ORGANIZATIONAL CONFLICT IN PUBLIC SERVICE:
CONFLICT MANAGEMENT, CONTEXTUAL FACTORS, AND EMPLOYEE OUTCOMES

by

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To my family.
I would like to express my gratitude to my committee members and department faculty, who all provided their support, guided me through my studies, and helped me get my Ph.D. First, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my committee chair, Dr. Paul Battaglio, for his supervision, ongoing guidance and invaluable support through all the phases of the dissertation process. Also, I would like to thank Dr. Doug Goodman, head of the department of Public and Nonprofit Management, who ensured that I have all the necessary resources and guidance that I needed for my research. I am also grateful for the guidance of Dr. James Harrington, who has generously provided his time, expertise, and insightful comments on my work. In addition, I would like to express my deep gratitude to Dr. Meghna Sabharwal, for her mentoring, support, and encouragement throughout my doctoral studies.

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By expanding the conflict and conflict management literature to the public service environment, this study provides an insight into the role and aftermath of interpersonal conflicts for the organizational setting. Workplace conflicts consist of an inevitable, and typically perceived as toxic, phenomenon, owing to their negative consequences for employee job-related attitudes. Mitigating the dysfunctional conflict results can be a challenging endeavor for managers, as effectively handling workplace controversies is contingent upon the nature of conflicts, the adopted conflict management approach, and the prevailing organizational environment. As public organizations find themselves in the midst of a human capital crisis, and confront challenges for high performance results, delving into the factors that can threaten smooth organizational operations and employee behaviors becomes imperative. When studying the attitudes of state HR professionals about the role of organizational conflicts and their overall work experiences, this study reveals that relationship conflicts can be detrimental for
organizational performance, even though there is not any association between organizational conflicts and turnover intent. Also, even though conflict management, and particularly a win-win approach, pertains to an essential human resources management mechanism, its role in balancing out the negative conflict outcomes only holds under the premise of a positive organizational environment. In view of fairness in interpersonal relations and an emotional attachment between employees and their organization, a cooperative approach to conflict handling could be positively associated with organizational performance and lower withdrawal intentions.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Considerable scholarly attention has been given to the study of organizational conflicts, a highly complex phenomenon, but at the same time, an indispensable element of human interactions. A multitude of studies in organizational theory, general management, and social psychology among other fields, have explored the dynamic and multidimensional nature of organizational conflicts. Either perceived as a social or organizational phenomenon, conflicts are defined as the emotional and behavioral response of individuals to a perceived competition or incompatibility between interests, goals or decisions (Behfar et al. 2008; De Dreu and Weingart 2003; De Wit, Greer and Jehn 2012; Jehn 1994; Sonnentag, Unger and Nagel 2013).

As a result of their dynamic and multi-dimensional nature, conflicts have not only been regarded as a highly permeating, negative phenomenon, but also as a positive, functional organizational element. Traditionally, interpersonal controversies have been studied as a pathology, as social stressors that threaten smooth daily operations, and hurt working relationships, organizational effectiveness and the overall positive job-related behaviors (Barki and Hartwick 2004; Jehn and Bendersky 2003; Pondy 1967; Spector and Jex 2008). Lower productivity, employee morale, trust in working relationships, employee commitment and satisfaction levels are some of the repercussions of organizational conflicts (DeDreu and Weingart 2003b; Coggburn, Battaglio, and Bradbury 2014; Langfred 2007; Simons and Peterson
2003), whereas they can also affect individuals’ emotional well-being (DeDreu, Van Dierendonck, and Dijkstra 2004; Spector and Bruk-Lee 2008).

Contrary to this approach to conflicts, scholars have more recently recognized the positive side of conflicts as drivers of an effective, creative and productive workplace (Bhat, Rangnekar, and Barua 2013; Okhuysen and Bechky 2009). Functional conflicts can boost creativity, enhance decision-making, communication and contribute to higher productivity levels (Amason and Schweiger 1994; Budd and Colvin 2014; Jaffee 2008; Jehn 1995). According to this positive perspective of conflicts, completely eliminating organizational conflicts will lead to stagnation and inertia, whereas maintaining moderate conflict levels is key to positive employee attitudes and behaviors (DeDreu and Beersma 2005; Rahim 2011; Shaw et al. 2011). Based on the literature, task-related conflicts can bring to the surface such “healthy” behaviors (DeDreu 2006; Jehn 1994; Tjosvold 2008), whereas, any personal and emotional controversies are purely detrimental for the workplace (Amason 1996; Jehn and Mannix 2001; Rahim 2011).

Dealing with conflicts in the organizational setting is an integral component of human resources management (HRM), but also an essential step toward a healthy workplace (Selden 2009). Coleman et al. (2013) mention that managers devote, on average, 30% to 40% of their time dealing with workplace conflicts, the majority of which are attributed to interpersonal problems. Diagnosing and intervening in a conflict situation are key steps for maintaining a positive work climate and achieving higher productivity and higher overall effectiveness (Budd and Colvin 2014; Rahim 2002; Shih and Susanto 2010). Managing, and not necessarily resolving conflicts, protects both individuals and the organization from the consequences of ignored or mishandled conflicts (Bhat, Rangnekar, and Barua 2013; Taylor and Fielbig 2009).
Taken together, the conflict literature accentuates that how individuals respond to workplace controversies will largely shape their functional or dysfunctional aftermath (Behfar et al. 2008; Dionne et al. 2004; Ohbuchi and Suzuki 2003; Somech, Desivilya, and Lidogoster 2009; Zhang, Cao, and Tjosvold 2011). Adopting a win-win, cooperative approach (e.g., problem-solving or compromising) when handling conflicts is generally regarded as a more beneficial approach, which leads to open communications, trust, and a greater likelihood of finding a solution beneficial for all conflicting parties (Coleman et al. 2013; Deutsch 1990; Rahim 2011). In contrast, a competitive style (e.g., dominating or avoiding) will bring the opposite results, as it becomes more difficult to achieve a common ground between the parties involved. Thus, it increases anxiety, reduced employee satisfaction, and performance (DeDreu et al. 2001; Rainey 2009; Weingart and Jehn 2009).

According to the contingency approach to conflict-related behaviors, in addition to the preferred conflict management style, concluding about the harmful or functional conflict aftermath should also account for the prevailing organizational setting (Coleman et al. 2013; Deutsch 1969; Jehn 1997; Rahim 2002; Rahim 2011). Individuals’ perceptions of their work experiences, such as perceptions of organizational justice, or supervisory or organizational support to name a few, will greatly influence their attitudes, together with their conflict-related behaviors (Hofstede et al. 1990).

As an understudied phenomenon in public administration research, exploring organizational conflicts in public service offers both academics and managers a better understanding of the extent to which organizational outcomes are threatened, or enhanced by interpersonal conflicts, together with an insight in public servants’ organizational behaviors.
Overall, delineating the conflict dynamics becomes a competitive advantage for public organizations to build positive personnel relations, improve decision-making, strengthen team cohesion, and detect problems. Particularly as governments strive to attain high-performance goals, and they face challenges in recruiting and retaining qualified personnel (Brewer and Selden 2000; Cho and Lewis 2012; Kim 2005a; Moynihan and Pandey 2008; Rainey 2009), effective conflict handling becomes a valuable managerial tool in the pursuit of a higher effectiveness in HRM operations and positive job outcomes (Caillier 2011; Roche, Teague, and Colvin 2014).

1.2 Research Purpose and Research Questions

In view of the literature findings of a negative role of conflicts in the organizational setting, the primary purpose of the present study is to explore the conflict perceptions and behavioral responses of state HR professionals to workplace conflicts, together with the implications for job-related outcomes. In particular, the study examines whether organizational conflicts, specifically task and relationship conflicts, can have an impact on perceived organizational performance and turnover intentions.

To the extent that conflict management strategies are considered to be a core HRM function, the present study aims at exploring whether conflict handling is associated with positive employee attitudes and behaviors. An emphasis is given on a cooperative attitude in conflict handling, which can mitigate the harmful conflict outcomes and lead to positive job-related outcomes. Given that organizational conflicts can disrupt organizational operations, a constructive conflict intervention can mitigate the negative conflict outcomes, and boost
productivity, employee morale and overall satisfaction (Behfar et al. 2008; Rahim 2011; Tjosvold 2008).

Moreover, the purpose is to take into consideration organizational elements that can shape individuals’ conflict-related behaviors. Doing so, not only sheds light on the factors that affect public servants’ conflict-related behaviors, but also contributes to the development of a more integrated framework for the study of conflict and conflict management in organizations (DeDreu and Beersma 2005). Specifically, this study is looking at employee’s organizational commitment, perceived organizational support and organizational justice perceptions, as contextual factors that will enhance employees’ perceptions about their work environment.

Taken together, the research questions of this study are developed as follows:

1. How can workplace conflicts, at the interpersonal level, shape employee behaviors and outcomes in the organization? Also, how do organizational conflicts interfere with individual perceptions of organizational performance, and turnover intentions? And last are there any differences found in the impact of task and relationship conflict on turnover intentions and performance?

2. Moreover, does a constructive conflict management approach (i.e., problem-solving, compromising, and obliging strategies) have a positive effect on organizational performance and turnover intentions?

3. What other contextual variables can influence individuals’ perceptions of their work experiences? Are employee commitment, organizational justice perceptions and perceived organizational support having a positive impact on perceived organizational performance and turnover intent?
1.3 Contribution of the Study

Even though a large body of research studies the dynamics and management of workplace conflicts, the literature is primarily drawn by research conducted in the private sector. Given the deficiency of research in the nuances of conflict in the public sector context, this study contributes to the organizational conflict literature by reporting about the presence, dynamics, handling and implications of workplace conflicts within the government setting. In particular, this study elicits the input of state human resource (HR) professionals about the conflict repercussions for the organizational environment, and preferred approaches to managing them. In consideration of the negative conflict aftermath, “a greater awareness of the possible impacts of conflicts can help public administrators turn destructive conflicts into constructive efforts” (Lan 1997, 29).

Moreover, the majority of earlier studies focus solely on the impact of workplace conflicts, or the beneficial role of conflict handling strategies in the organizational environment (DeChurch, Mesmer-Magnus and Dotty 2013). This study extends existing literature, by exploring both the association of task and relationship conflicts, together with conflict management mechanisms, with organizational performance and turnover intent. In accordance with a contingency approach to conflicts and earlier recommendations for future inquiry, the present research accounts for elements of the organizational environment, by focusing on organizational commitment, justice and perceived organizational support. Exploring how these organizational elements interact with conflict-related behaviors is essential for a more comprehensive study of organizational behaviors.
The following sections provide an elaborate description of conflict theory, the several conflict types, and manifestations, as well as the productive or destructive conflict aftermath, with a focus on the job-related outcomes of interest (i.e., employee turnover intentions and individual performance perceptions). The study then goes on to the conflict management literature, the benefits accruing from managing conflicts, and from adopting a constructive, rather than competitive approach to dealing with conflicts. The study also explores the role of contextual factors (i.e., perceptions of organizational commitment, organizational justice and organizational support) that can influence employee outcomes and their conflict-related behaviors.
CHAPTER 2
ORGANIZATIONAL CONFLICT THEORY

The purpose of this chapter is to present the theoretical underpinnings of organizational conflicts. The studies summarized in the present chapter are mainly drawn from private sector scholarship, as workplace conflicts have been, so far, an understudied phenomenon in public management research. The first section sets the foundations of conflict theory. The second section reviews main organizational and individual predictors of organizational conflicts, with a special reference to the public service environment. The last section evaluates the conflict consequences and focuses on the conflict aftermath on organizational performance and turnover intentions.

2.1 Conflicts in the Organizational Setting

Either seen as a necessary evil, an interference of social order, or a threat to established social norms, conflicts have long received academic attention in many disciplines, such as psychology, political science, sociology, and international relations (Lan 1997; Rahim 2011). Even though, there is great variation as to how conflicts are defined in the literature, scholars, for the most part, achieve unanimity by recognizing that conflicts consist of an inevitable element of all human interactions (DeDreu and Gelfand 2008; Gelfand, Leslie, and Keller 2008; Jehn et al. 2008; Pondy 1967; Rahim 2011), and they share a common view of conflict as a predominantly dysfunctional phenomenon.

Philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle largely considered conflicts to be a social pathology, which interrupts social and political life and thus, the role of government is to take
action in order to minimize conflicts (Rahim 2011). Similarly, sociologists and other intellectuals have treated conflicts as an undesirable and toxic phenomenon, a disruption of social life, which needs to be eliminated, or, minimized to a possible extent. According to this traditional approach, an emphasis was given on the negative, counter-productive elements that conflicts bring to the environment wherein they are developed. Further, the early theories treated conflicts as a competition between opposing forces; according to Darwinian theory, conflicts take the form of an eternal competition for survival, as a necessary step for human evolution, whereas Marx perceived conflicts as the antagonistic struggle between social classes (Deutsch 1990; Rahim 2011).

Research inquiry in conflict, as an organizational phenomenon, became more systematic at the end of the 20th century (Rahim 2011). Even though conflicts occur in many different context and settings, they are commonly conceptualized as the incompatibilities, oppositions or disagreements between two or more parties. Scholars specifically define conflicts as any real or perceived disagreement or opposition between two or more entities due to contrasting interests, ideas, preferences, personalities, goals or expectations (Alper, Tjosvold, and Law 2009; De Dreu, Dierendonck, and Dijkstra 2004; De Dreu and Weingart 2003; Jehn and Mannix 2001; Rahim 2002; Rahim 2011; Wall and Callister 1995).

One of the earliest, but most elaborate, definitions is given by Pondy (1967), who perceived conflict as the end product of antecedent conditions (such as dearth of resources), affective states (stress, anxiety, pressure), cognitive states (individuals’ perception and recognition of the problem) and conflicting behaviors, varying from passive resistance to overt aggressive behavior. He also distinguished between latent (the conflict has not been expressed
yet), perceived (recognition of the problem), felt (the conflict outcomes are visible) and manifest (the problem is now an open discussion/dispute) stages of conflict (Pondy 1967, 298-300), a distinction that helps to better understand the dynamic nature of organizational conflicts. More recently, Rahim (2011, 16) conceptualized conflict as “an interactive process manifested in incompatibility, disagreement, or dissonance within or between social entities (i.e., individual, group, organization, etc.).”

### 2.1.1 A Multi-Level Phenomenon

In an effort to grasp the multifaceted nature of conflict, scholars point toward a multi-level analysis, as conflicts might occur at different settings and levels in the organization. For instance, organizational conflicts emerge between subordinates and supervisors (vertical), as well as between individuals at the same hierarchical level (horizontal) (Xin and Pelled 2003). So far, the conflict literature has given emphasis on the controversies, incompatibilities, or competition emerging between (interorganizational) or within (intraorganizational) organizations (Rahim 2011). At the intraorganizational level, conflicts are distinguished between those occurring at the group and individual levels.

A prominent type of individual level conflicts refers to the *interpersonal* ones, which are developed between two or more individuals of the same or different hierarchical positioning in the organization (Brewer and Lam 2009). Furthermore, the *intrapersonal* type of conflicts describes the personal, cognitive incompatibility when an individual experiences a belief, or, value incompatibility, or has difficulty deciding between two or more different courses of action (Rahim 2011). A common example is role conflicts, which refer to the incompatibilities between different roles and resulting expectations that an individual needs to undertake, as for instance
those experiences by individuals dealing with work-life conflicts and incompatibilities between their work-role and family-role (Wadsworth and Owens 2007).

Moreover, as work groups are increasingly becoming an essential element of organizational life, as a means to higher competitiveness, effectiveness, productivity and innovation (Jehn and Mannix 2001; Thomas, Bliese, and Jex 2005), the conflict literature has given considerable emphasis on the team-based conflicts. Working in teams presupposes high interaction between the members, close collaboration, sharing of information, and exchange of ideas, which in turn increase the prevalence of conflicts (Jaffee 2008). In more detail, the intragroup conflicts are attributed to disagreements over tasks and team-related issues among the members of the same group, whereas intergroup controversies emerge between groups or organizational units and they are usually attributed to power imbalances, task-related problems, or limited resources (Beersma, Conlon, and Hollenbeck 2008; Cox 2003; Jehn 1995; Rahim 2002).

2.2 Antecedents of Organizational Conflicts

Organizational theorists have given considerable attention to the multiple facets of conflicts, by studying their determinants and distinct impact on organizational life. Understanding the context of workplace conflicts and distinguishing between the different conflict types enables managers and supervisors to detect their influence over organizational life, better understand employee attitudes and behaviors, and respond to underlying personnel problems more effectively (Jehn et al. 2008; Rahim 2011). Given the innumerable conflict triggers, this study makes a review of the most commonly studied conflict determinants, as they related with organizational attitudes and behaviors.
2.2.1 Organizational and Individual Triggers

Organizational conflicts occur in a variety of contexts and they are attributed to a multitude of reasons, varying from individual traits and behaviors, to organizational processes and characteristics. As organizations are moving toward greater flexibility in their operations, flattened hierarchies, people-centered practices, and antagonistic employment relations, conflicts are increasingly becoming more prevalent (Gelfand, Leslie, and Keller 2008).

The modern workplace is very prone to conflicts, as a result of the growing prevalence of teamwork, collaboration and cooperation skills, joint decision-making, sharing information, which entails a high degree of interdependence between organizational members. Particularly factors such as lack of goal clarity, role or task ambiguities, work overload, misinterpretation of tasks or processes, together with scarce resources and power asymmetries, become popular triggers of conflicts (Beersma, Conlon, and Hollenbeck 2008; Behfar and Thompson 2007; Coleman et al. 2013; DeDreu and Gelfand 2008; Rahim 2011). Further, the prevailing organizational, or team, culture plays a significant role, as the established norms and shared values between team members help them achieve greater consistency and cooperation toward the accomplishment of common goals, but also result in the development of internal controversies and personal disagreements (Jehn and Mannix 2001).

Workplace diversity has been frequently studied as a conflict determinant, but existing research findings show mixed results in regards to whether the changing demographics actually create more conflicts. The modern workplace is becoming increasingly heterogeneous, not only in respect to demographic attributes such as gender, race, or age, but also, individuals’ educational background, work experiences, values, cultural beliefs, perceptions, personal goals,
lifestyle preferences, to name a few (Behfar and Thompson 2007; Randel 2002). On one hand, some studies show that workplace diversity decreases team cohesion, creates conflicts, and hurts harmonious interpersonal relationships (DeDreu and Weingart 2003b; Pelled, Eisenhardt, and Xin 1999; Phillips and Thomas-Hunt 2007; Simons and Peterson 2000). One the other hand, diversity over task-related issues is often thought to lead to productive disagreements and creative thinking (Philips and Thomas-Hunt 2007; Jehn, Bezrukova, and Thatcher 2008).

When exploring the leading causes of conflicts at the individual level, the literature mostly refers to personal differences, conflicting interests or roles, ineffective communication, or withholding of information between two or more interacting parties (Herrman 2010; Rainey 2009; Rahim 2011; Wall and Callister 1995). In this context, the work-family role incompatibilities are commonly studied as a source of conflicts; individuals’ inability to balance their working responsibilities, with the family or personal life roles and demands, results in a negative spillover from personal to working life, and ultimately, in the development of workplace conflicts (Ferguson et al. 2012; Frone 2003). In particular, work-life conflicts have been found to negatively impact job performance or satisfaction (Cox 2003), to increase turnover intentions and absenteeism (Anderson, Coffey, and Byerly 2002; Glass and Finley 2002; Frone 2003), and exacerbate stress and psychological pressures (Aslam et al. 2011).

2.2.2 Relationship, Task and Process Conflicts

One of the most popular typologies of interpersonal conflict sources, as developed by Jehn (1994, 1995), distinguishes between affective, task-oriented, and process-based conflicts. Relationship (emotional, interpersonal, or affective) conflicts refer to the disputes or controversies that take a more personal and emotional character. These conflicts are less work-
related, as they stem from personality differences, incongruences between individual beliefs and ideals, or even political differences, and are usually associated with feelings of hostility, anger, annoyance and mistrust (Amason and Schweiger 1994; De Dreu and Weingart 2003a; Jehn 1994; Jehn 1997; Jehn and Bendersky 2003; Pelled 1996). Thus, they can become really persistent and deleterious, as they are attributed to more personal, socio-emotional issues than task or process related issues. Relationship conflict can be particularly prevalent at the team level, owing to the higher interdependence between group members, as the closer interaction between them intensifies and personalizes their differences (Jehn 1995).

Task conflicts refer to disagreements over work-related issues. Defined otherwise as cognitive, or substantive, these conflicts are caused by issues and disagreements between individuals, owing to differing opinions and ideas, or misinterpretations, about the content of tasks, goals, allocation of resources, or organizational policies and processes (DeDreu and Weingart 2003b; De Dreu, Van Dierendonck, and Dijkstra 2004; Jehn 1994; Sonnentag, Unger, and Nagel 2013). This type of conflicts becomes a burdensome stressor for employees as they increase the time and attention required to resolve work-related issues (Sonnentag, Unger and Nagel 2013). Scholars show that task conflicts occur more often when they involve routine tasks and there is high disagreement among team members, owing to the greater diversity of viewpoints and ideas they bring (Jehn 1995; Jehn and Mannix 2001).

The last type of process conflicts were the last type to be developed, and they refer to the disagreements over the execution of tasks, the delegation of authority, duties, or responsibilities, and they are particularly prevalent between group members (Behfar et al. 2008; De Wit, Greer and Jehn 2012; Jehn 1997; Jehn et al. 2008b). Overall, process conflicts have received the least
scholarly attention, mainly due to their perceived similarity with task-oriented type of conflicts, as both refer to work-related issues. However, some scholars argue that process conflicts are a conceptually distinct category, and that they are distinct from task conflicts which are related to the content of the tasks to be performed, as they refer to disagreements over “logistical issues,” such as who is responsible for task execution, or what would be the best way to accomplish the set goals (Behfar et al. 2002; Greer and Jehn 2007; Jehn et al. 2008b; Weingart 1992).

Besides providing a clear conceptual distinction between relationship, task and process types, the aforementioned studies also show the dynamic nature of conflicts and their ability to transform given the prevailing circumstances wherein they occur (Pelled, Eisenhardt, and Xin 1999). Depending on the severity, duration, causes of conflict and human reactions to them, conflicts can quickly become more personal. For instance, ignored or mismanaged task-related conflicts, can quickly take a more personal tone, as disputes over the execution of tasks might create distrust between individuals (Barki and Hartwick 2004; Jehn 1994). Thus, task conflicts can quickly transform to relationship conflicts, which are related to negative attitudes, hostility, anger, and they eventually become more challenging to handle (Greer and Jehn 2007; Jehn et al. 2008a; Pelled, Eisenhardt, and Xin 1999; Weingart and Jehn 2009). Similarly, a process-related conflict might turn into a personal and high emotional issue if organizational or team processes are unfair, and eventually, have a negative influence on organizational life (Greer and Jehn 2007). Once conflicts become more emotional and affective, they ultimately become much more challenging to handle (Weingart and Jehn 2009).

Both task and process conflicts can become particularly detrimental when they take a more negative, emotional tone, as they eventually become a personal controversy; in this case,
conflicts take time off from dealing with job to be done, shift the attention to personal issues, and thus, reduce employee productivity (Greer and Jehn 2007). The more individuals get emotionally involved in the problems, the greater is the likelihood for them to engage in irrational acting and thinking, which ultimately hurts their work-related behaviors.

2.2.3 Conflict in the Public Service Environment

Taking into account that conflicts are highly contingent upon their surrounding, studying organizational conflicts in the public sector environment should take into account the unique government setting. Despite though the recognition of conflicts as fundamental element of political life, policy-making and decision-making processes in government (Bingham, Nabatchi, and O’Leary 2005; Rainey 2009; Schwenk 1990), there has been paucity in public administration scholarship regarding workplace conflicts (Lan 1997).

The unique public sector environment, together with the ebb and flow of competing interests, values and actors in government create the fertile ground for the development of conflicts. As the possible triggers of conflict in the public sector are innumerable, thus, this study only makes a brief review of some structural elements of the government that contribute to the emergence of workplace conflicts. The public workplace is exposed to the complexity of the bureaucracy itself. On one hand, there is great ambiguity in tasks and goals, the interference of political actors and institutions, and a multitude of regulatory and legal constraints (Boyne et al. 2005; Pynes 2004; Rainey, Backoff, and Levine 1976; Jung 2014; Stazyk and Goerdel 2011; Williams 2013). On the other hand, public entities are dealing with blurred lines of authority, shrinking budgets, pressures “to do more with less,” changing demographics, and competing
interests between the multiple stakeholders involved in public agencies’ operations (Kellough and Selden 2003; Pynes 2004; Rainey 2009; Selden, Ingraham, and Jacobson 2001).

Furthermore, the heritage of recent civil service reforms, under the premise of achieving higher effectiveness, has spurred a great deal of change in core personnel management operations. The New Public Management (NPM) era has challenged public organizations to become more efficient and effective, by calling for higher flexibility and managerial discretion, adoption of private-sector practices, and a strategic direction in public HRM systems (Battaglio 2010; Denhardt and Denhardt 2007; Hays and Kearney 2001; Rainey 2009; Selden 2009; Selden, Ingraham, and Jacobson 2001; Vigoda-Gadot and Beeri 2012). In addition, the widespread adoption of at-will employment systems, together with the forces for higher decentralization, adoption performance-based practices, and privatizations, have brought greater uncertainty and complexity in government (Condrey and Battaglio 2007; Hays and Sowa 2006; Kellough and Nigro 2006; Lan 1997; Rainey 2009; Selden, Ingraham, and Jacobson 2001).

From a macro perspective, the structure of the federal system itself is built on the grounds of conflict, cooperation, and competition between different government levels (O’Toole and Christensen 2013). The American intergovernment relations, along with the growing presence of networks, intersectoral and intergovernmental collaborations and partnerships, create additional challenges for public administrators (Agranoff 2006; Bingham, Nabatchi, and O’Leary 2005; McGuire 2006). These multi-party collaborative and cooperative arrangements call for a high degree of interdependence between the actors involved, as both cooperation and competition are predominant characteristics of interjurisdictional interactions and intergovernmental relations (McGuire 2006; O’Toole and Christensen 2013).
Taken together, these developments have resulted in a re-definition of employment relationships (Kellough and Nigro 2006), and created more imbalances and feelings of insecurity (Coggburn et al. 2010; Berman et al. 2013). Ultimately, conflicts become a daily issue for public managers, who assume the task of handling them (DeDreu and Gelfand 2008). Even though little empirical evidence exists to show an association between organizational conflicts and organizational outcomes, existing scholarly work shows that conflicts have negative implications for the organizational environment. A few studies have dealt with conflicts in the context of school boards (Grissom 2010; Grissom 2014), council-manager or inner-council conflicts in local governments (Watson and Hassett 2003; Gordon and DeHoog 1991; Nelson, Gabris, and Davis 2011; Svara 1999; Whitaker and DeHoog 1991), political conflicts (Feiock et al. 2001; McCabe et al. 2008; Nie 2004; Teich 2008), work-family conflicts (Facer and Wadsworth 2008; Kim and Wiggins 2011; Wadsworth and Owens 2007), or labor-management conflicts (Douglas 1992). Overall, those findings argue that conflicts are associated with poor organizational outcomes, such as higher turnover (DeHoog and Whitaker 1990).

2.3 Assessing the Conflict Aftermath

As scholars delve into the nuances of conflict to detect their implications for organizational outcomes, the research findings are mixed, as conflicts take both a dysfunctional and a positive, functional role, which leads to favorable outcomes.

2.3.1 Dysfunctional Conflicts

The aftermath of interpersonal conflicts for the organizational environment has received attention from scholars in management, social psychology, and organizational theory, with their negative impact to receive a prominent role in these studies. Conflicts have traditionally been
described and studied as an undesirable and inevitably toxic phenomenon, which disrupts normal organizational operations (Barki and Hartwick 2004; Bhat, Rangnekar, and Barua 2013).

According to this approach, organizational conflicts are seen as pathology, with a detrimental impact on overall organizational effectiveness, negative employee attitudes, stressful emotions and counterproductive behaviors.

Similarly, early organizational theorists have adopted this traditional, dysfunctional view of conflicts, and perceived them as an obstacle to smooth organizational operations; they were treated as a malady to be cured and an undesirable situation that creates miscommunications, hostilities, disagreements, stress, and an overall negative working climate and personnel relations (Jehn and Bendersky 2003; Pondy 1967; Rahim 2011). Influenced by the scientific management’s principles, there was only one, formal, and rational way of handling conflicts, so that they should be suppressed, minimized, or eliminated (Jaffee 2008; Slabbert 2004). As a result, strict hierarchical relationships, top-down chain of command, and formal organizational rules and processes were generally regarded as the best remedy against conflicts (Jaffee 2008; Rahim 2011).

Dysfunctional conflicts have the tendency to persist and escalate, to the extent where they negatively affect individual well-being, as they elevate stress levels and anxiety (DeDreu, Van Dierendonck, and Dijkstra 2004; Sonnentag, Unger, and Nagel 2013; Spector and Bruk-Lee 2008). Besides dealing with stressful emotions, individuals dealing with frequent, severe and prolonged conflicts, they are also likely to experience burnout and face difficulties in responding effectively to work and family-related roles (De Dreu, Dierendonck, and Dijkstra 2004; Spector and Bruk-Lee 2008).
When particularly persistent, conflicts threaten the individual’s overall psychological state (De Dreu and Beersma 2005; Spector and Bruk-Lee 2008), and can even lead to violence and physical harm (Wall and Callister 1995; Neuman and Baron 1998; Raver and Barling 2008). Value conflicts, in particular, consist of a deleterious conflict type as they are attributed to differences in deeply rooted individual perceptions, which are challenging to overcome (Weingart and Jehn 2009), and they threaten the harmonious group relationships and normal execution of tasks (Behfar and Thompson 2007; Jehn 1994; Jehn and Mannix 2001).

An extreme type of organizational conflict and workplace violence pertains to workplace bullying, which has a significantly harmful impact on the psychological state of employees (Raver and Barling 2008). Strandmark and Hallberg (2007) refer to workplace bullying as the accumulation of escalating conflict incidents, which mostly stem from humiliating, aggressive and unethical behaviors (expressed by physical or verbal attacks). Their study focused on public service professions and concluded that workplace bullying is associated with lasting power asymmetries, ineffective leadership, and conflicting personal beliefs. The deleterious effect of such incidents is largely exacerbated when conflicts remain unsettled.

The dysfunctional conflict consequences are particularly evident in job-related outcomes. Organizational conflicts can undermine organizational trust (Simons and Peterson 2000), performance (DeDreu and Weingart 2003b), commitment, satisfaction and retention (Coggburn, Battaglio and Bradbury 2014; Guerra et al. 2005; Jehn 1995; Rahim 2011). As past research indicates, relationship conflicts can have a particularly detrimental role, and negatively affect stress, autonomy, creativity, productivity and overall effectiveness (DeDreu et al. 2004; Jehn 1994; Spector and Bruk-Lee 2008; Rahim 2011; Rentsch and Zelno 2003; Tjosvold 1998). When
compared to task or process conflicts, the personal and emotional nature of relationship conflicts is the main reason why they are associated with unhealthy interpersonal relations, and a negative impact on employee performance (Amason 1996; Langfred 2007; Rahim 2011).

The more individuals experience personal and emotional conflict, the more distracted they are from their job, as negative emotions will affect their psychology. Therefore, they will be less capable of resolving task-related issues, less creative and attentive to resolving them. In this case, very low relationship conflict levels will allow individuals to devote the necessary and productive time to resolve task-related problems and be creative, and keeping a modest level of task conflict can have constructive effects on individual and organizational performance.

Scholars further show that task conflicts can have a similarly detrimental role, even though under certain conditions they are associated with positive outcomes (Jehn 1995; Jehn 1997). The meta-analytical research of DeDreu and Weingart (2003b) revealed that task conflicts have a detrimental impact on performance and satisfaction at the team level and that these relationships are moderated by the content of the tasks performed and the prevailing team culture. In addition, process conflicts create confusion and disagreements over the assignment of tasks and allocation of responsibilities and lead to lower satisfaction and performance (Behfar et al. 2002; Jehn 1997; Jehn 1997; Jehn and Chatman 2000; Jehn and Mannix 2001).

2.3.2 Functional Conflicts

The evolution in organizational studies and the attention given on human behaviors in the workplace has challenged the conventional view of conflicts and they are now regarded as a natural element of organizational life, rather than a purely toxic phenomenon. The human relations movement greatly contributed to that end, by studying human behavior and recognizing
the inevitability of conflicts and their functional side (Bhat, Rangnekar, and Barua 2013). Organizational theorists have recently begun recognizing the “healthy” aspects of conflicts, and accept them as a fundamental, even desired, element of organizational life, and a driver of change, organizational effectiveness and productivity (Jaffee 2008; Rahim 2011).

This contemporary approach posits that conflicts encourage productive disagreement, inform problem-solving, boost creativity and overall performance (Amason and Schweiger 1994; Budd and Colvin 2014; De Dreu et al. 2001; Jehn 1995; Okhuysen and Bechky 2009; Schwenk 1990; Tjosvold 2008). Constructive conflicts do not hurt communications, but rather, they enable positive change and problem-solving. At the same time, though, the absence of conflict is not desirable, as it brings inertia, indecisiveness, and stagnation, and hurts productivity (De Dreu and Beersma 2005; Okhuysen and Bechky 2009; Rahim 2011). In the case of task conflicts, when found at high levels, they impede the effective execution of organizational tasks and inhibit the successful dissemination of information, whereas at low levels they lower performance due to lack of task effort and loss of information (De Dreu 2006).

In consideration of a consensus among scholars that relationship conflicts are purely negative (Amason 1996; Jehn 1997; Jehn and Mannix 2001), the potential for “constructive conflicts” refers to the task-related conflicts, which are often regarded as improving decision-making and leading to more innovative ideas (Jehn 1994). Therefore, rather than eradicating any conflicts, the goal is to maintain a moderate amount of task conflict, and minimize relationship conflicts. Rather than disrupting organizational relations and processes, these so-called “constructive” conflicts, boost productivity, creative thinking, and problem-solving (Bhat, Rangnekar, and Barua 2013; DeDreu 2006; Jehn 1995; Rahim, Garrett, and Buntzman 1992;
Shaw et al. 2011). In addition, they bring higher organizational commitment and motivation, improve daily communications and enhance daily decision-making (Amason and Schweiger 1994; Assael 1969; De Dreu et al. 2001; Jehn 1995; Jehn 1997; Schwenk 1990; Tjosvold 2008). This functional view of conflicts leads to a positive approach toward problems, and create the conditions for effective communications, better quality interpersonal relations and productive handling of conflicts (Alper, Tjosvold and Law 2000; Assael 1969; Brewer and Lam 2009; Dionne et al. 2004; Rainey 2009).

Similarly, earlier studies also show that process-related conflicts can also boost productivity by improving or revising existing processes, revealing areas that need improvement, and ultimately, lead to a more functional workplace (Jehn, Northcraft, and Neale 1999). When groups experience high levels of process-related issues, especially at the early stages of task execution, they are likely to perform very well since controversies enhance productive decision-making and enable mutual understanding between the team members (Jehn and Mannix 2001).

Moreover, workplace diversity is also associated with positive conflict outcomes. In a study of different diversity types, Jehn, Northcraft, and Neale (1999) found that information diversity (i.e., differences created as a result of team members’ differences in education, position, or specialization area) is associated with task conflict, and in turn, is positively related to performance. Also, social category diversity (i.e., differences in age, gender, ethnicity, etc.) is related to higher relationship conflict levels and found to have a positive effect on employee morale, whereas, value diversity has a negative effect on morale. In the same vein, the field study of Pelled, Eisenhardt, and Xin (1999) found that the functional background type of
diversity is associated with task conflict, which has a more favorable effect on performance when compared to affective conflict.

2.3.3 Organizational Performance

As a result of recent administrative reforms aiming at creating the conditions for a better government and meeting the expectations for higher efficiency in the delivery of public service, improving government performance has been a leading concern in government institutions (Battaglio 2015; Nigro and Kellough 2008; Rainey 2009). And while public agencies are called to achieve higher effectiveness, the study of organizational performance has received widespread attention in public management research and theory (Boyne et al. 2005; Brewer and Selden 2000; Kim 2010b; Meier and O’Toole 2002; Meier et al. 2007; Rainey and Steinbauer 1999).

Public management scholars have devoted significant attention to identifying predictors of performance in public agencies. Characteristics of the working environment such as goal ambiguity, human resource practices, leadership, employee demographics, or employee attitudes and behaviors, such as employee satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Brewer and Selden 2000; Gould-Williams 2003; Kim 2005a; Vermeeren, Kuipers, and Steijn 2014) have been found to shape individual and organizational performance in government. Overall, public management scholars conclude that conceptualizing and measuring government performance is a challenging task (Chun and Rainey 2005; Kim 2005a), mainly due to the lack of a commonly accepted performance definition (Van Loon 2015), and the absence of objective performance metrics, or financial measures, as those used in business research (Battaglio 2015; Hatry 2015; Meier and O’Toole 2002).
In respect to the conflict literature, organizational and individual performance have been the most frequently studied job-related outcomes in the conflict literature (see Alper, Tjosvold, and Law 2000; Behfar et al. 2008; DeDreu and Vianen 2001; DeDreu and Weingart 2003a; DeDreu and Beersma 2005; Jehn 1994; Jehn 1995; Jehn 1997; Jehn and Mannix 2001; Zhang, Cao, and Tjosvold 2011), but this relationship has not been studied, so far, in the public administration setting.

As discussed in the sections above, conflicts play both a positive and negative role in organizational life. Relationship conflicts can be particularly harmful to performance, as they are associated with negative interpersonal relations, competition, hostile emotions and feelings of anxiety (Jehn 1994; Rahim 2011). Task conflicts can also permeate the execution of tasks, impede effective communication and hurt performance, with the difference that they can also take a more functional role, by enhancing performance, creativity and productive decision-making (Bhat, Rangnekar, and Barua 2013; DeDreu 2006; DeDreu and Gelfand 2008; Jehn 1997).

Some scholars shed light to a more complicated association between performance and workplace conflicts, as there is evidence for a curvilinear relationship between these constructs; for moderate task conflict levels, performance increases, whereas for low, or high levels, performance takes a downward trend (De Dreu 2006; De Dreu and Beersma 2005; Jehn 1995; Jehn 1997; Rahim and Bonoma 1979; Shaw et al. 2011). Even though little task conflict brings inaction, and high levels become utterly disruptive for job outcomes (DeDreu 2006), a moderate amount of conflict will lead to higher diversity in perspectives and enhance innovative thinking.
Specifically, Shaw et al. (2011) found that in the case of non-routine and complex tasks, and when relationship conflict is kept at low levels, moderate task conflict levels will be positively related to team performance. However, when relationship conflict levels are high, this relationship becomes negative. Thus, a small amount of debate between team members boosts productivity, but personal controversies hurt team operations and overall performance. Overall, the positive relationship between task conflict and performance is not a panacea, as it depends on an overall, well-functioning organizational environment. Nyhan (2000) specifically explains that when trust is developed in the organization, there is a higher likelihood that functional conflicts will occur that will help “challenge the status quo, increase the robustness of debates and relieve organizational tensions” (Nyhan 2000, 92).

2.3.4 Turnover Intentions

Employee voluntary turnover and retention are critical topics for organizational research, as they capture individuals’ perceptions and attitudes toward their employment conditions. Even though turnover is an exclusively negative employee behavior for organizations (as for instance, when low performers exiting the organization), it has been mostly studied as a critical organizational problem (Meier and Hicklin 2008). Turnover rates and turnover intentions are of particular interest for public management, as governments find themselves in the midst of a “human capital crisis” (Moynihan and Pandey 2008). An aging workforce, high retirement rates of baby boomers, and the high recruitment and training costs for organizations when having to fill in the empty positions impose challenges for public managers (Cho and Lewis 2012; Lee and Jimenez 2011; Lewis and Park 1989).
Governments encounter difficulties in attracting and retaining “the best and the brightest” (Moynihan and Pandey 2008); besides a general public distrust toward government, high turnover rates are reported among younger and newly hired employees, while the overall recruiting rates in government at relatively low levels (Cho and Lewis 2012; Lewis and Cho 2011). On one hand, the millennials entering the workforce are more prone to often changing positions and sectors, as they are less likely to build loyalty in a single organization, and on the other hand, the financial hardship of most governments delays employees recruitment, as well as the filling of vacant positions (Battaglio 2015; Cayer and Sabharwal 2013; Naff and Crum 1999; Selden 2009).

Employee turnover and turnover intentions can be particularly costly for organizations, given the direct and indirect consequences (Moynihan and Landuyt 2008). Besides the immediate administrative, staffing and training costs, and lost of investment in human capital (Balfour and Neff 1993; Cho and Lewis 2012; Eberly et al. 2009; Lewis and Park 1989; Moynihan and Landuyt 2008; Selden and Moynihan 2000), employee voluntary turnover is strongly associated with negative feelings and job attitudes, as well as loss of productivity (Barak, Nissly, and Levin 2001). Higher turnover rates have been strongly associated with employee dissatisfaction, as probably the strongest turnover predictor (Bright 2008; Caillier 2011), reduced productivity, trust and employee morale (Barak, Nissly, and Levin 2001; Bertelli 2007; Bright 2008; Eberly et al. 2009; Meier and Hicklin 2008; Rainey 2009).

Even though turnover studies have not received widespread scholarly attention in public management, the research interest has been recently reintroduced (see Bertelli 2007; Bright 2008; Cho and Lewis 2012; Cohen, Blake, and Goodman 2015; Kellough and Osuna 1995; Kim
Several factors are identified in recent scholarly work as antecedents of turnover intentions, which are broadly categorized into environmental factors (e.g., geographic location, local economy), individual characteristics (e.g., age, gender, education, race, or tenure in the organization), and organizational elements, such as HR policies and work-related factors (e.g., promotion and compensation policies, performance-based management, benefits, family-friendly programs, or, employment relationships) (Barak, Nissly, and Levin 2001; Cho and Lewis 2012; Kim 2005b; Kim 2012; Ezra and Deckman 1996; Lee and Jimenez 2011; Lewis and Park 1989; Moynihan and Landuyt 2008; Moynihan and Pandey 2008; Shaw et al. 1998).

As elements of the organizational environment, past research shows that conflicts can lead to absenteeism and turnover (DeDreu and Gelfand 2008; Spector and Jex 1998). Scholars agree that an unhealthy working environment, fostering negative employee attitudes, stressful emotions, and the emergence of disruptive and undesirable events for the organizational routine, will result in low satisfaction levels, which in turn, significantly determine individuals’ intentions to leave their job (Bertelli 2007; Eberly et al. 2009). According to Jehn (1995), both relationship and task conflicts have a negative impact on individuals’ withdrawal intentions. Further, Frone’s (2000) study of organizational interpersonal relations, finds that workers’ conflict with their supervisor affects the formers’ psychological well-being, by increasing employees’ turnover intentions, along with lower commitment, and satisfaction.

Even though existing public sector research have not incorporated organizational conflicts as predictors of turnover or turnover intent, a few studies show a connection between conflicts, as a major job stressor, and withdrawal behavior (Frone 2000; Spector and Bruk-Lee
2008). For instance, when exploring the consequences of political conflicts, scholars argue that the conflicts between city council members and city managers, in addition to other environmental factors, often become predictors of their intention to quit their job (DeHoog and Whitaker 1990; Kaatz, French, and Prentiss-Cooper 1999; McCabe et al. 2008). Frone (2000) further shows that conflicts between subordinates and their supervisors have a negative affect on turnover intentions, as well as satisfaction and organizational commitment. On the contrary, Kim (2005) did not find role conflicts to predict turnover intentions among state government IT personnel, among other tested antecedents, a finding which comes into contrast with the general belief that role conflicts are particularly challenging as they create tensions, and negative overall employee behaviors, such as turnover intentions (Rahim 2011).
CHAPTER 3
MANAGING ORGANIZATIONAL CONFLICTS

The following chapter delves into the conflict management literature. First, it provides the conceptual basis and benefits accruing from conflict handling in the organizational environment; second, this chapter reviews different conflict management approaches and discusses the different expectations from a cooperative or competitive handling style; third, an emphasis is given on the contingent nature of conflict management and last, the role of conflict handling in public management research is discussed.

3.1 Defining Conflict Management

To the extent that conflicts have a powerful impact on organizational dynamics, studying best practices for effective conflict handling is a salient HRM topic. Exploring how individuals respond to conflicts provides valuable information about the numerous conflict nuances, as people’s reactions to conflicts will largely determine how harmful or beneficial the conflict outcomes will be (Behfar et al. 2008; DeChurch and Marks 2001; DeChurch, Mesmer-Magnus, and Dotty 2013; Dionne et al. 2004; Herrman 2010; Sonnentag, Unger, and Nagel 2013; Somech, Desivilya, and Lidogoster 2009; Zhang, Cao, and Tjosvold 2011).

A review of conflict management studies shows that there is plethora of ways that academics and practitioners conceptualize the handling of workplace controversies, varying from an informal, intuitive individual reaction, to a well-structured supervisory response. The majority of definitions refer to the management of conflicts as the individual response, or, “behavioral
orientation and general expectations” from conflicts (Somech, Desivilya, and Lidogoster 2009). Individuals might respond to conflicts in a multitude of ways, such as unilateral action, mutual decision-making, third-party intervention, withdrawal, negotiation, compromise, or inaction, to name a few (Herrman 2010; Mahony and Klaas 2014; Tinsley and Brett 2001).

In more detail, managing organizational conflicts involves the process of diagnosing the conflict sources, identifying the parties involved, consulting relevant organizational policies, exploring the context wherein conflicts occur, and finally, deciding to intervene (Herrman 2010; Rahim 2002; Rahim, Garrett and Buntzman 1992; Weingart and Jehn 2009). According to Rainey (2009), the “conflict manager” is the person who bears the responsibility of understanding and assessing the conflict situation, and inspiring a common goal when working toward resolving the issue. The manager’s attitude toward workplace conflicts will serve as an example and the paradigm adopted by the personnel to resolve conflicts. When ignored or poorly handled, conflicts can quickly escalate, lead to poor job outcomes, intensify negative emotions, become issues of lengthy and costly litigation, or even lead to physical harm, violence, employee discipline or termination (Bhat, Rangnekar, and Barua 2013; Jehn 1994; Rahim 2011).

Even though conflict management is often studied as part of the conflict resolution literature, these processes need to be conceptually distinguished. Conflict resolution mechanisms refer to more formal organizational policies, and they are typically integrated into the context of labor-management relations and collective bargaining. Conflict resolution has become a synonym of eliminating workplace conflicts (Rahim 2011), and usually takes a legalistic and punitive role, and forces a solution to the conflict issue. Common conflict resolution strategies consist of negotiation, mediation, or, arbitration, which typically involve a third-party, or, the
court intervention to the conflict situation (Lan 1997; Rahim 2011; Taylor and Fielbig 2009). Herrman (2010) points out that these tools are most appropriate when conflicts have escalated, an intervention is an immediate necessity and they require strong negotiation skills to be successful.

On the contrary, conflict management consists of a more informal approach, defined as the individual, or, team behavioral orientations toward dealing with conflicts. Managing conflicts does not automatically translate into the eradication of conflicts, as it might involve maintaining a certain level of conflicts (as in the case of task conflicts) in order to achieve more positive outcomes (Rahim 2011). As mentioned by Rahim (1992), within the context of organizational behavior studies, managing and not resolving conflicts will lead to more beneficial outcomes. Managing conflicts translates into a wider range of possible actions, varying from disregarding conflicts, to maintaining a certain degree of conflict (Rahim, Garrett and Buntzman 1992).

3.2 A Tool for Organizational Effectiveness

The primary purpose of managing conflicts is to take proactive control over personnel controversies and disagreements before they become uncontrollable, and detrimental to organizational operations (Budd and Colvin 2014). Rahim (2011, 46) conceptualizes conflict management as the design of “effective strategies to minimize the dysfunctions of conflicts and enhancing the constructive functions of conflict in order to improve learning and effectiveness in an organization.” In essence, effective conflict handling becomes a protection shield from the negative conflict outcomes, and a managerial tool for higher organizational effectiveness and overall positive outcomes (Behfar et al. 2008; Jehn and Bendersky 2003; Langfred 2007; Shih
and Susanto 2010). Tjosvold (2008, 19) accentuates that, “to work in an organization is to be in conflict. To take advantage of joint work requires conflict management.”

The costs related with the (mis)handling of conflicts are both direct (i.e., financial costs in terms of loss of productivity, due to the actual time spent on dealing with conflicts rather than job-related tasks) and indirect (i.e., the psychological impact of prolonged conflicts, hostile and aggressive behaviors, reduced satisfaction and justice perceptions to name a few) (Taylor and Fielbig 2009). Reducing the time and money spent on dealing with conflicts, helps achieve greater efficiency in daily organizational processes (Budd and Colvin 2014). Rahim (2002, 208) asserts that conflict management comprises of “effective macro-level strategies to minimize the dysfunctions of conflict, and enhance the constructive functions of conflict in order to enhance learning and effectiveness in an organization.” Budd and Colvin (2014) mention that, conflict management helps achieve greater efficiency, fairness and employee participation in organizational operations, and minimize disruptions on job-related behaviors and outcomes.

3.2.1 Conflict Management Strategies

The widespread study of how individuals respond to workplace conflicts and optimal ways of handling them has resulted in the development of several typologies of conflict management strategies. Traditionally, addressing conflicts was a synonym of avoidance or complete elimination of any conflicts, where, following rules, formal processes and a top-down chain of command are the predominant tools adopted as a remedy to personnel controversies (Rahim 2011). Weber’s rational approach to bureaucratic structure is an illustrative example, as it proposes that formal organizational tasks and processes, and authority, to be the best means to
eliminate conflicts, achieve greater control over personnel problems and protect normal operations (Gross, Hogler, and Henle 2013; Jaffee 2008; Weber 1958).

Following the developments in organizational research, scholars began recognizing the benefits of adopting more cooperative, problem-solving practices, to replace the traditional, competitive and assertive attitudes toward conflicts (Budd and Colvin 2014). The shift of academic attention, from direct productivity gains, to the importance of improving employment relationships and the overall psychological well-being of employees, contributed to building a new direction to conflict handling, where employment relationships, along with the psychological mechanisms that shape conflict management became more valuable for organizations (Budd and Colvin 2014). Within this context, supervisors and subordinates are not seen as adversaries, but as parties working alongside toward achieving a win-win situation.

The rationale of conflict management was initially formulated in Deutsch’s (1949; 1990) cooperation-competition model. According to the theory, conflicts will be either seen as a mutual problem and will be approached cooperatively (win-win), or, they will be confronted competitively (win-lose or zero-sum game) (Coleman et al. 2013). Under a cooperative process, conflicts are handled on the basis of communication, open exchange of information, positive attitudes and trust, and involve mutual decision-making and an emphasis is given on the common ground between the interests of parties involved. On the contrary, under a competitive process, which is characterized by hostility and antagonism, the emphasis is given on the opposing interests of the conflicting parties and conflict handling can only be unilaterally beneficial. In all instances where cooperation becomes the underlying principle in interpersonal relations, individuals will foster a more productive and less stressful handling of emerging conflicts.
Later scholarly work in conflict management theory provides a more nuanced analysis of the various responses to organizational conflicts, and contributed to the development of best conflict handling practices. Blake and Mouton (1970) have made a significant contribution, as in their “fifth achievement,” they refer to dispute resolution as the development of a problem-solving culture, wherein individual differences are resolved through mutual agreement. The authors developed the managerial grid, one the most popular conflict management models, which distinguishes between five conflict handling styles: forcing, withdrawing, smoothing, compromising and problem solving, based on two dimensions: “concern for people” and “concern for production” (Blake and Mouton 1970; Shell 2001; Thomas 1992; van de Vliert and Kabanoff 1990). Rahim and Bonoma (1979), and Rahim (1983) further developed this model, to reflect the “concern for self” and “concern for others,” and distinguished between integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding and compromising styles.

3.2.2 The 5-style Typology

As scholars showed interest in developing conflict management theory, they have further developed the characteristics of each conflict handling “approach”, as described in the proposed 5-style typology. The dominating approach (or else defined, as forcing, competing or win-lose), is the most confrontational and least cooperative one. The focus is on personal needs and goals, and little attention, if any, is given to what the other party wants (De Dreu et al. 2001). This style, overall, scores low in effectiveness when managing conflicts, and it is more suitable in situations where a quick decision over minor issues is required, or there is a high power differential between the parties involved (Rahim, Garrett, and Buntzman 1992).
The *obliging*, or accommodating, approach on the other hand, gives more emphasis on the other party’s interests, rather than personal needs (Rahim 2011). This style aims at emphasizing the common elements, while downgrading the differences between the conflicting parties, and suppresses the individual (self) needs and goals in order to satisfy the other party’s interests (De Dreu et al. 2001). The obliging style is more appropriate when the conflicting issue is more important for one party, an immediate solution is required and both parties are willing to exchange something to achieve a solution to the problem (Lee 2009; Rahim, Garrett, and Buntzman 1992).

*Integrating* can be seen as the optimal strategy for dealing with interpersonal conflicts, as it refers to a problem-solving, or collaborating approach to the problem. This style offers a hands-on approach to conflict management, as it highly considers the interests of all parties involved and brings them together to work toward the accomplishment of common goals and reach a unanimous decision, even in challenging situations (Rahim 2011). The integrating style requires open communication and exchange of ideas as it requires the conflicting parties to jointly work on achieving goals or finding solutions to a problem (Weingart and Jehn 2009). Overall, it is considered to be the most preferred approach as it increases creativity and effectiveness (Budd and Colvin 2014; Lee 2009; Rahim and Magner 1995).

The *avoiding* style is generally regarded as the least effective style, as it shows little concern for the interests of all parties involved. Avoiding conflicts is a poor handling strategy, as it decreases the importance of the problem, and does not allow the parties involved to openly disagree; thus it leads to inaction, higher anxiety, withdrawal, lower satisfaction and performance (Rainey 2009; Schwenk 1990; Weingart and Jehn 2009). Avoidance might be most appropriate
approach when dealing with unimportant issues, or when the controversy will become more problematic if addressed (Rahim, Garrett and Buntzman 1992; Rahim 2011). Or else, unresolved conflicts can easily escalate, become more enduring, even chronic, and eventually, highly dysfunctional (Behfar et al. 2008; DeDreu and Weingart 2003a; Deutsch 1969; 1990).

Last, the *compromising* style is a middle-way solution, as it is moderately interested both in the individual and the other party’s needs. This approach combines elements of integrating and obliging, and refers to the efforts made by all interested parties to give up something and find a commonly accepted solution to a problem (Chen et al. 2012). However, even though agreeing upon a solution might often have seen as a desirable approach when dealing with highly confrontational issues, but in reality, compromising might bring the opposite results, as it limits the open dialogue between the conflicting parties (Rahim, Garrett, and Buntzman 1992).

### 3.2.3 Cooperative vs. Competitive Conflict Management

When studying the various approaches to handling conflicts, scholars strongly support the use of cooperative, and thus, more constructive styles. The orientation of a cooperative style is toward addressing the interests of all parties involved, or else described as a win-win solution to the emerging problems when compared to a competitive style, which is associated with win-lose outcomes, as it shows little concern for the interests of the conflicting parties (Rahim 2011). The problem-solving, cooperative approaches have received significant attention in the conflict management literature, as bringing more positive outcomes when dealing with conflicts, as compared to a competitive style (Blake and Mouton 1970; DeDreu 2006; Lee 1009; Ohbuchi and Suzuki 2003; Rahim 2011; Weingart and Jehn 2009).
Besides assessing each conflict management strategy separately, scholars suggest that individuals often result in using a combination of multiple styles, described as “patterns” of conflict handling styles, as being more effective than adopting a single approach (Munduate et al. 1999; Rahim, Garrett, and Buntzman 1992; Somech, Desivilya, and Lidogoster 2009). In particular, Moberg (2001) refers to the handling of conflicts as “specific behavioral patterns that individuals prefer to employ when dealing with conflict (47). Similarly, when Behfar et al. (2008) explored the link between performance, satisfaction, and conflict management styles of MBA students, they found that a mixture of various styles was more effective in boosting performance and satisfaction (e.g., combining collaboration, accommodation and compromise), when compared to employing a single approach.

Even though the linkage between conflict management and positive organizational outcomes is not firmly established by existing empirical studies (Rahim 2002; Rahim 2005), the more cooperative approaches (such as integrating and compromising styles), are considered to bring the best results. Specifically, they are positively related to higher effectiveness, performance and job satisfaction (Alper et al. 2000; Ohbuchi and Suzuki 2003; Shih and Susanto 2010; Somech, Desivilya, and Lidogoster 2009), as the parties involved are given the opportunity to find mutually beneficial solutions, in contrast to an avoiding style (Chen et al. 2012; Coleman et al. 2013).

Alper, Tjosvold and Law (2000) further illustrate that, when teams try to handle conflicts more cooperatively, they will achieve higher conflict efficacy (the perception of individuals that they can effectively deal with problems), and ultimately, higher performance. Similarly, after reviewing relevant literature, DeDreu and Weingart (2003a) argue that a collaborative approach
is suggested for the handling of task conflicts, as there is room for constructive discussion, exchange of different ideas and open communication between the conflicting parties.

3.3 A Contingency Approach to Conflict Management

According to the contemporary approach to conflict management, the aforementioned handling styles should be neither regarded as a one-size-fits-all approach, nor as the direct path to effective management of organizational conflicts. Even though problem-solving or compromising are regarded as the most desirable strategies, the effectiveness of each style will largely depend on the organizational setting (Behfar et al. 2008; Lee 2009; Rahim, Garrett, and Buntzman 1992; Rahim 2011; Somech, Desivilya, and Lidogoster 2009).

As discussed in recent scholarly work, the conflict handing mechanisms lead to better outcomes when they are tailored to the nature of the emerging conflicts (Budd and Colvin 2014; Harinck, DeDreu, and Vianen 2000; Stanley and Algert 2007). Thus, an overarching step for managers would be to identify the context of occurring conflicts, which will assist in finding the best handling approach, before conflicts escalate and become more detrimental (Jehn 1994; Rahim 2011).

To that end, scholars assert that avoidance is best suited when dealing with relationship conflicts, whose long duration increases the likelihood of them escalating in the near future (Jehn 1995; Weingart and Jehn 2009). De Dreu and Vianen (2001) argue that relationship conflicts could be best treated by avoidance or inaction, than with a collaborative or compromising approach, that would be more suitable to managing task-related problems. The strong emotional element and any underlying value differences, which are inherent in affective conflicts, make
them more difficult to handle, and their negative impact can be more permeating since they require more time and effort to be resolved (Jehn 1995; Sonnentag, Unger, and Nagel 2013).

However, the arguments about task-oriented conflicts are not conclusive. Some scholars argue that task conflicts are more effectively managed when approached collaboratively (Amason 1996; Jehn 1995; Jehn 1997). On the contrary, Rahim (2011) notes that task or process conflicts are better handled by a dominating approach; owing to their ability to become more emotional and antagonistic when left uncontrolled, and eventually, transform into relationship conflicts, task conflicts need to be quickly addressed (Jehn 1997). Further, Weingart and Jehn (2009) argue that a collaborative management approach is well-suited for both relationship and task conflict, even though the former would be ideally handled outside the work setting, whereas task-related conflicts can be dealt with on site.

Even though cooperation appears to be a highly desirable approach, it can be more challenging to achieve, as it requires more effort, open communication norms, and motivation to work jointly toward common goals. Some studies argue that individuals’ motivations, as expressed in the team context, will affect the choice of a conflict management approach. In specific, a prosocial motive between team members will lead to an integrative behavior and a constructive conflict management approach, whereas a proself motive, will be associated with a more competitive, distributive behavior (Beersma, Conlon, and Hollenbeck 2008; DeDreu, Weingart, and Seungwoo 2000).

Moreover, the prevailing organizational culture can help create the climate fostering more cooperative conflict behaviors. The “conflict cultures” become an important determinant of conflict handling, and how harmful or beneficial they can be. The organizational culture can
significantly influence the adoption of certain approaches to dealing with organizational conflicts (Brewer and Lam 2009; Gelfand, Leslie, and Keller 2008). How employees respond to workplace controversies, will be significantly influenced by their managers’ or supervisors’ preferred approach (Mahony and Klaas 2014; Rahim 2011). Particularly at the group level, the established norms will significantly shape how conflicts are defined and handled between group members (Jehn 1995, 1997). A “team culture” built around common values, shared beliefs and communication norms, will facilitate, or even, prevent the development of conflicts (Jehn and Mannix 2001).

3.4 Conflict Management in Public Management Research

As public managers are called to engage in strategic HRM and achieve high effectiveness standards, they need to create a functional workplace, wherein their personnel can attain high-performance goals (Vigoda-Gadot and Beeri 2012). As there are growing expectations for public managers to retain a competitive organizational environment, keep the workforce motivated and attract and retain the best and the brightest, the need to operate in a working environment that will enable them to accomplish such goals becomes imperative.

Even though conflict management has not received adequate attention in public management scholarship (Rainey 2009; Lan 1997), scholars have begun paying more attention to the effective handling of workplace controversies, as an essential component of public HRM and a tool for fulfilling organizations goals (Selden 2009). For instance, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) refers to the constructive conflict handling, as a core qualification for successful leadership (Office of Personnel Management 2016). Managing conflicts effectively will help administrators to take an active role in the pursuit of a more effective public service
(Roche, Teague, and Colvin 2014), and achieve positive employee outcomes and job-related behaviors (Coggburn, Battaglio, and Bradbury 2014).

In their discussion about collaboration in the public sector, Agranoff and McGuire (2003) refer to the importance of conflict handling as a problem-solving process, which facilitates the multi-organizational arrangements and operations, when compared to the efforts of single organizations. Also, scholars stress the importance of a collaborative environment, and positive social relationships with coworkers, as indicators of a supportive environment which will reduce the likelihood of employee turnover (Bright 2008; Jung 2014), and helps in employee retention (Selden 2009). Additional studies list the collaborative handling of conflicts, problem-solving, boundary spanning competencies, and an overall positive, productive approach to conflict, as core qualities of public managers (Denhardt and Denhardt 2000; Getha-Taylor 2008; Williams 2002).

Being one of the more recent trends in government, the prevalence of networks and partnerships between governments at all levels, non-profits, and private organizations intensify the need for managers to build skills for the control and productive handling of conflicts. Collaborative and cooperative arrangements involve a high degree of interdependence between the actors involved, as both cooperation and competition are predominant characteristics of inter-jurisdictional and intergovernmental relations (McGuire 2006; O’Toole and Christensen 2013). Such interactions require the development of problem-solving, conflict handling and negotiation competencies.

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1 Williams (2013) refers to boundary spanners as those individuals who operate in a highly collaborative setting, and they are equipped with skills varying from technical, communication and managing, to cooperation, conflict resolution, negotiation, mediation and problem-solving competencies. Within the public service environment, they facilitate the interactions and collaboration between organizational actors and the external environment, such as politicians, citizens, etc. (McGuire 2006).
competencies (Agranoff and McGuire 2001; Bingham, Nabatchi and O’Leary 2005; Denhardt and Denhardt 2001; O’Leary, Choi, and Gerard 2012; Rainey 2009). Communicating effectively, compromising, and reducing conflicts become valuable tools, not only for successful collaborations but also for higher organizational performance.

Prior studies have found that public employees are more inclined to adopt an integrative approach to handling conflicting situations with their supervisors (Brewer and Lam 2009). Particularly, the adoption of more cooperative or integrating behaviors to dealing with conflicts becomes a significant determinant of positive conflict outcomes (Somech, Desivilya and Lidogoster 2009). When surveying Senior Executive Service (SES) members about the essential skills for a successful collaboration, O'Leary, Gerard, and Choi (2012) found that conflict management was highly rated as a necessary precondition. Their findings further showed that the strategies that the study participants mentioned as being most often employed when handling conflicts, were collaborative problem-solving and third-party interventions, whereas compromise and avoidance were the least mentioned ones.

Similarly, Brewer and Lam (2009) compared the conflict handling style of accountants in a public agency and a private firm in Hong Kong. Their findings revealed no differences in the preference of conflict handling style that involves a superior. Also, the integrating style was the most preferred one for handling conflicts for both groups, with public employees showed a stronger preference, whereas the dominating approach was the lower ranked one. A study by Moberg (2001) in the Indonesian public sector corroborates with the aforementioned research findings, as he confirms that integrating and compromising, were the most preferred conflict management styles, and that integrating had a positive effect on job performance.
Following earlier work in conflict and conflict management theory, this study considers constructive conflict management an indispensable part of HRM policies, which helps create a functional environment, and promote positive organizational outcomes (Caillier 2011). For instance, Coggburn, Battaglio and Badbury (2014) found that federal employees consider constructive conflict management to enhance federal employees’ perceptions of organizational performance and job satisfaction. However, they mention that this relationship does not hold for severe conflicts, which decrease job satisfaction and performance, and the positive outcomes resulting from a constructive conflict handling.

Grievance policies, for instance, as a formal process of resolving workplace conflicts, have been found to have a mitigating effect on turnover intentions (Colquitt et al. 2001). When employees feel that their input is taken into account and consider the grievance management system as being fair, they will be less likely to want to leave. Similarly, a constructive approach to conflict management becomes the informal organizational response to workplace disputes and gives organizations the opportunity to show how committed they are in maintaining a supportive, positive and balanced environment.
CHAPTER 4
CONTEXTUAL FACTORS AND CONFLICT BEHAVIORS

This chapter focuses on employees’ attitudinal mechanisms as contextual factors that can affect their conflict behaviors and job outcomes. Drawing on a contingency approach to conflict and conflict management, the present chapter will first review studies in organizational justice, then, organizational commitment, and last, perceived organizational support.

4.1 The Role of Contextual Factors

Similarly to conflicts, conflict management is also greatly shaped by contextual factors, as the process of identifying, evaluating and deciding to intervene in a conflict situation, is inextricably related to the conditions prevailing in the organizational environment (Hofstede et al. 1990). Past studies have identified several factors that affect conflict management outcomes, such as perceived fairness of organizational processes, the nature of conflict, the tasks to be executed, or personal traits (Callanan, Benzing and Perri 2006; DeDreu and Weingart 2003a; Spector and Bruk-Lee 2008; Rahim, Magner and Shapiro 2000).

As suggested by Jehn (1997), in order to better capture the nuances and aftermath of workplace conflicts, the study of individual attitudes about the organizational environment wherein conflicts occur, is required, as exploring the impact of conflicts on job outcomes alone, will not suffice. Therefore, taking into account additional environment factors that can affect employee attitudes and behaviors will contribute to the development of a more integrated
theoretical framework of studying conflict and conflict management (De Dreu and Beersma 2005).

Moreover, even though conflict management has been established in recent literature as a core HRM function which brings equity and voice in organizational operations (Budd and Colvin 2014), there is still need for further empirical support of the linkage between conflict management and positive outcomes (Rahim 2002; Rahim 2005). DeDreu and Beersma (2005) emphasize the need for additional inquiry into the contextual factors that influence the relationship between conflicts and their impact on the organizational environment. Such an endeavor though, should take into account the contingent nature of conflict and conflict handling behaviors (DeDreu and Weingart 2003a; Guerra et al. 2005).

To that end, this study will explore the role of organizational justice, affective commitment, and perceived organizational support as intervening, contextual variables that contribute to clarifying the role of conflicts and conflict management in the public sector environment. The argument is that a working environment perceived as fair, supportive and interested in building lasting relationships with the personnel, will mitigate the negative affect of conflicts, and reinforce the positive role of a constructive approach to handling them (DeDreu and Gelfand 2008). The ultimate results will be a positive influence on job-related outcomes, such as less reported turnover intentions and higher reported performance. Brief and Weiss (2002) provide further support in this argument, by arguing that that positive emotions and attitudes increase the likelihood that individuals will have a more productive approach to problem-solving.
In more detail, psychological mechanisms such as justice perceptions, commitment and organizational support serve as essential elements of the interpersonal exchange in the organizational setting. Social exchange theory provides the theoretical foundation of these concepts, and postulates that the more individuals perceive their organization’s actions as favorable toward them, they more likely they are to reciprocate, by creating positive outcomes as well (Jiang et al. 2012; Masterson et al. 2000). Therefore, a fair, supportive and committed to its personnel, organization will intrinsically motivate its employees toward more beneficial job outcomes (Ryan and Deci 2000).

Such an environment will be particularly valued by public servants, as past studies have shown that public servants will be less attracted by monetary rewards, and more incentivized by personal fulfillment, an opportunity to make a meaningful contribution, and serve the public good (Giauque, Anderfuhrren-Biget and Varone 2013; Perry 2000; Perry and Wise 1990; Rainey 2009). For instance, when Guerra et al. (2005) compared public and private organizations, they found that even though public employees reported higher conflict levels, the latter did not appear to have a negative impact on team member satisfaction and overall employee well-being, within the limits of a supportive organizational culture.

4.2 Perceptions of Organizational Justice

Fairness in the workplace has been well acknowledged in earlier scholarship as a critical factor influencing social and organizational behaviors, and job outcomes (Alexander and Ruderman 1987; Greenberg 1990; Greenberg 1993a; Moorman 1991). Organizational scholars have been interested in studying the behavioral response of individuals to the (un)fair treatment they might encounter in the execution of organizational tasks, performance appraisals,
compensation, examinations or dispute resolution to name a few, as it significantly affects personnel satisfaction and organizational effectiveness (Aryee, Budhwar, and Chen 2002; Folger and Cropanzano 1998; Simons and Robertson 2003). Injustice occurs when there is a perceived imbalance between the ratio of inputs (e.g., effort, expertise, skills, education, personal and demographic traits) and outputs (e.g., compensation, rewards, recognition); the greater the difference between inputs and outputs, the greater the degree of unfairness (Adams 1965; Miner 2005; Moorman 1991).

Organizational justice has been conceptualized as a multidimensional construct, which reflects the perceptions of fairness in terms of organizational outcomes, processes, and interpersonal relationships (Greenberg 1990). Distributive justice refers to fairness in the allocation of the outcomes of organizational processes (i.e., compensation, benefits, rewards, promotional opportunities, or other resources) (Alexander and Ruderman 1987; Choi 2011; Greenberg 1990). This justice type represents the degree that individuals believe the organizational outcomes they receive are fair, in analogy to their inputs.

Procedural justice describes how fair the formal decision-making processes are perceived to be (Blader and Tyler 2003; Masterson et al. 2000; Parker and Kohlmeyer 2005; Rubin 2009). In exchange to the perceptions of a fair organizational environment, employees will feel valued and appreciated, and build trust relationships with management (Meng and Wu 2015; Rahim, Magner, and Shapiro 2000), and adopt more positive behaviors (Moorman 1991; Rubin and Kellough 2012).

Interactional justice reflects the perceived fairness of interpersonal relations in the organization, and more specifically, the quality of treatment, communication norms, and
consideration received from management, during the execution of tasks and organizational interactions (Simons and Robertson 2003; Masterson et al. 2000; Miner 2005). This justice type is based on the truthfulness, consistency, timely feedback, unbiased communication and polite consideration of employees (Cohen-Charash and Spector 2001; Colquitt 2001). The perceived interactional justice is further distinguished in informational justice, which refers to the extent that individuals are informed about the choice of certain decision-making process and their expected outcomes, and interpersonal justice, which targets the understanding, respect and dignity they are treated with, through this process (Colquitt 2001; Colquitt et al. 2001; Greenberg 1993b).

4.2.1 Organizational Justice and Job Outcomes

The more individuals feel that the organizational norms, processes and interactions are built on equity and fairness criteria, the more they will reciprocate by positive attitudes and higher productivity (Colquitt 2001). Justice perceptions have been associated with higher employee satisfaction, and morale, organizational commitment, trust, and ultimately, personnel retention and higher performance (Cohen-Charash and Spector 2001; Colquitt et al. 2001; Dailey and Kirk 1992; Parker and Kohlmeyer 2005; Rubín 2009; Simons and Roberson 2003). On the contrary, an unfair workplace will trigger negative behaviors, such as, tension, conflicts, decreased job effort, dissatisfaction and lower organizational performance (Adams 1965; Greenberg 1987; Miner 2005), as well as, complaints, job dissatisfaction, withdrawal behaviors, and lower commitment (DeConinck and Stilwell 2004; Meng and Wu 2015; Parker and Kohlmeyer 2005).
The perceptions of workplace fairness are especially important for public agencies, as fairness in all personnel policies and operations consist of the major premise of the merit system (Meng and Wu 2015). As public organizations strive to retain their personnel and maintain high organizational performance records, ensuring legitimacy and fairness is not only an essential component of civil service reform, but is also the means to achieve positive organizational outcomes, such as higher satisfaction, lower turnover and trust in management (Rubin 2009).

When studied separately, though, the four justice constructs are empirically proven to have distinct impact on organizational outcomes (Choi 2011; Cohen-Charash and Spector 2001; Colquitt 2001; Cropanzano, Prehar, and Chen 2002). Some studies have found that distributive justice has a stronger effect on turnover intentions, trust in management, satisfaction, (Choi 2011; Rubin 2009), and intrinsic motivation (Kim and Rubianty 2011) when compared to the other types. Other scholars, though, argue that justice perceptions are overall significantly related to turnover intentions, and that, procedural justice had the strongest predictor of turnover and performance outcomes (Konovsky and Cropanzano 1991).

Interactional justice has received less attention in the literature as a more recent construct, but existing research findings show a negative association with hostility, turnover intentions and lower productivity levels (Kim 2008; Stecher and Rose 2005), and a positive association with leader-member exchange relationships (Masterson et al. 2000), high rankings of supervisory support (Ambrose and Schminke 2003).

### 4.2.2 Organizational Justice in the Conflict Management Context

Under the context of organizational conflicts, both procedural and interpersonal justice elements are essential for successful conflict handling efforts (Budd and Colvin 2014); the more
individuals feel that there is a good interpersonal relationship with their supervisor and perceive the organizational procedures and rules as being fair, they more likely they are to positively approach workplace problems, and to the interest of all parties involved.

Earlier studies show that, a negative approach to resolving disputes was perceived as unfair, whereas a compromising style was related to higher procedural justice perceptions (Karambayya and Bret 1989). Rahim (2002) contends that, a constructive approach to conflict management will align with employees’ perceptions of fairness toward the manager or supervisor taking over this task. The study of Nesbit, Nabatchi, and Bingham (2012) shows the significance of interpersonal justice in disputant–disputant relationships during the mediation process, as their findings suggest that fairness perceptions can lead to a more cooperative, rather than competitive, conflict management approach.

Moreover, Rahim, Magner, and Shapiro (2000) studied justice perceptions as predictors of a constructive conflict management approach (i.e., integrating, obliging, compromising). When employees are respected and well-treated by their supervisors, they will reciprocate by approaching conflict positively, and adopting a problem-solving approach. However, a problem-solving approach to conflict handling does not remain as the preferred strategy when perceptions of procedural fairness are low. These study findings are especially important for public organizations, as higher fairness perceptions become an alternative, less costly way of ensuring better cooperation in conflict situations, and positive organizational outcomes.

4.3 Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment holds an important role in organizational research, as it captures the bond between individuals and their organization. Commitment is perceived to
reflect employees’ psychological state, which allows building membership, and a stronger connection between the individual and the organization (Allen and Meyer 1990; Meyer and Allen 1991; Park and Rainey 2007). Mowday and colleagues specifically conceptualize organizational commitment as “the relative strength of an individual’s identification with and involvement in a particular organization” (Mowday et al. 1979, 279). High commitment levels are critical for higher effectiveness, as individuals do not only embrace the organizational mission and goals, but they are also willing to work hard toward their accomplishment (Meyer and Allen 1997; Steinhaus and Perry 1996).

Allen and Meyer (1990) distinguished between three facets of organizational commitment; the affective attachment to the organization, the perceived costs associated with leaving the organization, and the obligation to stay with the organization (Meyer and Allen 1991). *Affective commitment* pertains to the emotional connection that the employee develops with the organization, where individuals become attached to their organization (Liou and Nyhan 1994). *Continuance commitment* reflects the exchange relationship developed between the individual and the organization (Meyer and Allen 1991). Defined as such, commitment is based on a transactional relationship between the organization and its personnel; people stay with their organization as a result of the perceived costs resulting from the decision to leave their job (Allen and Meyer 1990). And last, *normative commitment* reflects an employee’s felt obligation to stay with the organization, and it is typically based on formal relationships and a sense of individual ethical duty or moral responsibility, toward the organization (Allen and Meyer 1990).
4.3.1 Affective Commitment and Organizational Outcomes

Organizational commitment has been well studied by organizational behaviorists and social psychologists, as one of the most critical antecedents of voluntary turnover (Allen and Meyer 1990; Jaramillo, Nixon, and Sams 2005; Lambert and Hogan 2009; Ng and Feldman 2011; Rhoades, Eisenberger, and Armeli 2001). The favorable results for the organizational environment are translated in positive job-related behaviors, such as higher job satisfaction, performance, and employee retention (Jaramillo, Mulki and Marshall 2005; Meyer et al. 2002; Park and Rainey 2007).

Even though organizational commitment has not received widespread attention from public management studies, it is still recognized as a critical predictor of employee outcomes (Caillier 2012; Giauque, Anderfuhen-Biget and Varone 2013; Lambert and Hogan 2009; Liou and Nyhan 1994; Reid et al. 2008). For example, when Park and Rainey (2007) studied the work experiences of federal employees, they revealed that affective commitment had a significant positive impact on job satisfaction, employee performance, and work quality.

Among the three commitment types, affective commitment has been found to have the strongest positive relationship with a supportive organizational environment and overall positive work experiences (Meyer et al. 2002), and a positive impact on outcomes, such as turnover, performance, and organizational citizenship behavior (Giauque, Anderfuhen-Biget and Varone 2013; Griffeth, Hom, and Gaertner 2000; Lambert and Hogan 2009; Meyer and Allen 1991; Park and Rainey 2007). To that end, an older study by Liou and Nyhan (1994) stresses that public servants are more likely to develop affective, rather than continuance or normative commitment.
Affective commitment is a critical antecedent of employee withdrawal behavior, as when employees have a developed a sense of membership and emotional connection with the organization, they will demonstrate a stronger will to stay (Meyer and Allen 1991; Park and Rainey 2007; Wasti 2003). Allen and Meyer (1990) explain that the close association between commitment and turnover is expected, as emotionally attached with their organization employees will want to remain in their position, as a result of a personal desire, rather than a felt need, or moral obligation. The more employees have a sense of belonging to their organization, the more willing they will be to highly perform and accomplish organizational goals, and ultimately, they will be less likely to express an intention to leave (Meyer and Allen 1991).

Other studies have also shown that affective commitment is shaped by the organizational climate; as mentioned by Meyer and Allen (1991), a positive working environment will strengthen employees’ commitment and subsequently, will increase their desire to maintain membership with their organization. Therefore, employee commitment can be affected by the presence of workplace conflicts and how effectively they are handled. Thomas, Bliese, and Jex (2005) explored the relationship between interpersonal conflict and commitment in the U.S. Army personnel, moderated by the role of supervisor support. Their study confirmed the negative impact of interpersonal conflict on affective and continuance commitment, while the perceived support of mid-level managers to the personnel moderated this relationship.

From an HRM perspective, investing in an affectively committed workforce should be a key concern for public managers, when aiming at building successful organizations (Park and Rainey 2007). Particularly in consideration of the complexities and staffing challenges that government agencies face (such as limited resources, competing with the private sector for
human capital, and striving to achieve employee retention and boost motivation), identifying the factors that boost organizational commitment of the personnel is a necessary task (Reid et al. 2008). When combined with a functional conflict management approach, the result will be positive overall interpersonal interactions.

4.4 Perceived Organizational Support (POS)

A concept that is similar, but distinct from organizational commitment, is that of perceived organizational support. Organizational support theorists have been discussing the importance of a positive and affective relationship between the employees and their organization, accruing from the rewarding of work effort and caring about employees’ socioemotional needs (Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002). Perceived organizational support (POS) is conceptualized as the organizations’ commitment to its personnel, or, the employees’ global belief that their organization values their contributions and is interested in their well-being (Eisenberger et al. 1986; Eisenberger et al. 2002).

According to organizational support theory, several factors contribute to the development of POS and the most often referenced ones are perceived fairness, supportive supervisors, organizational conditions, HR practices (such as employee compensation, rewarding, or promotion policies), or demographic traits (Allen et al. 2003; Eisenberger et al. 1986; Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002). For instance, Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) argue that a stressful working environment will significantly reduce POS among the personnel; job stressors such as role conflicts, ambiguity over tasks, and increased workload, have a negative impact on POS. These negative relationships are mainly attributed to the fact that they can be preventable and
thus, when present, employees feel that the organization has not been committed enough to achieve a stress-free environment and promote employee well-being.

Overall, POS is developed at all hierarchical levels, as it is perceived as the support and favorable treatment of employees from their organization (Shanock and Eisenberger 2006). However, when higher hierarchically positioned individuals develop high POS levels, they will reciprocate, by assisting their subordinates and contributing in increasing the latter’s POS levels, and ultimately, their performance. Overall, creating a supportive organizational environment will help individuals to better cope with job difficulties, stressful situations, increased workload, a heavy workload and getting new skills.

4.4.1 POS and Job-Related Outcomes

Social exchange theory posits that, when employees feel that they are emotionally supported, rewarded and valued, they will reciprocate, by giving back in the sense of loyalty to their organization, and higher effort toward the accomplishment of organizational goals (Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002; Rhoades, Eisenberger, and Armeli 2001). This sentiment of perceived support creates the feeling that any favorable actions toward the employees, such as rewards, promotions, or higher job involvement, are stemming from the organization’s honest interest and commitment to the personnel. In turn, the organizational benefits accruing from such perceptions pertain to higher performance and involvement, lower absenteeism and withdrawal intentions (Allen, Shore, and Griffeth 2003; Eisenberger et al. 1986; Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002; Rhoades, Eisenberger, and Armeli 2001; Shanock and Eisenberger 2006).

Overall, POS has received scholarly attention as a critical predictor of both turnover intent and actual turnover behavior, affective commitment, performance and job satisfaction
(Eisenberger et al. 1986; Eisenberger et al. 2001; Hom and Griffeth 1995; Maertz et al. 2007; Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002; Shanock and Eisenberger 2006). The study of Allen et al. (2003) shows that POS is negatively associated with turnover behavior, while commitment and satisfaction mediate this relationship. Also, the meta-analysis of Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) corroborates with earlier studies by showing that, POS is strongly and positively related to affective commitment, job satisfaction and overall positive attitudes, whereas, there is a moderate positive association with job performance and withdrawal behaviors.

Within the limits of this study, organizational conflicts are considered as job-related stressors that can affect employees’ POS, but most importantly, can lead to unfavorable job outcomes. As a supportive organizational environment promotes a more productive handling of conflicts, it will ultimately become a predictor of low turnover intentions and higher organizational performance. These expectations are salient for public agencies, as POS is an important non-monetary factor that helps explain public employees’ job behaviors (Jordan, Lidsay, and Schraeder 2012).
CHAPTER 5
DATA AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter includes a description of the data and the methodology adopted in this study. The first section provides an overview of the study’s research hypotheses, as formulated based on the review of the literature. The second section describes the methodology of the survey research, with details about the study population, operational definitions of study variables, and the survey administration process. And the last section of the chapter describes the methodology for the data analysis.

5.1 Research Hypotheses

5.1.1 Conflict Behaviors and Job Outcomes

Building on literature in workplace interpersonal relations and conflict-related behaviors, the present study investigates the perceptions of public employees about organizational conflicts and their aftermath for the organizational environment. This study anticipates that task and relationship conflict will have a negative influence on individual intentions to quit and perceptions of organizational performance, as the two outcome variables of interest for this study. Even though conflicts have been examined before as predictors of performance, there is lack of empirical evidence of a linkage between organizational conflicts and turnover intentions, and also, these relationships have not been studied in the public management context. Overall, the first research hypotheses are stated as follows:
**Hypothesis 1a:** Relationship conflict will be negatively associated with perceived organizational performance.

**Hypothesis 1b:** Task conflict will have a curvilinear relationship with perceived organizational performance.

**Hypothesis 2a:** Relationship conflict will be positively associated with turnover intentions.

**Hypothesis 2b:** Task conflict will be positively associated with turnover intentions.

### 5.1.2 Conflict Management and Job Outcomes

Following the literature in conflict management as a salient HRM function, the expectation is that conflict management will mitigate the negative repercussions of organizational conflicts, by having a positive impact on individuals’ perceptions of organizational performance and turnover intentions. Drawing on the distinction between a cooperative and competitive approach to dealing with organizational conflicts, this study further suggests that a cooperative conflict handing approach will be associated with positive job-related behaviors when compared to a competitive style, which leads to the next hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 3a:** A cooperative conflict management approach will be positively related to perceived performance, when compared to a competitive style.

**Hypothesis 3b:** A cooperative conflict management approach will be negatively related to turnover intentions, when compared to a competitive style.

### 5.1.3 The Role of Organizational Factors

As the organizational setting plays a significant role in determining conflict-related behaviors, the present study also takes into account individuals’ perceptions about their work experiences. The expectation is that, an organizational climate, which cultivates a sentiment of attachment
between the personnel and the organization and is considered to be fair and supportive to the personnel, will lead to positive employee outcomes. In consideration of the argument that public servants will place more value on non-monetary rewards, an organizational environment that fosters positive working relationships is expected to be particularly valued. These positive work experiences will help buffer the harmful conflict effects and maintain high performance and low withdrawal intentions. Thus, the next research hypotheses are formulated as follows (Table 5.1 provides a summary of all research hypotheses):

**Hypothesis 4a**: Affective commitment will be positively associated with perceived organizational performance.

**Hypothesis 4b**: Affective commitment will be negatively associated with turnover intentions.

**Hypothesis 5a**: Procedural and interactional justice will be positively related to perceived organizational performance.

**Hypothesis 5b**: Procedural and interactional justice will be negatively associated with turnover intentions.

**Hypothesis 6a**: POS will be positively related to perceived organizational performance.

**Hypothesis 6b**: POS will be negatively related to turnover intentions.

### 5.2 Survey Methodology

Due to the lack of research in organizational conflict in the public management literature, and available data to address the research questions of this study, an original survey instrument was developed in order to assess individual conflict behaviors and job-related outcomes. A survey methodology is the most appropriate data collection method for the purposes of this
Table 5.1. Summary of Research Hypotheses

| H_{1a} | Relationship conflict will be negatively associated with perceived organizational performance. |
| H_{1b} | Task conflict will have a curvilinear relationship with perceived organizational performance. |
| H_{2a} | Relationship conflict will be positively associated with turnover intentions. |
| H_{2b} | Task conflict will be positively associated with turnover intentions. |
| H_{3a} | A cooperative conflict management approach will be positively related with perceived performance, when compared to a competitive style. |
| H_{3b} | A cooperative conflict management approach will be negatively related with turnover intentions, when compared to a competitive style. |
| H_{4a} | Affective commitment will be positively related with perceived organizational performance. |
| H_{4b} | Affective commitment will be negatively associated with turnover intentions. |
| H_{5a} | Procedural and interactional justice will be positively associated with perceived organizational performance. |
| H_{5b} | Procedural and interactional justice will be negatively associated with turnover intentions. |
| H_{6a} | POS will be positively related with perceived organizational performance. |
| H_{6b} | POS will be negatively related with turnover intentions. |

study, as it is faster to administer, and less costly and time-consuming when compared to mailed surveys or interviews (Fowler 2014). According to Weisberg (2005), survey research is the most suitable data collection method to measure human attitudes and behaviors; thus, a survey research design can best capture the respondents’ behavioral responses to workplace conflict incidents and perceptions on the detrimental or beneficial impact of conflicts on organizational outcomes.

A self-administered survey instrument was developed specifically to tailor the needs of the present study and uses attitudinal measures to capture public servants’ perceptions about
workplace conflicts, conflict handling, and work-related experiences. Overall, self-administered surveys offer respondents greater discretion and privacy in their answers, and minimize social desirability issues since they do not include interviews, or other face-to-face interactions between the researcher and study participants during the data collection process (Fowler 2014).

Overall, survey research holds a prominent role in social sciences, and public administration in particular, for the study of individuals’ behaviors, opinions attitudes (Lee, Benoit-Bryan and Johnson 2011). The present survey instrument focuses on the subjective states of public employees, in respect to conflict-related behaviors and job outcomes. When compared to objective metrics, subjective measures are often criticized for biased results as a result of measurement error (Boyne et al. 2005) and social desirability bias (Yang and Pandey 2009).

However, scholars defend the use of subjective measures, as they argue for a convergence between subjective and objective measures (Bommer et al. 1995; Choi 2011; Pandey, Coursey, and Moynihan 2007). Moreover, individual perceptual data are best suited for the study of internal psychological states, which constitute a valuable source of evidence for actual organizational processes and behaviors (Van Loon 2015; Yang and Pandey 2009).

5.2.1 Study Population

Intending to capture the work-related perceptions and conflict behaviors of public servants, the present study contributes to the research gap of conflict studies in public administration scholarship. In particular, this study targets state HRM professionals, as experts in managing personnel issues and processes in state agencies. HRM professionals are key actors in effective personnel management practices and effective accomplishment of agency goals, and
especially to any discussion pertaining to the handling of workplace conflicts among the personnel.

The present study specifically wants to elicit the input of upper-management professionals, as, being seasoned employees, they bring more experience in dealing with interpersonal conflicts and a more insightful perspective on work-related experiences. Also, HR directors hold a salient role in decision-making, and planning and implementing personnel-related policies (Kim and Kellough 2014; Reddick and Coggburn 2007). As mentioned by Coggburn et al. (2010, 194), studying the perceptions of HRM professionals “is an appropriate strategy given their subject matter expertise and their ability to affect HRM practices.”

Despite conflict management being an essential skill for any supervisory or managerial position, this study argues about the special role that conflict handling possesses in the HRM profession. In view of the premises of a strategic personnel management where the human capital is regarded as a valuable organizational asset, effective conflict handling ensures greater overall organizational effectiveness and positive employee outcomes. Herrman (2010, 366) specifically argues that, “a position in HR allows you to help employment conflicts run their course to great outcomes so that employees gain confidence and feel more comfortable confronting earlier in the next cycle.” Furthermore, HR managers have been found to significantly contribute to the creation of a supportive environment, which fosters employee devotion and promotes job satisfaction (Reid et al. 2008).
The survey instrument for this study was distributed to a non-probability, convenience sample of state agency HR personnel, from a random selection\(^2\) of ten U.S. states: Alaska, California, Florida, Georgia, Kansas, Indiana, Nevada, New York, Texas, and Wisconsin. This is an interesting selection of states, as they represent both states with a traditional civil service and employment at-will system. For instance, states like Georgia, Florida, and Texas have made an early transition to an at-will employment system, while Kansas has also experienced a civil service reform (Kim and Kellough 2014). The attitudes of state HR professionals toward their work experiences might greatly vary based on their employment classification status.

The contact information of the study participants was collected by the researcher, through the online staff directories that are publicly available at the websites of the selected state governments. Specifically, the contact information (name, e-mail address, department/division, position, phone number, and mailing address) of all HR professionals at supervisory/managerial positions was collected, from all state agencies, divisions and departments that provide their staff information online. Overall, a total of 795 contacts\(^3\) were collected, and the study participants serve at positions such as, Director of Human Resources, Human Resources manager, Chief of Personnel, Chief of Human Resources, Personnel Director, Personnel Supervisor, etc. However, the online staff directories might not be exhaustive of all state agency HR professionals, or, the

\(^2\) The RAND function at MS Excel was used to randomly select the ten (10) states included in this study.

\(^3\) The breakdown of the contacts collected from each state is as follows: 26 from Alaska, 558 from California, 11 from Florida, 54 from Georgia, 10 from Indiana, 20 from Kansas, 33 from Nevada, 29 from New York, 41 from Texas, and 13 from Wisconsin.
available contact information might not be regularly updated; this imposes a big limitation to the deliverability of the survey, and the representativeness of the study population.

### 5.2.2 Survey Administration

After receiving the approval of the UTD Institutional Review Board (IRB), the survey instrument was pre-tested via an expert review; two public administration scholars with expertise in the HRM field were asked to review the survey and provide their input and suggestions on the content and flow of the questions. Pre-testing consists of an essential step in self-administered surveys, as it helps detect problems and improve the survey quality (Weisberg 2005).

Overall, the survey instrument included a total of 70 items; 66 questions were close-ended, measuring individuals’ conflict and conflict management behaviors, along with their work-related experiences and demographics. Four open-ended questions were also included, asking individuals about the aftermath of organizational conflicts and best practices for handling and preventing them. These questions gave participants the option to personalize their responses and describe their experiences in more detail. In addition, the open-ended questions were intended to provide more information about the multifaceted nature of workplace conflicts, and supplement the information provided by the main survey questions.

The survey was distributed online from November 2015 until March 2016, via the license of the University of Texas at Dallas (UTD) with Qualtrics online survey software. Following Dillman’s (2007) Tailored Design Method, the study participants received a pre-notice letter that explained the purpose of the study, ensured the respondents for the anonymity and confidentiality of all survey responses, and included the researcher’s contact information. A
week later, respondents received a second notice, which included the instructions and link to the online survey. Once opening the survey link, the respondents had access to the cover letter, and the consent form for participation in this study. During the period that the survey remained open, the study participants received regular reminders to complete the survey.

The pre-notice was sent to 795 contacts; however, after excluding duplicate and email addresses that bounced back, the second notice was sent to 746 email addresses. A total of 118 responses were collected (including those who started, partially and fully completed responses), for a response rate of 15.8%. In an effort to improve the low response rate of the online survey, a paper-based survey was also mailed to non-respondents. According to Dillman, Smyth, and Chiristian (2014), adopting a mixed mode survey can bring higher response rates and decrease nonresponse error. The survey was distributed via postal mail to a sub-sample of 303 contacts, which were randomly chosen from a total of 630 mailing addresses (mailing addresses were not available for all 795 initial contacts). The selection of the random sample for the mailed survey was based on quotas, where a percentage of contacts for each state were selected.

The survey format, number, and wording of questions were consistent for both the online and mailed surveys, to ensure consistency and comparability between the results of the two survey modes (Fowler 2014; Weisberg 2005). The only exception was the addition of one question in the mailed survey instrument, which asked respondents to report their state. Similarly to the online survey, the mailed survey material included a cover letter with detailed instructions.

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4 The random sample of 303 contacts was selected based on the percentage that the contacts of each state participated in the 630 contacts, for which the mailing addresses are available. For example, the contacts from the state of Florida account for 5% of the sample for the paper survey (630 contacts). Thus, 5% of the 300 contacts (15 contacts) were randomly selected from the Florida sample to receive the mailed survey.
for completing and returning the survey, a copy of the consent form, the survey instrument, and a pre-stamped envelope for respondents to use in order to return the completed survey. The paper survey was mailed in April 2016 and the last response was collected in mid-June 2016.

Owing to the cost of mailing another wave of surveys and in an effort to improve the response rate of the mailed survey, phone calls were also made to contact those respondents whose survey letter was returned back to the researcher, due to invalid mailing address, or, because the recipients of the survey letter were not found, due to retirement, relocation, etc. Overall, though, the mailed survey did not significantly increase the response rate, as only 24 completed responses were returned, for a response rate of 8%. Taken together, the total responses from the online and mail survey distributions were 143. However, the usable responses from the online survey were 69 (49 responses were excluded as they had missing data for 90% or more of the questions). Therefore, the total usable responses were 93, for a total response rate of 16.4% (as compared to a study population of 795 contacts).

5.2.3 **Operationalization of Study Variables**

This study will focus at the individual-level of analysis to study the conflict behaviors of study participants. As mentioned by Somech, Desivilya, and Lidogoster (2009, 361), “because conflict management is perceived and experienced by individuals, it is best investigated by analyzing individually manifested states, cognitions an acts.” Similarly, Kolb (2008) suggests that an individual-level analysis is appropriate when studying conflict, as all feelings, thoughts

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5. The breakdown of the collected responses for each state is the following: Alaska-4, California-48, Florida-3, Georgia-10, Kansas-2, Nevada-6, New York-4, Texas-13, Wisconsin-2. No responses were collected from Indiana, and one of the respondents participating in the mailed survey did not indicate his/her state of employment.
and emotions initially begin from the individual, and then they develop to a group-level phenomenon. The survey questionnaire asked respondents about their work-related experiences, conflict-related behaviors and demographic characteristics, and all study variables were measured with previously validated scales and survey items used in existing scholarly work (table 5.2 provides an overview of all study variables).

**Dependent variables**

*Turnover Intentions:* Turnover intention, the first dependent variable of the study, has been widely used in organizational research as a “surrogate”, or proximal measure, for actual turnover behavior (Cho and Lewis 2012; Cohen, Blake, and Goodman 2015; Moynihan and Pandey 2008; Selden and Moynihan 2000; Jung 2014). The benefit from using turnover intent is that it captures employee attitudes better than actual turnover behavior, as individuals will typically express withdrawal feelings before actually quitting their job (Barak, Nissly, and Levin 2001; Moynihan and Pandey 2008). Following Kim’s (2012) study, turnover intent is measured by two items, a short-term measure: “I will be probably looking for a job during the next year”, and a long-term measure: “I frequently think about quitting this job,” and the responses are measured on a 4-point Likert scale (1=Strongly disagree, 4=Strongly agree).

*Perceived Organizational Performance:* So far, public management studies have operationalized organizational performance in a multitude of ways, such as effectiveness, efficiency, productivity, or fairness, without however, scholars reaching consensus on a common

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6 A detailed description of all survey items can be found in Appendix A.
7 The middle point ‘Neither agree/Nor disagree’ found in the typical 5-point Likert scale, was excluded, as such a response is not very informative when measuring individuals’ intention to quit.
definition (Van Loon 2015). Owing to the nature of this research, the study of perceptual variables and the absence of readily available objective performance data, this study adopts a subjective measure of organizational performance perceptions, as a proxy for organizational performance. As the second outcome variable, the perceived organizational performance is measured by two items, as found in past studies (Choi and Rainey 2010; Kim 2010a; Stazyk and Goerdel 2011; Vermeeren, Kuipers, and Steijn 2014): “How effectively do you think that your department is accomplishing its core mission?” and “How would you rate the overall quality of job done by your work group,” measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from poor (1) to excellent (5).

**Main Independent variables**

**Organizational Conflict:** Even though the distinction between task, relationship, and process conflict types has been extensively used in existing studies, the present study only focuses on task and relationship conflict. Process conflict is not included, as it has been often found to be conceptually overlapping (and highly correlated) with the other two types, and task conflict in particular (Shaw et al. 2011).

Organizational conflict is measured by the four-item scales for task and relationship as developed by Jehn (1994, 1995), and the responses range from none (1), to very much (5). Sample items for relationship conflict are: “How much emotional conflict is there among members of your work unit?,” or, “To what extent are personality conflicts evident in your work unit?”, and for task conflict: “How often do people in your work unit disagree about opinions regarding the work being done?” and “How frequently are there conflicts about ideas in your work unit?”.
Conflict Management: The Dutch Test for Conflict Handling (DUTCH)\(^8\) is adopted to measure conflict management, as developed in the study of De Dreu et al. (2001). The DUTCH is a 20-item instrument, which includes five subscales for the conflict management styles of avoiding, forcing, problem-solving, compromising, and yielding. All items are measured on a 5-item Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1), to strongly agree (5). Sample items are “When I have conflict at work, I give in to the wishes of the other party” (yielding), “I strive whenever possible towards a fifty-fifty compromise” (compromising), “I push my own point of view” (forcing), “I examine ideas from both sides to find a mutually optimal solution” (problem-solving), “I try to avoid a confrontation with the other party” (avoiding). For the purposes of this study, problem-solving, compromising, and yielding are defined as the “cooperative” conflict management approach, which according to the literature, brings the most beneficial outcomes (Gross and Guerero 2000; Moberg 2001; Shih and Susanto 2010). On the contrary, the avoiding and dominating styles consist of the “competitive”, dysfunctional approach to handing conflicts.

Contextual Factors

This study also takes into account additional contextual factors that can influence job-related attitudes and behaviors, as important antecedents of withdrawal intentions, and performance.

\(^8\) The Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory (ROC-II) (Rahim 1983; Rahim and Bonoma 1979) has been the most popular instrument in conflict management studies. However the DUTCH was adopted in the present study, as, despite being a newer instrument, Daly et al. (2010) found that this instrument also reflects the 5-style taxonomy of conflict handling styles very well. Also, the DUTCH does not take into account the existence of a hierarchical relationship between the parties involved in the conflict situation (an information not available here), compared to the ROC-I (conflict with supervisor) and ROC-II (conflict with a coworker) instruments (De Dreu et al. 2001).
**Organizational Justice:** Procedural and interactional justice are measured by the 7-item and 4-item scales, respectively, developed by Colquitt (2001). Sample items for interactional justice are “*My supervisor treats me with respect,*” and “*My supervisor treats me in a polite manner,*” and sample items for procedural justice are “*The organizational decision-making processes are free from bias,*” and “*I am able to appeal the decisions arrived at by the organizational decision-making processes.*” All responses are measured on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1), to strongly agree (5).

**Organizational Commitment:** The 8-item scale developed by Allen and Meyer (1990) is adopted to measure respondents’ affective commitment. Sample items are “*I really feel as if the organization’s problem are of my own,*” and “*I do not feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization (reversed),*” and the responses vary from strongly disagree (1), to strongly agree (5).

**Perceived Organizational Support (POS):** Eisenberger and colleagues (1986) have developed three instruments for the measurement of POS, a 36, 16 and 8-item one. This study adopts the shortest, 8-item version, and responses are measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1=Strongly disagree, 5=Strongly agree). Sample POS items are: “*My organization values my contribution to its well-being,*” and, “*My organization cares about my general satisfaction at work.*”

**Control Variables**

To measure the effect of the predictor variables on turnover intentions and perceived performance, this study includes several control variables. As found in existing studies, individuals’ demographic characteristics have been included as important controls in the study of
turnover intentions (Bright 2008; Cho and Lewis 2012; Ko and Hur 2014) and organizational performance (Chun and Rainey 2005; Kim 2005a; Kim 2005b).

Therefore, this study controls for age ("What is your age?"), where possible answers are: “24 or younger,” “25-34,” “35-44,” “45-54,” “55-64,” and “65 or older;” gender ("What is your gender"), which is coded 1 for “Female” and 0 for “Male”; race/ethnicity ("What is your race/ethnicity?"), with possible responses: “White, Hispanic or Latino,” “Black or African American,” “Native American or American Indian,” “Asian/Pacific Islander,” and “Other” (a dummy variable for race/ethnicity is also created, where “Minority” is coded as 1 and “White” as 0); and, educational level ("What is your highest level of educational attainment?"), with response options: “High school diploma,” “2-year college degree,” “Other professional certificate,” “Bachelor’s degree,” “Master’s degree,” and “Doctorate degree.”

This study also controls for several characteristics of the respondents’ position in the organization. The study participants were about their supervisory status ("Your current position is"), where “Supervisory” is coded as 1, and “Non-supervisory” as 0, and their classification status ("Your current position is covered under a"), with possible answers “At-will system (for example, unclassified)” coded as 1 and “Civil service system (for example classified)” coded as 0. Also, the study participants were asked to indicate their tenure in the agency ("How many years have you been in your current position?")}, with possible responses: “Less than 1 year,” “1-5 years,” “6-10 years,” “11-15 years,” and “16 years or more.”
Table 5.2. Overview of Study Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent variables:</th>
<th>Turnover intentions</th>
<th>Perceived organizational performance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Independent variables:</strong></td>
<td>Relationship conflict</td>
<td>Task conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Problem-solving</td>
<td>(Cooperative conflict management)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Compromising</td>
<td>(Cooperative conflict management)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yielding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Forcing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Avoiding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Procedural justice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interactional justice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Affective commitment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perceived organizational support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Control variables:</strong></td>
<td>Gender ((1=Female, 0=Male))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Educational level</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Race/ethnicity ((1=Minority, 0=White))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supervisory status ((1=Supervisory, 0=Non-supervisory))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Classification status ((1=At-will, 0=Civil service))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tenure in position</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.3 Data Analysis

The statistical analysis for hypotheses testing will be performed via STATA software (version 14). Multiple regression methodology will be used to estimate the effects of predictor variables on perceived organizational performance. The cases with missing data were dealt with listwise deletion, which is the default option of STATA. Perceived performance is treated as a continuous variable as it is measured in a 5-level Likert scale; the linearity assumption is not violated, as variables with 5 or more categories can be treated as continuous (Allison 1999).
Turnover intention is also measured at the ordinal level with a 4-item scale, but for the purposes of this analysis, it will be treated as a dichotomous variable, where all “Strongly disagree” and “Disagree” responses are coded as “Disagree” (1), and all “Strongly Agree” and “Agree” responses are coded as “Agree” (0). A linear probability model (LPM) will be used to test the turnover intentions model; LPM is a methodology most often used in economics, and describes the linear regression with a dichotomous outcome variable (0,1) (Mood 2010; Williams 2016).

Even though logistic regression is typically prescribed as the best-suited methodology to estimate models with binary outcome variables, scholars often discuss the use of linear regression instead. LPM has received criticisms for biased and inconsistent results (Horrace and Oaxaca 2006), as it violates the assumption of the outcome variable being a continuous variable, and, that the range of probabilities of the outcome variable might fall outside the boundaries of 0 and 1 (Hellevik 2009; Mood 2010). Also, LPM can be more susceptible to heteroscedasticity (non-constant variance of the error terms), and non-normality of the error terms of the independent variables, as they are bound to take values of 0 and 1 (Williams 2016). However, the proponents of LPM argue that this methodology facilitates the interpretation of results. In support of LPM, Hellevik (2009) argues that LPM can produce estimations similar to a logistic regression model, without yielding problematic results. The big advantage of this method is that, LPM is easier to comprehend and provides a much easier interpretation, when compared to the interpretation of odds ratios in logistic regression.

In addition, inductive and deductive reasoning is used for the interpretation of participants’ responses to the open-ended questions included in the survey instrument. NVivo
(version 11) software for qualitative analysis will be used for the coding and development of themes and patterns for the reporting of the qualitative findings.
CHAPTER 6
RESEARCH FINDINGS

The main purpose of this study is to determine the association of conflict behaviors and cooperative conflict management with organizational performance and turnover intentions, as reflected in the perceptions of state government HR professionals. This chapter presents the analysis of the research findings of the survey data collected for the purposes of the present study. The first section of this chapter presents the descriptive statistics, by reporting the characteristics of the study sample and summary statistics, together with the level of agreement/disagreement of respondents for individual variables. The second section reports the regression results for the effect of predictor variables on the two outcome variables, perceived organizational conflict types and turnover intentions. The last section describes the analysis of participants’ responses to the open-ended questions included in the survey instrument.

6.1 Descriptive Statistics

6.1.1 Characteristics of Study Respondents

When looking at the summary of respondents’ demographic characteristics, Table 6.1 shows that the majority of survey respondents were female (71%). In respect to their race/ethnicity, 66% were White, followed by 11% Hispanic/Latino, 11% Black/African-American, 1% Native American/American Indian, 6% Asian/Pacific Islander and 5% identified
themselves as other⁹. Most of the respondents reported being between 45-54 years old (38%), while the rest were 25-34 (14%), 35-44 (20%), 55-64 (24%), and few 65 years or older (3%).

Table 6.1. Respondents’ Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Freq.</th>
<th>(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American/American Indian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34 years</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44 years</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54 years</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64 years</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 years or older</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school diploma</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-year college</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other professional certificate</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1 year</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5 years</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15 years</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 years or more</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisory</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-supervisory</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classification</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil service</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At-will</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

⁹ Most of respondents who chose the ‘other’ category, either they reported being multi-racial, or they declined to specify.
When asked about their educational level, 36% of respondents have earned a Bachelor’s degree, whereas approximately one-third of them hold a graduate degree (27% Master’s and 3% Doctorate), 11% are high school graduates, and the rest graduated from a 2-year college (12%), or they hold a professional certificate (11%).

Almost half of the respondents mentioned being employed in their current position from 1 to 5 years (48%), whereas the rest reported being in the organization less than a year (10%), 6 to 10 years (20%), 11 to 15 years (11%), or, 16 years or more (11%). Almost all respondents hold a supervisory position (90%), while they were evenly distributed between those being covered under a civil service (53%), or, an at-will (47%) employment system.

6.1.2 Summary Statistics

The summary statistics for all study variables are provided in Table 6.2. When looking at the two conflict types, relationship conflict ($\bar{x} = 2.554$, $sd=.748$) has the highest reported mean, when compared to task conflict ($\bar{x} = 2.390$, $sd=.601$). In respect to the conflict management styles, the highest mean in that of problem-solving ($\bar{x} = 3.690$, $sd=.538$) among the cooperative styles, whereas avoiding is the competitive approach with the highest mean ($\bar{x} = 2.989$, $sd=.636$). Overall, yielding is the least preferred, in contrast to problem-solving which is the most preferred conflict management approach. Among the contextual variables, interactional justice has the highest is reported mean ($\bar{x}=4.061$, $sd=0.818$).

6.1.3 Respondents’ Responses on Survey Items

The following tables present the percentages of respondents’ agreement over the survey statements, along with the mean values of the respective items. As shown in Table 6.3, the study respondents clearly indicate that they are not considering leaving their job (40%), or, they will be
Table 6.2. Descriptive Statistics for the Study Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Obs</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependent variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnover intention</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.823</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived organizational performance</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>3.841</td>
<td>0.785</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Independent variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship conflict</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>2.554</td>
<td>0.748</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task conflict</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>2.390</td>
<td>0.601</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>4.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative conflict management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yielding</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>2.603</td>
<td>0.614</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compromising</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>3.639</td>
<td>0.603</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem-solving</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>3.960</td>
<td>0.538</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitive conflict management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forcing</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>2.272</td>
<td>0.693</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>2.989</td>
<td>0.636</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>4.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contextual factors</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective commitment</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>3.235</td>
<td>0.723</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POS</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>3.444</td>
<td>0.700</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactional justice</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>4.091</td>
<td>0.818</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedural justice</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>3.463</td>
<td>0.776</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Control variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>1.708</td>
<td>0.457</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>3.837</td>
<td>1.061</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>3.644</td>
<td>1.376</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/ethnicity</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>1.843</td>
<td>1.461</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>1.099</td>
<td>0.300</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classification</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>1.473</td>
<td>0.502</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>2.648</td>
<td>1.149</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Looking for a job within the next year (38%), whereas a very small portion of the study participants expressed an intention to quit. Moreover, the findings also indicate high perceptions of organizational performance. Approximately half of the respondents suggest that their agency is effectively accomplishing its mission (45%), and that high-quality job is done by their work group (46%), while, approximately one-fourth of them reported excellent organizational performance.
Table 6.3. Survey Responses to the Dependent Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turnover Intentions</th>
<th>% SD</th>
<th>% D</th>
<th>% A</th>
<th>% SA</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I often think about quitting my job</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>1.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will be probably looking for a job</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>2.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>next year</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived Organizational Performance</th>
<th>% Poor</th>
<th>% Fair</th>
<th>% Good</th>
<th>% Very Good</th>
<th>% Excellent</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How effectively do you think that your</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>3.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>department is accomplishing its core</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mission?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How would you rate the overall quality</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>3.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of the job done by your work group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.4 reports in more detail the respondents’ agreement/disagreement to the individual items for the two conflict scales. The survey findings show that the majority of study participants reported dealing with very little, or some conflicts in their working environment. In respect to relationship conflicts, approximately half of the study participants reported experiencing very little workplace frictions (51%), tensions (58%) and emotional conflicts (49%), whereas they experience personality conflicts more often (41% reported some level of conflicts). Only 13% of respondents mentioned experiencing quite a bit of personality conflicts or tensions, whereas, overall, very few respondents indicated absence (the percentages ranged from 4% to 10%), or, high levels of conflicts (the percentages ranged from 1% to 4%).

Similarly, respondents agreed that, even though, task-related conflicts are evident in the workplace, they mentioned that opinion differences over work issues (55%), conflicts over ideas (48%), and conflicts over the work being done (55%, 48%, and 61% respectively) are kept at low
levels. On the contrary, 46% of respondents reported encountering conflicts due to opinion differences, more often. Also, few individuals mentioned that they are experiencing quite a bit of task-related conflicts (the highest number was 14% for opinion differences), and only 2% reported high conflict levels (due to work-related opinion differences).

Table 6.4. Survey Responses to Organizational Conflict Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% None</th>
<th>% Very little</th>
<th>% Some</th>
<th>% Quite a bit</th>
<th>% Very much</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationship Conflict</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friction</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality conflict</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tension</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional conflict</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Task Conflict</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion disagreement over work issues</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflicts over ideas</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflicts over work execution</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion differences</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2.73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.5 provides a more nuanced understanding of respondents’ preferences over the different conflict management styles examined in this study. In general, respondents provided their agreement that the more cooperative mechanisms are more suitable for conflict handling, when compared to a more competitive approach. The survey findings indicate a preference toward problem-solving, as close to two-thirds of respondents reported their agreement with statements such as, finding an optimal solution (65%), serving the interests of all parties (63%), or, finding a solution that works for all (65%). Similarly, compromising was also highly preferred; more than half of respondents agreed that they would look for a compromising
solution (58%), or, that they work on a middle-of-the-road solution in a conflict situation (54%). However, they seemed undecided when asked about giving in a little in a conflict situation (40%). On the contrary, yielding was the least preferred approach, as almost half of respondents disagreed that they would prioritize the other party’s interests, and they took a neutral stand in respect to concurring with the other party in a conflict situation.

Table 6.5. Survey Responses on Conflict Management Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cooperative Conflict Management</th>
<th>% SD</th>
<th>% D</th>
<th>% NA/ND</th>
<th>% A</th>
<th>% SA</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yielding</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give in to others’ wishes</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concur with the other party</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Compromising</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle-of-the-road solution</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>3.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compromising solution</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>3.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both give in a little</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>3.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifty-fifty compromise</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>3.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Problem-solving</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find satisfying solution for all</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>3.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stand for my and others’ interests</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>3.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find mutually optimal solution</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>4.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find solution to serve all interests</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>3.85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competitive Conflict Management</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Forcing</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fight for a good outcome</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everything to win</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Avoiding</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid confrontation about</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>differences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid opinion differences</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make differences look less severe</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid confrontation with others</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
State HR professionals were less likely to agree with an avoiding or competing attitude to handling with conflicts. The majority of respondents disagreed about doing everything to win in a conflict situation (52%), whereas they were undecided (37%), or they disagreed (47%), about fighting for a good outcome. The survey findings reveal mixed attitudes about avoiding conflicts. Even though 40% of respondents agreed that they would avoid a confrontation, and 49% reported that they would try to make differences look less significant, half of them disagreed with avoiding opinion differences (54%), and, they were neutral about avoiding a confrontation about interpersonal differences (27% neutral and 28% agreed).

In respect to the contextual factors, Table 6.6 shows that the majority of the respondents expressed an overall positive attitude about their emotional attachment to their current organization, the support they receive from their organization, and the degree to which their interpersonal relations are built on fairness criteria. The participants also revealed a positive attitude toward their affective commitment levels, and overall, reported having built a personal relationship and emotional bond with their current organization. For instance, close to one-third of them agreed (31%) that they intended to build tenure in their organization, and that they regard the organizational problems as their own (33%), while 43% of respondents indicate that the organizational has a personal meaning to them.

Moreover, the respondents expressed high perceptions of organizational justice. The majority of responses indicated an agreement about fairness in interpersonal relations, as the study participants perceived their interactions with their supervisor as being based on respect (43%), politeness (47%), dignity (39%), and proper overall behavior (41%). Similarly, the survey responses revealed high perceptions of procedural justice. For instance, HR professionals
perceived that organizational decision-making processes are executed consistently (33%), accurately (43%), and ethically (46%), whereas most responses indicate a neutral stand in respect to bias in decision-making (38%). It is also worth noting that, even though most responses indicate high perceptions of procedural justice, many respondents have also taken a neutral stand.

Table 6.6. Survey Responses on Contextual Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affective Commitment</th>
<th>% SD</th>
<th>% D</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>% A</th>
<th>% SA</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I would spend the rest of my career with this organization</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>3.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy discussing my organizations’ problems outside it</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>2.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel as if the organization’s problems are of my own</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>2.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think I could easily become as attached to another organization as I am to this one (R)</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>3.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not feel like ‘part of the family’ at my organization (R)</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>2.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not feel ‘emotionally attached’ to my organization (R)</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>2.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My organization has a great deal of personal meaning to me</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>3.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not feel a strong of belonging to my organization (R)</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2.32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interactional Justice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% SD</th>
<th>% D</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>% A</th>
<th>% SA</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My supervisor treats me in a polite manner</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>4.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My supervisor treats me with dignity</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>4.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My supervisor treats me with respect</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>4.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has refrained from improper remarks or comments</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>3.98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Procedural Justice**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>2%</th>
<th>3%</th>
<th>14%</th>
<th>57%</th>
<th>24%</th>
<th>3.97</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am able to express my views and feelings during the organizational</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>decision-making processes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can influence the decisions arrived at by the organizational decision-</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>3.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>making processes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The organizational decision-making processes are consistently applied</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>3.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The organizational decision-making processes are free from bias</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The organizational decision-making processes are based on accurate</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>3.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>information</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am able to appeal the decisions arrived by the organizational decision-</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>3.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>making processes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The organizational decision-making processes uphold ethical and moral</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>3.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>standards</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Perceived Organizational Support (POS)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>5%</th>
<th>13%</th>
<th>17%</th>
<th>48%</th>
<th>16%</th>
<th>3.57</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My organization…</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>values my contribution to its well-being</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fails to appreciate any extra effort from me (R)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>would ignore any complaint from me (R)</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>would fail to notice it, even if I did the best possible job (R)</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>really cares about my well-being</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>3.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cares about my general satisfaction at work</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>3.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shows very little concern for me (R)</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>2.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>takes pride in my accomplishments at work</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>3.56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similarly, the majority of responses indicated that the survey respondents overwhelmingly agreed on their organization providing a supportive and caring environment, that will take into consideration employees’ work effort, high performance, or, complaints. To
describe a few representative items, state HR professionals perceive their organization to care about their well-being (44%), their work satisfaction (43%), and being proud of their accomplishments at work (43%).

Taken together, the participating HR professionals showed a positive attitude toward a supportive and fair environment, and a sense of attachment to their organization, even though they do not show an overwhelmingly strong agreement on the respective survey items.

6.2 Bivariate Correlations and Scale Reliabilities

The Spearman correlations between the study measures\textsuperscript{10} are reported in Table 6.7. There is a positive and moderate correlation between relationship and task conflict; these two conflict types have often been found, in earlier studies, to be correlated (DeChurch and Marks 2001; DeDreu and Weingart 2003b; Pelled, Eisenhardt and Xin 1999; Rahim 2011). Overall, the reported correlation coefficients are not very high (above .80), which supports the distinctiveness of the measured constructs. The highest correlations are reported between procedural justice and POS (.70), procedural justice and affective commitment (.70), and affective commitment and POS (.70). Turnover intent was positively correlated, even though weakly, with both relationship (.45) and task conflict types (0.27), whereas organizational performance is only significantly and negatively related to relationship conflict (-.379).

The internal consistency of all scales that were used in this study was tested with Cronbach’s alpha (\(\alpha\)). All variables reported acceptable, or high levels of internal consistency, when compared to the criterion of .70 or above that is typically suggested in the literature. The results show higher reliability estimates for relationship conflict (\(\alpha=.88\)), and task conflict

\textsuperscript{10} The summated scales are used in the descriptive analysis.
(α=.82). When testing the reliability of the conflict management subscales\textsuperscript{11}, the alpha score for compromising was .70, .65 for avoiding, .69 for problem-solving, .41 for yielding and .38 for forcing. Because the subscales of yielding and forcing reported very low alphas, two items\textsuperscript{12} were removed from those scales, which improved their α scores to 57 for yielding and .59 for forcing. The scale for turnover intentions (α=.77), and perceived performance (α=.75) had acceptable reliability scores, whereas the rest of the scales used in the study also reported high reliability estimates: α=.83 for affective commitment, α=.95 for POS, α=.87 for interactional justice, and α=.90 for procedural justice.

\textbf{6.3 Multicollinearity Test}

When checking for possible multicollinearity issues, none of the bivariate correlations is extremely high, which might suggest that multicollinearity is not an issue between the predictor variables. In addition, a variance inflation factor (VIF) test for multicollinearity was conducted. Initially, some of the variables reported very high VIF scores, which indicated multicollinearity between the predictor variables. To resolve this problem, the study variables were centered at their mean, before being entered in the regression model. As shown in Table 6.8, all variables have a VIF score much below the cutoff score of 10. Procedural justice was the only variable that consistently reported very high VIF scores, so for this reason, it was excluded from the regression analyses.

\textsuperscript{11} The internal reliability of the conflict management subscales as reported in this study, do not deviate much from the scores found in DeDreu et al. (2001): α=.65 for yielding, α=.66 for compromising, α=.70 for forcing, α=.68 for problem-solving, and α=.73 for avoiding.

\textsuperscript{12} The two items removed from the ‘yielding’ scale are: In a conflict situation, a) I try to accommodate the other party, b) I adapt to the other party’s goals and interests; and the two from the ‘forcing’ scale are: a) I push my own point of view, b) I search for gains.
Table 6.7. Bivariate Correlations and Scale Reliabilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Relationship conflict</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Task conflict</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Yielding</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Compromising</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Problem solving</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>-0.16</td>
<td>-0.14</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Forcing</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>-0.15</td>
<td>-0.20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Avoiding</td>
<td>-0.22</td>
<td>-0.35</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Affective commitment</td>
<td>-0.30</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>-0.34</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 POS</td>
<td>-0.30</td>
<td>-0.26</td>
<td>-0.23</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Procedural justice</td>
<td>-0.27</td>
<td>-0.14</td>
<td>-0.23</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Interactional justice</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>-0.25</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Turnover intentions</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.71</td>
<td>-0.63</td>
<td>-0.56</td>
<td>-0.47</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Organizational performance</td>
<td>-0.38</td>
<td>-0.18</td>
<td>-0.18</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>-0.46</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=93
Note: All significant correlations at the p < .05 level, are in bold; the Cronbach’s alpha reliability estimates are reported in the parenthesis.
Table 6.8. VIF Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>VIF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationship conflict</td>
<td>1.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task conflict</td>
<td>1.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative conflict management</td>
<td>1.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitive conflict management</td>
<td>1.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective commitment</td>
<td>2.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactional justice</td>
<td>2.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POS</td>
<td>3.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority</td>
<td>1.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At-will</td>
<td>2.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisory position</td>
<td>1.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>2.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>2.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure</td>
<td>1.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task conflict x Task conflict</td>
<td>1.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative conf.manag. x Affective commitment</td>
<td>2.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative conf.manag. x Interactional justice</td>
<td>2.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative conf.manag. x POS</td>
<td>2.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean VIF</td>
<td>2.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.4 Regression Results

6.4.1 OLS Regression for Perceived Organizational Performance

The results of the OLS regression analysis for perceived organizational performance are shown in Table 6.9. As shown in regression Model 1, the predictor variables explain approximately 58% of the variance in organizational performance ($R^2=0.579$), whereas, when the quadratic term for task conflict and interactions are also added in the regression, the full model (Model 2) explains close to 63% of the variance in performance ($R^2=0.629$). Both models reach significance at the $p<.001$ level ($b= 7.032$ for Model 1, and $b= 6.653$ for Model 2).
This study anticipated that relationship conflict would be negatively related to organizational performance. The regression results provide support to this hypothesis (hypothesis 1a), as relationship conflict is significantly and negatively related to perceived performance ($b = -0.134$, $p<.05$ in Model 2), a finding consistent between the two regression models. The more employees experience relationship conflicts in the working environment, they will report lower perceptions of organizational performance. The second hypothesis stated that task conflict would have a curvilinear relationship with perceived performance, in that certain levels of task conflict can boost performance, but for high conflicts levels, performance will decrease. The non-significant coefficient of the quadratic term shows that task conflict does not have a curvilinear relationship with organizational performance, which does not confirm hypothesis 1b.

When testing conflict management as predictor of organizational performance, two indices are used in the analysis; yielding, compromising and problem-solving variables are summed under “cooperative conflict management”, whereas, avoiding and forcing are summed under “competitive conflict management”. A cooperative, rather than a competitive, approach to dealing with conflicts is expected to mitigate the detriments of conflict, by leading to positive outcomes. The regression results, however, do not support this hypothesis (hypothesis 3a); contrary to expectations, neither cooperative, nor competitive conflict management is significantly associated with organizational performance.

This study also tested for the importance of a positive organizational environment for higher performance perceptions. When considering that a supportive and fair organizational environment will matter for public HR professionals, affective commitment, interactional justice, and perceived organizational support (POS), are anticipated to be positively associated with
Table 6.9. OLS Regression for Perceived Organizational Performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived organizational performance</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th></th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coefficient (β)</td>
<td>Standard error (se)</td>
<td>Coefficient (β)</td>
<td>Standard error (se)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship conflict</td>
<td>-0.121+ (0.062)</td>
<td>-0.134* (0.060)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task conflict</td>
<td>-0.017 (0.082)</td>
<td>0.001 (0.079)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative conflict management</td>
<td>-0.011 (0.049)</td>
<td>-0.015 (0.045)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitive conflict management</td>
<td>0.039 (0.031)</td>
<td>0.028 (0.029)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective commitment</td>
<td>0.130** (0.038)</td>
<td>0.106** (0.037)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactional justice</td>
<td>0.139+ (0.077)</td>
<td>0.183* (0.075)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POS</td>
<td>-0.019 (0.052)</td>
<td>-0.024 (0.053)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-0.313 (0.335)</td>
<td>-0.212 (0.341)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority</td>
<td>-0.983** (0.330)</td>
<td>-1.179** (0.356)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At-will</td>
<td>-0.726+ (0.382)</td>
<td>-0.802* (0.372)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisory position</td>
<td>-0.954+ (0.482)</td>
<td>-1.063* (0.503)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.187 (0.138)</td>
<td>0.294* (0.145)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.204 (0.158)</td>
<td>0.235 (0.171)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure</td>
<td>0.233+ (0.133)</td>
<td>0.256+ (0.134)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task conflict²</td>
<td>0.003 (0.018)</td>
<td>0.016 (0.013)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative conf. manag. x Affective commitment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.016 (0.013)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative conf. manag. x Interactional justice</td>
<td>-0.059** (0.020)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative conf. manag. x POS</td>
<td>0.011 (0.010)</td>
<td>0.011 (0.010)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>7.032*** (0.690)</td>
<td>6.653*** (0.856)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N | 78 | 78 |
R² | 0.579 | 0.629 |
Adj R² | 0.486 | 0.516 |

+ p<.10, * p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001
Note: Robust standard errors are reported in the parentheses.
performance outcomes. In both models, affective commitment is a significant predictor of organizational performance ($b=0.106$, $p<.01$ for Model 2), which confirms hypothesis 4a. The regression results also show that interactional justice is significantly and positively associated with performance ($b=0.150$, $p<.05$). In contrast, the estimated coefficient for POS is not statistically significant. Hence, hypothesis 5a is confirmed, whereas hypothesis 6a is not supported.

To further explore these relationships, the interactions between cooperative conflict management and affective commitment, interactional justice, and POS are added in the analysis. Even though, cooperative conflict handling is not significantly associated with performance, the effect of cooperative conflict management on interactional justice ($b=-0.059$, $p<.01$) has a significant, and negative effect on performance. Nonetheless, the negative sign of the interaction term between cooperative conflict management and interactional justice shows that, for higher levels of interactional justice, the effect of cooperative management on performance will decrease. This finding indicates that, when HR professionals place high value on fairness and quality in their working interpersonal interactions, adopting a win-win approach becomes less important when dealing with conflicts, and aiming at achieving effective job outcomes.

Interestingly, even though task conflict is not significantly associated with perceived performance, it is worth noting that its negative sign in Model 1 turns positive once the contextual organizational factors are added in the analysis. This can be regarded as an additional indicator that a positive and supportive working environment has the potential to mitigate the detriments of conflicts, and turning task conflict to a potentially positive, rather than a detrimental organizational element.
Also, even though in Model 1 the effect of relationship conflict barely reaches significance at the $p<.10$, when the contextual variables are added in the model its significance increases at the $p<.05$. Even though, the expectation would be that the effect of relationship conflicts would become less important, when controlling for a positive organizational environment, instead, affective conflicts become more detrimental. This finding gives emphasis to the toxic nature of relationship conflicts, which are overall regarded as a threat to interpersonal relations and organizational outcomes, and they particularly challenging to handle.

The respondents’ demographic characteristics were also included as controls in the analysis, four of which are entered in the model as dummy variables (female, minority, at-will, and supervisory position). In spite of the non-significant effect of gender, the rest of the control variables are significantly associated with performance. On one hand, the findings suggest that the study participants belonging to a minority group ($b=-1.179$, $p<.01$ in Model 2), being covered under an at-will system ($b=-0.802$, $p<.05$ in Model 2), and holding a supervisory position ($b=-1.063$, $p<.05$ in Model 2), tend to report lower perceptions of organizational performance. On the other hand, education ($b=0.294$, $p<.05$) and tenure ($b=0.256$, $p<.10$ in Model 2) are positively and significantly related with performance; more educated and longer tenured in the organization individuals report higher perceptions of organizational performance.

### 6.4.2 Linear Regression for Turnover Intentions

The results of the linear regression for turnover intention\(^\text{13}\) are reported in Table 6.10. The two regression models show that the predictor variables explain close to 40% in Model 1

\(^{13}\) A logistic regression analysis was also conducted to test the relationship between turnover intentions and the predictor variables, and it yielded results similar to the linear regression findings. This additional analysis is available upon request.
### Table 6.10. Linear Regression for Turnover Intention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turnover intention</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coefficient (β)</td>
<td>Standard error (se)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship conflict</td>
<td>-0.052</td>
<td>(0.038)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task conflict</td>
<td>-0.022</td>
<td>(0.040)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative conflict management</td>
<td>-0.019</td>
<td>(0.028)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitive conflict management</td>
<td>-0.002</td>
<td>(0.015)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective commitment</td>
<td>0.031</td>
<td>(0.022)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactional justice</td>
<td>-0.022</td>
<td>(0.041)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POS</td>
<td><strong>0.052</strong></td>
<td>(0.024)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-0.054</td>
<td>(0.184)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority</td>
<td>-0.008</td>
<td>(0.160)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At-will</td>
<td>-0.062</td>
<td>(0.245)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisory position</td>
<td>0.397</td>
<td>(0.255)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-0.081</td>
<td>(0.075)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.148</td>
<td>(0.103)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure</td>
<td>-0.148</td>
<td>(0.090)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative conf.manag. x Affective</td>
<td>-0.014</td>
<td>(0.007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>commitment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative conf.manag. x Interactional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>justice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative conf.manag. x POS</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>(0.006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td><strong>1.230</strong></td>
<td>(0.459)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N  78  78
R²  0.392  0.425
Adj R²  0.246  0.257

* p< .10, ** p< .05, *** p< .01, **** p< .001
Note: Robust standard errors are reported in the parentheses.
(R²=0.392), and 43% in Model 2 (R²=0.425), and both regression models reach statistical significance at p<.05 (b=1.230 for Model 1 and b=1.114 for Model 2).

The regression findings do not provide support to the expectations that organizational conflict will negatively influence public HR professionals’ intention to leave their organization. Neither relationship nor task conflict is significantly associated with turnover, by thus, not providing support to hypothesis 2a and 2b. Hypothesis 3b expected that conflict management would be positively related to turnover intentions; however, this hypothesis is also not confirmed, as there is no significant relationship between a cooperative, or, competitive conflict management and turnover intent.

Moreover, when testing whether public HR professionals will express lower turnover intentions as a result of a positive, supportive and fair organizational environment, the regression results are mixed. Affective commitment is significantly, but positively associated with turnover intentions (b=0.051, p<.05). Despite being significant, the unexpected, positive sign of this relationship does not provide support to hypothesis 4b.

In addition, hypotheses 5b is not confirmed, as higher perceptions of interactional justice are not significantly associated with less withdrawal intentions. The expectation for a negative relationship between perceptions of a supportive organizational environment and lower turnover intentions is also not confirmed by the findings; even though POS is significantly associated with turnover, the estimated POS coefficient has a positive sign. Therefore, neither hypothesis 6b is supported.

Even though cooperative conflict management does not have a significant effect on turnover intentions, the interaction term with affective commitment is statistically significant
This relationship has a negative sign, which suggests that for higher reported affective commitment, cooperative management will have lower effect on turnover intent. Hence, a cooperative approach to dealing with conflicts only matters, when public HR professionals are emotionally attached to their organization, and its importance decreases as affective commitment levels increase. Or else, this relationship does not hold.

When testing the control variables, supervisory status is positively associated with turnover intentions (b=0.493, p<.10). Also, tenure in the organization is significantly, but negatively associated with the intent to leave (b=-0.148, p<.10). Therefore, state HR professionals being longer in the organizations are less likely to express an intention to quit, whereas, those holding a supervisory position are more likely to report turnover intent.

6.5 Analysis of Open-Ended Questions

This section provides the qualitative analysis of the study participants’ responses to the open-ended questions regarding the negative impact and best conflict handling and prevention practices. A total of 71 respondents provided their input to the three open-ended questions. As, many of the respondents touched on more than issues in their responses, the analysis of the response patterns (themes) emerging from the data, are reported as percentages of the total of comments reported for each question.

6.5.1 Implications of Dysfunctional Conflicts

Similarly to past research addressing the harmful conflict manifestations, the study participants commented about the negative repercussions that workplace conflicts have for organizational life and daily interactions (Table 6.11). When HR professionals were asked about the ways that conflicts hurt the organizational environment, the research findings show that 25%
of the comments report a negative influence of conflicts on productivity and execution of agency tasks, as more time is devoted to discussing and dealing with conflicts, rather than getting the job done. As mentioned, “conflicts can cause employees to not meet organizational goals, and delay processes,” and they lead to “failure to achieve the mission, as more time is spent toward addressing conflicts.”

Table 6.11. Implications of Dysfunctional Conflicts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Frequencies</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Productivity loss</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Low morale</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Divisiveness</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Unresolved conflicts</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Positive conflict outcomes</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Voluntary turnover</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Distrust</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Disengagement</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Communication barriers</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total comments</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The findings reveal that interpersonal conflicts interrupt organizational operations, and that personality or personal conflicts can be particularly detrimental for the accomplishment of organizational goals; they create hostility and feelings of anxiety, and when prolonged, they have a long-term negative impact on working relations. Lower employee morale (19%), together with divisiveness and erosion of group cohesion (15%), are the next most reported conflict repercussions. The more conflicts take a personal tone, or, left unaddressed, the more teams are affected by animosity, isolation, and disruption of daily operations; as reported in the comments, “individuals tend to pick sides,” “they stop working together,” and “an us versus them environment is created.”
The respondents further discussed the repercussions of leaving conflicts unresolved (11%); when ignored or mishandled, organizational conflicts accumulate, and they eventually have a long-term impact on organizational operations and interpersonal relations negative impact. In addition to productivity losses and deteriorated working relationships, a few comments discussed about conflicts potentially leading to employee withdrawal (8%). Individuals might choose to voluntarily leave the organization as a result of extensive and unresolved conflicts, a problem that is aggravated when those quitting, are high performers. Moreover, the respondents’ comments indicate that the presence and persistence of conflicts create additional barriers in developing trusting relationships (5%), keeping employees engaged (4%) and maintaining open communication norms (4%).

Despite the recognition of the negative conflict aftermath, respondents also acknowledged the functional aspect of workplace conflicts. Approximately 9% of the comments address conflicts as a healthy and positive phenomenon; they specifically mentioned that, “conflicts are often beneficial in bringing about change, new ideas and process improvements,” and that, “some conflicts are healthy, and foster growth.”

6.5.2 Improve Conflict Handling

When asked about ways to attain higher effectiveness in the handling conflicts, that will ultimately lead to positive job-related outcomes (Table 6.12), the majority of HR professionals’ comments mentioned that addressing conflicts at an early stage, when they are still controllable, should be of high priority (24%). Instead of ignoring conflicts, early detection and immediate supervisory and employee confrontation of any emerging controversies, are keys to higher fairness, accountability and individual responsibility in the resolution of interpersonal problems.
Open and honest communication between supervisors and subordinates (21%) is also reported as an important prerequisite of effective conflict handling. The study participants mentioned that, being open to disagreements, “voicing our opinions” and getting employee input, contribute to an open dialogue, prevent misunderstandings and reinforce the positive attitudes toward workplace conflicts.

Table 6.12. Improving Conflict Handling Practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Frequencies</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Address conflicts immediately</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Open communication/dialogue</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Be strategic and professional</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Effective leadership/supervision</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Existing effective strategies</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Training</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Win-win approach</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total comments</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In conjunction with an open communication organizational climate, improving conflict handling would also require professionalism, and being strategic about how conflicts are approached. Approximately 19% of the comments refer to the need to be grounded on professionalism, accountability, impartiality, confidentiality and consistency when dealing with interpersonal problems. Such an organizational environment helps shift the focus from serving personal needs, to prioritizing the accomplishment of organizational goals. In particular, one of the study participants commented that, “conflict must be addressed not ignored, expectations should be clear and everyone should be held accountable for meeting them.” Additional comments were made in respect to further actions, such as realigning staff, using a third party
intervention, or one-to-one meetings with the staff, as mechanisms showing commitment to the resolution of personnel problems and ultimately benefit the organizational environment.

In addition, as reported in the comments, effective leadership and supervision are indispensable elements in making such decisions (10%). The support and commitment, along with the necessary skills held by top management officials are essential for informed decision-making; getting the facts, asking for employee involvement and ensuring transparency in all operations, provide higher objectivity and effectiveness in conflict handling. As mentioned by the participating HR professionals, “top management needs to ensure that they have all the facts before reacting to a situation,” and that, “some leaders need to involve their employees and give them the opportunity to provide solutions.” One a more practical note, improving conflict management is also contingent upon the skills and relevant training offered by the organization. As mentioned in approximately 9% of the comments, effective personnel management and good interpersonal skills, combined with ongoing training, not only in conflict management, but also in “respect, diversity and inclusion,” contribute to successful dealing with interpersonal controversies.

Last, the importance of adopting a win-win approach as a way to improve conflict handling is reported in respondents’ comments (6%); they mentioned that it is much more beneficial to “ensure that both parties are listening to the needs of the other side and that they take responsibility to help find solutions that will meet their needs as well as their own.” Few respondents (10%) also mentioned that their department’s conflict handling practices are successfully adopted. They mentioned that personnel controversies and tensions are successfully controlled, either by an open dialogue, or by devoting time to discussing the emerging issues in
detail. One respondent mentioned that, “right now conflict is handled fairly well. Whenever there is a disagreement about something, we spend time on the details - what, why, how - gathering the facts for both sides and deciding on the best path.” Such an approach does not only help manage conflicts, but will also bring positive change.

6.5.3 Strategies for Conflict Prevention

Besides detecting the aftermath of conflicts and identifying best practices for effectively handling them, the study participants were also asked to comment on preventive measures (Table 6.13). Approximately one-third (34%) of the comments mentioned the need to promote open, regular and honest communication between the organizational members. One of the participating HR professionals mentioned that, “Communication is the key. I find that probably 90% of workplace conflict, it stems back to a communication issue.” Acknowledging the importance of diversity in individual opinions and viewpoints, helps build honest, transparent and strong interpersonal relations, particularly among group members.

Table 6.13. Prevention of Organizational Conflicts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Frequencies</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Open and honest communications</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Effective leadership and supervision (9)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common goals and mission (5)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffing choices (3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Respect</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Clear guidelines, goals</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Acknowledge diversity</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Inevitability</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Constructive approach</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total comments</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The study participants also emphasize the need for effective leadership and supervision as key elements, not only for improving conflict management, but more importantly, for preventing the emergence of workplace conflicts. In more detail, 21% of the comments discuss the necessity for leaders and managers to empower and engage their employees, provide guidance in conflict handling, instill a shared vision and ensure a common, rather than an individual, course of action toward the accomplishment of organizational goals. Moreover, the findings indicate that staffing is important, as personnel selection will largely determine how effectively the organizational mission is accomplished.

The participating HR professionals also revealed that building respect is highly rated for them as an essential attribute of smooth organizational operations (13%). As mentioned by one of the respondents, “listen to the other's point of view; speak respectfully so others hear your point of view, so others will agree with you; let people know you considered what they said; show genuine care and appreciation for each other.”

As conflicts often stem from ambiguity in tasks or roles, ensuring clarity in expectations, organizational tasks and decision-making processes, and provision of clear of guidelines are steps that, according to the respondents, will contribute to the prevention of conflicts (12%). Further, the participants’ comments reveal the importance of acknowledging and valuing diversity in opinions, cultures, and personal differences (10%); the more open the organizational environment is to diversity, the more inclusive, respectful and conflict-free the working relations will become. Last, the HR professionals acknowledge the inevitable nature of conflicts as a potentially positive and healthy for the organization, phenomenon, and emphasize the need for their effective management (6%). To that end, they refer to a constructive approach, and
specifically compromising (4%), as the best-suited attitude toward prevention and effective handling of conflicts.

In sum, the study findings confirm the detrimental role of relationship conflicts for organizational performance, even though such a relationship was not confirmed for turnover intentions. Interestingly, conflict management does not seem to mitigate the harmful conflict repercussions, as it is not significantly associated with job-related outcomes. Furthermore, a positive and supportive organizational environment is associated with more beneficial work attitudes. Also, when interactional justice and affective commitment are combined with cooperative conflict management, they are significantly associated with employee outcomes. However, these relationships show that the more state HR professionals value such positive work experiences, the less important cooperative conflict management becomes.

In addition, the input of the study participants’ shows that negative facet of interpersonal conflicts is reflected mainly in productivity losses, together with lower morale, and division in workgroup relationships, and last, turnover. Moreover, HR professionals mention that improving conflicts handling can be accomplished by giving an emphasis on early detection and active handling of emerging controversies, building an open dialogue, and dealing with interpersonal relationships strategically and professionally, and with strong leadership skills. Last, open communication norms, together with effective leadership and supervision skills, goal clarity and respect of diversity in personal opinions are listed as the most preferred means to prevent conflicts.
CHAPTER 7
DISCUSSION

This study contributes to existing conflict and conflict management research, by exploring the phenomenon of interpersonal conflicts in the public service environment. In particular, this study sheds light on the association between conflicts and conflict management with organizational performance and turnover intent, as well as the role of intervening contextual factors. Following the analysis of the research findings as presented in the previous chapter, this section provides a discussion of the importance and implications of the research results for the study of organizational behaviors and attitudes in the public sector environment.

The first part discusses the association between relationship and task conflicts, and conflict management with performance and turnover intent. The second part of this chapter discusses the role that contextual factors play on the relationship between cooperative conflict management and organizational performance and turnover intentions. The third part stresses the implications of the present study for research and theory, and lays out future research ideas. The last part discusses the study’s major limitations.

7.1 The Role of Organizational Conflicts and Conflict Management for Organizational Outcomes

The main hypotheses of this study were that organizational conflicts will be negatively associated with job-related outcomes, and that, conflict management, with an emphasis given on a cooperative approach, will lead to positive job outcomes owing to its role in mitigating the
destructive conflict aftermath. The study findings provide support to the negative association between relationship conflicts and performance, even though there was no observed relationship with turnover intentions. In other words, when relationship conflicts are developed, state HR professionals are more likely to report lower perceptions about their organization accomplishing its mission and providing high-quality results.

Overall, this finding corroborates with the majority of conflict studies emphasizing the negative repercussions of personal and emotional conflicts for interpersonal interactions, employee well-being, and employee outcomes (Barki and Hartwick 2004; DeDreu et al. 2004; Jehn and Bendersky 2003; Pondy 1967; Rahim 2011; Sonnetag, Unger and Nagel 2013; Spector and Bruke-Lee 2008; Wall and Callister 1995; Xin and Pelled 2003). The response patterns to the survey questions provide further support to these findings, as relationship conflicts are described as being the most detrimental. Particularly when unresolved, they are negatively associated, besides performance, with low employee morale, disrupted teamwork and group divisiveness.

In contrast to confirming the expectations for a negative role of relationship conflicts, the expectations for task conflicts are not confirmed, as there was no observed association with organizational performance, or turnover intentions. Thus, the findings provide support for the distinctive role that the two conflict types are undertaking in the organizational environment, as the controversies over how organizational tasks will be performed do not appear to be harmful to performance or turnover intent, by thus confirming existing scholarly arguments that these conflicts are not necessarily a negative or toxic workplace phenomenon (Jehn 1994; Bhat, Rangnekar, and Barua 2013; DeDreu et al. 2001; Shaw et al. 2011; Tjosvold 2008). Instead, task
conflicts can be beneficial for organizational operations, as they can increase productivity, improve decision-making, and boost creative thinking (Jehn 1995; Jehn 1997; DeDreu 2006). This finding further indicates that either task-related conflicts have become a more tolerated phenomenon, or that they have become part of the daily routine, to the extent that they do not threaten organizational operations (Guerra et al. 2005).

The lack of any association between interpersonal conflicts (either affective or task-related) and HR professionals’ turnover intentions, is an interesting finding, as eventually, interpersonal controversies may not be that harmful for working relationships. It appears that experiencing conflicts in the workplace might not consist in itself an adequate motivation for individuals to leave their job. When reviewing the study participants’ personal comments to the survey questions, they provide further support to this argument, as they do not indicate that conflicts are deleterious to the extent that HR professionals would consider quitting their job. They do mention though, that when extensive or unresolved, interpersonal conflicts can have a long-term impact on employee turnover. Further investigation of these findings is necessary, in order to shed more light on the conflict-turnover association.

Noteworthy is also the absence of an association between conflict management and the outcome variables. Neither a cooperative, nor a competitive conflict handling style, appear to be significantly associated with performance, or turnover intent. This unexpected finding runs counter to existing empirical studies emphasizing the positive role of conflict management in the organizational setting. Instead of completely eliminating conflicts, handling them, and particularly cooperatively, mitigates the destructive conflict consequences for job outcomes, by leading to higher satisfaction, perceptions of organizational justice and smooth execution of
The study participants’ personal input yields similar results. When asked about best conflict management practices, they stressed the importance of early detection and early handling of conflicts, together with professionalism, consistency and accountability, and effective leadership and supervision, whereas cooperative, or win-win attitudes were the least preferred. Considering that conflict management consists of an informal behavioral response and intervention tool to daily controversies (Garrett and Buntzman 1992; Rahim 2011; Somech, Desivilya, and Lidogoster 2009), a possible explanation is that the participating HR professionals have little expectations for a compromising or problem-solving approach as an effective response to organizational conflicts.

Indeed, some of the comments did reference the need for a third-party intervention, such as mediation, as a drastic way to protect organizational operations against conflicts. In practice, it could be that consulting a formal resolution mechanism, such as a department-wide established conflict resolution policy, would be a more viable solution for HR professionals. Such formal conflict resolution systems are typically more structured, binding, and they elicit the input of all parties involved (Mahony and Klaas 2014). Cho and Lewis (2012) explain that, when formal grievance policies are in effect, employees have more opportunities to voice their concerns, participate in the resolution of workplace issues, and prevent problems from aggravating. And, eventually, employees would be less likely to leave their organization.

On the contrary, the informal conflict management practices might prevent polarization of interpersonal differences (Purcell 2014), but whether they will be prioritized or not in daily
personnel management practices, will be largely determined by the prevailing organizational or department norms. The more supervisors perceive conflict management as a process that enhances team coherence, communication norms, and performance (De Dreu, Dierendonck, and Dijkstra 2004; Somech, Desivilya, and Lidogoster 2009), the more productive conflict handling will be.

The study respondents specifically mention that effective dealing of conflicts is contingent upon managerial or leadership skills in detecting personal controversies, maintaining an open dialogue between the parties involved, as well as maintaining confidentiality, transparency and consistency in their conflict approach. The respondents’ comments particularly highlight that open and honest communication norms are critical, not only for effective handling, but also for preventing conflicts from being created. The comments further indicate that when communication is based on trust, respect, employee involvement, and acknowledgment of diversity in viewpoints and cultures, dealing with conflicts effectively becomes a more attainable goal.

7.2 The Intervening Role of Contextual Factors

This study also explored the role of contextual factors, under the expectation that an organizational climate that fosters higher employee commitment, fairness perceptions and supportive relations with the personnel, will be more likely to encourage a problem-solving approach when handling conflicts (DeDreu and Gelfand 2008; Rahim 2011). However, the research findings did not confirm all expectations.

The findings show that the more state HR professionals are emotionally attached to their organization and experience fairness in their interpersonal interactions, they will be more likely
to report higher organizational performance perceptions. This finding agrees with past studies discussing about lower turnover intentions, higher productivity and overall positive work experiences, as beneficial organizational outcomes, stemming from higher perceived interactional justice (Ambrose and Schminke 2003; Kim 2008; Stecher and Rose 2005).

In respect to turnover intentions, though, the findings are not that straightforward. Affective commitment and POS appear to be positively associated with turnover intentions, a finding which runs counter both to the study expectations and literature findings. As a reflection of a sense of belonging and strong bond between employees and the organization, affective commitment has been studied as one of the most important predictors of lower turnover (Allen and Meyer 1990; Lambert and Hogan 2009; Meyer and Allen 1991; Meyer et al. 2002). Similarly, POS has been associated with lower withdrawal intentions and turnover behavior, among other outcomes (Eisenberger et al. 2001; Maertz et al. 2007; Shanock and Eisenberger 2006), as employees will reciprocate to the perceived support and favorable treatment from their organization, by expressing positive outcomes, as well as outcomes.

However, the study yields some interesting findings, as interactional justice and affective commitment appear to play an intervening role in the relationship between cooperative conflict management and the outcome variables. The perceived fairness in interpersonal relationships is positively associated with organizational performance, as it will help a cooperative management to buffer the negative conflict consequences. Nesbit, Nabatchi, and Bingham (2012), together with Budd and Colvin (2014) provide further support to this finding, by arguing that the positive feelings stemming from perceived interactional justice will become a valuable component to successfully handling conflicts. However, the negative sign of this relationship (cooperative
management when combined with interactional justice) indicates that, the more HR professionals express perceptions of interactional justice, the less important a cooperative approach toward conflicts will become for organizational performance.

Similarly, the study findings show that, when cooperative conflict management is combined with affective commitment, there is a significant, but negative association with turnover intentions. In other words, when being emotionally attached to their organization, adopting a cooperative approach for conflict management will reduce the likelihood of HR professionals expressing an intention to leave. Again, the negative sign of this relationship indicates that as affective commitment increases, cooperative conflict management will be less significant for reducing turnover intentions. This shows that, lower turnover intentions are more associated with employees’ having a strong membership with their organization (Meyer and Allen 1991; Meyer et al. 2002), rather than adopting a cooperative handling of conflicts.

Taken together, these study findings provide further support to a contingent nature of conflict management, by stressing that how effective or valuable conflict management becomes, it will largely depend on the organizational context (Beersma, Conlon, and Hollenbeck 2008; Behfar and Thompson 2007; DeDreu and Weingart 2003b; Grissom 2010; Jehn 1997; Rahim 2011). As shown by the study results, a cooperative conflict management by itself is not related to positive employee outcomes. Such as relationship is more likely to exist under the presence of interactional justice and affective commitment, even though its importance will decrease the more the organizational environment fosters strong and fair interpersonal relationships. Thus, HR professionals place more importance on a positive organizational environment, than a cooperative attitude toward workplace conflicts.
7.3 Conflict Perceptions and HR Professionals’ Demographics

Turning to respondents’ demographics, some of the findings yield interesting results. It appears that under an employment at-will system, state HR professionals will be more likely to report lower performance perceptions. This finding, though, runs counter to the main premise of at-will employment systems for positive employee outcomes, such as higher performance (Gossett 2003; Green et al. 2006; Nigro and Kelough 2000).

Scholars agree that at-will systems have had a fundamental impact on personnel practices (Coggburn et al. 2010; Condrey and Battaglio 2007), as, in view of achieving higher productivity, flexibility and managerial discretion over personnel management, at-will systems significantly limit employee rights by removing job protections, and eliminating grievance mechanisms and due process rights (Battaglio 2010; Coggburn et al. 2010; Green et al. 2006; Kim and Kellough 2014; Rubin and Weinberg 2016). A few studies that have explored the relationship between at-will employment and performance outcomes provide mixed results as to whether employment at-will employment will be related with positive performance outcomes (Battaglio 2010; Hijal-Moghrabi, Sabharwal, and Berman 2015). Thus, it might be that an insecure working environment is eventually disruptive, or even, detrimental for employee’s work experiences and their productivity (Battaglio 2010).

Under feelings of job insecurity, though, public employees might feel that openly engaging and dealing with conflicts could jeopardize their position. According to Brewer and Lam (2009), when employees feel their position being at stake, or being unprotected against arbitrary employment practices, their conflict management attitudes will be accordingly affected. In addition, it can be argued that, in fear of termination or other reprisal behaviors, individuals
might be more reluctant to openly disagree, voice their concerns and participate in conflict handling, particularly when their supervisors are also involved (Kaufman and Levine 2000). This could also provide an alternative explanation for the non-significant relationship between cooperative conflict handling and positive outcomes.

In addition, the present study shows that minority employees are more likely to report lower organizational performance, as they appear to be more prone to holding negative perceptions about their work experiences (Battaglio 2010; Choi and Rainey 2010), for instance, as a result of personal controversies. Race holds an important role in conflict research, as workplace heterogeneity has been identified in the past as a conflict antecedent, which challenges the smooth personnel relationships and influences conflict behaviors (Grissom 2010; Jehn 1995; Pelled, Eisenhardt and Xin 1999; Rainey 2009). More specifically, race heterogeneity has been often related with dysfunctional conflicts (DeDreu and Weingart 2003a; Philips and Thomas-Hunt 2007; Simons and Peterson 2000). Last, the results show that respondents’ tenure is a significant demographic characteristic. More experienced HR professionals will be more likely to report higher perceived organizational performance (Kim 2005a), whereas they are less likely to report an intention to quit their job (Cho and Lewis 2012; Chun and Rainey 2005; Lee and Jimenez 2011; Moynihan and Pandey 2008).

7.4 Implications for Theory and Practice

The present study contributes to public human resources management research, by taking a first step in the study of organizational conflicts in the public service context, a phenomenon that has been understudied, so far, in public administration literature. In agreement with existing research, the findings show the detrimental role of relationship conflicts and the value of positive
work experiences for beneficial employee outcomes. In addition to contributing to the conflict-performance relationship, this study extends existing research by investigating the conflict-turnover intentions relationship, which has not yet received much scholarly attention.

Given the absence of any observed linkage between turnover intentions and the main independent variables of this study, future research is required to identify additional factors to shed more light on the organizational conditions that affect those relationships. Taking into consideration the unique government setting and possible sector differences, it is essential to get an in-depth understanding of a construct that has been almost exclusively studied in the business literature. From a methodological standpoint, future research would also benefit from a qualitative research design, which is highly appropriate to the study of conflict phenomena and conflict-related behaviors. For instance, conducting in-depth interviews would better capture the nuances of conflict phenomena as developed and perceived within the government organizational setting, in ways that a survey instrument would be unable to offer.

Also, in spite of much scholarly work discussing about compromising, problem-solving and yielding, as highly effective conflict handling attitudes (Rahim 2002; Somech, Desivilya, and Lidogoster 2009), the present study shows that neither conflict management, nor a cooperative style in specific, are directly associated with positive employee outcomes. These results do not undermine the value of conflict management, as an integral HRM function. Rather, they emphasize the importance of a positive organizational context, which fosters strong and lasting relationships among the personnel (Hofstede et al. 1990), in maintaining positive organizational behaviors (DeDreu and Beersma 2005). Additional research is necessary to delineate the conditions that contribute to a positive linkage between HRM practices and
organizational outcomes (Rahim 2002; Rahim 2005), and would help further establish conflict management in public personnel management operations. Future studies can also extend this research beyond the 5-style conflict handling typologies, and explore the role of conflict management training, grievance policies, or even diversity management, that could affect the instances that conflict management is related with positive outcomes, or not.

Also, this study focuses on organizational justice, affective commitment and perceived organizational support (POS), as intervening contextual factors associated with beneficial employee outcomes. The results present some promising findings with respect to the role of interactional justice and affective commitment, but testing other potential mediators, such as leadership or organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), would greatly advance the conflict literature. Transformational leadership in particular, can significantly promote cooperative conflict handling attitudes, and ultimately, lead to greater productivity or better group outcomes (Tjosvold 2014; Zhang, Cao, and Tjosvold 2011).

From a managerial standpoint, the research findings offer some practical considerations for more effective HR management. The findings indicate that quality in interpersonal dealings matters for state HR professionals. Reid et al. (2008) specifically assert that delineating the conditions that help employees remain productive and minimize any withdrawal intentions, can significantly help public organizations successfully retain their personnel. To that end, identifying the nature of conflicts and discerning their destructive or functional elements should be a primary managerial consideration, when aiming at handing conflicts effectively and sustaining a productive working climate (Guerra et al. 2005; Jehn 1994; Rahim 2011). Openly confronting and engaging into a conflict-related discussion can be a challenging task, especially
for individuals being accustomed to a work culture where problems are not directly confronted and interpersonal controversies are ignored. The managerial role is to reinforce the most productive attitude toward the productive dealing with conflicts, for both the personnel and the organization (Tjosvold 2014).

Consistent with social exchange theory, the present study indicates that employees’ perceptions about the organizational context, will greatly influence their outcomes. The more employees feel that the organization is genuinely interested in their well-being, and promotes fairness in interpersonal interactions, the more they will reciprocate by more productive organizational behaviors (Brief and Weiss 2002; Jiang et al. 2012; Masterson et al. 2000; Ryan and Deci 2000). To the extent that public organizations are interested in building positive and productive relationships with their personnel, fostering an organizational climate, which employees feel that they are valued and they fairly treated, pertains to an inexpensive and effective way of maintaining positive employee outcomes, such as higher performance and employee retention.

7.5 Study Limitations

The limitations of the present study should be also mentioned. The non-probability sampling of state HR professionals pertains to a significant limitation as, together with the study’s low response rate, can introduce sampling bias, as the study participants are not representative of the population of state HR professionals (Dillman 2007; Lee, Benoit-Bryan, and Johnson 2012). The present study is limited to a small sample of state HR professionals, and besides the geographic dispersion of the study population, the low response rate limits the representativeness and generalizability of the study findings.
Also, the study findings are limited to the perceptions of state HR professionals. Their contribution, experience and insight in personnel management issues are certainly a valuable source of information about the organizational conditions prevailing in state agencies. In view of increasing the generalizability of the findings, future research could replicate this study with a larger, and more representative sample of upper-management public employees, and get a more complete picture of how public employees respond to conflicts and explore their conflict-related behaviors and outcomes.

Further, the survey design developed for this study does not capture specific supervisor-subordinate relationships or work-groups working relationships. Being able to conduct such research in the future would greatly give the opportunity to make comparisons based on employee’s working interactions and sharing of duties. Doing so, would help provide valuable information about the conflict dynamics and organizational impact, and compare the perceptions of supervisors and their immediate subordinates.

In addition, the cross-sectional design pertains to an important limitation, as the study is unable to capture the true dynamics of conflict (DeChurch and Marks 2001; Jehn 1995), and greatly restricts the discussion over the research findings to associations, rather than causal inferences about the observed relationships. Unlike a longitudinal study, cross-sectional data are unable to track any transformations of task conflicts to relationship ones, or vice verse. Also, cross-sectional studies greatly limit the researcher’s ability to make arguments about directionality in the observed relationships. For instance, the finding of a negative association between relationship conflict and organizational performance can be interpreted as relationship conflicts are leading to lower performance, whereas the direction of this relationships could be
the opposite, as the employees’ overall low perceptions about their organization’s performance (attributed to factors not observed in this study) and negative work experiences, are creating the fertile ground for conflicts to emerge.

Therefore, as conflicts are a dynamic and quickly evolving phenomenon (Herrman 2010), future longitudinal studies will be able to observe patterns in conflict outcomes and employee behaviors, and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the conflict implications for organizational life (DeChurch, Memser-Magnus and Dotty 2013). Also, they will not only be able to detect the conflict aftermath for the organizational norms, but also to make arguments about the directionality of the observed relationships with greater confidence in the research findings.

The use of self-reported measures to capture the work experiences and conflict-related behaviors of state HR professionals cause additional concerns. Despite that attitudinal measures are widely being used in conflict studies, as well as public management research, using perceptual data has been often criticized for not providing objective findings, and research being more prone to common method bias, as both the dependent and independent variables were measured by a single survey instrument (Meier and O’Toole 2013). However, no objective data were readily available for the constructs included in the present study.

In particular, the measurement of organizational performance has long been the subject of extensive scholarly discussion in public management scholarship (Kim 2005a; Schachter 2010), owing to the lack of objective performance measures similar to those found in the business literature, and the absence of scholarly consensus over the definition of performance (Boyne et al. 2005). Meier and O’Toole (2013) discourage researchers to use self-reported performance
measures as outcome variables, as they increase the likelihood of measurement error, and specifically common source bias; individuals will tend to overestimate or underestimate their own, or their organization’s, performance, and thus produce false results. The counter arguments mention that, in the absence of objective performance metrics, the use of subjective (perceptual) performance measures can be a reasonable alternative (Delaney and Huselid, 1996; Kim 2005a), and they can be used as equally accurate predictors of the organizational reality. Future studies should aim to develop more objective measures. Overall, owing to these limitations and challenges, the findings of the present study should be interpreted with great caution.

7.6 Conclusion

The present study integrated conflict and conflict management literature in order to explore the ways that interpersonal conflicts can influence organizational dynamics, and expand our understanding of the nuances of organizational conflicts, as perceived by a small sample of state HR professionals. Conflicts do not act in a vacuum, and depending on their nature (affective or task-related), there will be a distinctive association with work-related perceptions; relationship conflicts matter for the study participants, and they are associated with low perceptions of organizational performance. Still, though, more research is required to get an in-depth understanding of the various conflict facets within the public service environment.

It appears that conflict management is not a one-size-fits-all approach, as state HR professionals do not regard the handling of conflicts as an effective mechanism. From an HRM perspective, handling conflicts effectively is not only the result of conflict management, communication, or leadership skills, but also, it depends on the prevailing organizational norms and quality of interpersonal relationships. Even though managers do not have immediate and
direct control over the numerous sources of conflict, they can have control over the way that conflicts are handled within the limits of their jurisdiction, and, they can greatly contribute to the prevention of conflict. Furthermore, the study findings yield mixed evidence, as it appears that the study participants will value an organizational climate, which fosters strong bonds with the employees and fair interpersonal relationships. And within such an environment they will place more value on a cooperative approach to handling conflicts, even though to a lesser extent than expected.

As depicted in recent literature, both business and public management scholars have devoted considerable attention to the study of organizational attitudes and behaviors, and their associations with employee outcomes, such as performance, satisfaction, or turnover, among others. Given the criticisms of higher rigidity and formality of public personnel management practices, conflict management may not have been established yet as an essential component of public HRM practices. According to the literature findings, the proposed conflict management approaches serve more as a facilitation tool for managers when dealing with workplace disputes, rather than an actual remedy to the root causes of the problem.

The findings of the present study stress the need for public administration scholars and practitioners to further delve into the study of workplace conflicts, and provide more conclusive evidence about the implications for employee attitudes and behaviors. Also, investigating the conditions under which conflict management mitigates the harmful conflict aftermath and improves employee outcomes is an essential endeavor when trying to improve performance and retention in government organizations. To conclude, even though the impact of human resource management (HRM) practices continues to be the objective for a large body of research,
additional investigation is required to delineate the multiple mechanisms through which HRM practices affect employee attitudes and behaviors.
APPENDIX A

SURVEY INSTRUMENT

**Turnover Intentions**
I often think about quitting my job
I will be probably looking for a job during the next year

**Perceived Organizational Performance**
How effectively do you think that your agency is accomplishing its core mission?
How would you rate the overall quality of the job done by your work group?

**Organizational Conflict**
*Relationship conflict*
How much emotional conflict is there among members in your work unit?
How much tension is there among members in your work unit?
How much personality conflict is evident in your work unit?
How much friction is present in your work unit?

*Task conflict*
How much disagreement about opinions regarding the work being done is there in your work unit?
How much conflict about ideas is there among people in your work unit?
How much conflict about the work you do is there in your work unit?
How many opinion differences are there in your work unit?

**Conflict Management**
[When I have a conflict at work, I do the following:]
*Yielding*
I give in to the wishes of the other party
I concur with the other party
I try to accommodate the other party
I adapt to the other party’s goals and interests
Compromising
I try to realize a middle-of-the road solution
I emphasize that we have to find a compromise solution
I insist we both give in a little
I strive whenever possible towards a fifty-fifty compromise

Forcing
I push my own point of view
I search for gains
I fight for a good outcome for myself
I do everything to win

Problem-solving
I examine issues until I find a solution that really satisfies me and the other party
I stand for my own and other’s goals and interests
I examine ideas from both sides to find a mutually optimal solution
I work out a solution that serves my own as well as other’s interests as good as possible

Avoiding
I avoid a confrontation about our differences
I avoid differences of opinion as much as possible
I try to make differences look less severe
I try to avoid a confrontation with the other party

Affective Commitment
I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with my current organization
I enjoy discussing my organization’s problems outside it
I really feel as if the organization’s problems are of my own
I think that I could easily become as attached to another organization as I am to this one
I do not feel like ‘part of the family’ at my organization
I do not feel ‘emotionally attached’ to my organization
This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me
I do not feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization (R)

Perceived Organizational Support (POS)
My organization values my contribution to its well-being
My organization fails to appreciate any extra effort from me
My organization would ignore any complaint from me
My organization really cares about my well-being
Even if I did the best possible job, my organization would fail to notice
My organization cares about my general satisfaction at work
My organization shows very little concern for me
My organization takes pride in my accomplishments at work

**Organizational Justice**

*Interactional Justice*
My supervisor treats me in a polite manner
My supervisor treats me with dignity
My supervisor treats me with respect
My supervisor has refrained from improper remarks or comments

*Procedural Justice*
I am able to express my views and feelings during the organizational decision-making processes
I can influence the decisions arrived at by the organizational decision-making processes
The organizational decision-making processes are consistently applied
The organizational decision-making processes are free of bias
The organizational decision-making processes are based on accurate information
I am able to appeal the decisions arrived at by the organizational decision-making processes
The organizational decision-making processes uphold ethical and moral standards

**Open-ended Questions**
1. In what can conflicts hurt the organizational environment?
2. What needs to be improved in the ways that conflicts are being dealt with in your department?
3. How can workplace conflicts be best prevented?

**Demographic Questions**
1. What is your gender?
   a. Male
   b. Female
2. What is your age?
   a. 24 or younger
   b. 25 – 34
   c. 35 – 44
   d. 45 – 54
   e. 55 – 64
   f. 65 or older
3. What is your highest level of educational attainment?
   a. High school diploma
   b. 2-year college degree
   c. Other professional certificate
   d. Bachelor’s degree
   e. Master’s degree
   f. Doctorate degree

4. What is your race/ethnicity?
   a. White
   b. Hispanic or Latino
   c. Black or African American
   d. Native American or American Indian
   e. Asian / Pacific
   f. Other (please specify):

5. Is your position covered under a:
   a. Civil service system (for example, classified)
   b. “At-will” system (for example, unclassified)

6. Your current position is:
   a. Supervisory
   b. Non-supervisory

7. Your current position is covered under a:
   a. Civil service system (for example, classified)
   b. “At-will” system (for example, unclassified)

8. How many years have you been in your current position?
   a. Less than 1 year
   b. 1-5 years
   c. 6-10 years
   d. 11-15 years
   e. 16 years or more
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