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Differentiating Leadership Competencies That Create Constructive or Destructive Conflict Cultures in a Nation's Military Service

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Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

Dena Counts, Ed.D.

Dr. Dena Counts for
Dr. Nannette Glenn, Dean of the
College of Graduate and Professional
Studies

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Differentiating Leadership Competencies That Create
Constructive or Destructive Conflict Cultures in a Nation's Military Service

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

William G. Maxwell, Jr.

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Abstract

Military services face extraordinary challenges as they seek to protect their nation's interests, and overcoming these challenges demands high-performing organizations capable of constructively managing intraorganizational conflict. Leaders bring different competencies to their roles and inspire different conflict cultures within their units. This study's aim was to differentiate the competencies of leaders that were associated with constructive versus destructive conflict cultures. A mixed methods research approach was used to interpret the types and frequencies of leaders' competencies identified through content analysis of 117 military service participants' responses to an online qualitative survey about their observations of leaders of both constructive and destructive conflict cultures. The participants offered qualitative descriptions of leaders' behaviors, skills, and tendencies that influenced the conflict culture. Content analysis of these responses identified themes in the competencies that the leaders used or did not use. Five themes emerged from the content analysis about participants' observations of leaders' competencies. The themes described how respondents identified a limited number of competencies (including their negative equivalents) as influencing conflict cultures, that these competencies were related to leaders' quality of interpersonal interactions, influence on teamwork, and cognitive flexibility, and that leaders that improved conflict cultures were described by their competence, while leaders that worsened conflict cultures were described by their personal characteristics. The identified competencies may be useful in leaders' training and selection. Further research that relates leaders' intentions with followers' observations may offer insight into what competencies exist in leaders and why they choose to use or not use them.

Keywords: intraorganizational conflict, conflict culture, constructive conflict, destructive conflict, leadership competencies