact of conflict, highlighted the necessary attention to dyadic conflict, administered practical uses of skills, and gave scholarly literature connected to the topic. Parties interested in one-time training opportunities around conflict management in student affairs are welcome to contact the author for further information.

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APPENDIX A
IRB APPROVAL DOCUMENTS

University of North Carolina at Greensboro

Principal Researcher: Cherise James (cnjames@uncg.edu), (336) 682-6714

Dissertation chair:

Dr. Laura Gonzalez, Graduate School of Education
1300 Spring Garden Street, Greensboro, NC 27412
Phone: (336) 405-8682, Email: lmgonza2@uncg.edu

Protocol Title:

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT SKILLS ACQUISITION AND USAGE IN STUDENT
AFFAIRS MID-MANAGERS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Purpose of the research study:

The purpose of this study will be to learn about the supervision experiences of mid-level managers in student affairs. This study focuses on the supervision and conflict management skills needed by mid-level managers and how the participants acquired those skills. In this qualitative study, participants will be asked how they learned their conflict management skills and their perceived competence in those skills. They will also be asked to share their knowledge and understanding of conflict management, how they learned this information, and how they might support and train their staff members to incorporate these skills in their work.

Who is conducting and funding the study:

Cherise James, a doctoral student in the Graduate School of Education will be conducting the study under the supervision of Dr. Laura Gonzalez.

What you will be asked to do in the study:

You are being asked to be a “key informant” in this project because of your role as student affairs mid-manager. You are invited to participate in an interview on campus (if possible) or video conferencing interview, which will last no longer than two hours and will take place in your office or in your school. You are free to end the interview at any time and may choose not to answer any question. I will be gathering information by taking notes and utilizing an electronic recording device. Upon your request, I will turn off the recording device. You may state an issue is “off the record” at any time during the interview in which case I will not make any explicit reference to what you said in that segment of the interview.

Time required:

The interview will last less than two hours. The interview will be scheduled at your convenience and can be scheduled during the work day, outside of the work day and/or on a weekend.

Risks and Benefits:

The study involves no foreseeable physical, psychological, social, or legal risks or harm to you, beyond possible discomfort in repeating experiences that were difficult to go through. The final product of this research is my doctoral dissertation. The findings of this research will become a public document; however, I will not mention you or any research participant by name. The institution where you work will also not be named.

Approved IRB
11/26/18

There are no direct benefits to you for your participation in this study.

Some indirect benefits to this study may include (1) an increased awareness of your supervision experiences as a department leader; (2) an increased awareness of your experience leading and supervising your supervisees in the area of conflict management; (3) the potential application of the study's findings to assist with their future leadership and supervision roles.

Compensation:

There will be no compensation offered to study participants.

Confidentiality:

Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. Your information will be assigned a code number that is unique to this study. The list connecting the name to this number will be kept in a locked file in my home and only Dr. Gonzalez, my dissertation chair, and myself will be able to see the list or the interview transcription. Any electronic information associated with this study will be stored in the University's secure Box system. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, the list will be destroyed. Study findings will be presented only in summary form and participant and institution names will not be used in any report.

Voluntary participation:

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There is no penalty for not participating. You may refuse to answer any of the questions I ask you and you may stop or end the interview at any time.

Right to withdraw from the study:

You may choose to stop participating in the study at any time without consequence.

Recording

- **Video Recording:** Absolute confidentiality of data provided through the Internet cannot be guaranteed due to the limited protections of Internet access. Please be sure to close your browser when finished so no one will be able to see what you have been doing."
- **Audio Recording:** Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the recording, your confidentiality for things you say on the recording cannot be guaranteed although the researcher will try to limit access to the recording.

I will be gathering information by taking notes and utilizing an electronic recording device. I will turn off the recording device either temporarily or permanently, upon your request. The electronic recordings will be transcribed and both the recording and the transcriptions will be stored in the University's secure Box system and only Dr. Gonzalez, my dissertation chair and I will have access to them. The recording and transcription of your interview will not be used for any purpose other than this research study.

Who to contact if you have questions about the study:

Principal Researcher: Cherise James (cnjames@uncg.edu), (336) 682-6714

Dissertation chair:

Dr. Laura Gonzalez, Graduate School of Education
1300 Spring Garden Street, Greensboro, NC 27412
Phone: (336) 405-8682, Email: lmgonza2@uncg.edu

Who to contact about your rights as a research participant in the study:

Office of Research & Engagement
University of North Carolina - Greensboro
1601 MHRA Building
1111 Spring Garden Street
Greensboro, NC 27412
Phone: 855.251.2351
Fax: 336.334.4624

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS FORM WHETHER OR NOT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE.

If you agree to participate in this study please sign below. Thank you.

Agreement:

I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the procedure and **I have received a copy of this description.** I agree to allow this interview to be recorded. I understand that I can request that the recording be stopped at any time.

Name (Printed) _____
Signature: _____ Date: _____
Principal Investigator: _____ Date: _____

Approved IRB
11/26/18

Dear _____,

My name is Cherise James and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro's Graduate School of Education. I am conducting my doctoral research on student affairs mid-level managers and their experiences with conflict management within a supervisory context. I am contacting you to invite you to be a "key informant" in my study due to your role as a student affairs mid-manager who has 3 years (or more) supervising full time staff. You are free to decide whether or not you want to participate.

If you agree to participate, I would like to schedule an on campus (if possible) or video conferencing interview with you. The interview will last approximately an hour and a half. In this qualitative study, participants will be asked how they learned their conflict management skills and their perceived competence in those skills. They will also be asked to share their knowledge and understanding of conflict management, how they learned this information, and how they might support and train their staff members to incorporate these skills in their work.

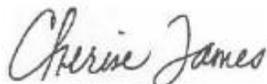
Participants will be interviewed in a private setting and the information provided will be treated confidentiality. Participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. Your identity, as a participant, will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. The names and location of the institution where you work will not be included in the study to ensure confidentiality. Upon completion of the research study, a copy of the findings will be sent to you.

Attached you will find the informed consent form for my dissertation. Please review the document carefully as it explains your rights as a research participant and provides information about the procedures for the study. If you would like to participate in the study, please sign the form and return it to me. You may return it by scanning the signed form and emailing it to me at cnjames@uncg.edu.

If you have questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me. You may contact me at (336) 682-6714 or cnjames@uncg.edu or my dissertation chair, Dr. Laura Gonzalez (lmgonza2@uncg.edu).

Thank you in advance for considering this request for participation.

Best,



Cherise N. W. James
Doctoral Student, Graduate School of Education
University of North Carolina - Greensboro

APPENDIX B
SAMPLE SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE

1. How long have you worked in higher education?
2. What functional area do you currently work in?
3. How many layers between you and your Vice President of Student Affairs?
4. How many years have you supervised full-time staff?
5. How many full-time staff do you supervise directly in your current role?
6. Are you familiar with the ACPA/NASPA competencies (specifically those associated with personnel management, including conflict management skills)?

(Yes/ No)
7. Have you had supervisory experiences where conflict has come up?
8. How often do you deal with conflict within your supervisory role?
9. Have you had any training experiences in conflict management?
10. Would you be willing to schedule a time to talk about your experiences surrounding conflict management in student affairs?

APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Learning/development of skills

- a. Tell me what comes to mind when I say “conflict management and student affairs”
- b. Tell me about your developmental experiences around conflict management and supervision...
- c. Tell me about any challenges you’ve experienced with developing these skills
- d. Tell me about the resources you have used to overcome these challenges)
- e. Tell me about professional role models or mentors who embodied competence in conflict management skills? *(Prompt/ probe: In what ways did they model competent conflict management skills? What characteristics did these role model(s) embody when addressing conflicts with the work environment and specifically a supervisory context?)*
- f. What resources have you used to develop conflict management skills?
(Prompt/ probe: within your department, university, or professional organization?)

2. Utilization of Skills

- a. Tell me about an example of this in your workplace - a time when conflict was managed well? A time when conflict was **not** managed well? *(Prompt/ Probe - what was the cost of the **ill-managed** conflict?)*

- b. Tell me about a time when you did not address a conflict (*Prompt/ Probe - what was the cost of the **avoided** conflict?*)
- c. How confident are you that your supervisee or team trusts your supervisory ability and believes you genuinely have their best interests in mind when addressing conflict situations?
- d. How (if at all) have you addressed the power differential within your supervisory conflicts scenario?

If time permits:

- e. A supervisor's philosophy to their supervisory style could have tremendous impact their subordinate's work environment and overall experience. How much thought have you put into actively working to craft a positive work dynamic for your subordinates by intentionally considering/ reflecting on your own conflict management style?

3. Comfort or competence with skills acquisition

- a. Tell me about what makes you feel most/least prepared (specific to your skills) when managing conflict
- b. Tell me about how you might describe your own competence around using conflict management skills with your supervisee(s)
- c. Can you tell me about any formal or informal training in the area of conflict management? How have those experiences assisted you in navigating your professional environment? How have you trained or assisted others in their development of these skills?

- d. What methods or modes would you recommend for training or developing conflict management skills in higher education mid-managers?

APPENDIX D

THE HUMAN RESOURCE FRAME

Human Resource Principle	Specific Practices
Build and implement an HR strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a shared philosophy for managing people • Build systems and practices to implement the philosophy
Hire the right people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Know what you want • Be selective
Keep them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reward well • Protect jobs • Promote from within • Share the wealth
Invest in them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in learning • Create development opportunities
Empower them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide information and support • Encourage autonomy and participation • Redesign work • Foster self-managing teams • Promote egalitarianism
Promote diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be explicit and consistent about the organization's diversity philosophy • Hold managers accountable

Note. Source: Bolman, L., & Deal, T. (2013). *Reframing organizations: Artistry, choice, and leadership* (5th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass (p. 140).

APPENDIX E**PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE DIAGRAMS**

From: **Cherise James** <cnjames@uncg.edu>
Date: Tue, Feb 12, 2019 at 3:55 PM
Subject: Re: Request to utilize "Three Perspectives in Workgroup Conflict" diagram
To: John Oetzel <john.oetzel@waikato.ac.nz>
Cc: Ting-Toomey, Stella <sting@fullerton.edu>

Hi Dr. Oetzel,

Thank you for your message and your quick response to my request! The citation was made accordingly and the Graduate School has just asked for this email to be included in my appendices for future record.

Again - thank you so much and I hope you have a fantastic rest of your academic year!

Best,

Cherise N. James, MS.
Ph.D. Student, Higher Education
Peace & Conflict (Concentration)
University of North Carolina at Greensboro
Email: cnjames@uncg.edu

On Tue, Feb 12, 2019 at 3:21 PM John Oetzel <john.oetzel@waikato.ac.nz> wrote:
Dear Cherise:

Thanks for your interest in using our work. I'm quite happy, and honored, to have you use the figure as needed with a simple citation to the work. You might check with your graduate office to see whether you also need permission from the publisher as well. I suspect not although I don't know all of the official copyright issues.

Best of luck with your final stages of your PhD.

Cheers,
john

Dear Drs. Oetzel and Ting-Toomey,

I hope this message finds you well and that you've both had a fantastic week thus far.

I am a current doctoral student that has just completed the data collection phase and heading into Chapters 4 and 5. I am writing you both today to request permission to use/ reproduce your "Three Perspectives in Workgroup Conflict" diagram for my dissertation. My phenomenological study is focused on exploring the role of student affairs mid-managers and their acquisition / utilization of conflict management skills within a supervisory context.

Are there specific questions that you might have for me to assist in gaining your approval? If so, please do not hesitate to let me know and I look forward to hearing from you!

Best,

Cherise N. James, MS.
Ph.D. Student, Higher Education
Peace & Conflict (Concentration)
University of North Carolina at Greensboro
Email: cnjames@uncg.edu

--

John Oetzel, Professor
Waikato Management School
University of Waikato
Hamilton 3240
+64 7 838 4431

From: **Cherise James** <cnjames@uncg.edu>
Date: Tue, Feb 12, 2019 at 5:07 PM
Subject: Re: Request to utilize "Conflict Mode Instrument" diagram
To: Ralph Kilmann <ralph@kilmanndiagnostics.com>
Cc: Kenneth W Thomas <ken@kennethwthomas.net>

Dr. Kilmann,

Wonderful - I will do exactly that and use what's on your website and cite it as you've directed.

Many many thanks for your incredibly quick responses and thank you both for all of your years of work and scholarship.

Best,

Cherise N. James, MS.
Ph.D. Student, Higher Education
Peace & Conflict (Concentration)
University of North Carolina at Greensboro
Email: cnjames@uncg.edu

On Tue, Feb 12, 2019 at 5:04 PM Ralph Kilmann <ralph@kilmanndiagnostics.com> wrote:
Hi Cherise,

Definitely use the citation I gave you on my website, if you want to use that version of the TKI Conflict Model. The one you cite in your most recent email is from an earlier version of the TKI assessment that was published by Xicom. But CPP (now called The Myers-Briggs Company) bought Xicom and then changed the design of the TKI Conflict Model, as shown near the beginning of that example of an online TKI Report.

Actually, to play it safe, try to use the design of the TKI Conflict Model that is on my website... that way, you don't have to go through The Myers-Briggs Company for their version of the model, which might take a long time to get permission!

I wish you well!

Warm regards,
Ralph

CEO and Senior Consultant
[Kilmann Diagnostics](#)
(949) 497-8766

Resolving Conflict Throughout the World
By Providing Online Courses with the
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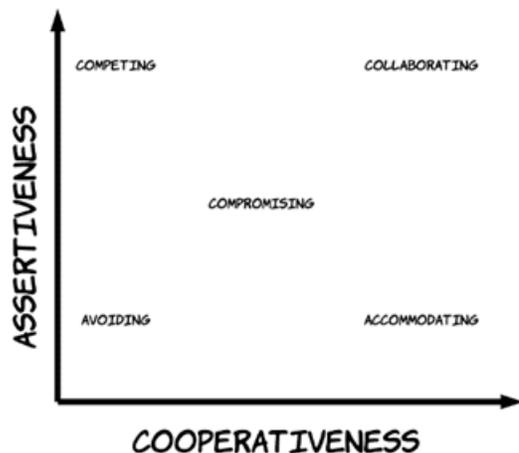
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[*The Courageous Mosaic: Awakening Society, Systems, and Souls*](#)

On Tue, Feb 12, 2019 at 1:44 PM Cherise James <cniames@unog.edu> wrote:
Hi Dr. Kilmann,

Pardon me as I take a second to let my "fan girl" moment subside.

Thank you so much for your response and additional information. I had to "recreate" this for my document (see below), but this is the current citation I have noted. Figure 2. Thomas-Kilmann model. Source: Thomas, K. W., & Kilmann, R. H. (1974). *Thomas-Kilmann conflict mode instrument*. Tuxedo, NY: Xicom.



My assumption is that this is in fact yours and not the one owned by MB Company based on what you have shared. If that assumption is incorrect, please let me know and I will be happy to go through the appropriate channels. If I am right, moving forward I will use the reference you have shared accordingly.

Again - thank you and unless I hear differently, I will use your previous message to confirm your approval.

Should you have any additional questions for me, please do not hesitate to let me know.

Best,

Cherise N. James, MS.
 Ph.D. Student, Higher Education
 Peace & Conflict (Concentration)
 University of North Carolina at Greensboro
 Email: cnjames@uncg.edu

On Tue, Feb 12, 2019 at 4:22 PM Ralph Kilmann <ralph@kilmanndiagnostics.com> wrote:

Hi Cherise,

Thank you for your email... and for your very kind words about our work!

The issue is WHICH version of the TKI Conflict Model you wish to use... mine or that owned by The Myers-Briggs Company, Inc., the publisher of the TKI assessment.

You have permission to reproduce my version of the TKI Conflict Model that is displayed on the webpage below. Please use the following citation as the original source of that figure:

Copyright © 2009–2019 by Kilmann Diagnostics. All rights reserved. Original figure is available at:

<http://www.kilmanndiagnostics.com/overview-thomas-kilmann-conflict-model-instrument-tki>

Regarding The Myers-Briggs Company's (the publisher's) version of the TKI Conflict Model, see page 2 of the [personalized TKI Report](#). If that's the version of the model that you wish to use, I suggest you contact [The Myers-Briggs Company, Inc.](#) directly and use the [The Myers-Briggs Company Permission Request Forms](#).

In terms of a research project, The Myers-Briggs Company does provide some support for using the TKI in studies if the proposal shows promise of making a significant contribution to the field. Contact [The Myers-Briggs Company's Research Division](#) with your inquiry.

If you and/or your participants want to take the authorized ONLINE version of the TKI assessment, visit the [TKI Purchase Page](#) on our website.

As you might have discovered: Some people (and organizations) offer illegal versions of the TKI assessment on the Internet (often for free), usually retaining the "Thomas-Kilmann" name in the title of these imitations for the purpose of trying to give the illusion of "credibility" and "authenticity," even though these illegal versions often modify the TKI's test items as well as its scoring key. Not only are these imitations a clear violation of international copyright law, but, in many cases, these TKI imitations also provide misleading results.

For full-length articles on the development, validation, and use of the TKI, see the THIRD HEADING on this page:

[THE TKI: BASIC, GROUP, AND ADVANCED TRAINING IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT](#)

If you want to make sure you'll be using the TKI to its full potential, which includes accurately interpreting an individual's TKI Profile, consider taking our 80-minute recorded online course, [BASIC Training in Conflict Management](#). We also offer a 3-hour online course, [GROUP Training in Conflict Management](#), which will help you develop and interpret the more complicated "Group TKI Profiles." In addition, we offer our flagship course on bringing the TKI even deeper into our complex organizations that continually face the most challenging problems and conflicts: [ADVANCED Training in Conflict Management](#). If you are interested in receiving the [Certificate in the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument](#), you can purchase all three of the above courses in [The TKI Package](#) (at a discounted price) and then pass the two Final Exams for GROUP Training and ADVANCED Training.

I wish you well with your research!

Warm regards,
Ralph

CEO and Senior Consultant
[Kilmann Diagnostics](#)
(949) 497-8766

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[*The Courageous Mosaic: Awakening Society, Systems, and Souls*](#)

On Tue, Feb 12, 2019 at 10:21 AM Cherise James <cnjames@uncg.edu> wrote:
Dear Drs. Thomas and Kilmann

I hope this message finds you well and that you've had a fantastic week thus far.

First, I have to admit that I'm so thrilled to reach out to you as I've been reading your work for years and it feels unreal to simply just reach out to you. I hope you will pardon my nervousness and excitement in that regard. Your work and this model in particular has been a pivotal part of my professional and academic development. It is one of the reasons I became interested in the study of conflict many years ago and specifically have pursued this area of research.

Second, I am a current doctoral student that has just completed the data collection phase and heading into Chapters 4 and 5. I am writing you today to request permission to use/ reproduce your "Conflict Mode Instrument" diagram for my dissertation. My phenomenological study is focused on exploring the role of student affairs mid-managers and their acquisition / utilization of conflict management skills within a supervisory context.

Are there specific questions that you might have for me to assist in gaining your approval? If so, please do not hesitate to let me know and I look forward to hearing from you!

Best,

Cherise N. James, MS.

Ph.D. Student, Higher Education
Peace & Conflict (Concentration)
University of North Carolina at Greensboro
Email: cnjames@uncg.edu