8-2021

Servant Leadership and Conflict Adaptivity in Local Government Leaders

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This dissertation, directed and approved by the candidate's committee, has been accepted by the College of Graduate and Professional Studies of Abilene Christian University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

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Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

June F. Mighty

August 2021

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my grandfather Daniel Blake (papa), whose love inspired me to dream, whose life exemplified perseverance, whose smile still warms my heart, and whose eyes continue to propel me forward. You've been gone a while now, but you are still missed.

Acknowledgments

In the early phases of this dissertation process, our professors reminded us that this would be a journey that required support from family, friends, and others, which has proven to be a fact. Thank you, my beautiful and talented daughter who made her love known when I needed it the most; to my dearest friends who encouraged me, prayed for and with me, and reminded me of God's purpose for my life. You know who you are because it required a tribe to help me obtain this prize. To my family members who kept telling me that I was going to make it and that there would be great things ahead for me, you are valued and loved.

I have to acknowledge Dr. Susan Slater and Phillip Armour, who helped me maintain a balance with work and school during the early part of this journey. Your support fueled me with hope, and you will never know how much that meant to me. Special thanks to Dr. Steve Tippins, the greatest reframer of all time, who helped me see opportunities in every obstacle. My sincere appreciation to Dr. Stuart Allen, my dissertation chair, for his patience, insight, and timely relevant input throughout the writing of my dissertation. Dr. Allen doesn't always say no; he does not always say yes; he says, "It's possible," and that kept me moving forward.

Above all, and most of all, thank you, God, for bringing back my childhood dream of attaining this advanced degree even though at age 22, I decided to quit before I even got started. This is proof that the plans (*New International Version*, 2014, Jeremiah 29:11) you have for our lives will not be altered. A God-inspired and purposeful deferred dream will arrive at the right time even when the dreamer has forgotten or, in my case, had chosen to give up on it.

Abstract

Government organizations' focus on public service provides a fertile ground for conflict due to competing interests and goals. Conflicts exist and persist because of workplace pressures such as unstable political climates, budget restrictions, technological advances, a diverse workforce, disruptive change, and organizational transformation. Although typically risk-averse, these organizations need flexible and adaptive leaders who exhibit the appropriate behaviors in the best interests of the organization and the community. Servant-leaders seem likely to demonstrate conflict adaptivity due to their focus on serving the needs of followers and other stakeholders, which may require different conflict styles at different times and in different situations. This study's aim was to discover if a relationship exists between servant leadership and conflict adaptivity in government leaders. A quantitative, nonexperimental, and cross-sectional approach was used to survey leaders and their followers. Leaders completed a measure of conflict adaptivity, and their followers rated them as servant-leaders. No correlation was found between servant leadership and conflict adaptivity. Therefore, the expectation that the leader's conflict adaptivity would predict increased perceptions of servant leadership by the follower was not supported in this sample. However, replication studies are needed to determine if this result is found with larger samples in different contexts. Further research is needed to determine if organizational culture moderates the relationship between conflict adaptivity and servant leadership as governments' organizational cultures may prescribe certain approaches to both conflict and leadership, potentially masking a relationship between servant leadership and conflict adaptivity.

Keywords: servant leadership, conflict style, conflict adaptivity, government, local government

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Chapter 1: Introduction

"The biggest risk is not taking any risk. ... In a world that's changing really quickly, the only

strategy that is guaranteed to fail is not taking risks." — Mark Zuckerberg

Local government organizations are facing unprecedented pressures due to an unstable

political climate and budget reductions (Witmer & Mellinger, 2016), technological advances, a

diverse workforce (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010), and disruptive changes that are occurring at national

and global levels. According to Dowdy et al. (2017), public sector organizations need to be agile

to address the challenges associated with increasing volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and

ambiguity (VUCA) where people expect more of themselves and others (Kegan & Lahey, 2016).

Although such organizations are typically risk-averse (Terason, 2018), they are seeking to

develop leaders who can navigate the conflicts that accompany organizational transformations

(Wang et al., 2017).

During an organizational transformation, conflict among leaders, employees, and

stakeholders can impede individual and organizational performance. This occurs because of

misunderstandings, decreased communication, stress, and burnout (Oore et al., 2015; Terason,

2018). In the United States, employees spend approximately 2.8 hours per week engaging in

conflict, and 60% of them have never received any conflict training (Consulting Psychologist

Press, 2008). Furthermore, "emotions during any type of conflict, if not regulated and channeled

constructively, decrease the positive effects of conflict and cause conflict to have negative effects

on performance and creativity" (Flores et al., 2018, p. 430). Oore et al. (2015) also suggested that

people behave differently in conflict depending on their experience and who they are in conflict

with. Therefore, flexible and adaptive leaders who view themselves as public servants and who

exhibit the appropriate behaviors that are in the community's best interests (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010) are essential to obtaining sustainable results for local governments.

Coleman and Kugler (2014) introduced an approach for assessing conflict adaptivity in managers. They go on to define conflict adaptivity as "the capacity to respond to different conflict situations in accordance with the demands specified by the situation" (p. 945). Eva et al. (2019) and Northouse (2016) indicated that scholars had neglected the importance of adaptability in conflict management research. Although previous research has examined individual conflict styles leaders use to navigate conflict, further research is needed to determine the relationship between specific leadership approaches and adaptivity between the individual conflict management styles (Coleman & Kugler, 2014). Because servant-leaders put others first, as well as focus on community, empowerment, and ethics (Eva et al., 2019; Northouse, 2016), it seems likely that servant-leaders should have high conflict adaptivity and will apply the most appropriate style of conflict management to a situation. Therefore, this study sought to advance research and practice by increasing the understanding of the association between servant leadership and conflict adaptivity in public sector organizations.

Background

Local government systems appear to be complex with web-like interconnectivity. Robert Frost said, "The best way out is through" (DeMers, 2014, p. 4). This statement seems especially relevant to local government leaders because the leaders must work through the issues to arrive at the best solutions for the community they serve. Emerging issues such as federal tax reform, sluggish state revenues, the demographic shift of the workforce, affordable housing services for the homeless (Keller, 2017; Welsh, 2019), and controversies surrounding the licensing of cannabis (McGreevy, 2018) are only a handful of the challenges local government leaders are

facing. This myriad of issues, along with the diverse needs and interests of stakeholders, creates an atmosphere ripe for conflict.

U.S. census data from 2015 showed that the state and local government combined employs more than 19 million people (United States Census Bureau, 2018). Local government is comprised of those who work for a county, a city, a town, or a borough (UShistory.org, 2019). They also include townships and what are known as special districts that have a special function. A school district would serve as an example of a special district (UShistory.org, 2019). These local government leaders must rely on conflict resolution skills to navigate VUCA environments and the competing priorities of their communities.

Conflict can be viewed as the cause or the result of a change (Mačiulis & Sondaitė, 2017). For example, the overall unfunded liability challenges that the California Public Employees Retirement System (CalPERS) is facing due to the requirement for increased contributions impact the delivery and possibly the quality of service that local government can provide and will be able to provide in the future (Robson & Smith, 2018). Such challenges increase the probability of conflict. Leaders have to explore alternative ways to overcome such challenges. Transforming bureaucratic organizations is not an easy task, and it is unlikely to occur without conflict. Transformation requires the right type of leadership with the right approach to conflict.

Conflict in Government

Local government's focus on public service provides a fertile ground for conflict due to competing interests and goals. Conflicts in local government exist and persist for a myriad of reasons. However, previous research suggested that conflict is an effective tool for initiating change in the political culture because it serves as a vehicle for public and community

transformation (Nabatchi & Amsler, 2014). Conflict also serves as an impetus for developing creative solutions to perceived obstacles and challenges (Ojo & Abolade, 2014). So, it is essential for researchers to develop a deeper understanding of the conflict management styles used in a local government setting (Brewer & Lam, 2009; Lee, 2002; Shih & Susanto, 2010).

Statement of the Problem

Although local government organizations are typically risk-averse (Terason, 2018), they are seeking to develop leaders who can navigate the conflicts that accompany organizational transformations (Wang et al., 2017) because conflict can impede individual and organizational performance. Destructive conflict outcomes include misunderstandings, decreased communication, stress, and burnout (Oore et al., 2015; Terason, 2018). Furthermore, "emotions during any type of conflict, if not regulated and channeled constructively, decrease the positive effects of conflict and cause conflict to have negative effects on performance and creativity" (Flores et al., 2018, p. 430). Therefore, it is essential to have flexible and adaptive leaders who exhibit the appropriate behaviors that are in the best interests of the organization and the community (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010).

History of Conflict

Conflict has existed since the beginning of human civilization. From a biblical view, it started in the Garden of Eden between Adam and Eve over their differing views about eating a fruit from the tree of knowledge (*New International Version*, 2014, Genesis 3:1–16). Later, Cain killed his brother Abel because of jealousy and what appears to be competition for God's favor (*New International Version*, 2014, Genesis 4:2–8). There are other ancient philosophical perspectives regarding conflict. According to Donohue and Cai (2008), the Jewish Torah references equality or an eye for an eye in resolving conflict, while the Christian teaching

focuses on forgiveness in conflict, and East Asian cultures based on the teaching of Confucius promote harmony. Greek and Roman philosophy on conflict management emphasizes persuasion and communicating to an audience (Donohue & Cai, 2008). Modern perspectives based on Darwin's Theory of Evolution promote conflict as a way of survival, while Marxist ideologies promote conflict as necessary to the struggle for dominance (Donohue & Cai, 2008).

Definitions of Conflict

There are various definitions of conflict in academic literature. Conflict is broadly defined as any situation where there is a clash between individual motives, purposes, and interests (Roeckelein, 2006), or it can be defined as an interpersonal disagreement between two or more individuals (McKibben, 2017; Yang & Li, 2018). Interpersonal conflict can be viewed as counterproductive to organizational productivity because it creates discord, negativity, and contributes to the breakdown of organizational communication (McKibben, 2017). Hocker and Wilmot's (2014) definition of conflict described conflict as "an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce rewards, and interference from other parties in achieving their goals" (p. 13). Task conflict, as a specific type of conflict, focuses on disagreement about how work should be performed (Lu & Wang, 2017; Moeller et al., 2012). Task conflict is a good example of functional conflict that is needed to foster the creativity and problem-solving strategies needed to achieve organizational goals. Conflict is also described as cognitive because it focuses on how people differ in their approach to solving problems (Lu & Wang, 2017; Mikkelsen & Clegg, 2019). In this respect, conflict has the potential to facilitate divergent views and encourages creativity, dialogue, and mutual respect when viewed as an opportunity rather than a negative experience (McKibben, 2017). There are also other "contemporary calls to view conflict not as a single event or situation occurring at a

specific moment in time, but rather as a process unfolding in relationships over time" (Coleman et al., 2012, p. 10). What many agree on is that conflict is an intrinsic part of the human experience (McKibben, 2017; Omisore & Abiodun, 2014).

Theoretical Views of Conflict

Historically, conflict scholars have examined dispositional and methodological approaches to conflict, which have yielded varying results (Coleman & Kugler, 2014; Coleman et al., 2012). Conflict research highlights five theoretical models of conflict, and each takes slightly different approaches to understand the situations and processes that foster functional and dysfunctional conflict (Coleman et al., 2012). For example, the dual concern approach, which emphasizes a concern for self and others, is one of five models that have been developed as a means to facilitate conflict constructively. The social interdependence theory examines the role of competitive and cooperative goals in conflict, as similar goals can foster greater cooperation among disputants. The social motive theory emphasizes how individual and situational differences affect an individual's values that ultimately drive the person's behavior during conflict (Coleman et al., 2012). Power dependence theory, which is readily visible during distributive bargaining and negotiations, focuses on the level of independence and dependence that exists between the negotiating parties. In this situation, the more dependent party may not have as many alternatives or as much leverage as the other and may have to succumb to an agreement that may not be in their best interest. Lastly, game theory is grounded in mathematics and seeks to produce rational decisions during the course of a conflict. This theory is most beneficial in competitive *zero-sum* conditions. Each individual theory has benefits and limitations and does not provide a holistic view of what processes and strategies contribute to constructive conflict (Coleman et al., 2012).

Why Conflict Occurs

Conflict occurs when people's goals, beliefs, values, and interests are incongruent with another person's (Yang & Li, 2018). It is not uncommon for an individual to assume that their interest is more paramount than another's, and they strive to maintain the needs, goals, values, and beliefs that are most important to them. An attribute of conflict is the state of antagonism that is precipitated by divergent ideas and interests (Roeckelein, 2006). Whether the state of antagonism occurs as a result of an interpersonal conflict or as a result of differing solutions to a problem, it may give rise to certain behaviors that can have an unfavorable effect on the work environment. Other antecedents to conflict are negative emotions, miscommunication, incompatible personalities (Kinicki & Fugate, 2018; Moeller et al., 2012), stress (Wang et al., 2007), competition for limited resources, unclear policies and procedures, and organizational change (Kinicki & Fugate, 2018).

Conflict is also viewed as functional and dysfunctional. Rahim (2002) explained that while the work of Wall and Callister (1995) does not support the necessity for any conflict within the organizational context, they appeared to be in the minority. Other conflict researchers believed that if not managed correctly, conflict can become dysfunctional and disrupt the organizational flow and threaten the organization's interest (Ojo & Abolade, 2014). Some possible causes of disruptive conflict are poor interpersonal skills, inability to navigate diversity, misperceptions, conflicting values and beliefs, or the inability to manage emotions, to name a few (Buon, 2008). On the other hand, functional conflict allows senior-level leaders to engage in cognitive or issue-oriented conflict that is essential for making strategic decisions (Rahim, 2002).

Drawbacks of Too Little Conflict

Researchers have remarked that too little conflict can contribute to stagnation (Aula & Siira, 2010; Rahim, 2002), and so there appears to be a relationship between the intensity of conflict within the organization and organizational outcomes (Aula & Siira, 2010; Nyhan, 2000; Rahim, 2002). Rahim (2002) reflected this as an inverted-U relationship that requires a balance between too little and too much conflict. The essence here is that functional conflict is good if managed effectively (e.g., increasing community and innovation). However, the challenge is that leaders may lack conflict management skills (Rahim, 2002).

Power and Conflict

Conflict can also be examined through the lens of power, and it is viewed as the capacity or energy needed to get things done (Coleman & Ferguson, 2015). Coleman (2014) suggested that all conflict directly or indirectly relates to the issue of power because people use it as a means to accomplish their objectives. Yet, exercising power to achieve goals can result in the subdual of others, or it may be viewed as a disadvantage to the other party, which can lead to conflict (Kahane, 2010). Kahane (2010) viewed this as degenerative power because it focuses purely on self-interest. Still, conflict and power move together, and power disparities tend to generate conflict (Coleman & Ferguson, 2015).

Psychological Orientations

The foundation for the theory of psychological orientations (POs) stems from the earlier studies of several researchers. Blake and Mouton (1967) developed the managerial grid that focused on the degree of concern toward those (e.g., people, production, hierarchy) with the understanding that the degree of concern would be reflected in his or her behavior and "flow out of his own basic attitudes" (Blake & Mouton, 1964, p. 8). Kilmann and Thomas (1977, 1978)

extended the concern model and created a conflict mode instrument that identified five styles of conflict: competing, collaborating, compromising, accommodation, and avoidance. Deutsch (2002, 2007) and Wish et al. (1976) identified the role of social psychology in conflict management by examining the influence of POs and perceptions in conflict dynamics.

There are five POs. Dominance, appeasement, and autonomy are task-orientated conflict resolution orientations that appear to be most effective in conflict situations where the parties are concerned about accomplishing a task because these orientations focus on sound judgment and efficiency (Coleman & Kugler, 2014). Benevolence and support are social conflict orientations that appear to be more relational and less efficient and goal-oriented than the task orientations (Coleman & Kugler, 2014; Coleman et al., 2012). A simpler way this can be stated is that the five well-known conflict orientations are blends of concern for one's own outcomes versus others, depending on whether the task or relationship is more important to a party. Other researchers emphasize the dual concern model developed by Blake and Mouton (1964) and Kilmann and Thomas (1977) that focuses on four conflict styles such as avoiding, accommodating, competing, integrating, and compromise. These styles differ from the POs in that they seek to identify an individual's usual approach to conflict, but they do not address the cognitive aspects as to how the person arrives at choosing the style, nor do they emphasize the aspect of adapting a style to fit the situation at hand.

Conflict Fit

Research to date has largely disregarded the importance of conflict *fit*: the ability to apply the right conflict style for the right situation (Coleman & Kugler, 2014). Finding the right fit takes into account a response that considers the person's behavior, the environment, and the interaction. Coleman and Kugler (2014) introduced an approach for assessing the managerial

competencies that facilitate adaptivity behaviors during conflict called the Managerial Conflict

Adaptivity Assessment. The ability to be adaptive means that the person can "move freely

between various mindsets and employ their related strategies and tactics to achieve" (Coleman &

Ferguson, 2015, p. 51) their goals. No empirical research was discovered during this study's

literature research that addressed if conflict adaptivity works best with a specific leadership style.

So, there is a need for further research to determine the relationship between leadership styles

and conflict adaptivity (Coleman & Kugler, 2014). Therefore, this study focused on two

elements: (a) understanding the relationship between servant leadership and conflict adaptivity in

local government leaders, and (b) examining the relationships between conflict adaptivity and

the various aspects of servant leadership (e.g., empowerment).

The Servant as Leader

The concept of the leader as a servant was developed by Robert Greenleaf and inspired

by his reading of Herman Hesse's *Journey to the East* (Greenleaf, 2008; Parris & Peachey, 2013;

Reinke, 2004). The mystical story features a servant named Leo, who serves those who are on a

journey. He does menial chores and sustains the group with his spirit and his song (Greenleaf,

2008; Parris & Peachey, 2013). Leo had an "extraordinary presence." When Leo disappears, the

group falls into chaos, and the journey ends. Years later, the narrator of the story, who was

among the group of individuals traveling east, discovers that Leo was not a mere servant, as he

had supposed, but a great and noble leader who served as the head of the organization that had

sponsored the trip in the first place (Greenleaf, 2008). Greenleaf (2008) interpreted the story to

mean that a great leader should first be a servant. Greenleaf is also reported as saying that his

father was his first model of a servant-leader (Frick, 2016).

Greenleaf's philosophy appears to have been informed by his Christian ethics (Boyum, 2006; Frick, 2016) and by Hesse's fictional writing that was also inspired by his Judeo-Christian beliefs, as his parents were involved in missionary work and he had attended seminary (Hesse, 2019). According to Greenleaf (2008), a servant-leader is one who views themselves as a servant first—they exist to serve others rather than others serving them, which is not the typical view of leaders and managers. Greenleaf (2002) stated that "the great leader is seen as servant first, and that simple fact is the key to his greatness" (p. 21). He believed that the role of leadership could be taken from a person because it is given based on an organizational structure, but the aspect of being a servant was inherently part of who one was as a person and could not be withdrawn (Greenleaf, 2002).

Although Greenleaf (2008) popularized the servant-as-leader concept, the philosophy has its roots in biblical teachings (Parris & Peachey, 2013; Reinke, 2004). Jesus taught his disciples this approach to leadership, which was the opposite of what was occurring in his culture. He taught them that the one who wanted to be the greatest must be a servant to all (*New International Version*, 2014, Matthew 20:26). So while other leadership theories described what the leader does, servant leadership is differentiated by the leader's character and willingness to serve others (Parris & Peachey, 2013). This denotes that the servant as leader recognizes that his or her greatest contribution to life is to live for the service of others. This is similar to Jesus' example as he did not come to be served but to give his life for the benefit of others (*New International Version*, 2014, Matthew 20:28). Authors still struggle to define and operationalize the servant-leader concept as it appears that Greenleaf (2008) did not intend for the concept to be a series of steps but a way to reflect and grow (Parris & Peachey, 2013).

The servant-as-leader philosophy has been adopted by successful organizations like Starbucks, Nordstrom, Southwest Airlines, Service Master, and the Ritz Carlton (Eva et al., 2019; Parris & Peachey, 2013; Reinke, 2004). It is also referenced by successful authors like Stephen Covey, who created market appeal for the concept because he viewed it as related to value-based leadership and principle-centered leadership (Boyum, 2006; Parris & Peachey, 2013). Servant leadership is potentially appealing to the public sector because of its emphasis on ethics (Reinke, 2004).

After careful analysis of Robert Greenleaf's writings, Spears (2010) outlined 10 characteristics of a servant-leader that were necessary to progress or be viewed as a servant-leader. These characteristics are *listening*, *empathy*, *healing*, *awareness*, *persuasion*, *conceptualization*, *foresight*, *stewardship*, *commitment to the growth of people*, *and building community* (Spears, 2000, 2010). Many of these characteristics seem relevant to effective conflict resolution strategies used by a leader (e.g., building community).

Previous Research

Literature reviews on servant leadership (e.g., Eva et al., 2019; Parris & Peachey, 2013) showed that research on servant leadership had been conducted in the nonprofit sector, tourism, nursing, and the public sector, yet there exists a lack of agreement among academic scholars on how this theory should be operationalized. However, more empirical data now exists that substantiates the relationship between servant leadership and positive outcomes such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Eva et al., 2019; Parris & Peachey, 2013).

Servant Leadership in the Government

One aspect of servant leadership is its focus on sustainable performance over the long run (Eva et al., 2019) while focusing on ethics and flexible and contingent behaviors that consider

the needs of the follower and the organization. Local government employees differ from their private sector counterparts because they work to serve the public's interest. The emphasis on maintaining public trust is the main priority for public servants, and the desire to do so may stem from parental socialization, which may have fostered a sense of altruism and focus on the common good, political ideology, and religious beliefs the instilled a love for service to others, also known as *public service motivation* (Perry, 1997). Servant-leaders seek to cultivate trust with others so that others will know that their actions are for the benefit of the community (Greenleaf, 2002; Weinstein, 2013). Therefore, servant leadership appears to be a good fit for public service leaders. Also, the servant-leader's participatory and persuasive conflict strategies (Jit et al., 2016; Zhao et al., 2019) may be helpful in mitigating the conflicts and incivility that occur in local government. Examining how servant leadership is used in the public sector (Timiyo & Lee-Yeadon, 2016) to support conflict adaptivity leading to positive organizational outcomes will contribute to the empirical research on servant leadership.

Previous research relating to servant leadership in government has highlighted the servant-leader's role in building trust to minimize conflicts with collective bargaining units in the public sector after a business crisis (Weinstein, 2013), how local government leaders display their servant-leader characteristics in the leadership roles in hierarchal settings (Mareus et al., 2019), and how servant-leaders influence follower job performance in the public sector (Schwarz et al., 2016).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between servant leadership and conflict adaptivity in local government leaders. In the context of this research, local government leaders refer specifically to full-time management-level employees working in five local

government organizations (cities and counties) in the Midwest and Southern United States. The population was later extended to include state and federal government and nonprofit leaders to secure additional participants to reach the minimum number of participants for the intended statistical analyses.

Developing a greater understanding of the relationship between servant leadership and conflict adaptivity will help researchers, leaders, and educators to understand whether those leaders who apply servant leadership are more likely to adapt their conflict management strategy to be relevant to the situation they are facing (Coleman & Kugler, 2014). A leader's adaptivity could lead to greater creativity, collaboration (Terason, 2018), and successful organizational outcomes (Coleman & Kugler, 2014; Yang & Li, 2018; Zou et al., 2016).

Research Questions

This study focused on the following central research question:

- What is the relationship between servant leadership and conflict adaptivity in local government leaders?

As a subquestion, this study also examined:

- What are the relationships between conflict adaptivity and the servant leadership styles (overall and subdimensions)?

Definition of Key Terms

Conflict. Conflict is broadly defined as any situation where there is a clash between individual motives, purposes, and interests (Roeckelein, 2006).

Conflict adaptivity. According to Coleman and Kugler (2014), "conflict adaptivity is the capacity to identify and respond appropriately to different conflict situations or relevant changes

in conflict situations by employing the different POs of the situated model and their related strategies in a manner consistent with the demands of the presenting situation" (p. 949).

      Conflict fit. Conflict fit is the match between the conflict style and the needs of the situation (Coleman & Kugler, 2014).

      Conflict styles or conflict management styles. Conflict styles or conflict management styles (CMSs) are "specific behavioral patterns that individuals prefer to employ when dealing with conflict" (Moberg, 2001, p. 47).

      Local government. There are four types of organizations that fall into the category of local government: counties, townships, special districts, and municipalities. County government is the largest of the four and is responsible for administering state laws within their borders, which includes townships, special districts, and municipalities.

      Servant leadership. For the purposes of this article, servant leadership will be defined as "a holistic leadership approach that engages followers in multiple dimensions (e.g., relational, ethical, emotional, spiritual), such that they are empowered to grow into what they are capable of becoming" (Eva et al., 2019, p. 114).

Significance of the Study

      The emphasis of conflict research is identifying different conflict management styles. Yet, Mikkelsen and Clegg (2019) believed that more research needed to be conducted around the dynamic nature of conflict. Although it is important to understand a person's conflict style, problems arise within the conflict process when individuals fixate on one style above all others (Coleman & Ferguson, 2015). This study was a response to the call to examine the dynamic nature of conflict (Mikkelsen & Clegg, 2019) through the lens of conflict adaptivity. The topic of servant leadership is also experiencing a resurgence; therefore, this is an opportune time (Kiker

et al., 2019) to extend the empirical research on servant leadership by evaluating its influence on conflict behaviors.

Overview of the Study

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the key concepts (e.g., conflict, conflict adaptivity, conflict fit, servant leadership) that will be explored in more detail in the literature review and stated the purpose and research questions for the study. Chapter 2 will then provide more insight into the characteristics of a servant-leader and the relationship of these characteristics, if any, in facilitating adaptive conflict strategies among local government leaders. Chapter 3 provides information about the research methodology, population, instrumentation, data collection, and analysis. Results of the data analysis exploring the relationship between servant leadership and conflict adaptivity in local government will be presented in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 will summarize the research by discussing the findings, exploring implications of the research, listing the study's limitations, and providing future research recommendations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

"And as I ponder the fusing of servant and leader it seems a dangerous creation; dangerous for the natural servant to become a leader, dangerous for the leader to be servant first, and dangerous for a follower to insist that he be led by a servant. There are safer and easier alternatives available to all three. But why take them?" (Greenleaf, 2008, p. 14)

Leadership and conflict are parallel constructs. This means that they are often present at the same time. This is an important notion because ineffective leadership can result in costly disputes (Chukwuemeka et al., 2012) and prolonged conflict. Local government leaders have to address a variety of issues relating to climate change (Williams et al., 2017), retirement benefits for their employees (Robson & Smith, 2018), future workforce challenges due to the retirement of the baby boomers, hard to fill positions, increasing skills, and knowledge gaps needed to help government remain competitive and adapt to future workforce needs (MissionSquare Research Institute, 2019a).

The challenges faced by leaders in public service are varied, complex, and fraught with uncertainty and ambiguity (Rieckhoff & Maxwell, 2017). Researchers have examined servant leadership characteristics in hierarchal government organization structures (Mareus et al., 2019) and explored the negotiation skills government leaders need to navigate these diverse and complex situations (Chukwuemeka et al., 2012; Lee, 2002). Growing research suggests that servant-leaders may also influence employee job performance because they provide the development and support needed to sustain strong interpersonal relationships (Liden et al., 2008), which can mitigate conflict because they are considerate of others' perspectives. Servant-leaders also model the behaviors necessary to inspire excellence in public service (Shih &

Susanto, 2010), and they develop and empower their employees to achieve organizational outcomes (Melchar & Bosco, 2010). In addition, Eva et al. (2019) suggested that the servant-leader style might be a good approach for addressing modern-day workplace challenges because it is a multifaceted approach that encompasses the relational, ethical, emotional, and spiritual needs of the follower for their benefit and the benefit of the organization. For these reasons, this chapter will review the history and concepts of servant leadership and conflict adaptivity to explore if the servant-leader's motivation to put others first allows them to be more adaptive during conflict.

Servant Leadership

As mentioned in Chapter 1, local government employees' central focus is to serve the public, and their actions must benefit the community at large (Greenleaf, 2008; Weinstein, 2013). This implies that servant-leaders, because of their other-oriented focus, may be a good fit for the local governments who are in the throes of navigating the uncertainties and complexities of the modern workplace (Eva et al., 2019). Also, due to its conceptual framework of placing others first, and its holistic approach to the development of the follower, servant leadership is seen as an approach that can address 21st-century challenges, build trust in a unionized environment, and increase employee performance (Gandolfi et al., 2017; Schwarz et al., 2016; Weinstein, 2013) to achieve organizational outcomes. Furthermore, the servant-leader's participative approach to conflict (Jit et al., 2016; Zhao et al., 2019) may be valuable in mitigating incivility occurring in local government.

History

Greenleaf's servant leadership philosophy may also have been informed by his Christian values (Boyum, 2006; Frick, 2016). However, Gandolfi et al. (2017) suggested that although

Jesus Christ's teachings are the most prevalent teachings on the topic of servant leadership, the teachings and practice are similar to the teachings of Confucius (Gandolfi et al., 2017; Winston & Ryan, 2008), ancient monarchs who place their people and country above self (Gandolfi et al., 2017; Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002), and the tribal leaders within the Bedouin-Arab cultures who elevate the needs of their families and others above self (Gandolfi et al., 2017).

Defining Servant Leadership

Greenleaf (2008) believed that serving and leading were mostly driven by intuition which has been defined as acquired instincts "that somehow combines deep expertise with analytic skills at an unconscious level to produce an insight or recognize a pattern that others overlook"(Likierman, 2020, p. 104; Salas et al., 2010). This may explain why Greenleaf (2008) chose not to construct a one-size-fits-all definition, which left an open door for future researchers to define the term in the way that suited their context (Parris & Peachey, 2013; van Dierendonck, 2011). However, some researchers lament the lack of consistency in defining servant leadership (Eva et al., 2019; Gandolfi et al., 2017; van Dierendonck, 2011).

Greenleaf (2008) understood that the term servant-leader would be misaligned with the prevailing perspective of leadership, and he also sensed that others would seek to crystalize the term for the sake of logic and consistency and welcomed those who would attempt to do so. On the other hand, Gandolfi and Stone (2016) acknowledged that there is no universal definition of leadership, although scholars have been researching it for centuries. Therefore, attempts to crystalize servant leadership may be futile because the broader definition of leadership is still contextual. Nevertheless, there is a growing interest among academics to learn more about servant leadership.

Servant leadership articles have been published in 122 academic journals between 1998 and 2018. Researchers such as Eva et al. (2019) list 16 measures of servant leadership, most of which have not been reviewed and validated. Servant leadership is, therefore, growing in maturity as a construct. Below are several definitions that provide a broad overview of the servant-leader concept.

Robert Greenleaf's Definition of Servant Leadership. The concept of servant leadership was inspired by Robert Greenleaf (1904–1990) through what he called "intuitive insight" (Greenleaf, 2008, p. 14) and presented in his seminal work "The Servant as Leader," first published in 1970 (van Dierendonck, 2011). Greenleaf's (2008) definition is simple, "The servant-leader is servant first" (p. 15), and the impetus for service comes as a result of a natural feeling of wanting to serve and putting the needs of others above their own (Greenleaf, 2008; Spears, 2000). Servant-leaders inspire growth in their followers to "become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous" (Greenleaf, 2008, p. 15).

Jesus' Definition and Example of Servant Leadership. In Mark 10:42–43, Jesus said:

> You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. (*New International Version*, 2014)

Here, Jesus not only draws a distinction between the prevailing leadership practices of the day, but he goes on to explain that the greatest among them is the one who serves all, and then he points to himself as an example which they should follow. Although Gandolfi et al. (2017) and van Dierendonck (2011) referred to other ancient practices surrounding servant leadership,

Greenleaf's definition appears to align more closely with the biblical text (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002).

Working Definition. Because there is the lack of consistency and clarity surrounding the definition of servant leadership (Gandolfi et al., 2017; Parris & Peachey, 2013; Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002; van Dierendonck, 2011), Eva et al. (2019) attempted to crystalize the concept by defining it as "a holistic leadership approach that engages followers in multiple dimensions such that they are empowered to grow into what they are capable of becoming" (p. 114). This definition was used in the current study.

The Servant as Leader Approach

Servant leadership is unique from other theories because of its strong other-oriented focus on developing the follower to perform at a higher level to fulfill the greater good. It builds the social identity of leaders who embrace this style, creates a sense of belonging, and emphasizes the development of leaders to serve the common good (Eva et al., 2019; Parris & Peachey, 2013).

Eva et al. (2019) suggested that the practice of servant leadership might be appropriate for the modern work environment because it is a systems-oriented view that employs a variety of methods to engage followers on different levels (e.g., relational, ethical, emotional, spiritual). The intention is to help their employees become their very best selves so that they can serve at an optimum level within the organization. Servant-leaders practice the delicate balance of first developing their followers' selflessness and ethical orientation with a high regard for organizational stewardship (Eva et al., 2019). This by no means negates the importance of follower performance, but the emphasis is not on the short-term but rather sustainable performance over time (Eva et al., 2019).

Servant Leadership Characteristics

After careful analysis of Robert Greenleaf's writings, Spears (2010) outlined 10 characteristics that are indicative of servant-leaders. The characteristics that embody servant leadership are listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community (Spears, 2000, 2010). Many of these characteristics seem relevant to effective conflict resolution strategies used by leaders. Following are the definitions of each characteristic as defined by Spears (2010), together with a discussion of their proposed relevance to conflict resolution.

Listening. Listening is more than hearing what is being said, it is having a mindset to understand the desire or perspective of another person while staying attuned to the leader's own inner voice. It is a critical skill for facilitating open dialog and ensuring that people feel heard. This also requires moments of reflection to synthesize all perspectives, which should include the view that emanates from the leader's own inner voice. When dealing with conflict, one of the servant-leader's goals is to cultivate an environment where everyone perceives that they are being heard and to create consensus building (Wong et al., 2018; Zhao et al., 2019). In *Caring Enough to Hear and Be Heard*, David Augsburger wrote: "Being heard is so close to being loved that for the average person, they are almost indistinguishable" (1982, p. 12). This again supports the idea that listening is an attribute of servant leadership, which can encourage open dialog and adaptability during conflict.

Empathy. The servant-leader makes a concerted effort to understand and value various perspectives. People want to feel appreciated and respected for their uniqueness. The servant-leader assumes the good intentions of coworkers and colleagues and seeks to understand varying

perspectives (Littlejohn & Domenici, 2007; Oore et al., 2015), which is crucial to navigating conflict successfully.

Healing. One of the great strengths of servant leadership is their drive to experience wholeness within themselves and in their relationship with others. They seek to help make whole those who have been hurt and emotionally fractured through life's journey. Conflict is not relegated to a single event (Coleman et al., 2012), it can be a self-perpetuating process that requires the skills of a bridge-builder and healer (Littlejohn & Domenici, 2007) such as the servant-leader to bring about unity and create an environment for open dialog. Therefore, one of the objectives of the servant-leader is to bring healing to others, facilitate healing between people, and bring healing to the community, which ultimately facilitates healing within the servant-leader (Greenleaf, 2008).

Awareness. Awareness helps a leader in understanding issues involving ethics, power, and values. It lends itself to being able to view most situations from a more integrated, holistic position. Self-awareness is a key element of emotional intelligence because it helps the leader understand the types of behaviors that influence their response to conflict and also helps them to be aware of the impact that their emotions have on others (Gunkel et al., 2016; Shih & Susanto, 2010).

Persuasion. Servant-leaders seek to persuade, not coerce, and they are effective at building consensus within groups. The art of persuasion is a key skill for managing conflict and influencing the behaviors of others without coercion (Littlejohn & Domenici, 2007; van Dierendonck, 2011). Persuasion reduces the potential for conflict between the leader and their followers, especially when combined with listening and empathy. Aristotle's three modes of

persuasion of ethos, pathos, and logos (Demirdöğen, 2010), used for navigating conflict, are significant elements to servant leadership, the art of persuasion, and conflict adaptivity.

Conceptualization. Spears (2010) captured the essence of the servant-leader when he said that "Servant-leaders seek to nurture their abilities to dream great dreams. The ability to look at a problem or an organization from a conceptualizing perspective means that one must think beyond day-to-day realities" (p. 28). They have a systems view of the organization and community they serve, which means they have to look beyond today's realities and see connections between people, events, and actions over time (Spears, 2010). Servant-leaders should have a pioneering mindset, be willing to take risks (Russell & Gregory Stone, 2002), and be adaptable (Coleman & Kugler, 2014). This is critical in a government environment because people are more prone to be risk-averse because taking risks will frequently provoke conflict.

Foresight. Foresight allows the servant-leader to learn from past experiences, assess the current facts, and use them to formulate possible implications of their decisions for the future. The ability to conduct this type of assessment helps a leader develop more adaptive approaches to conflict (Mitchell & Mitchell, 2015). Foresight also enables a leader to anticipate and prevent conflicts since they may be able to envision the ramification of their decisions and the impact it will have on others.

Stewardship. Stewardship reflects accountability and responsibility to something entrusted in the leader's care. That being the case, conflict may be viewed as a dynamic process in which the leader stewards, exercises care, and demonstrates reflexivity (Littlejohn & Domenici, 2007) when dealing with conflict while being a good steward of the people and the process.

Commitment to the Growth of People. The servant-leader is dedicated to the growth of the individuals within their organization and seeks to cultivate the personal and professional growth of others. One way this is accomplished is by demonstrating a sense of humility (Savel & Munro, 2017), particularly when navigating interpersonal conflict. Coupled with foresight and persuasion, and their commitment to the growth of their followers and colleagues, the servant-leader may be able to anticipate which conflict situations could aid in furthering the growth of a person and understand how conflict may derail a person's career or contribute to the breakdown of a relationship with a colleague.

Building Community. A strong community fosters a sense of unity, pride, and a sense of belonging. The servant-leader seeks out various mediums and techniques for building a sense of community within their organization and the community at large. A community is part of the ecosystem (Littlejohn & Domenici, 2007), and the servant-leader must negotiate the relationships within the system to bring about positive outcomes.

Perspectives on Leadership

Leadership is a complex topic and must be viewed from varied perspectives (Northouse, 2016). Two theories that are closely related to servant leadership are authentic and transformational leadership. A comparison can be made to illustrate the uniqueness of servant leadership but also to connect the current study with other leadership theories highlighted in the conflict research.

Authentic leadership has a strong element of morality and ethics associated with it because it emphasizes these components more than other forms of leadership (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Authentic leadership draws on positive psychological capabilities such as a strong self-concept and relational transparency (Lemoine et al., 2019). The prevalence of political and

corporate corruption has called for a different type of leader—one who exercises transparency and does what they said they would do (Hickman, 2016). Like transformational leadership theory, authentic leadership theory requires that the leader be sincere about their motives for change and not just seeking their own personal agenda. That is also the case with servant-leaders whose objective is to place the needs of others before their own (Gandolfi et al., 2017; Greenleaf, 2008; van Dierendonck, 2011).

However, the authentic leader's focus is on self-awareness and internal processing (Fotohabadi & Kelly, 2018) that increases transparency and helps the leader to be aligned with their true values. Self-awareness is a key aspect of an authentic leader (Fotohabadi & Kelly, 2018), and it is an integral part of the conflict management process because it assists a leader in becoming more adaptive through being more in-tune with their psychological state. On the other hand, it differs from servant leadership in that its focus is not on serving—it does not support a focus on doing what is best for the common good of all, nor does it promote a servant-first mentality (Greenleaf, 2002, 2008). A survey of 65 leaders was conducted to assess if authentic leadership is positively correlated with constructive conflict behaviors (Fotohabadi & Kelly, 2018). Researchers used the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory, the Thomas–Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument, and the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire. Findings revealed a positive and significant association between the conflict modes and authentic leadership with the exception of avoidance and competing which the researchers identified as being negatively related to authentic leadership (Fotohabadi & Kelly, 2018) .

Transformational leadership is about using influence, inspiration, and individualized attention to gain the followers' commitment to organizational change (Avery et al., 2008). The transformational leader's central focus is on changing and transforming people to accomplish the

goal of the organization. It is a process that requires a great deal of influence and the ability to assess the emotions, values, ethics, and standards of the follower while keeping the long-term goals and vision of the organization in mind (Northouse, 2016), making it different from authentic leadership. Authentic leadership is more associated with who the leader is as a person, self-awareness, hope, purpose, and aligning their behaviors with their values (Avolio & Gardner, 2005).

Whereas there are similarities between servant and transformational leadership, such as the focus on ethics, the development of the follower (Caldwell et al., 2012), and conflict management strategies, such as persuasion and collaboration (Zhao et al., 2019), they differ in that transformational leadership's primary concern is accomplishing organizational outcomes (Weinstein, 2013). Furthermore, Weinstein (2013) stated:

> Under the pure transformational leader model, employees may distrust the leader; they may perceive that his or her investment in them as people is only being done to advance his or her agenda and organizational objectives. Transformational leaders are prone to self-aggrandizement and may take credit for the work of their followers. (p. 87)

This type of behavior can foster an environment of mistrust that contributes to conflict among colleagues (Weinstein, 2013) and even causes interdepartmental rivalry. Weinstein (2013) also stated that "while the transformational model of leadership proved effective in bringing forth tangible results, it did so at the expense of organizational trust because of the perceived motivation of the employer" (p. 87). A study of 150 middle-level managers from the manufacturing industries showed that managers who seemed to demonstrate the transformational leadership style used constructive conflict styles such as obliging (focus on commonalities, not differences) and integrating (showing concern for self and others; Saeed et al., 2014).

The research mentioned reflects the need for leaders to develop effective conflict management skills that require strong social skills and adaptivity, given that conflict can be stimulated by a situation or an individual's disposition (Saeed et al., 2014). While servant leadership differs from transformational and authentic leadership, the prior research on these two leadership theories suggests that there is an association between effective leadership styles and conflict management styles.

The Servant-Leader and Power

In their book, *Never Split the Difference*, Voss (a former hostage negotiator with the Federal Bureau of Investigations) and Raz (2016) explained the "paradox of power" that in essence suggests that "… the harder we push, the more likely we are to be met with resistance" (p. 227). Likewise, Coleman and Ferguson (2015), in their book *Making Conflict Work: Harnessing the Power of Disagreement*, noted that "Power differences between people are a common source of conflict and conflict makes people acutely aware of power differences" (p. 7). Although power can be a force and drive to serve others and accomplish a purpose, it can also be viewed as the primary antagonist of conflict, and it adds a layer of complexity to workplace dynamics (Coleman & Ferguson, 2015). This occurs because power differences are a prevalent agent of conflict. How one views power, which Coleman and Ferguson (2015) defined as "the ability to cause or prevent actions and to make things happen, and the discretion to act or not to act" (p. 7), determines the approach a leader will use during a conflict.

Yet, power is not always negative because Jesus gave his disciples power to fulfill purpose in their role as servant-leaders (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002), and Kahane (2010) mentions the role of "power to," which is initiated by love, serves the purpose of equipping individuals to perform their roles. Coleman (2014) asserted that "… virtually all conflicts directly or indirectly

concern power" (Coleman, 2014, p. 137) and that power is used as leverage to achieve one's goals. However, it is possible that the servant-leader is one who could mitigate the destructive aspects of power in conflict because of their concern for the follower and the focus on the common good (Greenleaf, 2008; Kiker et al., 2019; Spears, 2010; van Dierendonck, 2011). In this sense, servant-leaders are stewards of power, being humble and judicious in their use of power for the good of others.

Servant-leaders are acquainted with the use of power and authority that is inherent in the roles within the organization, and they understand the difference between coercive power that only strengthens resistance (Greenleaf, 2002; Voss & Raz, 2016) and the power that creates opportunity and alternatives (Greenleaf, 2002). Greenleaf (2002) expressed this effectively when he insinuated that the servant-leader's humility and care for others suggested that they use power to benefit others, not to hurt them. Therefore, the servant-leader could minimize the negative effects of power on conflict through perspective taking (related to empathy and conceptualizing), which is the cognitive ability to see things from various points of view by acknowledging the feelings, positions, and interests of others and adapting accordingly. Perspective taking and the ability to adapt implies that there may be a relationship between servant leadership and conflict adaptivity.

The Servant-Leader and Conflict

A leader's conflict approach can influence the course of a conflict, whether positive or negative, because it is how conflicts are managed that determines if the outcomes are constructive or destructive (Shih & Susanto, 2010; Wong et al., 2018). A study conducted by Wong et al. (2018) indicated that servant-leaders engaged in conflict by encouraging followers to discuss conflict openly and collaboratively. Zhao et al. (2019) supported this view because their

research showed that servant-leaders have a propensity to use persuasive, participative, and collaborative approaches to conflict.

To be successful in conflict scenarios such as those that local government leaders face, a leader must be adaptable (Reinke, 2004) when facing the verbal challenges from stakeholders and dealing with competing interests of political leaders. Servant-leaders may be more successful in this scenario because of their willingness to listen and collaborate with others, their ability to see various perspectives (Littlejohn & Domenici, 2007), and integrate conflict styles to achieve genuine consensus. Likewise, Weinstein (2013) suggested that the servant-leader "… has the ability to transform the union-management relationship in the public sector from adversarial to cooperative by fostering an environment of trust" (p. 85), which can result in positive organizational outcomes (Reinke, 2004).

Growing research suggests that servant-leaders may also have an influence on employees' job performance because they contribute to the development and maintenance of strong interpersonal relationships (Liden et al., 2008), which in turn mitigates conflict because they are considerate of another person's perspective. Servant-leaders also model the behaviors necessary to inspire excellence in public service (Shih & Susanto, 2010), and they develop and empower their employees to achieve organizational outcomes (Melchar & Bosco, 2010).

Servant Leadership and Self-Differentiation

Greenleaf (2008) perceived the *servant first* actions that stemmed from the leader's thoughts and attitudes and, coupled with inspiration, propelled an individual to action. God selected specific individuals (e.g., David, Moses, Paul, and Mary, the mother of Jesus) to fulfill specific acts that would transform the world around them. The influence of the individuals mentioned above may not have occurred if they had yielded to the norms and expectations of

their cultures or the expectation of others (Greenleaf, 2008). What allows servant-leaders to

respond in these ways may be the fact that they are guided by the characteristics that Greenleaf

(2008) outlined in his servant as leader thesis and those explained by Reinke (2004), Russell and

Gregory Stone (2002), and Spears (2010). This suggests that the servant-leader is clear about

their values and stated beliefs, and they live congruently with the stated characteristics while

being responsive to the needs of others without living in a state of anxiety. Being guided by

one's principles, priorities, and a well-thought-out approach can assist a servant-leader in

selecting the POs (Coleman & Kugler, 2014) necessary to be adaptive during conflict as it allows

a leader to stay calm in the face of conflict and less reactive to emotional triggers that generate

anxious behaviors (Gilbert, 2017).

Conflict

Philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle viewed conflict as an acute problem that

threatened the order of the state and thought that it should be kept to a minimum (Mikkelsen &

Clegg, 2019) through the art of persuasion (Donohue & Cai, 2008). Aristotle viewed politics as a

social activity that engendered disagreements, but he also viewed disagreements as a means to

find solutions to issues and problems (Demirdöğen, 2010). As a result, Aristotle outlined

principles for persuasion, which involved observing the other person so that one could assess the

appropriate means by which to persuade the person with a dissenting view (Demirdöğen, 2010).

The three modes used to persuade others are *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*. Ethos reflects the person's

character and reputation (doing the right thing), pathos is the tone of and mode of the

presentation (appealing to emotions or the heart), and logos represents intellectual appeals and

logical arguments (Demirdöğen, 2010; Stevenson, 1998). Such approaches might guide leaders

to consider the effects of conflict on people and outcomes, appeal to others to seek harmony or care for others, or appeal to higher values to be upstanding and fair.

Religions also shape the cultural perspective surrounding interpersonal conflict. For example, Confucius spoke of social harmony, and Christian teachings recommend turning the other cheek and promote forgiveness (Donohue & Cai, 2008). However, the biblical worldview also suggests that if Christians have a problem with another individual who is a Christian, they should go to them and try to resolve it, and if an individual is unable to resolve a conflict with an offended party, the person attempting to resolve the conflict should bring someone else to try to resolve the issue (*New International Version*, 2014, Matthew 18:15–17). Christians are also urged to speak timely and wholesome words that will encourage others to want to listen (*New International Version*, 2014, Ephesians 4:29). So, the biblical view is not just about turning the other cheek, but it also provides steps to resolve conflict so that people can live in peace with each other. This train of thought is similar to Aristotle's philosophy that insinuates that it is the communicator's responsibility to persuade the other person (Donohue & Cai, 2008), especially when it relates to divergent political views in conflict (Demirdöğen, 2010).

Gandhi's nonviolent approach to obtaining peace for all placed him in conflict with the Hindu culture, religion, and other prevailing opinions of his day (Nair, 1997). Martin Luther King, Jr. similarly adopted a nonviolent approach that created conflict with those who benefited from the infrastructure of racism and discrimination (King, 1963). These leaders sought to bring about change for the common good (Greenleaf, 2008; Nair, 1997) through an approach that is not necessarily free of conflict. Even Martin Luther King, Jr. (1963) acknowledged that negotiation is an element of the nonviolent strategy. So, social conflict is an extricable part of personal, organizational (Coleman et al., 2012; Mikkelsen & Clegg, 2019; Ojo & Abolade, 2014;

Saeed et al., 2014), and government life (Chukwuemeka et al., 2012; Demirdöğen, 2010; Lee, 2002). Sande (2004) summarized:

> To some, conflict is a hazard that threatens to sweep them off their feet and leave them bruised and hurting. To others, it is an obstacle that they should conquer quickly and firmly, regardless of the consequences. But some people have learned that conflict is an opportunity to solve common problems. (p. 22)

Conflict can be perceived as a hazard, obstacle, or opportunity (Sande, 2004) depending on the vantage point of the onlooker or the one engaged in the conflict. This may explain why conflict researchers to date have not developed a unifying definition for this phenomenon (Coleman & Ferguson, 2015; Coleman et al., 2012; Mikkelsen & Clegg, 2019), nor is there a consensus as to whether it serves a constructive or destructive role in interpersonal relationships (McKibben, 2017; Mikkelsen & Clegg, 2019).

Definitions

Mikkelsen and Clegg (2019) stated that "Although conflict is well established in both ordinary and academic language, it has different meanings" (p. 166), which led to an appeal from some researchers to create a single definition that all can agree on (Mikkelsen & Clegg, 2018, 2019). The lack of consensus regarding the definition of conflict is "a major obstacle to progress within the field because research results cannot be generalized from one study to another" (Mikkelsen & Clegg, 2018, p. 185). Researchers have progressed in conducting conflict research from a variety of perspectives, but according to Mikkelsen and Clegg (2019), researchers have not progressed beyond the debates surrounding the definition of conflict that existed in the 1960s. On the other hand, Mikkelsen and Clegg (2019) suggested:

The larger problem is not the many different definitions of the term conflict but instead the lack of reflexivity in the ways scholars conceptualize the term. This lack of reflexivity generates the tacit assumption that we all know—and all agree on—what conflict is. In other words, it is the failure to be specific about which epistemological and ontological meaning of "conflict" is being indexed, which creates conceptual ambiguity and obscures conceptual advancements in conflict research, rather than the absence of agreement on a common definition of conflict. (Mikkelsen & Clegg, 2019, p. 167)

It is unlikely that a single definition will be enacted in the near future (Mikkelsen & Clegg, 2019) because even though Mikkelsen and Clegg (2019) bemoaned the lack of consensus surrounding the definition of conflict, these researcher's introduced conflict as a neutral construct and proposed that the focus should be on comprehending the "complexities and dynamics" (Mikkelsen & Clegg, 2019, p. 167) that surrounds conflict. Following are some attempts by researchers to define conflict.

Conflict can be defined as any situation where there is a clash between individual motives, purposes, and interests (Rahim, 2002; Roeckelein, 2006), or it can be defined as an interpersonal disagreement between one or two individuals (McKibben, 2017; Yang & Li, 2018). Deutsch (1973) stated that "Conflict occurs when people perceive that their goals, attitudes, values, or beliefs are incongruent with those of another individual" (p. 107). Conflict is also described as cognitive because it focuses on how people differ in their approach to solving problems (Lu & Wang, 2017; Mikkelsen & Clegg, 2019). Coleman et al. (2012) defined "social conflict as a relational process influenced by the presence of incompatible activities" (p. 10).

Conflict is characterized in different ways. Interpersonal conflict can be viewed as counterproductive to organizational productivity because it creates discord, negativity, and

contributes to the breakdown of organizational communication (McKibben, 2017). Task conflict focuses on inconsistencies surrounding completing a task (Lu & Wang, 2017; Moeller et al., 2012). Process and task conflict are similar, but they differ in that process conflict focuses on a series of activities that occur within a workflow (Mikkelsen & Clegg, 2019).

Causes of Conflict

There could be numerous events that serve as a catalyst for conflict, but some researchers believe that conflicts result from a fundamental attribution error (Littlejohn & Domenici, 2007), which in essence is how people perceive and explain the causes of conflict. Attribution may contribute to people making snap judgments about an interpersonal conflict instead of taking a more panoramic view (Littlejohn & Domenici, 2007). This is because people tend to attribute other people's bad behavior to a flaw in their character instead of examining the circumstances that contribute to the conflict. On the other hand, people extend grace to themselves because they factor in the extenuating circumstances that instigate their behavior (Littlejohn & Domenici, 2007). In addition, conflict systems that exist in the work environment generate the energy to sustain themselves (Littlejohn & Domenici, 2007) due in part to the individuals' views and experience with conflict (Gilbert, 2017). The servant-leader's empathy skills can be beneficial in these situations because servant-leaders take great effort to understand the other person's perspective (Littlejohn & Domenici, 2007; Oore et al., 2015) to navigate conflict successfully.

Different opinions and goals (Kurt et al., 2014), lack of trust in public sector officials (Nyhan, 2000), different personalities (Coleman et al., 2012; Ome, 2013; Qadir & Khan, 2016), cultural values, lack of emotional intelligence, self-leadership (Flores et al., 2018; Gunkel et al., 2016), miscommunication (Mikkelsen & Clegg, 2019), and contradictory opinions about how

processes and tasks should be completed can all serve as an impetus to conflict (Flores et al., 2018; McKibben, 2017; Mikkelsen & Clegg, 2019).

Obtaining a global view of a situation requires the individual or leaders to engage in perspective taking, which is having the cognitive adroitness to see things from different viewpoints; it also allows a person to be more other-oriented than self-serving (Littlejohn & Domenici, 2007). The ability to consider self and others equally speaks to one of the strengths of a servant-leader because servant-leaders ideally pursue what benefits everyone (Greenleaf, 2008; Savel & Munro, 2017).

Benefits and Disadvantages of Conflict

To address future workforce trends, local governments focus on creating a learning environment that will attract millennials and retain top talent (MissionSquare Research Institute, 2019b). The dynamic changes and uncertainty occurring in government require that employees engage in more rapid learning to meet the demands of the community. Conflict is an essential part of a learning organization that can be helpful in improving decision-making skills, performance, and innovation (Mikkelsen & Clegg, 2018; Rahim, 2002) and can increase job satisfaction and employee commitment (Ahmed, 2015). As a result, conflict researchers have highlighted the need for strengthening conflict skills (Rahim, 2002). The 21st century ushers in a multigenerational workforce with several generations working alongside each other with different experiences, thoughts, and perspectives, which necessitates conflict adaptivity to navigate the nuances between these generational cohorts.

Theories and Previous Research

Conflict management research yields different results due to the varying epistemological and ontological views and contexts of conflict research (Mikkelsen & Clegg, 2019). Previous

research has explored normative and descriptive approaches to conflict. Normative practices provide prescriptive procedures for addressing what is viewed as an essential and productive phenomenon. This pragmatic approach to mitigating conflict prevents conflict from becoming dysfunctional (Kilmann & Thomas, 1978; Mikkelsen & Clegg, 2019). Descriptive practices emphasize strategies for managing conflict (Mikkelsen & Clegg, 2019). For example, the dual concern model (Blake & Mouton, 1964; Rahim, 1983), which provides five strategies for managing conflict, is a popular model that is cited by many researchers (Coleman & Ferguson, 2015; Demirdöğen, 2010; Mikkelsen & Clegg, 2018; Rahim, 2002; Rhoades & Carnevale, 2006; Sorenson et al., 1999). On the other hand, Mikkelsen and Clegg (2019) believed that this two-dimensional approach, concern for self and concern for others (Rahim, 1983), is simplistic and may blind researchers to other contextual factors that could be used to manage conflict (Mikkelsen & Clegg, 2019).

Kilmann and Thomas (1978), who developed an assessment that supports the dual concern model, suggested that conflict could be viewed through a process or structural lens. The process lens sees conflict as a sequence of events, where preceding events can affect future events, and the structural lens suggests that conflict occurs as a result of conditions such as "conflict of interest, norms, beliefs, attitudes, and skills" (Kilmann & Thomas, 1978, p. 61) that influences a person's behavior. The process view supports the conflict systems theory where conflict is maintained through cybernetic feedback loops, which refers to "the system exerting the energy to organize itself" (Littlejohn & Domenici, 2007, p. 55). Taking the systems view into consideration affirms that there is a network of forces at work that influences the conflict phenomena (Littlejohn & Domenici, 2007), while the structural view (Kilmann & Thomas, 1978) appears to align with the social motive theory that asserts that a person's environment

determines what they value, and those values will influence the individual's behavior during conflict (Coleman et al., 2012). Both the process and structural view appear to have a place in the conflict experience. Following is a more detailed summary of the dual concern model and four other theories mentioned in conflict research. Each theory has benefits and limitations and does not provide a holistic view of what processes and strategies contribute to constructive conflict (Coleman et al., 2012).

Dual Concern Theory. Conflict research highlights five theoretical models of conflict, and each takes slightly different approaches in understanding the situations and processes that foster functional and dysfunctional conflict (Coleman et al., 2012). The dual concern theory, which emphasizes a concern for self and others, is one of five models that have been developed to facilitate constructive conflict. The dual concern model was a great advancement in conflict research that was developed by Blake and Mouton (1964, 1967), Demirdöğen (2010), and Rahim (1983), and further enhanced by Kilmann and Thomas (1977) into a conflict mode instrument that focuses on identifying and managing personal conflict styles. This instrument focused on five conflict modes: avoiding, accommodation, compromise, collaborating, and competing (Brewer & Lam, 2009; Kilmann & Thomas, 1977; Rahim, 1983). However, the instrument has received criticism for failing to capture a broader range of conflict approaches (Mikkelsen & Clegg, 2019; Nicotera, 1993). This theory can be argued to align with the biblical perspective of loving your neighbor as yourself (*New International Version*, 2014, Mark 12:30–31). Relative to servant leadership, the leader's concern in conflict would be with the follower's needs.

Social Interdependence Theory. Social interdependence theory investigates the role of competitive and cooperative goals in conflict and looks at the conditions that exist between individuals that will serve as a catalyst for constructive or destructive conflict dynamics

(Coleman & Kugler, 2014; Coleman et al., 2012). Like or shared goals are apt to promote greater cooperation among disputants, and conflicting goals are likely to promote competition. The focus on cooperation versus competition is related to similarities or dissimilarities of values, beliefs, or mutually beneficial goals (Nyhan, 2000). Thus, parties with similar interests may be inclined to work more collaboratively with each other than those with dissimilar interests (Coleman et al., 2012). However, there are limitations to this theory in that the premise of the theory assumes that the conflicting parties have equal power with a high degree of interdependence. In situations where power and levels of interdependence are not equal, researchers have seen mixed results (Coleman et al., 2012). Servant-leaders seem likely to build cooperation rather than highlight competition**.**

Social Motive Theory. The focal point of social motive theory is to examine how individual and situational differences influence an individual's values, which ultimately drive the person's behavior during conflict (Coleman et al., 2012; Kilmann & Thomas, 1978). According to Coleman et al. (2012), researchers have identified several social motives that include "altruistic, competitive, and individualistic" motives (p. 12). However, the main emphasis has been on pro-self (demonstrates little to no concern for the other person and tends to be competitive) versus prosocial (collaborative, aiming for fair outcomes that will benefit all) motives (Coleman et al., 2012). The prosocial orientations of altruism and collaboration (Kruglanski & Higgins, 2007) aligned with the servant leadership's guiding principle to serve others and the community before self (Greenleaf, 2002).

Power Dependency Theory. The power dependence theory, which is readily visible during distributive bargaining and negotiations, focuses on the level of independence and dependence that exists between the parties. In this situation, the dependent party may not have as

many alternatives and as much leverage as the other and may have to succumb to an agreement that may not be in their best interest. In addition to a power imbalance (power over) that can be found in conflict (Coleman & Ferguson, 2015; Coleman et al., 2012; Kahane, 2010), access to resources, social status, and charisma can also influence the level of dependence or independence in a negotiation (Coleman & Ferguson, 2015; Coleman et al., 2012; Kahane, 2010). In this case, the servant-leader's ability to listen and take in various perspectives can encourage more candid dialog, which allows for all parties to be heard.

Game Theory. Game theory "emerged from the study of economics and the study of games" (Coleman et al., 2012, p. 14). The theory is grounded in mathematics and seeks to produce rational decisions during the course of a conflict, which can be difficult considering that emotions (Ayoko & Callan, 2010; Flores et al., 2018; Kurt et al., 2014; Wu et al., 2018) are a big part of conflict. This theory is most beneficial in competitive "zero-sum" conditions. The servant-leader's foresight can provide greater context to this theory because it takes past, current, and future implications into perspective (Greenleaf, 2008).

Conflict Adaptivity

Conflict adaptivity is a person's ability to exercise mental and emotional agility amid conflict. This means the individual will understand their values, belief, and cognitive motivations (Coleman & Kugler, 2014; Coleman et al., 2012) while considering external factors to develop the best approach that "fits" the conflict situation at hand. Coleman and Ferguson (2015) described adaptivity as "… the ability to move freely between various mindsets and employ their related strategies and tactics to achieve your short- and long-term goals" (p. 51). Being adaptive can also increase one's ability to engage in constructive conflict (Rahim et al., 2002; Saeed et al., 2014). Therefore, leaders should consider using a blend of styles (Huang, 2018) during a conflict

situation in lieu of taking just one approach simply because it is what they have become used to doing (Coleman, 2018; Coleman et al., 2012). In this instance, the ability to conceptualize and take a holistic view of the organization's systems (Greenleaf, 2008) helps the servant-leader be more adaptive.

Situated Model of Conflict. The situated model of conflict is an adaptive approach to conflict that looks at how a person's PO influences an individual's behavior and approach to a conflict situation (Coleman et al., 2012; Huang, 2018; Rahim, 2002). The conceptual framework for the situated model of conflict theory developed by Wish et al. (1976) uncovered five dimensions of social relationship using a scaling analysis method to analyze survey data (Coleman et al., 2012). The dimensions are "cooperation–competition; power distribution (equal-unequal); task orientation versus emotional orientation; and formality versus informality and degree of importance" (Coleman et al., 2012, p. 16). These orientations reflect a blend of a person's cognitive, motivational, morals, and actions. According to Coleman et al. (2012),

> Because of both internal and external pressures for consistency, specific types of situations will tend to encourage appropriate POs that 'fit' the situation, and different types of POs will tend to propel people toward social relations that are consistent with their orientations—when they have a choice. (p. 16)

Yet, there are those who develop chronic and rigid orientations that generate behaviors that are inconsistent with the situation they are facing. Therefore, it is important that individuals not only look at the social relationship between themselves and another person, but they must combine that with the appropriate PO to achieve the best outcome possible. This "fit" between the social relationship and PO is what supports a leader's ability to become adaptive in conflict (Coleman & Kugler, 2014; Huang, 2018) and achieve greater outcomes. This is the basis for the Coleman

and Kugler (2014) assessment used in this research to examine the association between servant leadership and conflict adaptivity.

Conflict Fit. The aspect of fit comes into play because the approach should fit the situation to achieve optimum results. Fit looks not only at the person and their approach to the situation at hand but also at the environment, and there should be an alignment between these two; meaning does the strategy being used to manage the conflict fit the general approach to conflict that is embedded within the organizational culture (Bundy et al., 2018; Coleman & Kugler, 2014; Huang, 2018). Although, one should also consider that the leader's approach to conflict influences the organization's environment (Bundy et al., 2018; Gelfand et al., 2012). This line of thought is supported by Coleman and Kugler (2014), who stated that "a specific conflict strategy will be more or less effective or ineffective under a particular set of conditions" (p. 946). However, a major challenge to the discussion surrounding fit is that although researchers place much emphasis on fit, there is a lack of information on its theoretical significance (Coleman & Kugler, 2014; Huang, 2018) as it relates to conflict.

Psychological Orientations. Psychological orientations (POs) comprise four highly interconnected elements of cognitive, motivational, moral, and action that contribute to the assessment of a situation, which in turn drives an individual's behavior (Coleman & Kugler, 2014; Coleman et al., 2012; Deutsch, 2007). This assessment of the appropriate action helps the individual to select the behavior that is the best *fit* for a situation (Coleman & Kugler, 2014). There are five POs: benevolence, support, dominance, appeasement, and autonomy (Coleman & Kugler, 2014; Coleman et al., 2012; Huang, 2018). Researchers posit that these orientations "help determine which perceptions, values, emotions, and behaviors the disputant will find to be relevant in a given conflict" (Coleman et al., 2012, p. 21). Dominance, appeasement, and

autonomy are task-orientated conflict resolution styles that appear to be most effective in conflict situations where the parties are mostly concerned about accomplishing a task because it focuses on sound judgment and efficiency. Benevolence and support are social conflict orientations that appear to be more relational and less efficient and goal-oriented than the task orientations (Coleman & Kugler, 2014; Coleman et al., 2012). Definitions reflected in Table 1 were synthesized from two sources (Coleman & Kugler, 2014, pp. 947–948; Coleman et al., 2012, pp. 33–34;).

Table 1

Definitions of Psychological Orientations

Psychological orientations	Definitions
Benevolence	Employing the combined elements of cognitive, motivational, moral, and action orientations to assess the most fitting response for a situation and guides one behavior in a conflict situation. It is typically displayed in high power, collaborative goals, and high interdependence situations.
Dominance	Employing the combined elements of cognitive, motivational, moral, and action orientations to assess the most fitting response for a situation and guides one behavior in a conflict situation. It is typically displayed in high power, competitive goals, and high interdependence.
Support	Employing the combined elements of cognitive, motivational, moral, and action orientations to assess the most fitting response for a situation and guides one behavior in a conflict situation. It is typically displayed in low power, collaborative goals, and high interdependence.
Appeasement	Employing the combined elements of cognitive, motivational, moral, and action orientations to assess the most fitting response for a situation and guides one behavior in a conflict situation. It is typically displayed in low power, competitive goals, and high interdependence.
Autonomy	Employing the combined elements of cognitive, motivational, moral, and action orientations to assess the most fitting response for a situation and guides one behavior in a conflict situation that is sustained by a low degree of interdependence.

Leadership and Conflict

Leaders cannot escape conflict because it is embedded in all organizational systems (Gelfand et al., 2012; Mikkelsen & Clegg, 2019; Tjosvold, 2008). Conflict, if not managed properly, can contribute to stress in the workplace, and stress can contribute to employee disengagement (Rispens & Demerouti, 2016) that in turn impacts organizational outcomes (Nyhan, 2000). Therefore, managing conflict is an essential aspect of a leader's role. According to Yang and Li (2018), "… conflict management is an important team leadership behavior" (p. 105), "avoidance generally has a negative impact on followers' perceptions and leadership effectiveness" (p. 106), and a leader's ineffectiveness can initiate or perpetuate conflict (Chukwuemeka et al., 2012). A leader's approach to managing conflict can also influence how followers approach conflict (Gelfand et al., 2012). The workforce has become increasingly interdependent (Ahmed, 2015; Tjosvold, 2008), and leaders must be able to navigate this diverse landscape to build effective teams (Tjosvold, 2008) and facilitate employee engagement and job satisfaction (Ahmed, 2015).

On the other hand, the destructive side of conflict can hamper group performance because it limits the flow of communication and destroys trust in a workgroup (Rahim, 2002) and increases job-related stress (Wang et al., 2007). Intractable conflict (Kurt et al., 2014), if not effectively managed by leaders and allowed to persist, can shape the conflict culture of the organization (Gelfand et al., 2012). While researchers strive to distinguish between the different interpersonal, process, and task conflicts (Mikkelsen & Clegg, 2019; Rahim, 2002), any three of them can be disruptive and destructive to the organization.

Conflict Styles

Previous researchers (Brewer & Lam, 2009; Demirdöğen, 2010; Rahim, 1983; Rahim & Magner, 1995; Shih & Susanto, 2010) have cited the dual concern model that was developed by Blake and Mouton (1964) and further enhanced by Kilmann and Thomas (1977) into a conflict mode instrument, which focuses on identifying and managing personal conflict styles. Yang and Li (2018) implied that these styles (e.g., collaborating, avoidance, accommodation, compromise, and dominating) allow followers to see where they and their leader fall as it relates to their conflict styles. This could help followers determine if they want to stay or leave the organization, especially if the follower perceives the leader's style to be unfavorable. Sorenson et al. (1999) highlighted the fact that the model does not highlight strategies for combinations of "high/moderate" or "low/moderate" concerns (p. 28). In addition, Trippe and Baumoel (2015), in their work with family businesses, found it necessary to expand on the Kilmann and Thomas (1977) by renaming what the creator labeled as conflict styles to "decision-making" and "negotiating" styles because it appeared to work more appropriately with family business clients in extreme conflict (Trippe & Baumoel, 2015, p. 94).

Power and Conflict

Shah (2014) noted that "To understand the story of humanity is to bear witness to the story of its greatest paradox; power. This phenomenon creates the constraints in which we operate yet is responsible for the structures that bind our society together" (p. 1). Although power was referenced in the context of servant leadership earlier, it is important to also highlight the role of power in the context of conflict. At times, people can perceive the word power as abusive or sometimes destructive, but power is neither good nor bad; it depends on how it is used. Through power, people have the ability to create order, which is essential for an effectively

functioning society because the absence of order is anarchy that can be destructive to society (Shah, 2014). Physicists and social scientists also view power as energy that generates the capacity to do work or get things done (Coleman & Ferguson, 2015; Shah, 2014). Power and conflict exist within the same space and they usually occur simultaneously (Coleman & Ferguson, 2015). It is a normal part of interpersonal interactions in organizations where divergent views on values, goals, attitudes, beliefs, and ways of accomplishing tasks are found (Mikkelsen & Clegg, 2019; Yang & Li, 2018). Conflict sheds light on disparities and imbalances within an organization.

Emotions and Conflict

There is a strong connection between emotions and conflict because they play an integral role in how an individual responds to conflict (Littlejohn & Domenici, 2007). Emotions are not only a byproduct of a physiological state, but they are also a result of the concepts, values, and beliefs that create realities and help individuals to make decisions about the world around them (Littlejohn & Domenici, 2007). Culture helps to define the appropriateness of emotions in a given situation (Littlejohn & Domenici, 2007). In some countries, an open display of emotion is acceptable during a debate, while in others, an open display is not appropriate, and each party must share their analysis in a calm and practical way (Groysberg et al., 2018).

However, Littlejohn and Domenici (2007) imply that emotions are not set in stone, and people should not be compelled or feel obligated to respond in specific ways. Feeling emotions and allowing people to respond in a variety of ways can help to develop the skills need to manage differences (Littlejohn & Domenici, 2007). The ability to be aware of one's emotions and their impact and to manage differences is deemed as being emotionally intelligent (Yang &

Li, 2018). Emotional intelligence is associated with leadership effectiveness (Rahim et al., 2002; Shih & Susanto, 2010).

Because the servant leadership style is viewed as a participative (Jit et al., 2016; Zhao et al., 2019) multifaceted approach and considers the ethical, emotional, and spiritual needs that exist in the modern workplace issue (Eva et al., 2019), there is likely to be a positive relationship between this approach and conflict adaptivity in local government leaders because the leaders focus is to do what is the best for the community at large. In addition, Zhao et al. (2019) indicated that servant-leaders have a propensity to use persuasive, participative, and collaborative approaches to conflict. Similarly, the POs outlined by Coleman and Kugler (2014) are likely to have a positive relationship and support various attributes of the subdimension of servant leadership.

Conflict in Local Government

Conflict in local government can be a very public matter, which is evident in the debate between the states and local government on a range of economic, environmental, and human rights issues (Quinton, 2017). According to Demirdöğen (2010),

> When Aristotle stated in his politics that 'man is by nature a political animal' and described politics as the 'master science', he meant that politics is, above all, a social activity at the center of which lies a dialogue searching for ways and means of finding solutions to subjects of disagreement. Persuasion lies at the core of this activity. (p. 191)

This type of dialogue still occurs in local government at council or board of supervisors' meetings as politicians try to explore solutions that will meet the needs of their constituents. The Magna Carta served as the catalyst for the development of the Western mindset regarding interpersonal conflict (Donohue & Cai, 2008). Because of the priority placed on assuring

individuals' rights and freedoms, the Western mindset about conflict shifted from government and community to the individual responsible for and affected by the conflict (Donohue & Cai, 2008).

In local government, discussions related to disparities, power, and imbalance can be seen during the annual budget meetings (Mikkelsen & Clegg, 2019), where departments make their pitch to local political bodies for financial support for programs or when the community members go to the podiums to make appeals for support for a specific program and also to complain about the imbalance of financial support of their program. Local government (e.g., state, county, cities) continues to face a myriad of challenges. In the Western United States, local governments continue to focus on environmental issues (Mozingo, 2019), the economy and public pension plans, homelessness (Welsh, 2019), leadership development, recruiting (MissionSquare Research Institute, 2019a), and the skills and knowledge gaps that are occurring because of exiting baby boomers. This means that scholars, human resource practitioners, and existing leaders need to be aware of the skills needed to navigate the complexities of the 21st-century work environment, including how to effectively address conflict (Gandolfi & Stone, 2016; Gandolfi et al., 2017).

Expected Relationships

Based on the theory and research presented in this study, several relationships can be anticipated from the survey results. While specific hypotheses were not proposed, as this study was intentionally exploratory, as supported by this literature, it was expected that (a) at the broad level, servant leadership would be positively related with conflict adaptivity, and (b) servant leadership's dimensions would be positively correlated with conflict adaptivity.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 2 provided a theoretical perspective of servant leadership (Eva et al., 2019; Gandolfi et al., 2017; Spears, 2010; van Dierendonck, 2011), which includes 10 of its most prominent characteristics (Greenleaf, 2008; Spears, 2010) and suggested that having a clear understanding of one's beliefs and values may assist servant-leaders in being more adaptive during conflict. This chapter also explored the different conflict theories and perspectives of conflict and conflict adaptivity (Coleman & Ferguson, 2015; Coleman & Kugler, 2014; Coleman et al., 2012) and its relationship to servant leadership. Chapter 3 will provide details about the methodology, population, and analysis employed in the course of this study.

Chapter 3: Research Method and Design

This chapter outlines the research design, the population and sample, the instruments, and the data collection and analysis procedures for this study concerning the relationship between servant leadership and conflict adaptivity in local government leaders.

Purpose Statement

This study's goal was to explore the relationship between servant leadership and conflict adaptivity in local government leaders. While the initial study aimed only at local government leaders, the scope was later expanded to include a small number of government and nonprofit leaders to gain a viable sample size. Hence, local government leaders, for this purpose, included the broader sampling frame.

Research Questions

This study focused on the following central research question:

- What is the relationship between servant leadership and conflict adaptivity in local government leaders?

As a subquestion, this study also examined:

- What are the relationships between conflict adaptivity and the servant leadership styles (overall and subdimensions)?

The second question focused upon a deeper exploration of the various subdimensions of servant leadership and conflict adaptivity.

Research Design and Method

The study used a quantitative, nonexperimental (Coughlan et al., 2007), and cross-sectional research design. A quantitative approach was the best approach for this study because it allowed me to examine information objectively (Wheeldon & Åhlberg, 2012) and analyze the

data to determine the strength of the correlation between the independent and dependent variables (Colorado State University, 2017). The quantitative approach fits within the paradigm of the postpositivist philosophy (Tsin-yee & Shek, 2018) and allowed me to test the relationship between servant leadership and conflict adaptivity in an attempt to determine more concrete conclusions consistent with the positivist philosophy (Leavy, 2017). I approached the study from an ontological view that suggests that the knowledge gained from research is only part of an individual's experience, and what is considered reality differs from person to person (Slevitch, 2011; Tsin-yee & Shek, 2018; Wheeldon & Åhlberg, 2012). This approach assumes that there is always information that researchers do not know. Epistemologically speaking, researchers can make comparisons and draw conclusions from the knowledge they have (Slevitch, 2011) as long as procedures are in place to ensure reliability and validity in data collection, measurement, and data analysis.

An online survey was used to attain this study's sample. Online surveys are an economical and effective tool used by researchers to ascertain peoples' beliefs, behaviors, opinions, and attitudes relating to a specific subject (Leavy, 2017). The survey was also useful for this study because it allowed the participants the flexibility to complete the survey at their convenience within the timeframe I provided. It also provided for greater anonymity because I did not know the participants' identities in hopes of putting participants more at ease about completing the survey and encouraging transparency in their responses.

Population and Sample

The population for this study was local government leaders from five local government organizations (cities and counties) in the Midwest and Southern United States. Indirectly, the leaders' direct reports were also included as part of the population and sample, as servant

leadership was measured from the followers' point of view. Matched leader-follower dyads were therefore required for this study as both the leader and one of their direct reports needed to complete a survey to measure both variables. Leaders invited their followers to anonymously rate them as part of the study.

Various local government organizations were approached to gain a sample of leaders to complete the online survey. The population was later extended to include state and federal government and nonprofit leaders to secure additional participants to reach the minimum number of participants for the intended statistical analyses. State, federal, and nonprofit leaders were ultimately the minority within the overall group of participants in the sample. Originally, I had received interest from a large local government organization in the West, but the unexpected demands caused by the COVID-19 pandemic led the organization to withdraw their offer. Subsequently, five additional local government organizations were approached and agreed to let some of their leaders participate.

A total purposeful sample (Leavy, 2017; Wheeldon & Åhlberg, 2012) of 494 leaders (Coughlan et al., 2007) from five local government organizations in the Midwest and Southern United States and 85 from my professional networks were invited to participate in an anonymous online survey (Leavy, 2017). Additional participants were also recruited via Amazon Turks (MTurk), which extended the sample to include state and federal government and nonprofit leaders. Amazon Turks is an online employment service (in the "gig" economy) where people can sign up to complete human intelligence tasks advertised by employers, such as surveys, for payment. In this case, survey participants were offered between $1 and $8 to complete an initial screening survey (to see if they qualified for the final survey) or to complete the final survey after qualifying. Best practices for using MTurk were followed (Aguinis et al., 2021).

Daniel (2012) recommended using a sample size of 100 participants for an exploratory study such as this, which would allow me to study the correlations between conflict adaptivity and servant leadership. G-Power 3.1 was used to complete a power analysis before the study to determine the minimum sample size to detect correlations of $r > .30$ (statistical test: correlation; two-tailed test; effect size: .80; significance level: .05). A minimum sample size of greater than 84 was needed according to the power analysis.

The sampling technique for this study was considered to be purposeful (Daniel, 2012; Leavy, 2017) as participants had to be (a) leaders and (b) working in local government, state and federal government, or nonprofit organizations. The participants have direct experience, knowledge, and perceptions related to the study topic. I obtained written approval from the organizations' human resource director, senior-level executive, or key staff capable of making the decisions on behalf of the organizations to conduct the research within their organization (see Appendix A) before seeking institutional review board [IRB] approval to conduct the study (see Appendix B). I had access to the specific local government organization through personal and professional contacts. The leaders approached through local government were selected with the cooperation of their human resources department, city manager's office, or executive leadership because they had the ability to identify the leaders who resided in the appropriate leadership classifications. The study's classification and level of leaders were decided in conjunction with the human resources and senior-level executives with the sampled organizations. A draft letter requesting the organization's permission to survey the leaders is included in Appendix C. The list of leaders working for the organizations and those identified in my professional network served as the sampling frame. The MTurk participants were included in the human intelligence task advert if their demographic group on MTurk was a government or nonprofit employee, and

they were subsequently invited to complete the final survey if they indicated they were a supervisor or manager on the screening survey. Where participants were invited from my professional network, they were emailed, called, or messaged through social media.

Instrumentation

This study examined the relationship between servant leadership (independent variable) and conflict adaptivity (dependent variables) in local government leaders. A draft of the online survey used in this study to measure the variables is included in Appendices D, E, and F as described in the following paragraphs. Demographics of participants were collected and included age, gender, leadership classification, years of leadership experience, and ethnicity (see Appendix G). The survey included an informed consent form, as discussed in the next section.

I received permission to use the Managerial Conflict Adaptivity Assessment (MCAA) as part of the study (see Appendix H). The MCAA was used to measure the dependent variable: conflict adaptivity (see Appendix I). The content validity of the MCAA was confirmed by Coleman and Kugler (2014) using the content validity ratio. The MCAA has 15 questions, and leaders were asked to review the scenarios and rate their responses using the five dimensions of benevolence, dominance, support, appeasement, and autonomy (Coleman & Kugler, 2014). I calculated an overall conflict adaptivity score by using the formulas provided by MCAA developers.

For assessing servant leadership, I considered using one of three servant leadership assessments recommended by Eva et al. (2019) and Parris and Peachey (2013). I contacted the lead researcher for the SLS-18 and obtained permission to use the survey (see Appendix J). I used van Dierendonck et al.'s (2017) SL-18 (see Appendix K) because the instrument is psychometrically sound (Eva et al., 2019; van Dierendonck et al., 2017) and because this SL

assessment focuses on servant leadership's cross-cultural applicability (Pircher Verdorfer, 2019; van Dierendonck et al., 2017). This is important because the organizations being surveyed represent a multicultural population, and I assumed that the leaders within the organizations might represent the population it serves. In addition, the items and subscales used in this measure appear to be best suited for this research (wording, relevance to local government). Using an instrument with subscales measuring dimensions of SL enabled me to explore the subquestion that seeks to understand the correlation between conflict adaptivity and the five subdimensions on servant leadership identified in the SL-18 (van Dierendonck et al., 2017). Direct reports of the leaders completed the servant leadership measure. This is the recommended approach by the scale's authors, as leaders may not have an accurate sense of their own servant leadership delivery.

The servant leadership assessment has 18 questions divided into five subdimensions: empowerment, humility, standing back, stewardship, and authenticity, and each dimension has three questions, with the exception of empowerment, which has six questions (van Dierendonck et al., 2017). For example, one question within the dimension category says, "My manager gives me the information I need to do my work well" (van Dierendonck et al., 2017, p. 8). The leaders' direct reports provided their response using a six-point Likert scale that ranges from "*fully disagree* to *fully agree* with no middle category" (van Dierendonck et al., 2017, p. 5). The instrument's developers used Cronbach's alpha to test the reliability of the assessment. The assessment was subjected to both exploratory and confirmatory analysis and a subsequent analysis of the criterion-related validity by its developers. The internal consistency of the scale (Cronbach's alpha) as a whole is reported as 0.95 and confirmatory factor analysis was used to establish the factorial validity of the instrument (van Dierendonck et al., 2017). The subscales

have convergent validity with other similar leadership measures, and it is the first measure for which the factor structure was confirmed across several occupational fields in two countries (van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011). Table 2 provides the subdimensions of the Servant Leadership Survey (SLS) and summarizes their respective meaning.

Table 2

Dimensions of Servant Leadership and Their Meaning

SLS subdimensions	Meaning
Empowerment	Enables others to release personal power in service of others, provides encouragement and opportunities for follower development.
Humility	Exemplifies modesty and puts the interest of others first while maintaining a healthy perspective regarding individual accomplishments. Learns from criticism and considers the different viewpoints and opinions of others.
Standing Back	Gives credit to others and does not pursue recognition or spotlight when a task is successfully completed; appears to enjoy the success of colleagues more than his or her own.
Stewardship	Demonstrating responsibility and accountability for the whole; emphasizes societal responsibility.
Authenticity	Expression of true self that is reflected in behaviors that align with personal thoughts and feelings.

Note: Dimensions of Servant Leadership and Their Meaning. Adapted from "The Cross-Cultural Invariance of the Servant Leadership Survey: A Comparative Study Across Eight Countries," by D. van Dierendonck, M. Sousa, S. Gunnarsdóttir, A. Bobbio, J. Hakanen, A. Pircher Verdorfer, E. Cihan Duyan, & R. Rodriguez-Carvajal, 2017, *Administrative Sciences*, *7*(2), p. 8. (https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci7020008). Copyright 2017 by Creative Commons.

When conducting quantitative research, there are two main criteria that must be considered: validity and reliability. Validity ensures that the instrument measures what is supposed to measure (Coughlan et al., 2007), and reliability seeks to ensure consistency and

accuracy of the survey instrument being used. Validity data is reported from previous studies. I

used preexisting assessments for this study, which have demonstrated validity and reliability.

While this study's procedures did not include reconfirming the validity of these existing

instruments, Cronbach's alphas were calculated to identify if there was evidence of their

reliability for the servant leadership measure for this sample. Reliability does not apply to the

MCAA as the individual items do not measure the same overarching construct. The MCAA's

total measures only conflict adaptivity.

Data Collection

After the approval of the institutional review board that oversees human subjects

protections, emails were sent to the leaders who resided in the managerial ranks of the

organizations where the data were collected. I emailed and held phone conversations with key

executives, human resource (HR) leaders, and the information technology team to ensure that

security requirements for the organizations were met. For example, Figure 1 shows the process

flow for one of the organizations.

Figure 1

Flow of Leadership & Conflict Style Survey at Site 1

Leadership & Conflict Adaptivity

This study explores the relationship between leadership styles and conflict adaptivity.

Email survey to leaders

Leader
Conflict Scenario Survey

Leaders will receive Conflict Scenario survey with introduction letter explaining purpose of study and consent letter.

Direct Reports Complete Leadership Style Survey with their leader in mind.

Leadership Classifications needed for this Study
- Senior level executives
- Department directors
- Assistant department directors
- Deputy directors
- Senior level throuh frontline managers

Direct Report will receive survey link from leader with a code to maintain anonomity. Direct report will review survey introduction letter and consent letter and must agree to consent letter to begin survey. I

Responses will be captured in a protected online platform and analyized by researcher.

Neither your departments nor your employees' identities will be included in athe study report.

Survey Completed

A copy of completed disseration will be provided to your organization after the completion of the doctoral program.

Note. Figure created by dissertation author.

As the study progressed, it became evident that additional sites would be necessary to obtain the number of participants needed for the study. Five sites participated in the study; additional participants were obtained through professional networks and through MTurk, which extended the sample to include state and federal government and nonprofit leaders.

The introduction emails and the link to the surveys were emailed to the leaders by a designated representative within the organizations to avoid possible firewall and security concerns. This procedure also helps to ensure anonymity during the data collection process. The email specified that participation was anonymous and voluntary. See Appendix E and F for a copy of the introduction email. See Appendix F for a copy of the draft participant invitation email.

The survey was hosted in QuestionPro, an online survey website. The survey included an introduction letter (landing page), a leadership consent form (see Appendix D), and a direct report informed consent form (see Appendix E) that participants completed (page two of the survey) to move forward to complete the survey. The link took the leaders directly to the first part of the survey, which included the introductory letter, consent form, and the Conflict Styles Assessment. The survey had two sections. In the first section, leaders were asked to complete a conflict styles assessment. After doing so, they were asked to forward the survey link for the leadership survey to one to three of their direct reports to complete using another link and a system-generated number generated by QuestionPro. Including a system-generated number allowed me to keep conflict and leadership surveys separate, maintaining the anonymity of the direct reports, so that the leader would not know if the direct report had completed the survey.

I also reached out to professional contacts via social media and email to gain their interest in participating in the study. Those who responded received an email similar to the same

messaging sent out to the other sites, highlighting the purpose of the study and providing a link for participants to take the survey. A similar process was followed with my professional network, and in this case, an email was sent to local government leaders within the network inviting them to participate in the study. A screening survey was developed to determine participants' eligibility to participate in the survey via MTurk, which included questions about the participants' role, rank, and organization, as well as a short comprehension item to screen out bots and inattentive participants. Those who met the study's criteria were provided a link to complete the study. Approval was obtained from the IRB prior to the launch of each site, the professional network, and MTurk surveys.

Analysis of Data

The data was exported from QuestionPro into an Excel sheet and reviewed (Leavy, 2017; Salkind, 2016) to ensure all questions were answered and to identify and remove inconsistent or substantially incomplete responses. After the data cleansing process, the data was imported into SPSS Version 26 to be analyzed. The first step was to run descriptive statistics to gather information relating to the mean, range, and standard deviation of responses on each scale and subscale (Leavy, 2017; Salkind, 2016). Frequency counts were produced for the categorical demographic variables. Cronbach's alpha measures internal consistency was used to ensure that the reliability for the servant leadership scale aligned with previous studies. Generally, alphas of at least .70 are considered reliable (Liden et al., 2015). Scores were totaled for the scales and subscales for the independent and dependent variables in SPSS using the individual items forming part of each subscale or scale indicated by the instrument's author.

Next, I calculated the Pearson correlation coefficient (Leavy, 2017) between the variables (subscales and scales) to determine the strength, significance, and direction of the relationship

between servant leadership and conflict adaptivity. Additional correlations were completed to determine the strength, significance, and direction of the relationship between servant leadership (overall and subdimensions) and conflict adaptivity. According to Salkind (2016), the Pearson correlation coefficient examines the relationship between two continuous variables. A numerical value between 0 and 1 (positive or negative) was used to show the strength of the relationship between variables and helped me to see if they move in the same or opposite directions (Salkind, 2016). Strengths of the correlations were categorized as follows: r values less than .30 are small, r values above .30 and below .50 are medium, and r values above .50 are strong (Cohen, 1988). The significance level determines if the correlation is likely to have occurred by chance or error. A standard of $p > .05$ was used in this study to determine significance (Cohen, 1988).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical practices are integral components of great research (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018) because it is important that research is conducted for the benefit and well-being of the community it serves and those who are participating in the study. I provided the participants the with details of the study in an introductory email (or task advertisement on MTurk), and each of the potential research participants received an informed consent form prior to acceptance at the beginning of the survey. I took measures to ensure the anonymity of the participants by using an anonymous online survey hosted by QuestionPro and only reporting on aggregated demographics and survey results. The names of the organizations are not revealed in the survey or study results.

Chapter Summary

   The research methodology chapter provided an overview of the purpose and design of the study, population and sample, instrumentation, data collection procedures, analysis methods, and ethics used during this research. Chapter 4 will describe the results of the analysis of the data.

Chapter 4: Results

Chapter 4 reiterates the purpose of the study and the questions under investigation. It also summarizes the research design, sample size, data collection, and data analysis process for the study, providing additional information on how the study proceeded beyond the planned methodology in Chapter 3. The study's findings are then presented, including the demographics, the descriptive analysis of the data, and the correlations that address the central research questions.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between servant leadership and conflict adaptivity in local government, state, federal, and nonprofit leaders. Exploring the association between servant leadership and conflict adaptivity helps researchers, leaders, and educators understand if servant-leaders are more likely to adapt their conflict management strategy to be relevant to the situation they are facing and to explore if specific servant leadership dimensions are associated with conflict adaptivity.

Research Questions

This study focused on the following central research question:

- What is the relationship between servant leadership and conflict adaptivity in local government leaders?

As a subquestion, this study also examined:

- What are the relationships between conflict adaptivity and the servant leadership style (overall and subdimensions)?

The second question focused upon a deeper exploration of the various subdimensions of servant leadership and conflict adaptivity.

This study was conducted with leaders working in counties and cities in the Midwest and Southern United States. The survey was emailed directly to a total of 494 leaders across five local government organizations. Site 1 distributed the survey to 100 leaders, Site 2 sent surveys to 93 leaders, Site 3 distributed the survey to 89 leaders, Site 4 sent surveys to 30 leaders, and Site 5 distributed surveys to 80 leaders. Additional participants were recruited via Amazon Turks (MTurk), which extended the sample to include state and federal government and nonprofit leaders. The survey was also sent to 85 leaders in my professional network. Each leader who completed the Managerial Conflict Adaptivity Assessment (Coleman & Kugler, 2014) survey was asked to forward the subsequent Servant Leadership Style (van Dierendonck et al., 2017) survey to one to three of their direct reports, although some sent it to a larger number of followers.

Data Collection

A total of 163 leaders responded to the survey, resulting in 87 paired responses (leaders' scores matched with followers' scores) where both a leader and one or more of their followers responded. An exact response rate cannot be determined as it is unclear how many potential participants saw the survey invitation on MTurk or how many followers were invited by their leaders to participate.

Obtaining survey responses from organizations was challenging due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the unique demands placed on government and local government leaders during this period, along with the social unrest issues that were transpiring at the time the survey was distributed (e.g., Black Lives Matter and related protests). In addition, based on the number of unmatched responses (leader response with no follower response), it seems likely that some

leaders either did not forward a request to their followers to ask them to complete the follower survey, or the followers chose not to respond.

The final approach to obtain the minimum number of matches was to invite participants on MTurk. MTurk allows researchers to find participants to participate in their study who fit within a researcher's target demographic group. The site is frequently used for survey research, and Aguinis et al. (2021) suggested guidelines for participation and payment when using MTurk. Potential participants can read task advertisements (e.g., completing surveys) on the website and are paid for completing the task. Prior to launching the survey through the MTurk platform, a screening survey was developed to identify additional participants and to determine if they met the criteria to participate in the study. MTurk participants are not associated with a specific organization, and respondents participated from various locations within the United States. More than 100 participants responded to the screening survey. The participant filter feature was used on the MTurk site to limit invitations to complete the survey to specific populations, namely government and nonprofit workers. Payments varied between $1 and $8 depending on whether leader participants were completing the screening or final survey.

Preparation of Data for Analysis

The results from both surveys, for leader and follower groups, were downloaded from the QuestionPro survey platform and reviewed to match leaders' and followers' survey responses using a unique leader identifier number that was assigned to the leader. After the conflict and leader survey data was checked for substantially incomplete responses or patterned responses, suggesting lack of attention or authenticity, responses were reviewed to find matches between direct reports' responses and leaders' responses using the leader identification number. In the case where a leader received a response from more than one direct report, those responses were

averaged to determine servant leadership scores. While van Dierendonck et al. (2017) did not

mention creating an overall score, other authors have average subscale scores to create an overall

score for servant leadership (e.g., Sun et al., 2017).

Findings

The information and tables that follow show the demographics for the study participants,

descriptive analysis of the servant leadership and conflict style scales, and the correlation matrix

showing relationships between the study variables (servant leadership and conflict adaptivity).

Demographics

Five demographic questions were included as part of the leaders' survey, asking

respondents to identify their gender, age range, leadership classification or role, length of time in

service, and ethnicity. The results are reflected in Table 3. The frequency and percentage of

respondents from each location, local government, professional network, and MTurk, are

reflected (see Table 3). The majority of responses were from Site 2 (27.6%) and MTurk (21.8%).

It remains unclear why there were no responses from Site 5, but it seems possible that the email

may have been directed to spam folders, blocked by a firewall, or experienced a similar

challenge.

Table 3

Location

Location	n of leader-follower pairs	%
Local Government Site 1	16	18.4
Local Government Site 2	26	27.6
Local Government Site 3	4	4.6
Local Government Site 4	12	13.8
Local Government Site 5	0	0.0
Professional Network	12	13.8
MTurk	19	21.8
Total	87	100

As shown in Table 4, most of the participants (62.1%) were male.

Table 4

Gender

Gender	f	%
Female	32	36.8
Male	54	62.1
Prefer Not to Say	1	1.1
Total	87	100

The majority of respondents (46.0%) were in the age range of 46 to 55 years, followed by the 36 to 45 years category (23.0%), as shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Age Range

Age range (years)	*f*	%
18–25	1	1.1
26–35	11	12.6
36–45	20	23.0
46–55	40	46.0
56–65	12	13.8
66+	0	0.0
Prefer Not to Say	3	3.4
Total	87	100

Table 6 reflects the hierarchical level of the leaders that participated in this study. The majority of responses (43.7%) were from the middle managers and the assistant department head leadership roles, followed by the senior managers (18.4%).

Table 6

Participants' Leadership Classification

Leadership classification or role	f	%
Frontline Manager	12	13.8
Middle Manager	18	20.7
Senior Manager	16	18.4
Assistant Department Head	20	23.0
Executive Level	17	19.5
Assistant CEO or Above	4	4.6
Other	0	0.0
Prefer Not to Say	0	0.0
Total	87	100

The majority of participating leaders (43.7%) had been serving in their roles for more than 10 years, with 27.6% in the six to 10 years category and 23% in the one to five-year category (see Table 7).

Table 7

Length of Time Served in a Leadership or Executive Role

Time served in a leadership or executive role	*f*	%
Less than 1 year	5	5.7
1–5 years	20	23.0
6–10 years	24	27.6
More than 10 years	38	43.7
Total	87	100

As shown in Table 8, the predominant ethnic group (72.4%) was Caucasian, with 12.6% being African American.

Table 8

Ethnicity

Ethnicity	*f*	%
Caucasian	63	72.4
African American	11	12.6
Latino–Hispanic	3	3.4
Asian	2	2.3
Two or More	2	2.3
Native American	0	0.0
Native Hawaiian–Pacific Islander	0	0.0
Other–Unknown or Did Not Say	1	1.1
Prefer Not to Say	5	5.7
Total	87	100

Descriptive Statistics

Table 9 provides a descriptive summary of the data from the 87 participants on the study variables. The mean response on each servant leadership dimension is shown, with empowerment receiving the highest mean score of 5.12. The overall mean of all the servant leadership dimensions was 4.95. The servant leadership (SL-18) instrument uses a response scale of 1 to 6, suggesting that a mean of 5.12 fits closest to the *agree* scale anchor.

The second category in Table 9, conflict styles, shows the range, mean, and standard deviation for each of the five conflict style factors (support, autonomy, dominance, benevolence, and appeasement). The mean scores for the conflict styles range from one to three, with dominance having the highest mean at 1.61, followed by autonomy at .91. Appeasement had the lowest mean at .09. The standard deviation appears to be consistent across all factors, with the exception of appeasement. Given how the MCAA operates, this score suggests that leaders less frequently selected appeasement when the style was the best style for the situation, whereas dominance was more frequently selected when it was the correct style for the situation, according to Coleman and Kugler's (2014) scoring system.

The last category in Table 9, conflict adaptivity, provides descriptive statistics for the overall MCAA score. The maximum score for this sample on conflict adaptivity was 36.0, and the mean was 31.85, with the highest possible score being 45 (sum of 15 items on a range of one to three). This score represents how often the participants selected the correct conflict approach for the scenario across 15 scenarios, where consistently selecting the correct style across would suggest conflict adaptivity. A low score would suggest either an inability to identify the appropriate conflict styles for situations or low adaptivity to the needs of different situations. The mean reported in Table 10 can be compared to Coleman and Kugler's (2014) original study that

reported a mean and standard deviation ($M = 2.3$, $SD = .18$ multiplied by 15 items, resulting in a mean of 34.5 and a standard deviation of 2.7), which were slightly higher.

Table 9

Descriptive Statistics SL-18 Dimensions, Conflict Styles Factors, and Conflict Adaptivity Scores and Means

Leadership dimensions and conflict style factors	N	Cronbach's Alpha	Minimum	Maximum	M	SD
SL-18 Leadership Dimensions						
Empowerment	87	.848	3.00	6.00	5.12	.58
Humility	87	.876	2.70	6.00	4.72	.78
Standing Back	87	.792	2.30	6.00	5.03	.69
Stewardship	87	.716	3.00	6.00	5.10	.67
Authenticity	87	.754	2.00	6.00	4.56	.79
Overall: Servant-Leader	87	.932	3.00	5.90	4.95	.57
MCAA Conflict Style Scores						
Support	87	-	1.67	3.00	2.27	.30
Autonomy	87	-	2.00	3.00	2.31	.33
Dominance	87	-	1.00	3.00	2.41	.43
Benevolence	87	-	1.00	2.67	1.65	.32
Appeasement	87	-	1.00	3.00	1.98	.52
Conflict Adaptivity (Total)	**87**	**-**	**26**	**36**	**31.85**	**2.13**

Table 10

Correlation Matrix for Conflict Factors and Servant Leadership Subscales

	Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1.	CS Support											
2.	CS Autonomy	.05										
3.	CS Dominance	.-.11	.33**									
4.	CS Benevolence	-.19	-.38**	-.28**								
5.	CS Appeasement	-.07	-.08	-.03	-.01							
6.	Conflict Adaptivity	-.22*	.38**	.53**	.30**	.40**						
7.	SL Empowerment	-.28**	-.08	.01	.21	-.01	.00					
8.	SL Humility	-.08	-.09	.00	.18	-.07	.03	.70**				
9.	SL Standing Back	-.19	-.09	.05	.20	.05	.03	.65**	.61**			
10.	SL Stewardship	-.21	-.01	.00	.22*	.01	.07	.79**	.60**	.62**		
11.	SL Authenticity	-.12	.02	-.02	.19	-.01	.08	.57**	.61**	.47**	.49**	
12.	SL Overall	-.22*	-.06	.01	.24*	.-.03	.04	.92**	85**	.79**	.84**	.75**

Note: $N = 87$. CS = conflict style; SL = servant leadership; $**p < .01$; $*p < .05$

Correlation

The goal of this study was to explore the relationship between servant leadership and conflict adaptivity. As shown in Table 10, the relationship was analyzed using Pearson's correlation coefficient, which found a correlation of $r = .04$, $p < .05$, $N = 87$ between leader's conflict adaptivity scores and followers' perceptions of their leaders' use of servant leadership. This suggests there is no relationship between followers' perceptions of their manager's servant leadership and the leaders' conflict adaptivity, as the correlation is very weak and insignificant. Similar results were found between the servant leadership subscales and conflict adaptivity.

Four correlations are shown in bold in Table 10, where significant correlations emerged. These significant correlations show relationships between individual MCAA conflict style scores and subdimensions of servant leadership. The tendency to pick the right psychological orientation in relation to a scenario designed to require that orientation might suggest an understanding of that orientation or a tendency to gravitate to that orientation. The MCAA is not explicitly designed as a measure of the different orientations as much as it intended to indicate conflict adaptivity from its overall score (the ability to vary one's approach to different conflict scenarios). Hence, the meaning of correlations is somewhat tentative. The correlation between servant leadership and the supportive score on the MCAA was found to be $r = -.22$, $p < .05$, $N = 87$. This correlation may be described as weak, negative, and significant. This suggests that direct reports' servant leadership perceptions were lower when the leader selected the supportive psychological orientation when responding to support scenarios. There was also a negative correlation between the support score on the MCAA and the servant leadership subscale and the servant leadership empowerment subscale $r = -.28$, $p < .01$, $N = 87$, which, although still weak, are significant. There were positive and significant correlations between the benevolence scores on the MCAA and both the servant-leader stewardship subscale ($r = .22$, $p = .04$, $N = 87$) and the overall servant-leader average ($r = .24$, $p = .03$, $N = 87$). The meaning of the correlations is more fully discussed in Chapter 5.

Given the size of the sample, a post hoc power analysis was calculated for a medium effect size ($p = .3$, $\alpha = .05$, $N = 87$) to determine if the sample was sufficient for the analyses reflected in Table 10 which suggested the power for the study was adequate at .83, where .80 is considered an acceptable level. However, ideally, the power should be higher. Looking at the significant correlations found (varying between $r = -.22$ and $r = -.28$), the R^2 values (percentage

of variance predicted in one variable by another variable) suggests that only 4.8% to 7.8% of the variance in servant leadership ratings can be predicted based upon the relevant MCAA style scores. These are generally weak relationships, which can be challenging to rely upon with a small sample.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 provided an overview of the research design process, the sample size, data collection and preparation process, and the data analysis process. The section also included the research demographics and analysis of the instruments and correlations for the study variables. The next chapter will include a summary of the research findings, a discussion of the findings, theoretical and practical implications, the study's limitations, and conclude with recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Conflict is an inevitable part of leadership, and many leaders will find themselves embroiled in work-related conflicts such as organizational transformations, union negotiations, and interpersonal and task conflict at some point. This requires emerging and seasoned leaders to increase their conflict management skills to mitigate the destructive outcomes associated with conflict (Oore et al., 2015; Terason, 2018). Developing a greater understanding of the relationship between servant leadership and conflict adaptivity will help researchers, leaders, and educators understand whether those leaders who apply servant leadership are more likely to adapt their conflict management strategies to be relevant to the situation they are facing (Coleman & Kugler, 2014). A leader's adaptivity could lead to greater creativity, collaboration (Terason, 2018), and other positive organizational outcomes (Coleman & Kugler, 2014; Yang & Li, 2018; Zou et al., 2016).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between servant leadership and conflict adaptivity in government leaders.

Research Questions

This study focused on the following central research question:

- What is the relationship between servant leadership and conflict adaptivity in local government leaders?

As a subquestion, this study also examined:

- What are the relationships between conflict adaptivity and the servant leadership styles (overall and subdimensions)?

The second question focused upon a deeper exploration of the various subdimensions of servant leadership and conflict adaptivity.

Research Design and Method Summary

The study used a quantitative, nonexperimental (Coughlan et al., 2007), and cross-sectional study design to collect (Wheeldon & Åhlberg, 2012) and analyze data from leaders and their direct reports to determine the strength of the correlation between servant leadership (independent variable) and conflict adaptivity (dependent variable). The survey link was shared with local government, government, and nonprofit leaders who completed the Managerial Conflict Adaptivity Assessment (Coleman & Kugler, 2014). The leaders then invited followers to complete the SL-18 leadership style survey (van Dierendonck et al., 2017) about their leader's use of servant leadership. The results from both surveys were matched using a unique leader identifier number assigned to the leader. The data for 87 leader-follower pairs were then analyzed to determine the correlation between the study variables.

Findings

The central focus of this study was to discover if a relationship existed between servant leadership and conflict adaptivity in government leaders, although some nonprofit leaders were included in the sample. This study examined the relationships between conflict adaptivity (from the leader's completion of 15 scenarios) and their servant leadership (rated by the followers). The relationship was analyzed using Pearson's correlation coefficient, which found a correlation coefficient of $r = .04$, $p > .05$, $N = 87$. Therefore, the expectation that conflict adaptivity in the leader would result in increased perceptions of servant leadership by the follower was not supported in this sample.

A negative correlation was found between some servant leadership subscales and some conflict adaptivity subscales. The correlation between servant leadership and the supportive style of conflict resolution was found to be $r = -.22$, $p < .05$, $N = 87$. This correlation can be characterized as weak, negative, and significant. The scores on the subscales of the conflict adaptivity instrument are not indicative of a preference for certain styles but only reflect that the leader selected these styles correctly in response to scenarios that required these styles. Correctly selecting styles might be an artifact of the leader preferring the style, being skilled at the style, being able to recognize the need for that style in a situation, or some other reason. Coleman and Kugler (2014) did not discuss these subscales in terms of their interpretation as the overall score of the MCAA is the objective of the assessment as a measure of conflict adaptivity. Therefore, the interpretation of these correlations is speculative. The supportive style describes making amends, feeling concerned, clarifying roles, and appreciative support (Coleman & Kugler, 2014). Since the supportive style correlates negatively with servant leadership, it might be that leaders who attempt the supportive style are not seen as effective. It is also possible that is why the supportive style was also negatively correlated with stewardship ($r = -.22$, $p < .05$, $N = 87$) and empowerment $r = -.28$, $p < .01$, $N = 87$ as an individual with the supportive style might be quite self-interested at times (desiring to avoid conflict by being more relational and less firm). This appears opposed to the nature of servant leadership. Those displaying stewardship may view conflict as a dynamic process in which a leader must demonstrate care for the people as well as the process (Littlejohn & Domenici, 2007), again providing a plausible explanation for the correlation.

As stated in Chapter 2, I expected to find a strong correlation with benevolence and support more so than the other subdimensions because both of those approaches are relational

(Coleman & Kugler, 2014). As previously stated, there was no correlation between the supportive style and servant leadership (r = -.22, p < .05, N = 87); however, a positive and significant correlation between the MCAA benevolence scores and both the servant-leader stewardship subscale (r = .22, p = .04, N = 87) and the overall servant leadership scale (r = .24, p = .03, N = 87) were also found. Coleman and Kugler (2014) described benevolence as the ability to behave constructively and responsibly in a situation. This depicts a leader who is able to work collaboratively with others to solve problems. It is possible, then, that benevolence correlates positively with stewardship because of the focus on being responsible for the people and program within the leader's care (Spears, 2010), and servant-leader's desire to seek the best solution for the common good of all through listening and demonstrating care for the perspective of others (Coleman & Kugler, 2014; Spears, 2010). The positive correlation between the overall servant leadership scale and benevolence may similarly be the result of components of listening, caring, cooperation, and responsibility embodied within the attributes of a benevolent servant-leader (Coleman & Kugler, 2014). However, readers are reminded that these interpretations, however logical, are speculative.

Although this study did not support the proposition that servant-leaders are adaptive in conflict situations, the assumption that servant-leaders would vary their conflict styles according to the needs of the follower and community, as is central to the definition of servant leadership, suggests that different styles and behaviors would be used, resulting in higher levels of conflict adaptivity (Chukwuemeka et al., 2012; Greenleaf, 2002; Mareus et al., 2019; Shih & Susanto, 2010). Therefore, further study may be needed, as discussed later in this chapter, to confirm and clarify the nature of the relationship.

Conflict Fit and Organizational Culture

A servant-leaders' use of both the servant leadership style and adaptive approaches to conflict may be limited by their context and the organization's culture. This addresses an element of conflict fit, which was not examined here but may influence the servant-leader's approach to conflict (Coleman & Kugler, 2014; Huang, 2018).

Researchers have explored the role of person and environment fit from various perspectives (Bundy et al., 2018; Coleman & Kugler, 2014; Gunkel et al., 2016; Huang, 2018; Vondey, 2010) to understand the relationship they play in influencing organizational behavior. One study done by Gelfand et al. (2012) highlighted three types of conflict cultures that may exist in an organization. A dominating conflict culture may encourage open confrontation and disagreeableness to win a position, while a collaborative conflict culture prefers active cooperative discussions. The servant leadership approach tends toward a more collaborative approach and may not fit a dominating culture. If viewed through the lens of organizational and stakeholder misfit (Bundy et al., 2018; Vondey, 2010), the servant-leader could be a misfit because their values and strategic needs are incongruent with the prevailing culture, which could explain why leaders may not display servant leadership behaviors in conflict situations and why there was no correlation between servant leadership and conflict adaptivity. While a true servant-leader would display consistent conflict styles regardless of the organization's conflict culture, the prevailing culture may exert sufficient pressure or even dictate how conflict should be handled. This notion needs further exploration.

In public sector agencies that are heavily unionized, the servant leadership approach could be viewed as weak, even though if it was embraced, it could potentially increase the level of trust between management and the unions (Weinstein, 2013). The relationship between

leadership and the unionized bargaining units is known to be adversarial because of issues such as poor communication, misaligned values and practices, broken promises, and lack of strategic fit (Bundy et al., 2018; Chukwuemeka et al., 2012), to name a few. Therefore, the prevailing conflict culture between the unions and management with its preferred win-lose approach might not willingly yield to a servant leadership approach that values people over power. This type of contentious mindset appears consistent in the government sector fraught with entrenched systems and policies (Chukwuemeka et al., 2012; Mareus et al., 2019). A dominating conflict style does not fit the values (Bundy et al., 2018; Gunkel et al., 2016; Vondey, 2010) and collaborative mindset of a servant-leader. However, creating an environment of trust may be possible because the servant-leader's ultimate aim is to do what is morally correct and in the best interest of all involved (Weinstein, 2013).

Another aspect of working in the government is that leaders are usually constrained by bureaucratic rules and regulations to maintain uniformity and ensure issues are addressed consistently (Nyhan, 2000). To that end, relationships between the leader and follower may be more structured, and servant-leaders who have been working within these environments for some time may be constrained or acculturated in their approach to conflict because of the top-down cultural paradigm on leadership (Nyhan, 2000; Terason, 2018).

While the servant leadership approach may not be readily apparent in a dominating conflict culture where open conflict and win-lose approaches are the standards (Gelfand et al., 2012), and because those that use a servant leadership style may be viewed as being weak leaders (Weinstein, 2013), I echo the sentiments that psychological orientation does not tell the full story (Coleman & Kugler, 2014; Huang, 2018), and a more holistic perspective might be

found through conducting more studies to explore the effects of organizational culture on a leader's approach to conflict.

Theoretical Implications

While this study did not demonstrate a correlation between servant leadership and the ability to adapt in conflict, the idea that servant leadership and conflict adaptivity are related cannot be dismissed so easily. In this case, it could be that the size of this study ($N = 87$) was too small to establish a relationship or that other key variables were not included (e.g., organizational culture). Some correlations were found, which might provide some clues, but it was not completely apparent what they meant. At the beginning of this research, there were no empirical studies that explored if conflict adaptivity worked best with a specific leadership style. Although this study is small, it does fill a void in this area as it focuses on conflict adaptivity and its relationship to servant leadership.

Relationship Between Servant Leadership and Conflict Adaptivity

While the study did not show a correlation between servant leadership and conflict adaptivity, Greenleaf's (2002) belief that leaders should demonstrate concern for themselves and others to find the best solution for our community and the world each of us lives in cannot be ignored. Greenleaf (2002) referenced the idea of demonstrating adaptability when he said, "In the ultimate test, the only reality to be trusted, that which shelters decision-making with sensitivity and compassion so that one sees and feels what fits the situation, is the prompting of the human spirit—from the heart" (p. 318). Hence, one theoretical implication of this study was that this study's results did not align with the theory of servant leadership and, therefore, different research methodologies and measures need to be employed for further studies to resolve the mismatch of the theory and findings.

Conflict Adaptivity and Organizational Culture

This study focused on the leader providing a self-evaluation of their approach to conflict, but conflict is a multifaceted construct, and gaining a better understanding of how organizational culture influences a leader's approach to conflict would be beneficial to conflict research as it could assist leaders and human resource professionals in ensuring that conflict is handled more effectively. The environment or organizational culture can influence how a leader views and responds to conflict (Coleman & Kugler, 2014; Huang, 2018). Therefore, a second theoretical implication of this study was that organizational culture's role needs to be investigated in future studies to clarify the relationship between servant leadership, organizational culture, and conflict adaptivity. While the need to consider organizational culture in this theoretical picture might seem obvious now, this may not have been as clear without completing this initial study.

Practical Implications

Because of the sample size and the weak correlations in this study, it is hard to draw definitive conclusions from the study's results. Initial results suggested that servant leadership and conflict adaptivity were not related. A larger study with government leaders should be conducted to verify this finding to determine if this is accurate. Nevertheless, there is sufficient research that suggests that servant leadership could be beneficial in the government sector to facilitate a bond of trust (Miao et al., 2014; Nyhan, 2000; Timiyo & Lee-Yeadon, 2016) between the organization and unions (Chukwuemeka et al., 2012). This leadership style can also help leaders to cultivate an environment that focuses on the growth and development of followers, a sense of altruism, and a focus on community (Mareus et al., 2019).

Previous servant leadership studies and a review of the theory did not suggest that leaders would be limited to one or a few styles. The servant-leader's benevolence toward others can

cause them to be firm or even forceful in seeking the best outcomes for followers and community members. Hence, it seems likely that the servant-leader might embrace various styles at different times. This line of thought is important because leadership and talent development professionals can customize their training and coaching programs to emphasize the aspects of servant leadership that support conflict adaptivity while acknowledging the need for dominant conflict styles in a crisis or unique setting. This would help those who are servant-leaders to understand the benefits of dominance in a specific context. This way, the servant-leader may not feel as if they are moving away from their core values and guiding principles by using a dominant approach or any of the styles. In addition, characteristics that more obviously correlate with conflict adaptivity, such as benevolence that fosters cooperation, problem-solving, empathy, and reflective listening, can also be incorporated into employee and leadership development programs as guiding principles to build successful interpersonal relationships and conflict resolution.

Recommendations for Future Study

Further research could be conducted with a similar conflict assessment with questions that depict the local government context to see if the contextual framing of the scenarios yields different results. The MCAA provides private sector-orientated situations, but using scenarios the leaders can relate to even more might influence the accuracy of the measurement. While this would be ideal, it would require an additional study to establish the validity of the scale after changes, and I, as a local government employee, believe the questions were adequately applicable for government leaders for them to be able to answer them meaningfully and provide an estimate of conflict adaptivity. To help achieve this aim, future researchers should consider

developing an MCAA from the followers' perspective instead of the self-reporting view of the leader.

Revisiting this study within the local government context, hopefully at a less tumultuous time (e.g., after the pandemic crisis abates), may allow for a greater number of participants to contribute their views to the study and provide more insight in a stable context. Some organizations did not consent to the use of incentives encouraging participants to complete the assessment. That is sometimes done to minimize the appearance of preferential treatment. However, wherever possible, the appropriate use of an incentive may be beneficial in increasing the response rate for the conflict assessment, as it is a more time-consuming (15–20 minutes) assessment.

Gelfand et al. (2012) provided great insight into the various conflict cultures that can exist within an organization and how leadership can influence the prevailing conflict culture. Bundy et al. (2018) suggested that a misfit of values and strategic focus between the individual and the organization might also contribute to conflict. Further exploration of the effect of organizational culture on a person's approach to conflict (Coleman & Kugler, 2014; Huang, 2018), specifically in the local government context, will provide greater insight into the role of organizational culture and its influence on a servant-leaders' ability to adapt to conflict. Also, Laub's (1999) measure of servant leadership as a characteristic of the whole organization might be useful in understanding the extent to which servant leadership is practiced in specific government organizations when attempting to examine the correlation between servant leadership and outcomes variables like conflict adaptivity on an individual level. Another option is to conduct interviews with leaders and followers in local government to get their views on conflict adaptivity and how and if it is expressed in their context if they think a servant-leader

(select a leader they have worked with who fits servant leadership criteria) is adaptive when dealing with conflict. Because servant-leaders' characteristics such as stewardship, empathy, listening, and awareness (Spears, 2010) appear to be subsumed in the definition of benevolence, it is understandable that there was a significant relationship $r = .24$, $p < .05$, $N = 87$ between these constructs. Further research should be conducted to explore how they are related.

Further research with direct measures of conflict styles, rather than conflict adaptivity, is needed to determine if servant leadership is related to specific styles, not just conflict adaptivity. Lastly, conflict adaptivity can also be studied to see if it is associated with leadership effectiveness in general, which might then act as a further precursor to studies examining if servant, transformational, or high leader-member exchange leaders are more likely to embrace conflict adaptivity.

Limitations

This study had a small sample, which limited the confidence with which I could interpret the results. The study also had low response rates in most organizations. Volunteer bias was another potential limitation for this exploratory study. Volunteer bias "… refers to a specific bias that can occur when the subjects who volunteer to participate in a research project are different in some ways than the general population" (Boughner, 2010, p. 2). Nonresponse bias refers to the effects of certain participants not responding to research participation requests on the overall study results. In this study, the overwhelming demands of some leaders' schedules during the time this study took place, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and social unrest, likely contributed to the presence of volunteer and nonresponse bias. Some of the larger cities I had initially contacted were heavily impacted by COVID-19 and were unable to participate in this study.

Direct reports may have been reluctant to be transparent in their responses for fear that the information may be shared with their leaders despite my reassuring participants that their participation was anonymous and would not be reported to the leader. The length of the MCAA may have been a deterrence to completing the survey. One respondent sent an email suggesting to me that the MCAA be customized to reflect a local government context (as mentioned in the previous paragraph). The sample also included leaders from multiple organizations and even different types of organizations. This may have resulted in some impact on the results in terms of additional factors impacting the results, such as organizational context and culture. Given the overall size and lack of homogeneity in the sample, and the low response rates, the present study's results should only be considered an early indication of the relationship between servant leadership and conflict adaptivity, which needs to be researched further.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between servant leadership and conflict adaptivity in government leaders. Developing a greater understanding of the relationship between servant leadership and conflict adaptivity will help researchers, leaders, and human resource professionals to understand whether those leaders who apply servant leadership are more likely to adapt their conflict management strategy to be relevant to the situation they are facing (Coleman & Kugler, 2014). Based on the results of this study, no correlation was found between servant leadership and conflict adaptivity. It seems likely that servant leadership and conflict adaptivity would correlate; however, this small study did not find support for that notion. This might be a result of the effects of organizational culture, but further research with larger samples will be needed to truly understand this relationship.

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Appendix A: Request to Conduct Research

March 15, 2020

RE: Permission to Conduct Leadership and Conflict Styles Research

Dear XXXX,

I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study with XXX County employees who reside in your leadership classifications. I am currently enrolled in the Doctor of Organizational Leadership program at Abilene Christian University, and I am conducting a study that seeks to clarify the relationship between leadership and conflict styles in local government leaders under the supervision of Dr. Stuart Allen (Ph.D.).

Participants will be asked to complete an anonymous online survey, which will take about 15 minutes to complete. At the end of the survey, there is a link to a separate survey where they can enter information to be *included in a prize draw for two Amazon gift cards for $50 each or a bundle of three leadership books (two that include assessment) or an online True Colors Personality Assessment*. The data from the prize drawing survey cannot be linked by the researcher to the anonymous responses in the main survey, which ensures that participants remain anonymous. Neither your organization's nor your employees' identities will be included in any study report. I will not require the employees' email addresses, as I will share a link to the survey for you to distribute to the employees on my behalf, which further ensures anonymity.

Your approval to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated. I will schedule a meeting with your assistant as a follow-up to answer any questions or concerns that you may have at that time. You may contact me at my email address, or you can call me at XXX-XXX-XXXX. I am including a copy of the intended survey for review. If you consent to my study, please respond

with your approval via email to XXXXXX@acu.edu so that I can share your response with the

institutional review board (university's human subjects protections committee).

Thank you for your support. You will receive a copy of the completed dissertation after

all program requirements have been met.

June Mighty

Doctoral Student
Abilene Christian University

Enclosures

cc: Dr. Allen, Dissertation Chair, RMU

Appendix B: IRB Approval

ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY
Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103
325-674-2885

July 2, 2020

June Mighty
Department of Organizational Leadership
Abilene Christian University

Dear June,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled
"Servant Leadership and Conflict Adaptivity in Local Government Leaders",

(IRB# 20-089   )is exempt from review under Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects.

If at any time the details of this project change, please resubmit to the IRB so the committee can determine whether or not the exempt status is still applicable.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

Megan Roth

Megan Roth, Ph.D.
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs

Appendix C: Request to Participate

My name is June Mighty, and I am a doctoral student in the Organizational Leadership program at Abilene Christian University. I am also an employee of a local government in an agency in California. I am conducting a study to explore the relationship between leadership and conflict styles in local government leaders.

Permission has been granted by XXXXXX for me to invite you to participate in this study. I am asking you to complete an **anonymous survey** about your leadership style and your approach to different conflict situations. The survey will take about 15 minutes to complete, and no personal information will be collected during the survey. You will complete the Managerial Conflict Adaptivity Assessment, but you will forward the leadership assessment to one to three of your direct reports to complete. Because this is an anonymous survey, you and the direct reports will not receive any information regarding the results of this study.

You will also have an opportunity to participate in a prize draw for two Amazon gift cards for $50 each or a bundle of three leadership books (two that include leadership self-assessments) at an estimated value of $50 (your choice if you are a winner). The data for the prize draw survey cannot be linked by the researcher to your anonymous response in the main survey, ensuring your participation remains anonymous.

Please click on the link below to begin the survey.

[Linktobeadded]

Thank you for your support.

June Mighty, MSOD
XXXXXX@acu.edu
XXX-XXX-XXXX

Appendix D: Leader's Consent Letter

Relationship Between Leadership and Conflict Styles in Local Government Leaders

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You are being invited to participate in this research study that examines the relationship between leadership and conflict styles in local government leaders. This study is being conducted by June Mighty, a doctoral student in the EdD Organizational Leadership program at Abilene Christian University, under the supervision of Dr. Stuart Allen (Ph.D. Organizational Leadership). Permission has been granted by the XXXXXX to invite you to participate in this study.

This form provides important information about the study, including the risks and benefits to you as a participant. Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary and anonymous. You may refuse to participate or stop your participation at any time and for any reason. As this study is anonymous, any responses to a completed survey cannot be deleted as your individual responses cannot be identified.

Purpose and Description

This study seeks to clarify the relationship between leadership and conflict styles in local government leaders. If you chose to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete an anonymous and voluntary survey, which will take about 15 minutes to complete. At the end of the survey, there is a link to a separate survey where you can enter information to be *included in a prize drawing for one of five Amazon gift cards for $50 each*. The data from the prize drawing survey will not be linked by the researcher to the anonymous responses in the main survey, which ensures that participants remain anonymous. Only winners will be contacted (by email) to send the Amazon e-gift card.

Risks and Benefits

There is minimal risk involved in participating in this study. The primary risk with this study is a breach of confidentiality. However, as explained further in the next section, steps have been taken to minimize this risk. The main survey is completed anonymously, and no personal data will be collected during the survey. Data from the prize draw survey (name and email address) will be treated as confidential, protected in a password-protected survey account, and deleted from the survey system after the prize draw has been completed. Data from the main survey will be stored online in a password-protected survey account and backed up on an external password-protected hard drive. Once the study is completed, responses to the main survey will be digitally shredded using Shredder8, but anonymized data from the main survey will be retained for future studies or verification. The survey you forward to your followers (direct reports) is voluntary and anonymous and will not identify you by name. No one will receive feedback about the outcomes of the individual surveys, and only aggregated data will be used in the final study report.

You may not experience any personal benefits from participating in this study. Due to the nature of the study, you may find the survey to be enjoyable and rewarding as it may grant you an opportunity to reflect on your current leadership practices and the opportunity to potentially contribute to a greater understanding of leadership and conflict styles.

Privacy and Confidentiality

Any information you provide will be confidential to the extent allowable by law. Some identifiable data may have to be shared with individuals outside of the study team, such as members of the ACU Institutional Review Board. Otherwise, your confidentiality will be protected as described below. The primary risk with this study is a breach of confidentiality.

However, steps have been taken to minimize this risk. This study will not collect any personal

identification data during the main survey. However, QuestionPro may collect information about

your visitors to the survey site. You may read their privacy statements here

https://www.questionpro.com/help/privacy-policy.html. Information collected (name and email)

for the prize draw survey will be kept secured in the QuestionPro survey system using password

protection and deleted after the prize draw and will not be used for any other purpose than to

contact you to deliver the prize if your name is randomly selected during the prize draw. Neither

you nor your organization will be identified in any study reports.

Contacts

If you have questions about the research study, contact the researcher June Mighty at

XXX-XXX-XXXX or email her at XXXXXX@acu.edu. If needed, you may alternatively

contact Dr. Stuart Allen at XXXXXX@acu.edu. If you have any other questions regarding your

rights as a participant in this research, you may also contact the Office of Research Services at

Abilene Christian University at XXXXXXXXXX or osrp@acu.edu or ACU's Chair of the

Institutional Review Board and Executive Director of Research, Megan Roth, Ph.D. at

XXXXXX@acu.edu

320 Hardin Administration Bldg., ACU Box XXXXXX

Abilene, TX 79699

Agreement

Please click the agree button below if you voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Click only after you have read all of the information provided and your questions have been

answered to your satisfaction. If you wish to have a copy of this consent form, you may print it

now. You do not waive any legal rights by consenting to participate in this study. If you do not

agree to participate in this study, please close this webpage now.

Appendix E: Leadership and Conflict Styles Study Introduction

Welcome to the Leadership and Conflict Styles Study

Thank you for your interest in participating in the leadership and conflict styles study. This study seeks to clarify the relationship between leadership and conflict styles in local government leaders. The survey should take about 10–15 minutes, and your responses are anonymous. As a leader, you will complete a conflict styles assessment. After you've completed the survey, **please forward the survey link for the leadership survey to one to three of your direct reports to complete using the following link and number.** Your direct reports information will be anonymous, and you will not know if the direct report has completed the survey.

The sequence of the other forms to be presented is the introduction, consent form, demographics, main survey and the direct reports introduction, consent form, and a link to the leadership survey. If you are interested in participating in this survey, click the next button below and it will take you to the consent form. Please read the form and the yes or no option to determine if you want to progress with the survey. If you have any questions about the survey, please email June Mighty at XXXXXX@acu.edu.

Prize Drawing

At the end of the survey, there is a link to a separate survey where you can enter information to be *included in a prize drawing for one of five Amazon gift cards for $50 each*. The data from the prize drawing survey will not be linked by the researcher to the anonymous responses in the main survey, which ensures that your information remains anonymous. If you win, you will be contacted (by email) to receive your Amazon e-gift card. Again, thank you for your interest in this study.

Appendix F: Leadership Survey Introduction

Leadership Survey

Thank you for your interest in participating in my leadership study. This short survey has been forwarded to you by a leader, and it should take about 5 minutes to complete. The study seeks to clarify the relationship between leadership and conflict styles in local government leaders. **Your responses are anonymous, and neither you nor your supervisor will receive feedback from this study so that the anonymity of this process can be maintained.**

If you are willing to participate in this survey, click the next button below, and it will take you to the consent form. Please read the form and the yes or no option to determine if you want to progress with the survey. If you have any questions about the survey, please email June Mighty at XXXXXX@acu.edu.

Prize Drawing

At the end of the survey, there is a link to a separate survey where you can enter information to be *included in a prize drawing for one of five Amazon gift cards for $50 each*. The data from the prize drawing survey will not be linked by the researcher to the anonymous responses in the main survey, which ensures that your information remains anonymous. If you win, you will be contacted (by email) to receive your Amazon e-gift card.

Again, thank you for your interest in this study.

Appendix G: Demographics Questions

Please answer the following demographic questions:

1) My gender:

       1—Female

       2—Male

       3—Other

       4—Prefer Not to Say

2) My age range:

       1—18–25 years

       2—26–35 years

       3—36–45 years

       4—46–55 years

       5—56–65 years

       6—66 years or older

       7—Prefer not to say

3) My leadership classification/role:

       1—Frontline Manager

       2—Middle Manager

       3—Senior-Level Manager

       4—Assistant Department Head

       5—Executive level

       6—Assistant CEO or Above

7—Other (Please state your level: _____)

4) The length of time I have served in a leadership/executive role:

1—Less than 1 year

2—1 to 5 years

3—6 to 10 years

4—More than 10 years

5—Prefer not to say

5) Ethnicity

1. Caucasian

2. African American

3. Latino or Hispanic

4. Asian

5. Native American

6. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

7. Two or More

8. Other/Unknown

9. Prefer Not to Say

Thank you for completing the survey. Your responses have been saved. Click on NEXT to end the survey and to see the link for the prize draw.

Appendix H: Permission to Use MCAA

From: ▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬ AC
Subject: MCAA
Date: January 7, 2020 at 8:41 AM
To: ▬▬▬
Cc: ▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬
▬▬▬▬▬▬▬

Hello June,

Thank you for your interest in using one of ICCCR's scales. I've attached the 15 scenarios below.

In my experience, the assessment shouldn't take longer than 20 minutes. The 40 minutes may be referring to the time it took to complete the whole survey, which included covariates.

Please let me know if you have any questions!

Best,

Andy
--

Research Associate
Morton Deutsch International Center for Cooperation and Conflict Resolution (MD-ICCCR)
Teacher's College, Columbia University

they/them, she/her

MCAA.pdf

Appendix I: Scenarios of the Management Conflict Adaptivity Assessment (MCAA)*

Below are several conflict scenarios that you may encounter as a leader. The scenarios take place in different organizational settings but focus on the interaction between the individuals. **Read each scenario and choose one of the behavioral responses from the list below.**

No.	Scenario
1	You are managing a research and development team at a mid-sized software company. Your team is working on a new long-term project that is critical to the future of your team, to your bosses success, and to the future viability of the company. Your boss, who is your mentor and a brilliant engineer, has worked hard for months to develop the next steps for the design of the project. However you personally disagree with her plan and think the project should go in a very different direction, and this is not the first time you have felt this way. How do you react to your boss?
2	You are the office manager of a prestigious medical facility in Boston. An angry patient calls the office complaining that she has been waiting three days for Chris, one of your employees, to complete a referral authorization so that she can see a specialist. She says she's in a lot of pain and needs to be seen right away. When you talk to Chris you learn that the referral had been on his desk for days – that he has been meaning to get to it, but that he's been overloaded with claims. The process of doing referral authorizations can be tedious, but it's a quick process overall. But you also know that although both you and Chris want the patients to be satisfied and cared for, this is becoming a pattern with him. How do you react to Chris?
3	You are a sales manager for a real estate firm in New York. Every sales manager works independently; has his/her own "territory" and team of salespeople and his/her own strategy for generating business. One day you got into an argument with one of the other sales managers about which strategy is really best. It seems every time you two interact, this happens. How do you react to this particular sales manager?
4	You just started working as a middle manager in an advertising firm, when you got involved on a new project that your boss, John, the firm's ambitious creative director, was heading-up. You put in countless extra hours working on ideas for this project, which you presented to your boss. He often took your suggestions, but rarely acknowledged your work. Last week, you saw a file on the shared drive, which included many of your recommendations. You asked another manager about it and he said: "Oh we had a meeting the day before yesterday and John suggested these changes, which everyone loved." You now realize that your boss has no intention of acknowledging your work, which is very important to you because you just started in this job. Instead you believe your boss intends to steal your ideas to advance his career. How do you react towards your boss?
5	You are an event planner for a large public relations firm in New York. You are currently managing the coordination of an important event with several of your best staff members. One of them, Annie, who has worked closely with you on the coordination of the event, recently distanced herself from the work and started expressing frustration and a lack of interest. You were surprised as you know that this event is important to both of you. After reflection, you realize that much of her input was being ignored by you and some of the other staff on the team. The tension started to cause some problems between you as your relationship has become strained. How do you react towards her?
6	You are a regional manager for a financial investment company, and another manager was recently promoted to the same position in a different region. When he got promoted, he kept his personal investment accounts with his original firm but has now been overdrawn at the firm on more than one occasion. You have repeatedly notified him about this. You did it as a friendly gesture, as it is not officially your responsibility. You otherwise have few interactions with him and you don´t need to rely on him in any way. You finally spoke to him about it directly, as you got tired of notifying him. This upset him and he sent an annoying email to you (red, bold-print, etc.). How do you respond to him?

No.	Scenario

7 You just got a great new job as a front office manager for a Major League Baseball team. A couple of weeks after you started, your boss started making nasty jokes about you every time you made a mistake or made a comment that he disagreed with. You found this to be offensive and inappropriate. You first thought that this could be because he was stressed, because as co-owner of the team he has extraordinary responsibilities, but he continued to act this way and you soon heard from others that this is his way of behaving and that he is not very open to feedback. This is particularly hard for you because you need to work closely with him in your current position.
How would you react to your new boss?

8 You are a shift supervisor in a factory. You see one of your mechanics fail to follow an important safety procedure during his shift. Since the safety procedures are designed to prevent major injuries, a violation comes with a three-day suspension. This mechanic is one of your best workers, and this is his first violation. You also know he cannot afford to miss any work as he has five children and needs the money. Even though no one was injured by the violation, it was committed in front of other workers.
How do you react to this mechanic?

9 Dave, an engineer, runs the maintenance department in a medium-sized factory. At management team meetings he mostly keeps quiet. When he speaks, he tends to find fault with people. But he doesn't like to document problems because "it's a waste of time." He admits that he dislikes many of his responsibilities and prefers to work with machines rather than people. He has looked for other jobs, but has two kids in college and can't afford a drop in pay. He doesn't break any rules and gets his work done (begrudgingly). But he speaks curtly to his team, is a poor listener, and often rolls his eyes during meetings. When others give him feedback, he says, "okay." but doesn't change. You are Dave's boss. It is very important for you that the maintenance department is productive and that the staff is satisfied with the working climate. You realize that Dave does not really care about this.
How do you react to Dave?

10 You are managing a top research team at a national laboratory. You have been told by your board of directors to promote one of your junior biologists to team leader of an important new climate-control project. You are very concerned about this, as this particular researcher has consistently failed to perform properly at his job and has shown little ability to work with others or manage a team. You know that there is another agenda involved in this decision and that the board knows about the biologist's lapses. You strongly disagree with the board's decision. For you, good research is too important. However you also know that your career depends on the board of directors and that they hate to be questioned.
How would you respond to the board?

11 You are a middle manager at a large soft drink distribution company. You and your boss are responsible for the roll-out of a new product, which is very important to the company and for both of your future careers. You always work well together and it is important to both of you that this project is a success. Lately, however, you find yourself needing to fill-in and cover for your boss, as he has not been doing his job. You sometimes feel overwhelmed because of this.
How would you react towards your boss?

No.	Scenario
12	You are a new supervisor of an accounting team. Your MBA and 4 years with a top accounting firm prepared you for this. You had 3 years with your current company before being promoted. But you were not prepared to supervise people 20 years older than you, some of whom thought they should have been promoted. All of your direct reports have more experience than you. Some avoid you; two are openly hostile. Then your boss announces that you are in charge of implementing a new accounting procedure. Most of your team begrudgingly implements the change over a few weeks. But one has done nothing after 3 weeks, even though he told you each week, "I'm on it and it will be up soon." You hear from someone else that this particular supervisee is not willing to support your work, and that he expects you to fail. How do you react to this particular supervisee?
13	You are managing a purchasing team for a local museum store. You realize that one of the other team managers who is new to the museum continually misinforms his staff, as he does not yet know the correct organizational procedures. Even though you work independently from each other you tried to explain the procedures to him out of courtesy. However the other manager was not willing to admit what he does not know and ignored your advice. How do you respond to this manager?
14	You are the plant manager of a large farm equipment company in Iowa. One of your direct reports made a decision recently that will work out well for him and his department, but that ultimately will cost the company many hours of overtime and thousands of dollars. He did this against your advice and without clearing it beforehand. This seems to be a pattern with this employee, as he is very ambitious and usually looking out for himself. As he is your employee, you are ultimately responsible for this situation. How do you respond to your direct report?
15	You are managing a production team for a network, prime-time news program. You work very hard for long hours and often go above and beyond your responsibilities for the job. Last week, another production manager with less experience was chosen by your boss to work on a fascinating new project that you would have loved to work on. You normally get along well with your boss and you know that it is important to him that his producers are satisfied in their jobs. You are surprised about this decision as you normally agree with his decisions. How do you respond to your boss?

Note. No.= Number in the questionnaire

R=Region; Region 1: high power, cooperation, high interdependence; Region 2: high power, competition, high interdependence; Region 3: low power, cooperation, high interdependence; Region 4: low power, competition, high interdependence; Region 5: equal power, mixed motive, low-interdependence

CVR=Content Validity Ratio

Forced choice responses to the scenarios

Psychological Orientation	Behavioral Response (as in questionnaire)
Benevolence	You model how to behave constructively and responsibly in the situation by inviting those involved with the problem to discuss the matter cooperatively and sharing your concerns.
Dominance	You use your authority directly to get others to behave as you believe they should in order to solve the problem, including if necessary warning and threatening them with consequences.
Support	You obtain assistance and support from others to solve the problem through tactics like asking for help from those with relevant authority or power, or by attending more carefully to those you depend on in the situation in order to gain a better understanding of what's going on.
Appeasement	You tolerate the situation for now and try to smooth things over as best you can – as you know there is little you can do to make the situation better other than accepting it for now and waiting for opportunities to employ more subtle, coercive tactics later, if you feel you can get away with it.
Autonomy	You disengage from the situation or the relationship in which you are experiencing the problem and try to find some other way to achieve your goals and meet your needs by yourself.

Appendix J: Request to Use the SLS-18 Assessment for Doctoral Research

Dear June,

Thanks for your interest. You are, of course, more than welcome to use either the long or short version of the SLS. No, I do not believe it has been used to assess local government leaders. We are looking into to it too, given that it certainly is an interesting area that I can encourage you to pursue.

Best regards,

Appendix K: Leadership Styles Survey*

Indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement by selecting one option on the rating scale below.

Dimensions of Leadership Styles	Rating Scale					
	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Slightly Disagree 3	Slightly Agree 4	Agree 5	Strongly Agree 6
Empowerment Standardized						
1. My manager gives me the information I need to do my work well.						
2. My manager encourages me to use my talents.						
3. My manager helps me to further develop myself.						
4. My manager encourages his/her staff to come up with new ideas.						
5. My manager gives me the authority to take decisions which make my work easier to me.						
6. My manager offers me abundant opportunities to learn						

new skills.	
Humility	
7. My manager learns from criticism.	
8. My manager learns from different views and opinions of others.	
9. If people express criticism, my manager tries to learn from it.	
Standing Back	
10. My manager keeps himself/herself at the background and gives credits to others.	
11. My manager is not chasing recognition for the things he/she does for others.	
12. My manager appears to enjoy his/her colleagues' success more than his/her own.	

Stewardship	
13. My manager emphasizes the importance of paying attention to the good of the whole.	
14. My manager has a long-term vision.	
15. My manager emphasizes the societal responsibility of our work.	
Authenticity	
16. My manager is open about his/her limitations and weaknesses.	
17. My manager is often touched by the things he/she sees happening around him/her.	
18. My manager shows his/her true feelings to his/her staff.	

Note. From "The cross-cultural invariance of the servant leadership survey: A comparative study across eight countries," by D. Van Dierendonck, M. Sousa, S. Gunnarsdóttir, A. Bobbio, J. Hakanen, A. Pircher Verdorfer, E.Cihan Duyan, & R. Rodriguez-Carvajal, 2017, *Administrative Sciences*, *7*(2), p. 8. (https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci7020008). CC BY 4.0.