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# Conflict Resolution Strategies Used by Civilian Small Business Managers on Military Bases

Tavarus James Dunbar  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Tavarus Dunbar

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Review Committee

Dr. Kelly Chermack, Committee Chairperson, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Dr. Patsy Kasen, Committee Member, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Dr. Julia East, University Reviewer, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Chief Academic Officer  
Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

Walden University  
2018

Abstract

Conflict Resolution Strategies Used by Civilian Small Business Managers on Military

Bases

by

Tavarus James Dunbar

MBA, University of Phoenix, 2007

BS, University of Phoenix, 2005

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

April 2018

## Abstract

Unresolved conflict is responsible for at least 50% of resignations in the workplace, which negatively affects an organization's reputation and profitability. Although there has been ample research on the link between conflict resolution and leadership, there was limited research on conflict aboard military installations specifically. The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore conflict resolution strategies of civilian small business managers who work on a military installation in Southern Arizona. The theory of realistic conflict, or realistic group conflict theory, was used as the conceptual framework for this study. The data collection process involved semistructured interviews of 11 managers selected from 4 different civilian small businesses via purposive sampling along with company documents and public information found on the Internet containing conflict resolution processes within the organization. Transcribed interviews were coded and analyzed using software to help generate emergent themes. Yin's comprehensive data analysis method of compiling, assembling and disassembling, interpreting, and making conclusions resulted in the emergence of 3 themes: effective communication, situational leadership, and organizational culture. The results from this study may help business leaders identify strategies for resolving conflict, as well as recognize issues beforehand, mitigating conflict before it develops. This study has implications for positive social change, in that potential outcome of reduced conflict may lead to more organizational productivity and increase the revenue stream that is input into base programs for military members, their families, and other government employees, subsequently improving their quality of life.

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## Dedication

This study is in dedication to my children and family, in hopes that this serves as an example for them; knowing that one day, they could also accomplish this feat. I would also like to dedicate this to both of my grandmother's, both that are now part of heaven's angels. I know they were looking over me and sending their blessings down. To my children, Deuce and Nina, know that you were my main inspiration during the course of this journey and will always be my inspiration to endure whenever there is reservation.

## Acknowledgments

First and foremost I would like to thank God for blessing me with the will, courage, and endurance, which sustained me throughout my journey. When times were tough, faith is what kept my heart and mind at ease.

A special thank you to my wife and best friend, Janetta, for being patient throughout this entire process. Thank you for all the words of encouragement and for being my council when I needed someone to give me some candid advice. Also, allowing me the time to work on my projects while playing the role as the Mom and Dad at times. Without your support, this milestone in my life would have never come to fruition.

To Dr. Chermack, thank you for the countless conversations we had about my study and edging me on to stay with it. Dr. Kasen and Dr East, I also appreciate the guidance that you also gave me throughout this journey. I would like to thank all the managers who participated in my research. The willingness to share your journeys with me was inspirational and I am grateful for your honesty. I hope that the results from the research will help businesses aboard military installations manage employee conflict within their organizations.

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

While every business deals with some form of conflict, businesses on a military base (also referred to as *military installations* or *installations*) may face unique challenges on conflict. According to the base commander at one military installation, civilian-run businesses on a military base have the pressure not only to be profitable but an obligation to its patrons to provide quality services competitive with businesses outside the installation. In effect, businesses aboard installations face dual challenges: profitability and competition inside and outside the base. In addition to this competitive market, according to one base commander, business on installations also must abide by specific rules and regulations that are levied by the installation, all while giving a percentage of their profits back to the installation. The goal of this qualitative case study was to explore how small business managers on military installations handle conflict issues in the workplace.

### **Background of the Problem**

Under any leadership, conflict is inevitable. Employee conflict not only affects the organization, but the individuals within the organization (Hills, 2016); 50% of resignations in the workplace occur due to unmanaged employee conflict (Katz & Flynn, 2013). Unmanaged employee conflict distorts the entire dynamic within the workplace and ultimately creates an atmosphere that negatively affects productivity (Russell, 2013). Failure to adequately address workplace conflict may result in diminished corporate productivity (Russell, 2013).

If employee conflict is not dealt with properly by managers, it can have unintended consequences such as hostility, violence, and the destruction of relationships. Managers spend 38% of their work time resolving employee conflict (Katz & Flynn, 2013). Workplace conflict that is left unmanaged may have an effect on the productivity of the workforce and negatively affect an organization financially (Singleton, Toombs, Taneja, Larkin, & Pryor, 2011). Although there has been ample research conducted on the link between conflict resolution and leadership (e.g., Liu, Yang, & Nauta, 2013), there has been no scholarly research conducted on the conflict resolution strategies of managers aboard military installations and how these strategies may affect productivity.

### **Problem Statement**

Managers are often unaware of the negative impact that employee conflict has on the productivity and performance within the workplace—likewise there is little awareness about resolution skills to alleviate conflict in the workplace (Katz & Flynn, 2013). Twenty percent of employees experienced conflict in the workplace, and 12% of those employees reported a decrease in work productivity (Enehaug, Helmersen, & Mamelund, 2016). The general business problem was that some civilian small business managers are unable to manage employee conflict, which results in a loss of employee productivity. The specific business problem was that some civilian small business managers lack strategies to reduce employee conflict.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study was to explore the strategies civilian small business managers use to reduce employee conflict. The target population

consisted of civilian small business managers from four different businesses who work on military installations in Southern Arizona and who have experience implementing strategies to reduce conflict. This research on civilian small business managers' conflict resolution strategies in the workplace may help identify methods for improving conflict management skills for civilian small business leaders, subsequently improving profitability and productivity, as well as reducing conflict among employees. One potential positive social outcome is that increasing the profits made by civilian small businesses on military bases through less conflict and more cooperation may also increase the financial contributions reverted into military programs and other base resources (e.g., counseling services, wellness programs, and other quality of life programs for service members). Because bases operate partially on the success of base businesses, when the business are successful, the quality of life and programs for service members also has the potential to increase.

### **Nature of the Study**

There are three methods for conducting research: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed. To conduct this study, I chose the qualitative approach. The qualitative method is a means for researchers to conduct in-depth research on everyday life in the environment in which they have an interest; and it also allows researchers to represent the viewpoints of their participants (Goldman & Waymer, 2014). A quantitative study is one where researchers measure relationships between variables (Hoare & Hoe, 2013). Quantitative researchers also focus on trends and correlations in datasets (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Therefore, the quantitative methodology was not appropriate for this study focused on

exploring participants' use of strategies. Mixed methodology combines both the qualitative and quantitative methods to help enhance and quantify the phenomenon (Pluye & Hong, 2014). The mixed methods approach was not appropriate for this research because I did not plan on quantifying variables or using any of the design methods of quantitative methodology. As I described, the qualitative method allows researchers to make interpretations of what they observe, understand, and conceptualize a problem from their research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011); therefore, the qualitative method was best suited for my study.

Within the qualitative method, there are several designs that are appropriate for social science research. For this study, I chose a qualitative, multiple case study. An ethnographic design focuses on the beliefs of a group of people and their culture from a historical setting (Vesa & Vaara, 2014). In this research, I did not focus on the culture of a group from an extended historical standpoint, therefore ethnography was not appropriate for this study. Content analysis occurs when researchers use documents and other artifacts as their data to describe trends in studies (Celik, 2013). Content analysis was not appropriate for this study because this study did not focus on analyzing only company artifacts. A phenomenological design is focused on the lived experiences of participants (Moustakas, 1994), and was not appropriate for my study.

A case study allows the researcher to study a complex phenomenon in multiple applied settings (Yin, 2014). A multiple case study design, specifically, can be used to capture information firsthand rather than being limited to response options on a survey (e.g., Lindsay, Ashill, Roxas, & Victorio, 2014). Because I focused on the participant's

strategies for dealing with conflict management in multiple business settings, a multiple case study design was more appropriate for this research than a phenomenological design.

### **Research Question**

In this study, the central research question is: What strategies do civilian small business managers use to reduce employee conflict?

### **Interview Questions**

1. Based on your experience, how prevalent is workplace conflict in your organization?
2. What strategies have you used to manage employee-related conflict?
3. What strategies do you find work best to manage employee-related conflict?
4. How did your employees respond to your conflict resolution strategies?
5. What strategies are most valuable when resolving conflict in your workplace?
6. What are some of the outcomes you have experienced when you are able to implement conflict resolution strategies?
7. What else would you like to add regarding conflict resolution skills that civilian small business managers use to improve employee productivity?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework that I used in this study was the theory of realistic conflict (TRC), also known as the realistic group conflict theory (RGCT). RGCT was developed by Campbell (1965), and it was later extended by Sherif in 1966 (Jackson, 1993). Key constructs or propositions essential to the theory, are (a) perceived threats or



perceived conflict, (b) conflict of interest, (c) hostility (the greater the value of the goal, the greater the hostility), (d) solidarity (people seem to form teams and groups which make outsiders the enemy), (e) diversity, and (f) favoritism. Researchers (e.g., Brief et al., 2005; Campbell, 1965; Echebarria-Echabe & Guede, 2003; Jackson, 1993) used RGCT to help explain how hostility arises between groups of employees or individuals with similar qualities. The RGCT may help to identify conflict resolution skills that civilian small business managers use on a military installation. In addition, it may also help to explain why some strategies are effective when implemented in this setting.

As applied to this doctoral study, the RGCT implies that negative interdependence and competition is a major factor in social conflict and prejudice within the workplace. In the context of this study, individuals within the company may begin working toward a mutual goal, but conflict may develop as individuals focus on their individual goals, potentially diminishing employee productivity (see Jackson, 1993). Conflict is a detriment to a positive and productive workplace. The key constructs illustrated above outline the difficult position managers must navigate when attempting to maintain a harmonious environment for their employees. A solution to conflict can only arise from understanding the origins of said constructs. If managers are aware of contexts and characteristics of the work environment where conflict is likely, they can create strategies to mitigate those factors. Therefore, recognizing opportunities for leaders to develop or expand their conflict resolution strategies could ultimately help to reduce conflict in the workplace.

## **Operational Definitions**

*Sustainability*: Sustainability occurs when an organization incorporates economic, environmental, and social strategies to make their business thrive (Strand, 2014).

*Workplace conflict*: Hostile interaction between that is perceived as negative by one or more persons of an organization or entity (Singleton et al., 2011).

## **Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

### **Assumptions**

An assumption is a belief that a researcher has about the population, sample, or methodology; however, it is not a fact, and therefore its implications are not always apparent (Rasmusen, 2014). Assumptions allow researchers to make important decisions about ideas that they could use for potential breakthroughs in research (Connell, 2013). I conducted this research with the following assumptions.

I assumed that the information gleaned from managers in this study is unique to the U.S. Military population. Participant responses would likely be different if this study were to be conducted using military installations overseas because their leadership may include a mix of U.S. personnel and local foreign nationals. I also assumed that conflict on military bases is normal and inevitable, as is the case in most work environments (see Russell, 2013). I also assumed that the culture of being on a military base is different from businesses outside the base; subsequently, the study would help identify opportunities to enhance existing conflict strategies for businesses aboard military bases.

I assumed that managers are in a position to adequately evaluate the success of their conflict management strategies within the workplace. I also assumed that

interviewing managers who have been working in their position for a minimum period of 6 months would allow them to have explored different conflict resolution skills. I also assumed that participants were truthful in their responses, and that a qualitative, multiple case study, using face-to-face interviews, was the best approach to gather the data needed to answer the research question.

### **Limitations**

Limitations are unmanageable threats to the validity of a study; they are variables that pose weaknesses and subsequently limits the findings of the study (Brutus, Aguinis, & Wassmer, 2013). Limitations often mean that the results of qualitative studies are not transferable and that, if conducted under different circumstances, could affect the transferability of the results (Kong, Dirks, & Ferrin, 2014). Researchers should include limitations in their studies because it could have an impact on the interpretations of the results of the study (Hajli, 2014).

Because this study includes civilian small businesses on a military installation, it will not be transferrable outside the industry. This study is limited to only participants who have held management positions and does not include the perspectives of employees; therefore, these data and results are not applicable to the experiences of employees or their perceptions of effectiveness of these strategies. Because the study was strictly voluntary, and some managers may not have participated, the level of experience and knowledge by the managers who did participate may not include a broad perspective of conflict management and resolution.

## **Delimitations**

Delimitations are the bounds of the study that are within the control of the researcher (Bilbo, Bigelow, Escamilla, & Lockwood, 2014). Delimitations for this study included location and sample population. Delimitations narrow the scope of the study allow researchers to focus on the problem (Svensson & Dumas, 2013). The population for this study was civilian small business managers who have worked for at least 6 months in one of several businesses that have been in existence for at least 5 years on a military installation in Southern Arizona. Businesses comprising these managers would have to be conducting business on the installation.

## **Significance of the Study**

The U.S. military is part of the Department of Defense, which has more than 5,000 locations around the world and comprises more than 30 million acres of land (U.S. Department of Defense, 2017). Military installations contribute to the economic stability of some regions. The businesses on military installations generate revenue for the base (Schunk, 2004) as well as contribute to social change in the community. It is, therefore, important to understand how these businesses operate and thrive and to explore the unique conditions and challenges these installations provide. The results from this study may help business managers aboard military installations to further refine their strategies used to manage employee conflict in the workplace. Reduced conflict may increase productivity and performance (Enehaug et al., 2016).

### **Contribution to Business Practice**

Proactive business leaders develop training that provides employees with tools to handle situations involving conflict (Lipsky & Avgar, 2010). If managers can improve their strategies to reduce conflict, they may focus more on improving employee productivity, which is mutually beneficial to both the business and its stakeholders. In addition, knowledge of effective strategies for reducing conflict may help military installation businesses to focus their efforts further on implementing strategies to reduce conflict, perhaps even before conflict arises, and avoid the time and costs associated with conflict and conflict resolution (see Enehaug et al., 2016).

### **Implications for Social Change**

Positive social change occurs at various levels (e.g., individuals, neighborhoods, societies, communities, organizations, cultures) and involves a change that may produce a positive tangible and intangible outcome. On a military base, a portion of the installation businesses' profits is invested directly into military programs that support service members living aboard the base. These services consist of counseling services, wellness programs, and other quality of life programs for service members. Increasing the productivity and performance of these businesses, a potential outcome of reduced conflict (see Enehaug et al., 2016), may increase the revenue stream that is input into these programs and may subsequently help improve the quality of life for individuals living and working on the base.

In addition, Ibrahim Al-Shuaibi, Shamsudin, and Aziz (2016) posited that employees who have a healthy state of mind can contribute to the success of an

organization. Businesses with a high level of morale within their organization have employees with positive attitudes will perpetuate a healthy environment for both the business and the community (Hussein & Goel, 2016). Therefore, reducing conflict in the workplace may create a more positive working environment for civilian employees for individuals working on the base.

## **A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature**

### **Overview of the Literature Review**

The purpose of this study was to investigate strategies managers use to manage employee conflict in the workplace. I conducted a review of the literature to examine previous research and findings on conflict management conducted in the areas of causes/origins of conflict, leadership, organizational culture, training effectiveness, resolution strategies, and influences on the organization. The literature that I have reviewed will provide common subjects that former researchers have considered and used in their work. A conceptual framework is the link between a research study and existing literature that can offer an explanation of a phenomenon (Borrego, Foster, & Froyd, 2014; Brouwer, Faramarzi, & Hoogendoorn, 2014). I organized the literature by discussing the conceptual framework, followed by an examination of conflict, the negative effects of conflict, and organizational culture. I conclude with common methodological approaches to conflict.

I used peer-reviewed articles, scholarly journals, books, commercial and government websites, and doctoral dissertations in order to gather information that would be needed to conduct an extensive examination of the literature on my topic. I searched

for scholarly journals using Google Scholar, and the Walden University Library databases to include EBSCOHost, Emerald Insight, Sage Journals, ProQuest, and ProQuest Dissertations and Theses to write the literature review. I used the primary search terms to find literature for conflict resolution in the workplace multigenerational values and characteristics included *conflict*, *conflict management*, *conflict resolution*, *strategies*, *workplace violence*, *workplace conflict*, *organizational conflict*, *leading conflict*, *conflict theories*, *origins of conflict*, *types of conflict*, *conflict education and training*, and *affects of conflict*. Eighty-six percent of the sources in my literature review are from within 5 years of Walden University's Chief Academic Officer expected approval date and 87% of the total sources that I have included are peer-reviewed. See Table 1 for the complete description of the number of sources and percentages. Furthermore, 88% of the total 261 references cited in this doctoral study has a publication date of less than 5 years old and 85% of the total 261 references are peer reviewed.

Table 1

*Literature Review Sources*

Resources	References (within last 5 years)	References older than 5 years	Total
Peer-reviewed Articles	79	8	87
Not peer-reviewed	7	6	13

**Conceptual Framework**

RGCT explains how conflict amongst groups or individuals develops (Campbell, 1965). This theory, as Campbell suggested, is based on the idea that groups or individuals

within an organization compete for symbolic resources such as promotions, which may ultimately lead to prejudice and discrimination (e.g., Campbell, 1965). RGCT is also regarded as one of the prevailing theories that explain group conflict (Jackson, 1993).

RGCT states that conflict within organizations occurs because of the diversity within an organization, and because of the competition of a symbolic resource (e.g., Brief et al., 2005). Brief and colleagues posited that individuals or groups within an organization had preconceived notions about groups different from their own. In a study that they conducted, they found that the majority group reacted negatively toward a diverse population. The majority group also had adverse perceptions about working for organizations that supported diversity, and finally, when the proximity of one group to the other increases, there is an increase in negative attitudes, relationships, and perceptions (Brief et al., 2005).

Researchers (e.g., Jackson, 1993) have indicated that RGCT may be able to explain how group hostility can be managed. Some individuals feel they are entitled to resources that others want, and prejudices develop because they feel that they have earned their right, therefore, rejecting other's consideration to those resources (Jackson, 1993). Conflict may arise if an individual or group's status, resources, identity, or interests are threatened. Jackson (1993) postulated that, in order to reduce conflict between two or more groups, the groups must have goals that cannot be accomplished by a single group alone; these goals are defined as superordinate goals. These types of goals force conflicting groups to mitigate their differences and work together, thereby, reducing conflict.



Sherif expounded upon RGCT, positing that conflict could be explained using a social and psychological explanation that could be used in everyday life (Sherif 1966, as cited in Jackson, 1993). Sherif conducted a study to assess RGCT in a youth camp with two groups of boys aged 11 and 12 (as cited in Jackson, 1993). Each group bonded with each other and identified with their group. When there was intergroup competition, conflict was high amongst both groups since they were both trying to win. When someone that was high ranking tried to manage the conflict on his own between the groups, he was exiled and called a traitor. When the groups were given a superordinate goal, as RGCT indicated, they worked well with one another to accomplish the mission; however, hostilities grew after attaining the single superordinate goal (Sherif 1966, as cited in Jackson, 1993). These occasions supported the postulates of RGCT.

Many researchers have tried to analyze the psychology of group conflict; however, Campbell (1965) suggested that the origin of conflict is social rather psychological. Therefore, not siding with the psychological explanation, Campbell posited that the RGCT could offer a logical explanation for why there is conflict within a group. RGCT assumes that conflict is a natural occurrence when groups have goals that are clashing and when the group competes for a limited amount of resources (Campbell, 1965).

Conflict is much higher when the goals that the parties value is high. Individuals or groups who may benefit the most are those that experience conflict of this nature. Conflict is developed as a result of an individual or group that is emerging as a threat to another individual or group. When there is negativity that externally affects a group, the

group becomes more unified as well as prejudice toward the other group (Brief et al., 2005). RGCT assumes that individuals seek revenge on those that leave to be part of another group (Fowler, 2013). Individuals or groups create enemies, even fictitious ones so that they can be more unified.

Competition is one of the key reasons that conflict within a group emerges. According to Echebarria-Echabe and Guede (2003), competition can cause discrimination and favoritism from the same source. They also sought to determine whether RGCT research could be extended by examining conflict between groups of a single organization where the competition was induced by the leader of the organization or a third party. However, conflict levels remained the same regardless of whether a third party had induced competition or not. Results from their study showed that conflict due to competition resided amongst groups with different levels of status/prestige. Also, results from their study showed that when resources have been taken from individuals or groups that are in competition, negative shifts in attitudes and behaviors is created (Echebarria-Echabe & Guede, 2003).

Zarate, Garcia, Garza, and Hitlan (2004) used quantitative methods to evaluate the perceptions of individuals within their group as it relates to conflict. They used similar surveys that were worded differently to question two groups of participants. The answers, when evaluated, should have been similar, but because the wording made participants reflect on distinctive examples from the past, their answers were dissimilar. The researchers used interpersonal and work related traits to rate both groups, and this method of research provided the researchers a strong case for their predictions.

Personal and social similarities are not perceived as big of a threat as the similarities with work related characteristics or other economic roles (Zarate et al., 2004). RGCT shows that conflict between different parties could be due to the perceptions regarding the type of similarities they share. Zarate et al. (2004) conducted research on intergroup similarity, which considered the value of the similarities shared with the outgroup; some similarities may mitigate conflict, whereas other similarities may be perceived as a real threat. The research conducted by Zarate et al. (2004) supported the predictions of RGCT because participants of the study felt there were differences with the outgroup and also felt a sense of threat relating to work; subsequently, they were prejudiced against the outgroup. The perception of the intergroup toward the outgroup in this sense would be considered biased because of their differences.

Conflict could stem from persons or groups competing for the same goals or resources. According to RGCT, individuals have conflict with others in their organization because they have competing or conflicting goals, which are possibly obtaining the same social status or reputation as others or getting the same job position/promotion/raise, hence the competition over limited resources. In summary, RGCT explains how conflict is developed between two or more groups because of their desire to achieve or attain something that the other is competing for; it also gives an explanation for a group or individual's perception of the conflict that is realized (Fowler, 2013).

### **Conflict**

**Types.** There are several different types of conflict, but conflict, in general, sometimes stems from people assuming that they understand what someone else wants or

needs, and therefore a miscommunication arises. Conflict is inevitable in the workplace and a solution to quell conflict is to improve relationships and communication amongst individuals within an organization (Singleton et al., 2011). Conflict could be considered either dysfunctional or functional, and while inevitable, conflict could be positive since it offers a way of understanding another's perspective (Russell, 2013). For conflict to be healthy, conflict must be managed (Singleton et al., 2011).

Knowing the different types of conflicts and management styles may be meaningless if managers do not understand the different phases of conflict. According to Havenga and Visagie (2011), these phases are discomfort, incident, misunderstanding, tension, and crisis. Discomfort is when someone has a gut feeling that something seems out of place, which may lead to an incident occurring. A misunderstanding occurs when the incident is not communicated and perceived as aggressive. Tension is caused by the misunderstanding, which inevitably results in crisis or conflict escalation (Havenga & Visagie, 2011).

There are several types of conflict that may arise in the workplace, including task, process, and relationship conflict (O'Neill, Allen, & Hastings., 2013). These types of conflict encompass situations where individuals have issues with one another and with how and what work should be accomplished in the workplace. These types of conflict can negatively affect a team's productivity and creativity because of anxiety, fear, and the perception of prejudice amongst different groups (O'Neill et al., 2013). Process, task, and relationship conflict also perpetuate competitive and avoiding behaviors (O'Neill et al.,

2013). Relationship conflict is sometimes referred to as emotional or affective conflict (Meier, Gross, Spector, & Semmer, 2013).

Mood theory suggests that the moods of employees affect their behavior and the type of interactions they have with people. This is believed to be an antecedent in relationship conflict (Ismail, Richard, & Taylor, 2012). Individuals experiencing relationship conflict may use a dominating or avoiding approach as a response; however, an obliging style is believed to be more effective (Alok, Raveertdran, & Prasuna, 2014). In some cases, relationship conflict has a positive effect on organizational performance and a negative effect on team building. Neuman and Avgar (2013) suggested that relationship conflict causes individuals to seek counsel and camaraderie from those outside of their social circle.

Task conflict occurs when individuals have a difference of opinion regarding a particular task that is assigned (Loughry & Amason, 2014). Task conflict could be deemed positive because it helps to stimulate creative and constructive methods to accomplish objectives (Ismail et al., 2012). In contrast, task conflict may negatively affect a group's performance in a group task because of the clash of different views (Arazy, Yeo, & Nov, 2013). However, in a positive manner, task conflict in a group is what brings about the most discursive work (Arazy et al., 2013). Unlike process or relationship conflict, conflict stemming from a task will create unity rather than division (Neuman & Avgar, 2013); this is not to say, however, that task conflict does not create some division between individuals. Conflict surrounding a task that has been taken personally by someone ends up becoming relationship conflict (Meier et al., 2013).

Process conflict is when individuals have a disagreement about how a task that is to be accomplished (i.e., procedures, responsibilities, and resources (e.g., Arazy et al., 2013). Process conflict is reasoned to be a by-product of relationship conflict. Individuals that have conflict with the process of a task more than likely have a problem with other individuals included in the task (Avgar, Kyung Lee, & Chung, 2014). For example, an employee may feel that the role within the task that they have to perform is beneath them and therefore, this notion has personal connotations attached to it.

**Positive.** The conflict surrounding different perspectives can be harnessed and used for the betterment of the organization. Managers must use competing ideas to evaluate and identify gaps that may be overlooked to develop an optimal decision that will benefit all stakeholders (O'Neill et al., 2013). Conflict could be positive within an organization, but it takes individuals who understand and know how to manipulate the situation for the business (Katz & Flynn, 2013).

Conflict is natural and is important in the human learning evolution (Russell, 2013). Individuals have to communicate with one another about misunderstandings; after effective communication has taken place, people then adopt behaviors that will lead to less resistance and more creativity and collaboration in the future. Part of functional conflict is allowing individuals to offer their perspective, which is derivative of their experiences, values, analysis, and facts that they have discovered (Martínez-Moreno, Zornoza, Orengo, & Thompson, 2015).

**Origins/causes.** Conflict within the workplace stems from a variety of factors. Some include competition, clashing values and beliefs, goals that are not consistent with

the organization's goals, monetary, generational differences, ineffective leadership styles, change, the scope of work, and poor communication (e.g., Havenga & Visagie, 2011). Nuzulia and Utami (2014) posited that the majority of conflict stems from personality clashes, stress level, and the workload that they are facing. Conflict may manifest itself differently in different organizations coupled with leadership and individual characteristics.

Conflict within an organization could stem from any of the four areas: within the hierarchy, between different departments or branches, amongst the managers and leaders of the different departments, and lastly, interpersonal conflict (Nuzulia & Utami, 2014). Pondy (1967) developed a framework for the evolution of conflict that begins with the underlying conditions of the conflict, how the conflict is perceived, how someone is affected by it, its manifestation, and its repercussions (as cited in Winsor, Manolis, Kaufmann, & Kashyap, 2012). In the workplace, conflict may develop from the task itself or the relationship of its group members. In a study, researchers found a positive correlation between the length of time a team works together and harmful conflict (O'Neill et al., 2013). Meaning that, over time, as group makeup and functions remain unchanged, their relationships may falter as a consequence. If trust is not established amongst each person within a team, a disagreement or clash of ideas is likely, which triggers an emotional response. This emotional response, in turn, stimulates a retaliatory response, subsequently generating a conflicting environment (Simpao, 2013). If management heeds the emotional state of their employees, they may have a better chance at reducing conflict before it escalates (Demirbag, Findikli, & Yozgat, 2016).

Workplace stress, as a precursor of conflict, has a negative effect on employees in the workplace (Bennett, 2013). There are multiple stressors that people deal with such as job security, excessive workloads, work and family balance, and money. These stressors add to the frustration of work that puts an emotional strain, subsequently leading to hostility and conflict at work (Anita, Xu, & Frazier, 2013). Individual and organizational conflict occurs because of the deprived work relationships, human nature, and other external factors that support and retains a state of conflict within the organization (Gostin, Negoita, & Purcarea, 2012). Conflict develops as two parties have a disagreement or when they compete with one another to keep them from attaining their goals (Zia & Syed, 2013). Conflict between departments, between employees and management, and amongst employees is usually caused by inequalities that have lingered in the workplace (Gostin et al., 2012). Conflict should be dealt with on a case by case basis and should be analyzed initially to determine the severity or the cause of it because without determining the root could result in a failure in resolving the issue altogether (Zia & Syed, 2013).

***Interpersonal.*** Several interpersonal factors may also lead to workplace conflict. These factors include jealousy, competition, and attitudes (Ciby & Raya, 2014). Because humans are social actors, communication will always be necessary. The reception of communication is not always as intended, resulting in interpersonal conflict (Jaramillo, Mulki, & Boles, 2011, p. 342). Conflict causes individuals to either confide with individuals or groups they would not normally because they want to find someone that they feel shares in the same ideals or they gain closer relations with members of their own team to create more of a bond (Neuman & Avgar, 2013).



When individuals within an organization are singled out for personal reasons, this leads to bullying or exile and has negative implications for an organization. Bullying is when offensive conduct is committed against another that includes, intimidating others, degrading others, or abusing others (Gilbert, Raffo, & Sutarso, 2013). Thirty-five percent of the workforce reported either psychological or physical abuse concerning bullying in the workplace (Gilbert et al., 2013). This type of psychological abuse negatively affects the work performance and is the most reported cause of workplace stress (Cohen, Panter, & Turan, 2013). Such conflict in the workplace will negatively affect the individuals of the organization by hurting individual's feelings, causing treachery, and unfaithfulness (Katz & Flynn, 2013). Some individuals perpetuate conflict with their arrogant and independent mannerism because it causes psychological stress on others, subsequently leading to bullying, which directly correlates with conflict (Hassan, Maqsood, & Riaz, 2011).

Management styles can often be an antecedent of bullying in the workplace. In the workplace this may come in the form of giving unfair criticism or credit, showing favoritism, unprofessional interactions with others, and unrealistic expectations (e.g., Ciby & Raya, 2014). Bullying has an adverse effect on the organization. If employees feel that managers do not have their best interest in mind and do not value their beliefs, employee turnover and unproductiveness will result (Ciby & Raya, 2014). Listening to employees and showing them that their ideas and beliefs are being heard will increase morale and decrease divergence (McClean, Burris, & Detert, 2013). The perception of unfair management styles and actions may also cause conflict within an organization.

Observed unethical practices may create confusion and an uncomfortable atmosphere (Ciby & Raya, 2014).

***Generational/gender/cultural.*** Conflict in the workplace may stem from generational differences. Generational differences in an organization can create a space for conflict if not managed appropriately (Penney, 2011). The multiple generations that can be found in the workplace include veterans who were born before 1945, baby boomers born between 1945-1964, Generation X born between 1965-1979, and millennial born between 1980-1990 (Deyoe & Fox, 2012). Each generation has perceived behaviors and stereotypes that sometimes manifest themselves in the workplace and could potentially lead to conflict. Some of these perceptions include millennials being arrogant and having poor interpersonal skills; Generation X being independent and dubious of authority; baby boomers being idealistic and driven; and veterans being extremely loyal with a relentless work ethic (Deyoe & Fox, 2012).

To help bridge the gap amongst a diverse population, trust and collaboration are a necessity (Penney, 2011). The personal communication amongst members of an organization may lead to conflict because of generational differences. While younger individuals may be flexible and open to criticism from their decisions, older people may not be as creative and have other attributes that may have contrasting styles (Hassan et al., 2011). Communication is essential in an organization, and the ability to allow a useful exchange of information could prove to be the key to having positive or negative conflict (Hassan et al., 2011) thereby bridging the communication gap between generations.

According to Deyoe and Fox (2012), there is a lack of evidence for the age interaction about conflict because individuals who are much older, for example, 65 are not as common to be found in the workplace; whereas, there is an abundance of younger aged individuals. Deyoe and Fox's research also indicated that in order to mitigate conflict between different generations in the workplace, possible strategies may include managers providing clear guidance and expectations, working with each other in order to observe and find value and appreciation in the work that they do, and provide instruction to educational institutions about work performance and expectations in the workplace.

Cultural differences also influence conflict. An individual's values stem from his or her background and experiences, which define him or her and when these values are challenged conflict develops (Kumar & Rajasekar, 2014). Communication has been found to be one of the major issues in workplace conflict surrounding cultural differences. When employees assume and take actions on misunderstandings and ill-conceived perceptions, the chance of conflict in the workplace will increase (Kumar, & Rajasekar, 2014). Individuals having different beliefs, not having the same primary language, and lack of trust were antecedents for this type of conflict (Kumar, & Rajasekar, 2014). Managers who can communicate effectively and encourage their employees to do so will have a greater chance to mitigate conflict that stems from misunderstandings (Koch, Leidner, & Gonzalez, 2013).

Conflict in the workplace is often also rooted in gender differences. Women have increased their presence in the workforce and, subsequently, have assumed jobs and responsibilities that may have previously been occupied by men (Tate & Yang, 2015).

This may cause sex-role conflict in the workplace for a couple of reasons. Some men still have issues coping with women working as a peer or superior, and either avoid or reject the women in the workplace. As a result, these women try to meet the expectations that are sought after and subsequently modify their behavior to mitigate any perceived conflict that may stem from the role conflict (Peus, Braun, & Knipfer, 2015). Sheppard and Aquino (2013) indicated that women who work together in the same group might have cause for conflict if the perception is that they have different levels of status, women of the lower status may feel inclined to act aggressively toward the other women in order to protect their confidence.

***Work family.*** The overlap between work and family can also be a source of workplace conflict. Haeruddin and Natsir (2016) posited that it does not matter the place of employment if employees feel overloaded and stressed because of family-work conflict, it will probably carry over to the next place of employment. Therefore, conflict resolution is reliant on the people within the workplace and the systems that are established by the organization (Garaigordobil & Martínez-Valderrey, 2015). When employees feel they do not have organizational support, their perceptions become distorted and increase the chance of hostility and conflict, which means that management has to pay close attention to employee's behaviors. Likewise, the more organizational support an employee feels, the better he or she will be able to handle conflicting situations (Maidaniuc-Chirila & Constantin, 2016).

The abundance of couples having jobs and a family is increasingly applying pressure on them while they try to balance the two. The problems experienced at home

could spill into the workplace and create unnecessary conflict. Employers should implement strategies that help employees to balance their work and family tasks. While it is not mandated that organizations have such support programs for their workers, often organizations are too small to have such support systems and while others try to refer their employees to outside programs that may be beneficial (Anita et al., 2013).

Work-family conflict and family-work conflict have negative implications for individuals at both their homes and workplaces. The stress that individuals experience at home affects their attitudes at work and vice versa. This is due to the emotional frustration that they have needs to be released and this release of frustration will occur when something is triggered while at work or home (Liu et al., 2015). This phenomenon is known as displaced aggression; once an individual has been emotionally exhausted, they are more likely to behave inappropriately and act out of frustration toward anyone or anything that they have interactions with (Liu et al., 2015).

Conflict also stems from work-family stress that has built up. In this case, however, Ruppner (2013) posited that this type of conflict is only prevalent in some countries. Managers need to know about their employees and understand the cultural connotations that come with them because a cause of family-work related stress could make employees emotionally unstable.

**Responses to conflict.** Organizations have several avenues by which to address workplace conflict. Due to the complexity in the business industry, a stressful work environment is inevitable, and businesses have begun to address issues like work-family or work-life balance (Swaminathan & Rajkumar, 2013). Employees who work in an

organization for a longer period experience higher levels of stress because of lofty professional goals or because they are getting older (Swaminathan & Rajkumar, 2013). Therefore, leaders have to be more conscious creative in their actions. Employees internalize many types of interactions, and managers may not be aware of the issues concerning employees until something negative transpires, so it is important for management to understand this if they are to be effective in managing conflict (Swaminathan & Rajkumar, 2013). An effective leader can manage stress in the workplace and focus on reducing the stressors that are severe for the individual employee, which may include health problems, family problems, morale and job competition and other factors (Babatunde, 2013).

When confronted with conflict, management typically takes one of two methods to manage employee conflict. Management either confronts the conflict and tries to eliminate it before it progresses or they analyze the conflict so that no further action was taken that could make matters worse (Maccoby & Scudder, 2011). When conflict is unmanaged it creates hostility and an overall uncomfortable atmosphere for employees to work in (Russell, 2013). Also, unmanaged conflict fuels more anger and negativity within the organization and the culture of the organization suffers.

**Conflict management.** Beyond simply responding to conflict, organizations should also take steps to manage or prevent the conflict. Conflict management is the method taken by leaders of an organization to prevent conflict from becoming negative or quells conflict in a manner that produces positive results (Lipsky & Avgar, 2010). Management strategies for resolving conflict have to be easily understood and executed

by everyone. Conflict management and resolution policies should be directives that allow managers and employees to handle conflict in a manner that will be consistent with the vision and goals of the organization (Lipsky & Avgar, 2010). Resolution strategies must bring clashing perspectives together to come to a mutual understanding or at least foster an environment that will be more efficient than dysfunctional (Singleton et al., 2011).

Katz and Flynn (2013) posited that there is little knowledge of how to manage employee conflict within organizations, in fact, organizations often used outside agencies to remedy conflict instead of resolving conflict amongst the conflicting parties. Conflict resolution takes time away from a manager's primary duties and is usually expected to be one of their responsibilities as a leader (Zia & Syed, 2013).

The traditional conflict management strategies of an organization had the leaders assuming an authoritarian role to manage employee conflict. This style of management would seek to eliminate conflict without effectively communicating the issues and was considered the general method of satisfying all types of conflict (Lipsky & Avgar, 2010). This often led to forcing a resolution upon the conflicting parties or disciplining them to make the problem cease (Lipsky & Avgar, 2010). This traditional method of conflict management has come under scrutiny from scholars and researchers and is believed to have a negative impact on the organization. Innovative conflict management strategies can be implemented that allow organizations to effectively use positive conflict and suppress negative conflict. As of 2006, more than 20% of Fortune 1000 companies have integrated an innovative conflict management model within their organization (Lipsky & Avgar, 2010).

An organization's success with conflict hinges on the ability of their managers to handle varied types of conflict (Anita et al., 2013). Their success and performance could be predicated on the effectiveness of their conflict management application (Bradley, Klotz, Postlethwaite, & Brown, 2013). Organizations that are adopting new and innovative conflict management systems should use the following ideologies for their systems: include alternatives for everyone in the organization, identify individuals within the organization that has authority to manage employee conflict, identify a support structure that employees could use, include the employee's rights, and establish an organizational culture that fosters compromise and negotiation (e. g., Lipsky & Avgar, 2010).

**Resolution strategies.** Over the years, education on conflict management has evolved in the United States, within educational and business institutions. There are multiple types of conflict resolution strategies that conflicting parties use such as negotiation, mediation, and mutual decision making. These strategies were not introduced to the United States until in the 1980s (Katz & Flynn, 2013).

Other methods of managing conflict have been considered and used in the organizational setting. Blake and Mouton's Managerial Grid concept of managing conflict was to use the following techniques to mitigate conflict, accommodating, compromising, competing, and collaborating (Covey & Ewell, 2015). Some conflict management styles are thought to be more effective than others; compromising and collaborating, for example, allow conflicting parties to connect within one another and come to a resolution (Khan, Langove, Shah, & Javid, 2015).



Mediation is a tool that can be used to manage employee conflict in the workplace. Mediation involves having a neutral party to aid in the disposition of an issue (Corcoran, 2014). While mediation gives conflicting parties some input on the outcome, other forms of resolution may be dictated by guidelines or management (Bennett, 2013). Mediation was found to be an effective tool used by managers to help manage employee conflict; however, few organizations incorporate mediation because of the misconceptions surrounding it such as the costs are too high, it is only beneficial for large organizations, and the process should only be used as a last resort (e.g., Corcoran, 2014).

Organizations may choose workplace mediation as a method to manage employee conflict over other strategies because of the added benefits such as creating a culture of problem solving, cost efficiency, mitigating extreme conflict, and preserving relationships (e.g., Bollen & Euwema, 2013). Unions are another party that can be used to negotiate and mediate conflicting matters, especially when the conflict involves leadership and employees (Lipsky, Seeber, & Avgar, 2015). Union involvement, though, is associated with higher conflict as compared to not having union involvement, which may create a more conducive work environment leading to better financial productivity (Bryson, Willman, Gomez, & Kretschmer, 2013).

Much of the past research conducted on workplace conflict has been focused on the strategies that managers use to manage employee conflict, but what should be considered are the perceptions that employees have toward a manager's conflict management techniques (Romer, Rispens, Giebels, & Euwema, 2012). How a leader manages conflict in his or her workplace could add or reduce the amount of stress that

employees face in conjunction with conflict. Stress from conflicting situations can be reduced when trust is established between management and employee (Romer et al., 2012). Employees who perceive management intentions as immoral or deceitful may reject the strategies established by management and slow the progress needed to successfully implement them.

Managers typically respond to conflict in one of three ways. A manager's response to workplace conflict will either be to avoid it altogether, implement or impose a resolution, or find a compromise that will benefit the conflicting parties (Romer et al., 2012). When managers impose a resolution, employees feel there is injustice and that the manager could be taking another's side. A manager avoiding conflict makes employees feel more stressed because of a deteriorating situation that cannot be resolved by leadership (Romer et al., 2012). Avoiding conflict implies that the manager does not know how to manage employee conflict, therefore has a perpetuating result of failing to resolve the problem (Ubinger, Handal, & Massura, 2013).

One of the most effective strategies is to problem solve and find a solution that will work best for the parties which make employees feel they have some control over the strategy being implemented, subsequently feeling less stress (Romer et al., 2012). Problem solving is one of the most constructive methods to manage employee conflict because it allows the parties to collaborate on their differences while fostering their personal relationship (Hopkins & Yonker, 2015).

Certain conflict handling styles and personality traits are conducive for reducing conflict and a potentially hostile situation; these styles are: integrating, obliging, and

compromising; and the personality traits were: having an open mind, being agreeable, and conscientious (Khalid, Fatima, & Khan, 2015). This information could be useful to managers experiencing conflict in their workplace. It is important for individuals to control their behaviors, especially when dealing with people and situations that may seemingly lead to conflict. Researchers implied that all stakeholders in an organization can benefit from conflict being promptly and fairly managed (Li, Ardit, & Wang, 2014); conversely, it will have a negative impact on all stakeholders of the company if not effectively managed (Maidaniuc-Chirila & Constantin, 2016). Therefore, not all management strategies that have been indicated by researchers to have positive results will work every time; there will be situations that will require a combination of strategies or may require the use of a strategy that research indicated as having negative outcomes.

**Prevention.** Organizations and managers can also take steps to prevent conflict before it begins. When making guidelines and policies for dealing with conflict, organizations need to be specific and address as many situations and cover as many aspects of conflict management as possible (Walker, 2014). After conflict has been recognized, dealt with, and resolved, there is still the potential for residual conflict—in that the initial conflict has affected other entities within the workplace and may stimulate added conflict (Winsor et al., 2012). Leaders and employees should be aware of the potential of residual conflict and eliminate it before it begins.

**Alternative dispute resolution.** In the cases where traditional approaches do not lead to success, researchers have shown alternative methods that may also be effective. A method to help manage employee conflict in the workplace without having mediation and

arbitration is a management system called alternate dispute resolution systems (ADR) (Lipsky & Avgar, 2010). This method helps the company because individuals do not have to go out of their way to pay for the costs for litigation, which takes away from their work either directly or indirectly. ADR also allows managers to create innovative methods to manage conflict between two parties with clashing perspectives (Teague & Roche, 2012). A challenge for ADR systems is that some employees may feel that others are being favored with the use of such systems. When managers use means other than the formal, existing policy regarding conflict resolution, this may exacerbate conflict (Lipsky & Avgar, 2010).

Individuals experiencing conflict are not always able to face the individual(s) with whom they are in conflict, and a need for a third party may exist. Alternative dispute resolutions methods where a third party intervenes may consist of a manager or even a peer, but they must be able to be responsive and rational in their comprehension and advice to the conflicting parties (McClellan et al., 2013). This concept relies on managers to enact a conflict resolution system that best suits their company and will benefit its stakeholders (Lipsky & Avgar, 2010). To address plans and policies, leaders should align conflict resolution systems with the organization's strategic goals (Lipsky & Avgar, 2010).

Some organizations opt to use more aggressive conflict resolution strategies. Organizations do this as opposed to alternate dispute resolution strategies because they tend to result in the more positive results (Anita et al., 2013); however, many businesses in the United States do recommend the implementation of an alternative dispute

resolution system as a conflict resolution practice (Katz & Flynn, 2013). ADR systems may work when managers have confidence in their resolution methods and possess the skills that could be used for multiple scenarios (Teague & Roche, 2012). There are funded programs that offer ADR services for small businesses; however, awareness is lacking, thus the minimal participation in this type of service (Lipsky & Avgar, 2010).

Conflict can stem from a variety of places and manifest itself in the form of functional or dysfunctional conflict—meaning healthy or negative. The types of conflict that may result from these clashes are task, relationship, and process conflict (O'Neill et al., 2013). Causes of conflict may include generational differences, cultural differences, interpersonal clashes, and work-family issues (e.g., Havenga & Visagie, 2011). By implementing successful conflict resolution strategies, management will be able to effectively reduce the negative effects that may occur as a consequence.

### **Negative Effects**

Some organizations are unaware of the negative impact unresolved conflict has on their business. One study showed that leaders and employees had defined conflict differently, that they were unaware of the negative financial impact, and that there were tools that were used to help manage employee conflict (Katz & Flynn, 2013). In a study conducted by Patterson (2014), 85% of employees that experienced conflict in the workplace felt that management did not resolve their issue. Therefore, conflict resolution within the workplace was worthy of research.

Conflict may manifest into violence in the workplace, which could present major legal issues as well as performance issues for an organization. Because conflict absorbs

much of a person's energy and focus, it leads to developing bad habits and other activities that adversely affect one's health (Guimarães, Cançado, & Lima, 2016). Violence does not only mean physical contact between individuals, but it also represents threats, bullying, and harassment (Nierle, 2013). Nierle also found that workplace violence was found more in government organizations than the private sector.

**Profitability.** While leaders have responsibilities in the organization such as making a profit, the organization, planning, and execution of strategies, they also have to influence their employees in order work in harmony. Most managers and supervisors spend 21% to 42% of their time resolving conflict within the workplace (Katz & Flynn, 2013). Employees express overt actions for their reactions to conflict that may include absenteeism or tardiness (Tanguy, 2013).

The culture within an organization, however, is what guides the type of resolution system that leaders use to deal with conflict. Employee turnover from conflict could cost an organization an additional 200% of their budgeted salary (Maccoby & Scudder, 2011). As conflict becomes more prevalent within the workplace, it takes away from organizational priorities because they have to focus on negating costs associated with conflict (i.e., training and education and resolution; e.g., Katz & Flynn, 2013). When conflict is managed ineffectively, an organization is susceptible to losing good employees as well as their customers, which results in a decrease in the organization's profitability (Payton, 2014).

**Unmanaged conflict.** Some individuals would rather not deal with confronting a hostile situation and may choose to leave conflict unmanaged. Unmanaged conflict only

escalates to a situation that may become increasingly worse (Singleton et al., 2011). Not addressing conflict in the workplace when evident gives the impression that the organization not only condones conflict, but that the organization does not value the relationships of its members.

Some issues surrounding conflict get less attention because people find the severity of the conflict to be minimal, which may cause the conflict to lay dormant and materialize into something worse (Zia & Syed, 2013). Katz and Flynn (2013) added to this theory in their research with employees of the same organization with generational differences. Their example was of employees with conflict that stemmed from value differences and management did not step in and deescalate the situation because he felt that it would work itself out, but the situation escalated, and it became a situation that affected the entire organization.

Conflict can also occur in varying degrees. *Workplace incivility* is referred to as actions by individuals that are small in comparison to other conflicting actions on a spectrum, which may be characterized by actions such as making rude comments or sending shameful emails (e.g., Loi, Loh, & Hine, 2015). These are counterproductive work behaviors and are a detriment to an organization's success (Cohen et al., 2013). Gossip, discrimination, and disrespectfulness are other types of inappropriate behaviors in a work environment that lead to relationship and emotional conflict (Beirne, 2013), which negatively affects work performance and productivity. If these small, menial behaviors are not addressed, they can escalate and result in conflicting behaviors such as bullying or physical abuse (Loi et al., 2015). Tanguy (2013) revealed that employees

would redirect their behavior and actions when they feel that a conflicting situation will not be resolved. Escalating incivilities are a result of poor conflict management by leaders of the organization and directly correlate with negative performance (Loi et al., 2015).

### **Organizational Culture**

The culture of an organization may influence the attitudes and behaviors of its members. In one study, 84 percent of employees proclaim that when there is a clearly defined vision that positively impacts the organization culture, employees are more satisfied with work and as a result conflict decreases and the health of the organizations increases (Peterson, 2015). The culture of an organization refers to the system of shared values and beliefs that individuals have within their environment (Warren, Gaspar, & Laufer, 2014). Some factors that impact organizational culture are the leadership styles and effectiveness, competition amongst one another, job satisfaction, and the training that is received. These factors of organizational culture tie directly into whether or not the organization may experience healthy or negative conflict (Hassan et al., 2011).

**Leadership styles.** The actions that managers take when responding to conflict in their organization helps determine the path that employees ultimately take whether it is continuing with their same attitude, loss of employment, or a positive change (McClellan et al., 2013). Leaders have to face some challenges in the workplace, and effective leadership will only enable leaders to be successful (Latham, 2014). Front line managers need to be equipped with how to effectively manage conflict. These managers are also the individuals that mentor and provide counsel to employees, subsequently being one of



the first individuals that are able to recognize distress and emotional conflict and have the responsibility to mitigate it (Teague & Roche, 2012). The different management styles and interactions that leaders have with members of the organization will directly impact behaviors and performance.

Diversity issues in a team can be greatly influenced by the style of leadership that the leader has. Teams with a diverse population may create conflict because of prejudices and awkward interactions unless addressed by leadership (Sliter, Boyd, Sinclair, Cheung, & Mcfadden, 2014). Diversity within an organization leads to matters that are more complex for leaders to handle and having leadership that is effective and authentic could lead to successful collaboration (Penney, 2011). Implementing transparent and effective communication is a successful strategy used to resolve conflict amongst individuals that have diverse cultures, backgrounds, and ideologies (Parker, 2015). Addressing diversity issues using clear and concise communication and expectations will help mitigate miscommunication and conflict.

Some leadership styles will affect the culture of an organization in various ways. Transactional leaders are defined as leaders who use incentives and rewards to motivate their employees (McCleskey, 2014). Transformational leaders are individuals that may use incentives to achieve goals; however, they are individuals who strive to make their organization and employees rise to the next level (McCleskey, 2014). Transformational leaders are people-oriented, they care about personal issues, and are inspirational in contrast to transactional leaders that provide structure, are task oriented, and set a demanding tone from the onset (McDermott, Conway, Rousseau, & Flood, 2013). These

management styles play an important role in the culture of an organization because of the interaction between leader and subordinate, which directly impacts relationships and performance (Chou, 2014).

Task focused leadership has a positive impact on conflict. Conversely, person-focused leadership, which tends to stimulate conflict (Klein, Knight, Ziegert, Lim, & Saltz, 2011). When individuals of the same group have different values, their assumptions and expectations may be different, which could make it difficult to collaborate with one another. Task-focused leaders define roles and objectives; they also create an environment of structure where members of the organization are less likely to express their individuality and values because they are oriented on accomplishing a task (Klein et al., 2011).

People-focused leaders consider each person, which allows members of the organization to express themselves and their beliefs more often (Klein et al., 2011). An organization with individuals or groups that have divided beliefs will have a greater risk of conflict because they are reluctant to create an organizational distinctiveness (Klein et al., 2011). This does not mean that task focused leadership will cure all conflict. Leaders need to use the type of leadership style that will be most effective at the appropriate time. Leaders are most successful when they can apply certain leadership styles to a situation (Russell, 2013).

Authentic leaders are needed in the workplace to help cultivate change and better deal with the challenges in the workplace that stem from diversity (Penney, 2011). An authentic leadership style allows leaders to be more personal with employees and address

deeper issues that may cause employees to have conflict with one another (Penney, 2011). Leaders who are authentic will create a positive environment and culture in the workplace (Penney, 2011). Transparent communication also provides employees with the ability to take a route that is not only ethical, but it eliminates the chance of larger issues to arise within the organization that may have a negative impact (Shapira- Lishchinsky, 2014). Russell (2013) also posited that with diversity comes subjectivity, which is the matter in which conflict develops, and transparent communication within the organization will help mitigate disputes.

In one study researchers found that only 50% of companies had guidelines established for their managers on conflict resolution and only 47% of Human Resource Managers had knowledge of information regarding on how to appropriately manage employee conflict (Einarsen, Mykletun, Einarsen, Skogstad, & Salin, 2017). Management and Human Resource departments need to set the same standards and abide by the same values when assessing the employee's performance and attitudes, which will improve the health of the organization. A division between these two functions of the organization will ascertain conflict and confusion within the organization (McDermott et al., 2013; Teague & Roche, 2012). Since conflict is a clash in behaviors, human resource departments implement personality tests in their hiring practices (Di Tullio, 2014). This will help bring in people that have the right demeanor and attitude into an environment that is most suitable for cohesion and less confrontational.

There is a need for the traditional form of leadership to change. Leadership is progressing from the traditional role of being all knowing to one that advocates

collaboration (Penney, 2011). Leaders who make decisions for everyone and do not include the input of others have been implicated as being the cause of inefficiency and disjointed relationships within the organization (Katz & Miller, 2014). This is due to a lack of communication, which makes individuals feel defensive and protective, thereby slowing productivity. In a case study on authoritarian leadership style, employees felt they were disregarded and that the leader's vision was not shared by the entire organization; therefore, the organization became divided, and it decreased efficiency and productivity in the workplace (Jacob, 2014).

A suggested tool for organizations to use is involvement from employees as well as management in conflict resolution. Employee involvement gives employees a sense of teamwork and share in the organization's vision which will allow potential barriers to fall (Espedal, Gooderham, & Stensaker, 2013; Katz & Miller, 2014). Transparent communication not only allows employees to give their input and join in a shared vision, but it also allows leaders to be privy to insightful information about issues within their organization (Katz & Miller, 2014).

While conflict continues to exist in the workplace, managers need to find methods that they can use to inject conflict so that it stimulates productivity and ingenuity in a positive manner rather than the negative connotation that it represents (Singleton et al., 2011). In comparison, individuals who go against the organizational culture intentionally in order to create hostility and conflict need to be reprimanded (McClellan et al., 2013). Conflict management styles are only effective if organizational leaders compel members of the organization to work in a cohesive manner not allowing for dysfunction (O'Neill et

al., 2013). Conflict will continue to develop, and existing conflict will not end if management is not equipped with the necessary skills (Bennett, 2013).

Negative or positive effects will depend on the effectiveness of organizational leadership. A positive collaboration is best for instantiating ideas in an organization, and although there may be differences and competing ideas at times, as long as everyone has the same long-term goal, there will be success (Jarzabkowski, Lê, & Van de Ven, 2013). Some managers lack the confidence of resolving employee conflict because they often come into these positions without training and fear of reprimand if they mishandle a situation; and there needs to be procedures established on how to deal with employee conflict (Saundry, Jones, & Wibberley, 2015). Reade and McKenna (2013) posited that managers that are new to organizations or that have employees that are new and can relate to a specific culture should create a conflict management system that incorporates some of the systems that the employees are familiar with in order to enhance relationships within the workplace. However, this does not preclude existing policies that an organization may have.

Not all senior management and leadership are privy to conflicting situations. Individuals who are alert and take pride in building positive relationships and a positive organizational culture will try to manage employee conflict at their level as best as possible. Management can also learn from individuals within the organization that has nothing to gain from resolving other individual's conflict. The styles of these types of individuals are non-assuming, and they recognize the benefits of inserting themselves in the middle of a situation that is escalating negatively (Russell, 2013). Organizations

should try to create a culture that individuals accept some of this responsibility because it will lead to the overall success of the organization. Conflict in the workplace is a phenomenon that has several factors affecting it. Leaders can affect how individuals in the organization work together and the type of relationship that they establish with one another. As a result, when leaders are more engaged with the employees and the business, it decreases tensions and negativity and fosters a workplace that employee conflict could be easily managed (Way, Jimmieson, & Bordia, 2014). Although there is no one leadership style that is best to use when resolving conflict (McDermott et al., 2013), using certain leadership styles can either positively or negatively affect the culture of an organization with a diverse population.

**Leadership effectiveness.** Leadership is also a source of conflict. When employees perceive there is injustice on behalf of management, then it leads to conflict as well as a lack of organizational support (Liu et al., 2013). Employees and employers engage in a psychological contract in which the employee feels the organization and its leaders will provide the career support they need and in return the employee feels obligated to perform in a positive manner, which also means they would try to stay out of potential situations where conflict could arise (Ismail et al., 2012). Trust is essential to workplace ingenuity and conflict management (Gundelach, 2014). Employees that trust in their leaders also have confidence in the processes they take to manage conflict, which is emotionally important when developing a psychological contract.

Characteristics of a leader that negatively contributes to the culture of an organization that stimulates conflict include being judgmental, micromanaging, having a

constant reminder to employees who is in charge, never taking ownership for one's mistakes, non-supportive, and being manipulative (e.g., Hassan et al., 2011). In contrast, positive attributes of a leader that fosters an organizational culture that creates positive conflict and collaboration are being empathetic, fair, and just, problem solving oriented, flexibility, and spontaneity (e.g., Hassan et al., 2011).

Organizations may face change in some manner during their existence and organizations need leaders who will be able to help employees face this change. In organizations that do not address change, conflict will be sure to fester, and it will negatively impact the organization (Quiros, 2014). While planning for the future and execution are important agendas for organizational leadership, leadership has to concern themselves with the human factor when change is or will be taking place (Penney, 2011). Some techniques that leaders could use to help mitigate conflict and help employees go through change is to engage employees one on one, be considerate of their emotions and personal situation, and address changes that occur within the organization that affects individuals and not let rumors worsen (Quiros, 2014). Conflict is a personal phenomenon that is manifested through relationships and leaders need to be given the proper skills to handle conflict. Leaders sometimes fail because they do not have the necessary skills to manage conflict and relationships (Teague & Roche, 2012). This requires leadership and management to be open-minded, and consider different possibilities that could potentially alter the way business is normally conducted. A leader's influence will manifest throughout the organization, and their leadership effectiveness will potentially strengthen the culture or have a negative impact on it.

**Competition.** Competition among coworkers can also be a source of group conflict. Leaders should create an atmosphere where members can work as a team rather than compete with one another (Katz & Miller, 2014). When competition exists within an organization, it creates individualism and people that are only look out for themselves. Individuals become self-absorbed, subsequently affecting the performance and overall success of the organization (Katz & Miller, 2014). Competition could also represent two or more parties having a conflict of interest, which stimulates conflict (Walker, 2014). In contrast, Zia and Syed's (2013) research suggested that in organizations where competition is high, conflict management is much more controllable because conflicting parties have less time to dwell on the conflict.

People are more apt to share what they know in a friendly environment because they feel that knowledge gaining is mutual to all parties. While competition is used as a management tool for conflict (Simpao, 2013), it is self-reliant and individuals have to find ways of winning or being better than the other person. This results in a power struggle amongst individuals over a limited resource such a job position and it could result in the exploitation of people or resources for an individual's personal gain (O'Neill et al., 2013). In some organizations, competition is keen, and some companies and management take pride in fostering competition. If organizations can create a culture where competition does not manifest in negative conflict, then it may have a positive impact on relationships and performance.

**Job satisfaction.** Change is a factor that moderates conflict within the workplace. Managers are challenged with implementing change by execution of a strategic plan,



which entails getting their employees in line with the changes that need to be made (Anca, 2013). Change and resistance to change can cause unnecessary conflict within the workplace, and leaders that create an environment where individuals confide in each other will reduce tension (Katz & Miller, 2014). An establishment of an organizational chart and a hierarchy accompanied by concise and attainable tasks over time will also contribute to a decrease in workplace conflict as well as job dissatisfaction within the organization; ultimately, a collaborative effort and positive labor relations in an organization increases motivation and employee performance (Gostin et al., 2012). Conflict caused by change is due largely to leaders are not motivating their employees (Anca, 2013). Motivation pertains to factors dealing with monetary incentives, employee input, benefits, career development, and emotional inferences (e.g., Anca, 2013; Church, 2014).

Other interpersonal issues that may be of concern to employees are with their job satisfaction and job security. By having clear goals and expectations at work make employees feel like an integral part of the organization (Jaramillo et al., 2011). When employees know that there is little to no job security, they may feel they have nothing to lose and become confrontational. Jaramillo and colleagues also posit that interpersonal conflict such as unhappiness, low energy level, feeling vulnerable, low or no self- esteem; all these things can lead to an emotional overload or exhaustion (Jaramillo et al., 2011). As with individuals that work in the services industry, they are affected by subversive acts, so they eternalize their feelings and emotions since they cannot express their feelings to customers, and this creates tension buildup and undue stress (Jaramillo et al.,

2011). Low job satisfaction is among one of the key indicators of a high employee turnover and when analyzed, organizational leaders can better identify and address the causes, to establish a culture where individuals are emotionally inspired to perform.

**Training.** Management training is also a factor of both culture and the manager's ability to deal with conflict. The culture of an organization may cause infractions because of the difference in values; however, leaders that symbolize or represent an organizational culture that is negative may cause additional conflict (Church, 2014). In some professional settings, conflict management is not implemented in a development program nor are the skills necessary for dealing with conflict assessed during the hiring process (Simpao, 2013). This indicates that training through the appropriate channels have not been established to help individuals within the organization manage conflict. Hiring the right individuals or implementing effective development programs will enable organizations to have leaders that will fit their culture and enhance the efficiency of the organization rather than create hostility (Church, 2014; McLaren, 2013).

In organizations, leaders may or may not have formal training. Some leaders have been brought up from the bottom of the organization and have found their way through to the top, while others may have gone to school and received certifications that give them credibility to be put in a leadership position. The training that they may have gone through may include: customer service, change management, ethics, and diverse organizations.

Managers need to be skilled in the technique of listening, comprehending, and negotiating for individuals within their organizations that have conflict with one another

(Singleton et al., 2011). When implementing a successful conflict management program, training that would be considered most effective should include relationship building, skills based, and constructive resolution training to supply managers with the necessary strategies for managers to resolve conflict (Zealand, Larkin, & Shron, 2016).

Implementing such training in the organization for management, leadership, and employees if possible will only serve to benefit the entire organization. When training programs are not implemented, and conflict festers, the feeling that the employees get when the organization does not address a potentially negative situation will lead to distrust and unnecessary stress for members of the organization (McClean et al., 2013).

Rai (2013) posited that conflict resolution would evolve into a negotiation process; which will require the need for managers to both empathize and be skilled in psychology. Effective training programs allow managers to adapt styles that they are comfortable with and allow them to interact with employees enough so that they can interject when different types of conflict present themselves (Alok et al., 2014). The skills needed for managers to be successful with conflict management can be developed through the implementation of leadership development programs and other training scenarios that will allow leaders to practice different conflict resolution approaches. Some individuals do not like to deal with conflict, so they avoid it in hopes that it would go away. In one study, 30% of managers said they would let a serious conflict go a while hoping it would resolve itself and only 3% of those cases did (Nierle, 2013). Twenty-two percent of supervisors were never given any formal training on how to manage conflict

(Nierle, 2013); the failure to educate managers is part of why conflict management needed to be addressed.

Workplace violence and ruminants thereof need to be dealt with in a swift manner. Once behaviors and actions take place, employees should report this conduct immediately. Organizational leaders should foster a culture that eliminates conflict and violence in the workplace (Nierle, 2013). In doing so, Nierle insisted that organizations need to provide training to their managers on how to properly manage conflict and train employees on how to recognize and report. A culture that instills training and education will help individuals as well as leaders within the organization to recognize and manage conflict.

**Nontraditional businesses.** There are many bases that have nontraditional business venues that bring quality of life products and services to service members and their families (Winsor et al., 2012). Organizations that conduct business on a military installation operate because they feel they have a connection with their patrons and that they could provide a unique service and therefore leaders have to establish a culture where employees embody the organization's values (Winsor et al., 2012). Business relationships between franchisors and franchisees is a typical type of business relationship where one supports the other for there to be success, which pays dividends for both stakeholders (Anita et al., 2013).

More specifically, business franchises that are on military bases are geographically challenged just by being located on a military base. They have to follow certain rules and regulations, open at certain times, and the lack of flexibility when

making business decisions could put a strain on management, subsequently affecting the entire organization (Winsor et al., 2012). Conflict management systems and training, however, are the responsibility of the independent businesses. Franchise regulations concerning policies on conflict could dictate whether or not there is a conflict management system in place, if not local management has the responsibility to their employees to improve these systems (Anita et al., 2013). Venues of this magnitude may have complex systems and guidelines on how they should operate; and because of the complexity, management has to be cognizant of the different issues that may arise within the workplace that may result in conflict or create a harmful culture.

Organizational culture is directly influenced by its leaders and the systems they implement. By assessing areas such as leadership styles, leadership effectiveness, competition, job satisfaction, and organizational training, leaders will be able to implement strategies that will help mitigate or better manage conflict within the workplace.

### **Common Methodological Approaches to Conflict**

Studies that have been conducted on conflict in the workplace, with the goal of exploring causes of conflict and leadership perspectives, have been conducted using several methods in order to successfully analyze this phenomenon (e.g., McLaren, 2013). In this section, I provided several examples of the different methods and designs used to research conflict.

Researchers have used quantitative designs to measure conflict in workplaces. Data collection tools such as questionnaires and surveys can be used to obtain

information needed to gather information for quantitative studies (Pozniak, 2015). There have been several studies conducted using quantitative designs to help identify the sources of conflict within the workplace as well as strategies that could be used to mitigate the conflict such as an organizational chart, specific tasks, and a list of goals (e.g., Gostin et al., 2012). The results from the study conducted by Gostin, Negoita, and Purcarea in 2012 on 410 managers and employees indicated that compensation and performance evaluation were the main sources of conflict and to mitigate conflict, both management and employees have to build cohesiveness that will grow profit and subsequently boost salaries.

Qualitative research method allows researchers to extract information from participants that may help identify the need to address a phenomenon (Ciby & Raya, 2014). In 2013, Katz and Flynn conducted a mixed study, which included 219 participants on their satisfaction with conflict resolution. The authors' results were that there was little knowledge of how to manage employee conflict within organizations and that organizations often used a third party to remedy conflict. Qualitative studies allow researchers to explore the experiences that individuals have and allow researchers to analyze data through a myriad of techniques such as open, axial, and selective coding (Ciby & Raya, 2014). A case study enables researchers to gather qualitative information from specific populations that have different perceptions of a phenomenon, therefore, allowing transferability of information that is interpreted by the researcher (Graves, 2013).

Bollen and Euwema (2013) posited that future research should include qualitative research studies to complement the vast amount of survey data from quantitative studies that have been conducted on conflict resolution strategies. They also conducted an extensive review of literature conducted on workplace conflict and the mediation process for dealing with conflict (Bollen & Euwema, 2013). Their results indicated that only 13 empirical studies were conducted, and their findings further indicated that there are not enough individuals or groups who have shared their experiences with handling conflict due to various explanations. There is a lack of qualitative research on reducing conflict within the workplace (Deyoe & Fox, 2012); this supports the purpose of my research. Also, using a qualitative methodology will help generate knowledge and discussion that is needed for managers to bridge the gap between practical and scholarly research concerning conflict resolution (Mohrman & Lawler, 2012).

### **Transition and Summary**

Section 1 was an overview of the study. I introduced the background and nature of the problem and provided a statement of the problem. Conflict in the workplace is inevitable; it is a problematic and systematic phenomenon, and therefore a need for further research was identified. The conceptual framework used in this study was TRC, which offers an explanation on why individuals or groups have conflict within an organization. In this section, I also discussed the assumptions, limitations, delimitations, and significance of the study.

Section 2 contains the detailed execution of the research project going to step by step. I started by restating the purpose of the study, which was to explore the strategies

civilian small business managers use to reduce employee conflict. Followed by a discussion as the role of the researcher, which was to be the primary data collection instrument. Next, I included a discussion of participants who were selected for the study, the methodology and design that I used, the population and sampling method, and the ethical considerations required to have a complete and successful study. Discussions of the instruments, data collection, and data analysis were also included. I concluded Section 2 by discussing how I achieved reliability and validity in the study.

In Section 3, I present all of the findings of the study, followed by the application to professional practice and how it can improve the business practice. The implications for social change and how the findings may improve individuals, institutions, or the community were also discussed. Finally, I conclude the study with recommendations for action, recommendations for future research, and my reflection throughout the course of the entire DBA Doctoral study process.



## Section 2: The Project

Conflict is defined as a phenomenon that involves two or more persons where there is hostility because of conflicting goals, competing goals, and conflicting values due to limited resources (Zia & Syed, 2013). Until there is a holistic view of what type of conflict occurs and the measures that are implemented to manage employee conflict, there needs to be further research conducted to identify various methods of resolving conflict in the workplace. In this section, I will detail the process and execution of the study. I will begin by restating the purpose of the study. I will then discuss and describe the role of the researcher, the participants involved in the study, method and design, population and sample, and ethical considerations during the research. I will conclude the section by discussing data collection instruments and techniques, the organization and analysis of the data, and then reliability and validity aspects of the research study.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study was to explore the strategies civilian small business managers use to reduce employee conflict. The target population consisted of 11 civilian small business managers, from four different businesses, who work on military installations in Southern Arizona and who have experience implementing strategies to reduce conflict. This research on civilian small business managers' conflict resolution strategies in the workplace may help identify methods for improving conflict management skills for civilian small business leaders, subsequently improving profitability and productivity. One potential positive social outcome is that increasing the percentage of the profits made by civilian small businesses on military

bases also means increasing the financial contributions reverted into military programs and other base resources (e.g., counseling services, wellness programs, and other quality of life programs for service members).

### **Role of the Researcher**

In this study, my role as the researcher was the primary data collection instrument. The role of the researcher is to collect and analyze the information and then present the findings of the study (Collins & Cooper, 2014). One of the roles of the researcher is also to protect the participants of the study (Yin, 2014). I previously worked on the military installation where I conducted this study. I worked there for 4 years, but was transferred to another base and no longer employed at that installation. However, I was not familiar with any of the participants and I had no direct affiliation or influence over them, their jobs, or their compensation. I do have experience in dealing with conflict resolution. In my position at work, I often help manage employee conflict as a third party mediator.

Being the primary instrument as the data collector, I was the biggest of personal bias in the research study (see Wallace & Sheldon, 2014). Therefore, I asked each interview questions in order, and if the participant's answers led to information that helped me to understand them more clearly, I proceeded. However, I did not allow my emotions and past experiences to shape the outcome of my research to include the interview process and analysis. I used bracketing when conducting my interviews, which is a process to help researchers to eliminate any preconceived notions and biases that they may have (see Mortl & Gelo, 2015). Snelgrove (2014) explained that bracketing will also

allow the researcher to reflect throughout all stages of the research process including the interview process. Throughout the data collection process, I wrote memos to reflect on things that took place and use it as a reference for subsequent times.

During the data collection and analysis portion of the study, to help prevent bias, I used an interview protocol (see Appendix B) to ensure that the interviews were systematic (see De Ceunynck, Kusumastuti, Hannes, Janssens, & Wets, 2013). An interview protocol provides a researcher with a consistent method of ensuring data is collected through the interview process (De Ceunynck et al., 2013). While collecting data, I had to be a consummate professional, whether I was interviewing participants or preparing documents for review. The Belmont Report provides the ethical guidelines required for researchers to use when conducting a study on human subjects (Belmont Report, 1979). I abided by the ethical guidelines represented in the Belmont Report when I weighed the risks and benefits of the study, selected participants, and ensured the participants had as much knowledge about the research before they gave their consent (e.g., Belmont Report, 1979).

Fallacy leads to flawed logic based on researchers' conclusions regarding the information and individuals on which they are gathering data (Buckley, 2015). It was also my responsibility, while gathering information and conducting research, to frame the right problem based on the research. Once I collected the data, I analyzed and interpreted the information in order to formulate a conclusion.

## Participants

Qualitative research involves exploring human experiences and providing an insight into the perspectives that only an individual has (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas also added that, in a qualitative research study, choosing participants that have experienced the phenomenon is the premise of participant selection. Providing prerequisites for individuals to participate in a study allows the researcher to ensure qualified participants are being selected to align with the research question (Gray, 2013; Sowman, Sunde, Raemaekers, & Schultz, 2014; Yin, 2014). Selection criteria for this study included: civilian businesses who have been operating aboard a military installation in Southern Arizona for at least 5 years. The participants whom I selected for this study were managers who have been working in their current position for a minimum of 6 months, and who have dealt with employee conflict in their workplace. Participants were asked to fill out a brief demographic questionnaire to establish and confirm their eligibility to participate (see Appendix E).

In this study, I captured a variety of different perspectives from the participants; without having a demographic restraint, it provides the researcher a better examination of the phenomenon (see Robinson, 2014). I selected 11 managers from four different civilian businesses on the base. I chose to include the demographic questionnaire to systematically gather demographic information, including information on position, organizational tenure, and position tenure.

Gaining access to participants required me to first acquire approval to collect data from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the Service Branch, the Commanding

Officer of the installation, and then each business entity. Once I received authorization from the businesses' leadership, I asked for their help in communicating with their managers about the opportunity to participate in my study by providing them with an invitation for participation (see Appendix D). Appendix D contains the invitation letter for participants (to be distributed by the individual companies); it also includes my contact information so that if managers wanted to participate, they could contact me directly to schedule an interview. If the businesses' leadership did not distribute the invitation letters, then I distributed them to the managers. When I received interest from the potential participants, I emailed them an informed consent form and scheduled a time and place for the interview.

To establish a rapport with the participants, I explained the purpose of my study, which was to explore the strategies civilian small business managers use to manage employee conflict and improve productivity. I informed them that their personal information would be kept confidential and that it would not be divulged at any time during or after the completion of the study. I also obtained an agreement with the businesses' leadership, which was provided to me before the onset of the study. The agreement forms include the participant informed consent form for individual respondents and a letter of cooperation (see Appendix C) from each business.

Trust is essential to building a good working relationship in the business industry (Pinsky, 2013). To build trust, I ensured that the information provided by the participants used in this study would not have any connection to their identity. Disassociation enables participants to feel comfortable and willing to share the information that is necessary for

the success of the research study (Webb, Davies, Johnson, & Abayomi, 2014). When participants feel they are in a positive environment, it is conducive to the sharing of information (Yin, 2014). Only I know the identity of the participants and have access to the data. The identity of the participants will remain confidential to protect their identities and job. The data I collected from the interviews will remain locked in my home safe for 5 years and be disposed of thereafter, by shredding all physical paperwork and deleting all electronic files.

### **Research Method and Design**

In the day-to-day operations of any organization, there are interpersonal issues that arise, and the conflict that stems from it is unpredictable yet controllable to a certain extent. The purpose of my study was to explore strategies used by managers to manage employee conflict in the workplace and identify techniques and systems to improve the conflict management skills for managers, and a qualitative, case study design was most appropriate for this study.

### **Research Method**

Based on the purpose and problem of the study, I chose the qualitative research method for this study. Yin (2014) suggested that qualitative research has five characteristics: (a) it gives an understanding of people's lives, (b) depicts someone's viewpoint, (c) contributes to theory that helps explain a phenomenon, (d) uses a variety of sources to gather and analyze data rather than a single source, and (e) it is used to explain the related circumstances in which people survive. Researchers use qualitative research, unlike other social science methods, to study real world experiences and can be used for a

wide array of focuses (Yin, 2014). A qualitative approach was best suited for this study because this method is used to explore people's ideas and experiences; the information gathered from qualitative research cannot be easily combined and put into tables like quantitative data (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013).

Quantitative research is normally conducted when there is quantifiable data, and qualitative research is conducted when an inadequate amount of data exists (Mittra, 2013). Quantitative researchers focus on the measurement and analysis of variables. Qualitative researchers use structured collection methods such as surveys and experiments whereas qualitative researchers use unstructured methods, such as case studies and indepth interviews (Starr, 2014).

Quantitative research methods differ from qualitative methods because they are focused on the scientific approach, whereas qualitative methods focus on the mindset of an individual (Chandler, 2013). Quantitative research is used to gather large sums of data, which can be analyzed and used to generalize information from a sample population to a large population; in contrast, qualitative research narrows the scope and focuses on indepth information about a single phenomenon (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Also, quantitative research often requires a large sample size for issues of generalizability, but this limitation is not a factor in a qualitative study (Palinkas et al., 2013). The sample population that I used for this study is relatively small and that is why a quantitative research method was not suitable for my study.

Researchers use a mixed method approach when either a quantitative or a qualitative approach does not provide the insight into a phenomenon that is required for

the study (Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013). A mixed methodology is a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods and can be best used to evaluate complexities in the business world (Thamhain, 2014). Researchers use mixed methods if they need to capture the real-life experience of a participant as well as quantifying certain data (Hayes, Bonner, & Douglas, 2013). The mixed method approach should have an equal amount of both qualitative and quantitative characteristics to be considered mixed (Thamhain, 2014). The mixed methodology combines correlation analysis between variables and empirical research (Zachariadis, Scott, & Barrett, 2013). This methodology also combines quantitative and qualitative methods to form hypotheses that may explain lived experiences (Zachariadis et al., 2013). My study did not fit these criteria and therefore, a mixed method was not appropriate.

### **Research Design**

A multiple case study design was appropriate for exploring conflict resolution strategies on military installations because I sought to understand strategies used in practice in business environments. A case study can be used to explore relationships when studying a small sample size (Cronin, 2014). The other qualitative designs that I considered for this research study included ethnography, content analysis, and phenomenology. The design chosen for a study should be chosen based on the problem and research question (Cronin, 2014). Each qualitative design has specific characteristics.

Ethnography was not an appropriate design for this study because ethnography studies are focused on phenomena that take place within a culture (e.g., Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Ethnography also involves an in-depth study of the lived experiences of



individuals in their natural habitat (Herrmann, Barnhill, & Poole, 2013). This type of study could be used to study a cultural group or social setting by using direct observation and participation as a data collection method, which would not capture the same information that would be obtained from seeking the lived experiences of individuals (Moustakas, 1994). Ethnography research designs take a long period of time to conduct because of the extensive information that needs to be collected in a natural setting (Mazmanian, Cohn, & Dourish, 2014). This design involves investigating the everyday behaviors of individuals of a culture over an extended period to examine the patterns, beliefs, and traditions (Herrmann et al., 2013), and subsequently, ethnography was not deemed an appropriate design for this study.

Content analysis is the study of preexisting documents, and this design does not require research to be conducted using individual participation (Celik, 2013). It is a systematic research process that is used to recognize patterns, anomalies, or themes within communication resources such as books and newspapers (Cho & Lee, 2014). This design was inappropriate for my study because this study does not involve the investigation of documents, but it involves the empirical research of conflict resolution strategies of managers in the workplace.

In a study by Buser, Pitchko, and Buser (2014), the researchers conducted a phenomenological study in an attempt to understand the healing process that takes place mentally with individuals that committed a self-related injury. This type of research design was appropriate for exploring and interpreting the experiences that the individuals felt when dealing with their recovery and would also be appropriate for my study to

examine conflict management practices used by managers on military bases (Buser et al., 2014). While a phenomenological design focuses on the lived experiences in order to gain a better understanding of a phenomenon (Gray, 2013; Moustakas, 1994), this design was somewhat appropriate for this study; however, it would not have been the most effective design because of the desire to study participants working for civilian businesses aboard military installations.

A case study is a design where a researcher studies a person or group that there is a gap or missing information of a phenomenon (Rauch, Doorn, & Hulsink, 2014). A case study is used for an indepth exploration of an event, person, group, or process (Yin, 2014). Researchers conducting case studies provide a thorough investigation of historical data or lived experiences, and another source of data in order to investigate and get a better understanding of a phenomenon (Yin, 2014).

Case studies require a researcher to engage with and analyze their subject(s) while adding valuable knowledge to the phenomenon that is being researched (Yin, 2014). Researchers use a case study to study modern day events in which the significant behaviors cannot be manipulated (Yin, 2014); and because my study sought to explore conflict resolution strategies that can improve business managers' conflict management skills, a case study was appropriate for my study.

When selecting a qualitative design for a research study, it is important that the researcher address how data saturation will be achieved. Interviews and other data collection methods should continue until the information received becomes stagnant or redundant, at which point, data saturation is then reached (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, &

Fontenot, 2013). Data saturation is required to achieve content validity; however, in qualitative research, there are no specific criteria or sample size for establishing data saturation except that it is reached when there are no new findings or issues derivative from the data (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I determined that when my data started to become redundant and stories and experiences were repeated that I had reached saturation.

### **Population and Sampling**

The population I selected for this study were managers who worked in four civilian businesses aboard a military installation in Southern Arizona. In order to be eligible for participation in this study, participants must have been a manager within the organization, held the management position for at least 6 months, and used strategies for managing employee conflict; the civilian small business that the participant belongs to must have been operating on the installation for at least 5 years. With these selection criteria, managers were shared information that directly relates to my overarching research question. Participants received an invitation for participation, which stipulated the terms for eligibility (see Appendix D). When interviews were being scheduled, I confirmed eligibility with each participant.

Researchers select participants purposefully when they want to have individuals for their study that are not chosen random or left to chance (Robinson, 2014). In this research study, a sample population was chosen from civilian businesses aboard a military installation in Arizona. Purposive sampling is when a researcher selects a sample of participants from a population who have met predetermined conditions (Chetty, Partanen, Rasmussen, & Servais, 2014; Elo, et al., 2014; Gray, 2013). An advantage of

purposive sampling, Robinson posited, is that it allows the researcher to select participants that the researcher is interested in and a disadvantage of purposive sampling is that the sample has the potential for bias.

Purposive sampling allows the researcher to select participants that have some knowledge or expertise on the research question (see Wagstaff & Williams, 2014). Purposive sampling also allows the researcher to reach the targeted population in a quick manner (Robinson, 2014). Purposive sampling was ideal for this study. This type of sampling allowed a researcher to select participants who fit a specific criterion needed for their research (see Guetterman, 2015; Montero-Marín et al., 2013).

I selected participants for this study using purposive sampling. The businesses I chose were ones that have been operating on the installation for at least 5 years. After I have received approval from the businesses' leadership, I asked them to solicit participation from their managers via the Invitation for Participation (Appendix D). Those managers that were interested in participating in the study contacted me, and I noted the time, date, and business from which the participant was part of.

The sample size of the case study is dependent on the phenomenon that is explored (Yin, 2014). After I have reviewed all of the participants information that I received confirmation for, I selected from this group the participants that were ideal for this study. Researchers should focus on the research question or phenomenon to be explored rather than the sample size in a qualitative study (Roy, Zvonkovic, Goldberg, Sharp, & LaRossa, 2015). I selected participants who provided broad perspectives and that could aide in identifying strategies that civilian small business managers use to

manage employee conflict. I selected 11 managers from 4 different businesses. In a qualitative study, using a small number of participants, while conducting purposive sampling will potentially allow the researcher to transfer findings to a larger population (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013; Yilmaz, 2013); therefore, purposive sampling was ideal for this study.

Data saturation needs to occur in a research study to ensure that all pertinent information is captured, analyzed, and interpreted (Yin, 2014). Qualitative sample sizes are usually smaller than quantitative sample sizes because they focus on understanding the phenomenon (Palinkas et al., 2013). Several methodologists have varying opinions about the sample size that a qualitative study should have. Therefore, a technique that researchers could use to justify data saturation is by citing other studies and research that have used comparable designs to address comparable research problems (Marshall et al., 2013). However, the ideal method of obtaining data saturation is conducting research until the point when the data collected starts to become redundant or when there is no new information being collected from the research (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013).

Methodological triangulation is a method that researchers use to ensure data saturation is reached (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The use of a secondary means of data collection, to include organizational documents and observational data (Yin, 2014), will assist the researcher with converging data using methodological triangulation (Petcavage, 2016). I conducted a document review for methodological triangulation to achieve saturation of the data. For each of the four businesses (cases), I combined the interview

data with supporting documentation from the organization. This included manager handbooks, HR policies, and other documents related to conflict resolution.

I conducted interviews with participants at a location and time that was mutually agreed upon and if participants wanted to withdraw from the research study, they could have done so without any ramification personal or professional. If a participant wanted to withdraw, they simply needed to communicate with me via e-mail (if before or after the interview has taken place) or verbalize the desire to withdraw during the interview. Subsequent to the interviews, the data collection phase ended.

For the conduct of the interviews, we agreed upon a location that was in a private office setting. When individuals participating in an interview are in a setting that is comfortable and has privacy, they will be more apt to share rich data that is needed (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013; Yin, 2014). At the onset of the interview, I made casual conversation with the participants to make them feel comfortable. I scheduled 1 hour with each participant to conduct face-to-face interviews, and I conferred with the participant if there was additional time needed for the interview. After the interview was completed, I emailed them a synthesis of the transcript for each question answered for member checking.

### **Ethical Research**

Conducting business in an ethical manner will build trust amongst people that have a working relationship (Sharif & Scandura, 2014). Because the research focused on situations that have happened in the workplace, I made sure to inform the participants that the information they provided would not be able to be traced back to them or identify

them in anyway. The interviews were conducted separately from the participant's normal work activities at a location that was best suited for all parties.

I produced necessary agreement forms for organizations and participants to be read and signed before the conduct of the interviews. The agreements forms included the informed consent form and a letter of cooperation (see Appendix C). Appendix C contains the organizational permission letter from the organization leadership granting access to employees as participants and permission to collect data from its staff; it also states that I would not identify individual or company names, and logos or trademarks.

The informed consent form provided protection to the researcher and it serves to protect an individual's rights from being violated (Lad & Dahl, 2014). The informed consent form includes the researcher's contact information, a statement stipulating that participants are under no obligation to conduct the interview; this verbiage is in place to help protect all stakeholders (see Hardicre, 2014). During the interview process, participants were able to inform the researcher if they wished to withdraw or terminate the interview by leaving during the execution of the interview.

The consent form also has a confidentiality section, which states that I would not release any proprietary or personal information in connection with this study. There were no consequences for withdrawing from the study early; withdrawal is an ethical consideration that should be addressed by the researcher and made clear to the participant (Belmont Report, 1979). Participants were informed that they could terminate the interview at any time, and that there were no personal or professional repercussions. Participants were also informed that they could withdraw from the study any time prior to

the interview by contacting me via email or phone if they wished. There were no participants that withdrew from the study or terminated the interview before it was over. Participants were offered a copy of the signed informed consent form. Although, researchers sometime offer incentives to their participants if they participate in the research study (Amarasinghe et al., 2013); there were no incentives offered for participation in this study.

Researchers need to consider both the benefits and risks of the research study to determine if it is reasonable to proceed with their research. They have a responsibility to protect their participants from unnecessary harms and risks that may be associated with the research (Yin, 2014). I took certain measures such as assigning codes to identify participants and storing documents and pertinent information in a place that only I have access to in order to ensure each participant's personal information is not compromised and that the integrity of the research study would be maintained.

Confidentiality is an ethical consideration that should be addressed in a research study; it helps to eliminate possible damage to the participant and their organizations (Fisher, 2013). Individuals have rights that allow them certain privacies and confidentiality and the protection of their privacy should be addressed when conducting research on them (Fisher, 2013). Without confidentiality, the participants and their employers would open themselves up to scrutiny, and there could be negative implications if the responses from the participants are misconstrued (Edlund, Hartnett, Heider, Perez, & Lusk, 2014; Hardicre, 2014). I provided a confidentiality statement in the informed consent form to the organization so that they understand that I would not



release any information that could link them or their employees to anything in the research. The confidentiality statement is a promise to the organization from me that I would not divulge any confidential information and it includes that I would not discuss confidential information with friends and family and not sell, release, or alter information.

Individual participants received an informed consent form that both they and I signed before I began conducting the interview. Before the interview, I reviewed with them the purpose of the study and reiterated that their personal information would be held confidential. Also, I reminded participants that they have the right to refuse to answer, end the interview, or withdraw from participation in the study at any time. The participant's answers used in this study will not be used for any other purpose than this study.

Before the interview questions, I asked participants to fill out the demographic questions for participants (see Appendix E). I identified which participants filled out the form by inputting the participant's code on the form (i.e., SP1-SP20) and attaching the same code to their interview. I am the only person that would be able to link participants with their participant codes. Confidentiality for a participant can be maintained by using a coding system for a research study (see Mitchell & Wellings, 2013). In order to ensure confidentiality, I coded each participant SP1-SP20 (SP- stands for study participant) in consecutive order of the interviews. During the interview, I did not ask questions that would compromise the confidentiality of the individual or organization they belong to; I

did not inform participants of the identity of other participants that belong to the same organization conducting an interview.

Information gathered by researchers needs to be handled carefully, and any information that is received by the researcher should be maintained accordingly. To protect the organization's and individual's rights and their personally identifiable information, the raw data and files will be stored for 5 years and the researcher is the only person with access to that information. Lustgarten (2015) recommended that data be stored for 5 years; therefore, after the files and data have been stored for 5 years, all physical paperwork will be shredded and electronic files deleted. The Walden IRB approval number for this study is 06-16-17-0485541, and expires on June 15, 2018.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

The goal for data collection in this study was to obtain information about the exploration of strategies that civilian business managers use to reduce employee conflict. I served as the primary data collection instrument in this study. The researcher serving as the primary data collection instrument is one of the most capable data collection instruments in conducting qualitative studies (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013). Face-to-face, semistructured interviews served as the secondary data collection instrument. Peredaryenko and Krauss (2013) also posited that, in a qualitative study, the researcher serves as the primary instrument for data collection. It is also important for the researcher to serve as the primary instrument for data collection because the researcher is able to have social interactions with the participants, which would yield a quality exchange of information (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013).

In a qualitative study, it is important to gather an understanding and accurate interpretations of an individual's experience and conducting interviews is the best way to achieve that (McNulty, Zattoni, & Douglas, 2013). After participants responded to my study participation invitation (see Appendix D), we scheduled a time and place that was mutually beneficial to conduct the interviews. Interviews started after each participant gave their consent by signing the Informed Consent Form. Before the interview questions, participants answered several demographic questions. I examined information from the demographic questionnaire to ensure participant eligibility was met, and the information from this questionnaire could be used for future implications (see Appendix E).

After the interview, I collected and reviewed all company documents I received (i.e., manager handbook, HR policies, other documents related to conflict resolution, etc.). Participants' actual names or the names of organizations will not be provided to protect identities. Company documents I received from participants and information found on the company's website, and other published information served as a secondary source for methodological triangulation (see Bamiatzi & Kirchmaier, 2014; Heale & Forbes, 2013). Methodological triangulation, using data from a secondary source such as archival records, enhances the validity and reliability of the study (Kotlar & De Massis, 2013).

Semistructured interviews are used to gain rich data from participants during the interview process in the exploration of the researcher's research question (McNulty et al., 2013). Researchers use interviews in qualitative studies in order to gather information or

perceptions from participant's standpoint about a particular phenomenon (Idris, 2014). Conducting semistructured interviews help produce emerging themes and patterns to appear about a phenomenon, which can be used to compare and contrast with existing research (Mojtahed, Nunes, Martins, & Peng, 2014), which subsequently helped me to identify strategies managers can use to manage employee conflict. I used a portable audio recording device and note taking instruments to record the information shared by participants during their interviews. I used bracketing, which is used for the rigor of conducting the interview. Bracketing allows the researcher to reduce biases during the interview process by reflecting on the notes taken during that process (Snelgrove, 2014).

To ensure reliability and validity of the study, I used member checking and the same interview questions (see Appendix A) with each of the participants. The interview protocol (see Appendix B) was used to ensure that each interview process was consistent; an interview protocol also serves as a means of increasing the reliability and validity of the study (De Ceunynck et al., 2013). I used the interview protocol to guide me in the interview with each participant. After an interview was complete, I either scheduled a follow up meeting or emailed them the synthesized interpretations to the questions they answered to complete the member checking process and to ensure I accurately captured their perspectives. Member checking is another means to increase the reliability and validity of the study (Houghton et al., 2013). Member checking is used to ensure that the information recorded by the researcher interprets the information shared by a participant (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013; Koelsch, 2013).

### **Data Collection Technique**

The central question of my study focused on the strategies that civilian small business leaders use to manage employee conflict in the workplace. I sought to explore this question by conducting in-person, semistructured interviews with civilian small business managers on a military base using open ended questions (see Appendix A). The goal of this study was to extract the information needed to analyze the phenomenon of conflict in the workplace.

Prior to the data collection process, I identified myself as the doctoral student conducting the research. I confirmed that each participant agreed to continue with the interview by reviewing the Informed Consent Form with them. I then proceeded to conduct the interview the participants, who are managers of small businesses located on a military installation in Southern Arizona. With the permission of each participant, I audio recorded each interview and took notes when necessary. The entire duration of each session, from the time I met each participant until the end of the interview, lasted approximately 60 minutes.

Semistructured interviews as a data collection technique is one of the preeminent ways that a researcher can collect data for a qualitative study (see Doody & Noonan, 2013; Yin, 2014). I used semistructured interviews for this research study. An advantage of an interview is that allows the researcher to obtain firsthand information about an individual's experience because individuals can express themselves and give information that otherwise would not be collected using other techniques such as a survey (Moustakas, 1994). I used an interview protocol to guide the interview process (see

Appendix B). I also used open-ended questions, because in a qualitative study, open-ended questions are more thought provoking than close-ended questions (see Yilmaz, 2013). Using open-ended questions allowed me to extract the conflict resolution strategies that small business leaders from my study use so that I could better analyze the data to identify methods for improving conflict management strategies for civilian small business leaders. To ensure the information received by a participant is accurate, member checking is appropriate (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). During the interview, I interpreted the information that the participant shared to ensure that I understood what they meant.

A disadvantage of the interview is that participants may give the answers they believe the interviewer wants to hear (Yin, 2014). However, member checking is used to ensure the meaning of the participant answers are captured, which is also an advantage that the interviewer has (Koelsch, 2013; Skiba & Bisch, 2014). As a part of member checking, I shared a succinct synthesis of each question to determine if it represented their answers so that they could either validate or rebut what I provided; this would allow credibility and validity of the study and ensure that rich information is obtained (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The member checking process continued to take place until each participant's perspective was captured and there was no new data or themes that emerged.

There should be multiple techniques in collecting data in order to best gain the information needed to answer a study's central question (Yin, 2014). As a secondary source to ensure triangulation in this case study, I conducted a document review, by collecting company documents such as i.e., manager handbook, HR policies, and other

documents related to conflict resolution from the company's website which assisted in my research. Upon confirmation of the cooperation from the business to provide participants for the study, I requested documents containing information on conflict management/ resolution process within the organization and/or strategies that have been used by managers to resolve conflict. I also searched via the internet for any public documents that assisted in gathering information useful to my study. While I scheduled interviews with the participants, I asked them to provide any documentation they could provide on the company's strategies for conflict resolution or their individual perspective on conflict resolution should they differ from what the company documents stated or not available for public access. Once I reviewed all documents provided by the company and participants, I transferred information into a Microsoft Word Document so that it could be uploaded to into the NVivo10 software program for theme recognition.

A benefit of using document review for triangulation in a qualitative study is that it will help reduce the bias of having a single source of information (Barnes, Dang, Leavitt, Guarana, & Uhlmann, 2015; Heale & Forbes, 2013). An additional benefit of document review is that the researcher can use the documents to validate information obtained through the semistructured interview (Denzin, 2012); it could also help to gain additional insight for conflict resolution strategies used by civilian small business managers. A disadvantage of document review is that the researcher could possibly misinterpret the information presented, data could be outdated, or inaccurate; therefore, resulting in inaccurate triangulation (Bryde, Broquetas, & Volm, 2013).

There are some other advantages and disadvantages to using these data collection techniques as well. An advantage of document review is that some of the information needed could be easily sought out via the internet; in contrast a disadvantage is that some information may be confidential and harder to gain access to. An advantage of conducting interviews is that it will obtain the most accurate information when gaining information from a participant (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Interviews should be conducted in a place that is conducive to a fluid and effective flow of information between the interviewer and interviewee Anyan (2013). The semistructured interview technique allows the researcher to ask questions that stem from the structured interview questions to better interpret what each participant wants to express at that moment (e.g., Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). However, a disadvantage of an interview is that participants may feel pressured to answer questions or just be shy (Yin, 2014).

### **Data Organization Technique**

Data that are collected, organized, and analyzed using proven methods help reduce fear, and the results from the information is more reliable (Gabel & Tokarski, 2014). Qualitative researchers can enhance reliability by organizing information in a manner that is efficient (Mneimneh et al., 2013). I developed a coding system to ensure confidentiality of each participant and their organizations. Therefore, I coded each participant SP1-SP20 (SP- stands for study participant) in consecutive order of the interviews.



Using a coding system to refer to a participant will help establish confidentiality for participants in a research study (Gibson, Benson, & Brand, 2013; Pierre & Jackson, 2014). By providing confidentiality, the participants may feel more comfortable about the interview process and will be more apt to provide credible information, which will provide rich data for organization and analysis (Webb et al., 2014). An organization system that is used to store data should protect the integrity of the study (Anyan, 2013). Information and documents that I collected and organized included: letters of cooperation, informed consent forms, notes from participant observation data, interview transcripts, company review documents (i.e., manager handbook, HR policies, other documents related to conflict resolution, etc.) and transcribed interview data after member checking was conducted.

Researchers use coding techniques to distinguish between the different participants and organize emerging themes in a research study (Rosenfeld, Gatten, & Scales, 2013). I created electronic folders for all the information and separate them by participant code, theme, or application for simplicity (see Campbell, Quincy, Osserman, & Pedersen, 2013). I used an audio recording device to record each interview and took notes using a pen and a notepad to record participant observation data as necessary. All notes included the study participant's code at the top for ease of organization. I transcribed each interview utilizing Microsoft Word and input the information into the coding software, NVivo10, to analyze and identify current and emergent themes from the interview data. I grouped the participant's answers from the interview by the themes identified from the conceptual framework that is conveyed through the interview

questions. Moustakas (1994) articulated this organization technique as relating and clustering invariant themes.

Extracting data and creating organization techniques allows the researcher to mold the information and identify specific information that is required for a study (Gabel & Tokarski, 2014). I transferred all notes, informed consent forms, and raw data retrieved from the interviews to a digital file and stored on a flash drive. Banks (2013) supported the idea of digitally transferring all information retrieved from an interview on to a flash drive for 5 years. After all data from the audio recorder was transcribed, it was erased; and all physical content was shredded once I digitized it and saved to a flash drive (see Flannery & Gormley, 2014). It is important to keep all data collected during the data collection phase for 5 years before being destroyed (Connell, 2013).

### **Data Analysis**

Qualitative data analysis is a systematic process that researchers use to examine collected data (Houghton et al., 2013). As the primary data collector, I continuously reflected on the information collected and the data collection process to give an accurate assessment of the information. When conducting a qualitative data analysis, researchers have to make critical evaluations and inferences of the information received; being able to decipher, interpret, and organize information from qualitative data collection methods (e.g., interview, case study, or focus group discussion) will allow the researcher to develop themes (Yin, 2014). Yin also posited that a comprehensive data analysis should have the researcher to compile data, assemble and disassemble, interpret, and make conclusions. This perpetuation allows information to be as accurate as possible,

encompassing environmental, physical, and intellectual considerations during the data collection process, which increases credibility in the data analysis process.

Researchers use triangulation to validate information through multiple sources (Bureau & Andersen, 2014). Multiple sources of information are used in methodological triangulation for the data analysis process to provide a credible interpretation of a phenomenon and draw conclusions from the data collected; these sources include interviews, documents, focus groups, etc. (e.g. Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Yin, 2014). Triangulation adds credibility to a study because it considers more than a single source of reference for a researcher to analyze (Hoon, 2013; Richardson, Kalvaitis, & Delparte, 2014). I conducted methodological triangulation using information from the semistructured interviews and company documentation.

Data analysis is the process of gathering and organizing information in a manner that will allow the researcher to develop themes or patterns that represent the information collected (Yin, 2014). First in the data analysis process was: I recorded the interviews using an audio recorder, and after the interviews were completed, I transcribed them into Microsoft Word and reviewed the recordings multiple times to ensure that I have captured the meaning of each participant (see Othman & Rahman, 2014). After transcription, I created and shared a succinct synthesis of each question for member checking to validate the interpretation of the data. Being as accurate as possible and capturing all of the content that is stated in an interview will preserve the integrity of the interview and allow the researcher to recognize emergent themes (Johansson, 2013). Themes are created by the researcher to capture the essence of what the participants are

trying to say (Nassaji, 2015; Yin, 2014). My interview questions were used in developing themes that relate to my research study.

The next step was the coding process of the information; I coded using both manual and through the use of a computer-aided qualitative data analysis software, NVivo10. I uploaded the transcribed information from Microsoft Word into the NVivo10 software, which aided me in the coding process. NVivo10 computer-aided qualitative data analysis software aide researchers in identifying themes and coding from the data collected. I chose the NVivo10 computer aided qualitative data analysis software because it was recommended by staff members of Walden, user-friendly, and it allows users to import data from other word processing software (see Kovarik, 2016). Themes and patterns were developed through the coding phase of the data analysis process (see Yin, 2014). I used NVivo10 to identify frequencies of words, phrases, and thematic analyses to help support the data coding process, as a result I coded these data for emergent themes. In the manual process of coding, I highlighted patterns and themes that I recognized from the interview, member checking, and company documentation. I used methodological triangulation of semistructured interviews and company related documents to improve validity and credibility. The use of triangulation allowed me to develop comprehensive themes. I reviewed all of the company related documents that I received from participants as well as the public information I retrieved from the Internet to explore strategies that civilian small business managers used to resolve conflict. This is the process that helped me to analyze data and construct a detailed Presentation of the Findings.

In the final step of the data analysis process, emergent themes that were present in each case were aligned to the literature and the conceptual framework. Bishop and Lexchin (2013) postulated that a researcher should analyze the data collected to find themes that support patterns or common themes. Through the analysis of themes and patterns, researchers can better validate interpretations (Nassaji, 2015; Zheng, Guo, Dong, & Owens, 2015). To stay abreast of emergent themes through new publications, I reviewed newly published studies that related to my overarching research question, which supported the findings of my study.

### **Reliability and Validity**

Reliability and validity demonstrate consistency throughout the collection and analysis procedure of the research (Kayhan, Davis, Collins, & Bhattacharjee, 2013). Regarding qualitative research, credibility and transferability are similar to internal validity and external validity, respectively, in quantitative research; and dependability and confirmability in qualitative are similar to that of reliability and objectivity in quantitative research (Munn, Porritt, Lockwood, Aromataris, & Pearson, 2014). Rigor can be applied to a study by having the researcher using methodical and detailed procedures throughout their work. The factors used to address the rigor of qualitative research are credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011).

### **Reliability**

There are several tools that qualitative researchers can use to address dependability, member checking and using protocols to ensure consistency throughout

the data collection process (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Noble & Smith, 2015). A technique that can be used to achieve dependability is to ensure transparency and consistency throughout the study so that the work could be easily replicated to enhance results (Cope, 2014; Grossoehme, 2014; Yin, 2014). Member checking is a tool that qualitative researchers use to ensure the information collected from a participant is accurately interpreted (Houghton et al., 2013). When member checking is conducted in a study, there is a better chance for generalization in the study to occur (Fey, Scrandis, Daniels, & Haut, 2014). To address dependability, I allowed the participants to review the interpretation of my data, which was a synthesis of their answer from the interviews. Researchers address dependability by describing the purpose of the study, sample population, participants, data collection and analysis methods (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). To address dependability, I detailed the findings of my study and addressed any changes that were made during the research process.

### **Validity**

**Credibility.** Credibility is gained by trust and involves a person's perception of the situation (Kayhan et al., 2013; Munn et al., 2014). Practitioners and future researchers are more willing to use research that is credible (Abdallah & Jaleel, 2013). There are several different ways that a researcher could establish credibility, through member checking, peer review, and reflexivity (e.g., Thomas & Magilvy, 2011).

Researchers ensure credibility through member checking by having participants validate interpretations of the researcher (Houghton et al., 2013). After the interview was complete, I ensured that each participant had a chance to review the summary from the

interview to achieve member checking. By sharing my interpretation of what the participant said, it ensured the accuracy of their experiences was captured via themes or assertions during the data collection process (Kayhan et al., 2013; Nummela, Saarenketo, & Loane, 2014). Another technique to provide credibility is by the use of triangulation (Yin, 2014); triangulation strengthens the credibility of a case study by comparing multiple sources of data (Heale & Forbes, 2013; Marshall & Rossman). I used triangulation in the form of interviews and document review. I collected supporting documents from the companies/cases involved in the study, related to employee or manager training. The supporting documents consisted of manager training materials, the company website, and mission statement.

**Transferability.** Transferability is described as being able to transfer the data collection methods and results of a study from one group to another (Houghton et al., 2013). Transferability is achieved by providing solid descriptions of the population and other significant details relevant to the study (Houghton et al., 2013). By describing the population and geographic description, future researchers will better understand how to apply my methodology and findings to their research.

I also addressed transferability in the implications for future research section of this study by informing future researchers of possibilities to be explored, which may yield significant results. Providing detailed information on a research study for future researchers will increase the potential that those researchers will be able to transfer findings to other studies (Noble & Smith, 2015). Also, Marshall and Rossman (2016) posited that it is ultimately up to researchers to determine if results are transferable.

**Confirmability.** Confirmability can be achieved when the dependability, transferability, and credibility of the research has been established (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). Member checking and triangulation are two methods that are used by researchers to address confirmability (Yin, 2014). I used triangulation, member checking, and an interview protocol to address confirmability. Confirmability should be addressed in qualitative research using reflexivity or rather, continuously reflecting on the research that has been done (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011).

After conducting each interview, I reflected on the interview process and review notes and observation data to determine if there was anything that influenced the participant's responses. Confirmability means that the information or findings of the study are confirmed by others, which helps build trust and confidence in the entire study (Houghton et al., 2013; Zachariadis et al., 2013). I addressed confirmability by using existing literature to confirm the results or findings of my study.

**Data Saturation.** Data saturation is reached when there are no new themes emerging from the data (Marshall et al., 2013). I scheduled and conducted eleven interviews with participants for this study. After review and analysis of the data, there were no new ideas emerging and the interview questions were fully explored. Member checking and triangulation are techniques researchers use to achieve data saturation (Bonafide et al., 2013; Denzin, 2012). Therefore, I collected and reviewed company documents and I ensured the participants reviewed the data that I interpreted to ensure that I accurately represented their ideas and assertions from the interview. Fusch and



Ness (2015) suggested that data saturation must occur in a qualitative study to achieve reliability and validity.

### **Transition and Summary**

In Section 2, I provided a detailed discussion of how I conducted the research study. The purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study was to explore conflict resolution strategies of small business managers. I discussed my role as a researcher and the ethical considerations that must be upheld while conducting research. I discussed the instruments I used to collect the data and the techniques I used to analyze the data. I concluded the section with a discussion of how I addressed and ensured reliability and validity of the research.

In Section 3, there will be a discussion of the results of my research study and the application to professional practice. The results of the interviews were presented first along with the data analysis. Next, there is a discussion of implications for social change, and then my recommendations for action and future research as a result of my findings of the study. Lastly, I provided reflections and conclusions from my study.

### Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

In this section, I discuss the results of my study. I begin with an introduction and the purpose of the study, followed by a presentation of the results from the interviews and the data analysis. Next is a discussion of the application to business practice, implications for social change is included, along with my recommendations for action and future research as a result of my findings of the study. Lastly, I offer my reflections on and the conclusions of my research.

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies civilian small business managers use to reduce conflict and improve employee productivity. I used Campbell's (1965) RGCT as the conceptual framework for exploring the relationship between competition of resources and conflict in the workplace. When managers can incorporate competitiveness and incorporate everyone's goals, they might be able to use conflict in a productive way (Saiti, 2015). I collected data from 11 manager interviews and company-related documentation from four civilian small businesses on military installations in Southern Arizona.

To conduct this analysis, I used the NVivo10 software to explore transcripts from each of the interviews and company-related documents to identify themes during the coding process. The three themes that emerged from the data analysis were effective communication, situational leadership, and positive organizational culture. The exploration of these concepts may help civilian small business managers to manage conflict in the workplace and improve employee productivity.

### **Presentation of the Findings**

The overarching research question of this study was: What strategies do civilian small business managers use to reduce employee conflict? Yin described a comprehensive data analysis approach for multiple case studies by compiling data, analyzing each case through the process of disassembling, reassembling, and interpreting data, and finally conducting cross-case analysis.

Data from the interviews were collected and entered into the NVivo10 program. I performed coding by thematic analyses of a priori (based on the interview and purpose statement) codes, as well as emergent codes. In addition, I used the search function to search for specific terms to ensure that I had captured all relevant codes and narratives. This coding enabled me to develop emergent themes. This process was used to analyze these data and construct a detailed Presentation of the Findings. Data from this multiple case study included both document review and semistructured interviews of 11 civilian small business managers from businesses aboard a military installation in Southern Arizona. Participants provided rich data for the study as they had experience with resolving employee conflict in the workplace.

The data provided an in-depth understanding of conflict resolution strategies used by these managers. I achieved methodological triangulation through alignment of the interviews collected from the participants as well as documents that I retrieved from the Internet and that participants provided, including: mission and vision statements, training handbooks, manager's handbooks, and memorandums during the data analysis and data collection phases. The data analysis of these sources of information allowed me to

generate three themes/strategies that highlighted what civilian small business managers used to resolve employee conflict. In the case of this qualitative analysis of strategies managers used to resolve conflict, the emergent themes were strategies. In addition, these strategies were the answer to the research question of what strategies to managers use. These strategies emerged from the data analysis and thematic analysis, which were present in each case and aligned with the literature review and conceptual framework.

The three strategies for resolving employee conflict were: effective communication, situational leadership, and creating a positive organizational culture. Within these strategies, there were substrategies that managers used to implement the overall strategy in an effort to reduce employee conflict. The conceptual framework produced strategies that civilian small business managers could use to resolve employee conflict. Below is a synopsis of the findings from each business case, followed by the presentation of the three emergent themes, and closing the Presentation of the Findings with a comparative analysis of all four businesses.

### **Business Backgrounds**

**Business 1.** Business 1 was a fast food restaurant that was franchised, and included participants SP6, SP5, and SP11. This restaurant offered fresh food, with a high regard for customer service and a clean environment. According to the company documents, the vision of the company was for all of their employees to be masters of all skills including customer service and product knowledge. Business 1 was a world-wide organization and had a strong belief in having the best employees on staff. Business 1 sponsored several additional businesses that promoted healthy living. The company also

believed in fostering a professional work environment for their employees where respect and honesty were a must.

There was little information in the training handbook or information found on the Internet about how this company's managers should resolve employee conflict in the workplace. It was a requirement that all employees be professional and understand how to control their behavior and actions toward others as evidenced by the training handbook. In addition, teamwork was vital to the organization's success. There was no excuse for not being knowledgeable on a topic and individuals had a responsibility to ask for guidance when needed. Managers in Business 1 did not receive formal conflict management training; they either dealt with conflict based on what they interpreted from the training handbook, their past experience, situational experience, or observation.

**Business 2.** Business 2 was a retail establishment that had shops worldwide, and included study participants SP1, SP2, and SP3. Leaders of this business believed in fostering an atmosphere where the staff feels happy to come to work each day to provide a service to its customers. According to the company documents, the vision of Business 2 was to provide quality goods to their customers and provide a great customer service experience. Information from the company review documents on how the company's managers should resolve employee conflict in the workplace included conflict prevention, teamwork, cultivating positive relationships, and handling situations realistically.

Business 2 also indicated that positivity and enthusiasm from its staff brought forth a collaboration that created a well-rounded team capable of providing effective

service as evidenced by their company-related documents. One of the highest priorities of the business was the focus on the customer and achieving this focus. In addition, staff must have integrity, excellent customer service, and professionalism with peers and customers. Most of the managers from Business 2 had not received any formal training on conflict management. Instead they based their decisions on what was best for the company at the time by virtue of the information presented in the company review documents and/or the strategies they found on the Internet.

**Business 3.** Business 3 was a privately-owned company that provided hairstyles and hair care products. Business 3 employed over 5,000 employees nationwide and included study participants SP4, SP8, and SP10. Little information was available in the review documents about how this company's managers should resolve employee conflict in the workplace. A business goal of Business 3 was providing great customer service to the service members to help its employees build loyalty and embody the characteristics needed to be one of the leading providers on military installations. Business 3 made an effort to keep up with the hair trends and new products that customers demanded. Moreover, they also tried to grow their partnership with the military in order to provide a better service to its service members. Managers from this business did not receive any formal training on conflict management. Instead, they based their conflict resolution strategies on information in the company related documents, their own judgment, trial and error, past experiences, and other managers' actions.

**Business 4.** Business 4 was a regionally established company that specialized in providing fashionable hairstyles and provided haircare products. Study participants

included SP7 and SP9. This business believed in treating all customers, as well as staff, with courtesy and respect. There was no information available in the managers handbook that covered conflict resolution management or conflict resolution nor had these managers received any conflict management training and the only logic for their conflict resolution came from their past experiences.

### **Conflict Resolution Themes/Strategies**

When employee conflict develops in the workplace, it is incumbent upon managers to intervene so that all parties have a chance to resolve their differences in a practical manner. Aligning Campbell's (1965) RGCT in the sense that conflict stems from social psychology, it can be concluded that if managers address the impact that effective communication, situational leadership and creating a positive organizational culture have on conflict the strategies that come as a result will aid managers in reducing employee conflict in the workplace. If conflict is not addressed by the managers, it will affect organizational effectiveness (Gunkel, Schlaegel, & Vas Taras, 2016).

Researchers should create a list of codes ahead of time that will blend with the conceptual framework, which may allow the researcher to analyze the information to answer the research question (Saldana, 2009). The data I collected and analyzed generated the emergent themes I discuss in this section. In addition, based on Saldana's (2009) recommendations, I used a priori and emergent codes, as well as searched for specific terms that were related to the codes. These codes helped me fine-tune subcategories within each strategy, being able to focus more specifically on *how* these strategies were implemented.

**Strategy 1: Effective communication.** This theme/strategy highlights the significance of applying effective communication strategies before and in an effort to resolve employee conflict in the workplace. “Communication can be taken the wrong way and when you effectively communicate then employees understand what you are saying and not assuming” (SP2). The findings that resolving employee conflict through improved and effective communication were similar to the findings presented in the literature review by Singleton et al. (2011) and Kock, Leidner, and Gonzalez (2013). Moreover, communication is one of the predominate themes found throughout the cases in these findings.

Effective communication is important for the success of the organization, and is indicative of an essential strategy for addressing employee conflict in the workplace (Parker, 2015); this supports the information provided by the participants in these statements: “You have to be a good listener, let employees explain what happened and try to understand what they are saying; give everyone the benefit of a doubt before having all parties come together to address their differences” (SP7). A counseling document from Business 2 stated that “you have to communicate, I have written things down and had to talk to employees about it; I have given them do’s and don’ts.” This strategy is aligned to the conceptual framework because RGCT considers the ability of individuals to have open and effective communication a vital component in conflict resolution (Jackson, 1993). Perceived threats and solidarity lead to communication problems. Campbell’s RGCT considers effective communication for the resolving conflict (Campbell, 1965;



Jackson, 1993). Each of the civilian small business managers sought effective communication strategies to resolve conflict.

Businesses are composed of a collection of people who are interdependent, yet they serve for the betterment and productivity of the business as a whole. *Collaboration*, a strategy under effective communication, is used to resolve employee conflict more efficiently by having the support of organizational leaders to represent a unified front. The findings that supported that success in resolving conflict is established when people work with one another toward a purpose were similar to the findings presented by Davis (2016). RGCT postulates that having cooperation amongst with one another is the foundation upon which rules and guidelines can be established that will be adequate for all parties, which will reduce conflict amongst individuals. Campbell (1965) identified hostility as a driver of conflict and hostilities are reduced when superordinate goals are defined which allows for collaboration amongst employees.

When dealing with employee conflict that maybe too complex, SP1 suggested to have a backup, someone that could be with the manager who is just as, if not more, knowledgeable about conflict so that they can work together to resolve it. Being able to work with others in the organization showed support, unison, and commonality.

Statements from participants included:

- “Sometimes it helps when we are trying to resolve conflict between associates, that we come together and decide how we will handle the situation” (SP1);

- “If there is not teamwork then you can’t run a shift and you can’t get through the day. Working in unison makes the operation go smoother and helps mitigate conflict” (SP5);
- “When people work together, people come to work on time, the communication level is better, the productivity level is up, and we get more customers in and out” (SP10).

These examples demonstrate that (a) not every manager has all the answers, (b) managers and other organizational leaders need to collaborate, and (c) that there is strength in numbers when others support the cause.

When trying to understand a conflict, it is important to obtain all related information from parties involved before trying to resolve the issue. Having one-sided information could be a detriment in resolving conflict; moreover, it takes away the credibility of the person mediating the conflict if not all the information is presented. The findings were supported by Breugst and Shepherd (2017), that it is easier and less risky to make decisions when you have accurate and valuable information on which to base your decisions. Again, collaboration is a key element in effective communication.

SP4 posited that this is called the “chain link syndrome...when you first start a conversation and then that person tells someone else the story and the story changes just a bit and before you know it, the story blows up.” The strategy of obtaining all the facts in this instance may have prevented conflict by hearing all sides, especially with the individuals from which the conflict is stemming. In addition, SP7 advised that managers,

...be fully aware of what's going on and you can't go in not knowing what the situation is or you may be considered biased or not be able to resolve the conflict, so do the fact finding to understand the situation.

Managers implementing the strategy of obtaining all the facts and doing their due diligence to gather all the relevant information may have a better chance for gaining the respect and attention needed from the employees to resolve employee conflict. All participants indicated that obtaining all the facts is a critical component for managers to communicate effectively with and between the involved parties to resolve employee conflict.

SP4, SP10, and SP11 explained how gathering the information directly from the source may eliminate miscommunication and reduce employee conflict. SP11 stated that, "having respectful communication and figuring out the situation could help resolve employee conflict". SP10 also added "I talk to them and address the situation [and] figure out what the issue is". Lastly, "[conflict] could've been prevented if you would have just confronted the person you had a problem with [;] just bring it to the source" (SP4).

Leaders who are aware of the differences within their organization will be able to recognize issues beforehand and establish transparent communication, which will help mitigate conflict. Transparency among employees and managers are not the only type of transparency that should be adhered to when discussing employee conflict in the workplace. Organizations should have transparency in their systems as well as the operations that it has its employees to work in (Vaishali & Andotra, 2017). SP5 indicated how their company's policy is clear enough to provide a foundation for them to make

decisions that will have a positive impact on the business when dealing with workplace conflict; which may be evident of the low amount of conflict the participant felt they experienced as a manager. SP8 added that there is trust established in the managers when employees know there is a systematic approach to deal with issues.

The transparency element of the strategy aligns well with the perceived threat tenet of Campbell's RGCT in that when individuals perceive others to have the same skillset or like qualities, then they feel threatened because of the potential of an individual having underlying motives, one can conclude that having transparent communication can help resolve employee conflict (Jackson, 1993). SP4 stated that "open communication is important and no gossip, because if you have a problem, just bring it, don't tell other people the problem because it eventually gets back to the person." By having communication where there is no ambiguity and fairness on all accounts may help managers to understand the conflict and resolve it more effectively. Transparency also enhances straight forward communication that will allow employees to have more time committed to worthwhile issues rather than conflicts, therefore increasing productivity (Shapira- Lishchinsky, 2014). Utilizing transparent communication as a conflict resolution strategy stresses the notion that managers need to be honest and forthcoming with information, to the extent that they can share information.

SP1, SP5, SP6, SP9, SP10, and SP11 exclaimed that when employees are not direct with each other, managers have to be able to confront the individuals and reconcile the issue to keep a peaceful atmosphere. According to SP6, managers should "pull the employees aside and speak to them and have them to explain the situation in front of each

other.” It takes more energy for people to hide their personalities and feelings when dealing with conflict; subsequently, it is better to get everything out in the open, which may improve relationships and interactions among employees (Qadir & Khan, 2016). The abovementioned literature supports the findings that SP5 indicated that “you have to be upfront and have them to confront one another; get straight to the point of why they are having conflict and don’t take sides.” In most contexts, conflict avoidance by a manager may have negative implications (Yang & Li, 2017). Therefore, using the strategy of being direct will benefit managers in resolving employee conflict; which is also evidenced in the literature review postulated by Ubinger, Handal, and Massura (2013).

In a study by Poitras, Hill, Hamel, and Pelletier (2015), 59% of participants mentioned their manager’s ability to be unbiased, but 95% of the participants stated that managers have to follow that up with their actions. In this study SP4 described a similar description that helped tie my findings to the literature:

If I feel that as though I come across a situation that I may be bias because of the person, then I will excuse myself and have another lead or my assistant to step in because I never want to be accused that 'oh that's your buddy and that's why you didn't want to listen to my side of the story.'

As a result, by recognizing the potential for bias, participants exclaimed that they were able to better resolve employee conflict. This strategy aligns with the solidarity tenet of the conceptual framework that individuals sometimes develop prejudices and subsequently reject other individual’s considerations, making outsiders the enemy, and if addressed can mitigate conflict (Jackson, 1993). In cases where an employee felt he or

she received unfair treatment, managers should have had another individual to collaborate with, or remove themselves altogether.

While differing personalities contribute to employee conflict in the workplace, the personalities of managers also play a major role in how they will resolve the conflict (Qadir & Khan, 2016). According to SP4, “If you have a leader or manager that is fair and is going to listen then that’s the structure and foundation. If they are not good then everything is not going to work in the shop.” SP1, SP2, SP4, SP5, SP6, SP7, SP9, and SP11 posited that part of the strategy for managers to take of being fair is having an open mind and by having an open mind, a manager can engage with an employee and understand why they feel what they are feeling so they can best resolve the conflict they are experiencing.

The strategy of Effective Communication is executed through process of collaboration, obtaining the necessary information from the involved individuals, transparency, and being fair and unbiased. As evidenced in the data and documents, these are all ways that managers can implement effective communication as a strategy for resolving employee conflict. Overall, the theme of effective communication is a critical strategy to resolving employee conflict.

**Strategy 2: Using situational leadership.** The conflict resolution strategies that are adapted and implemented by managers will have a direct effect on organizational performance whether positive or negative (Longe, 2015). Another theme/strategy that managers implemented was situational leadership. A review of company-related documents used by managers postulates that managers would effectively resolve

employee conflict by taking a realistic approach to each situation and treat each as their own as indicated by the following excerpt, “Managers and supervisors are expected to decisively handle employee conflict by using appropriate measures. It is plausible for managers to look at each case individually and apply tangible actions to resolve the conflict” (Managers Handbook Business 3). Business 2 had a similar message in their code of conduct:

The highest possible standards of ethical and business conduct are required of [employees] in the performance of their company responsibilities. It is the responsibility of [leaders] to encourage [employees] to ask questions, seek guidance, report suspected violations, or express their concerns regarding compliance. (Code of Conduct and Ethics Business 2)

This strategy is in alignment with the RGCT. According to Jackson (1993) attitudes and behaviors of individuals toward others could be influenced by their leaders if the leaders have the appropriate information and willing to take the actions necessary to resolve the conflict. These ideas tie back to the diversity construct within RGCT because it postulates that the status of individuals within a group has an impact on their relationships and organization (Jackson, 1993). As a result, managers must understand the irregularity of the organization and employees and base each situation on its own merits. According to SP9, “you have to address the conflict and cater toward the employees and then make it where you understand what the problem is and then try to adjust so that you make everything best for them and the workplace.”

It is important for employers to recognize the leadership styles of their leaders and to ensure they are what the organization needs to excel. To confirm the findings with existing literature, He, Ding, and Yang (2014) found that although conflict can be positive it is most often not, thus the need for conflict resolution strategies in the workplace. Similar findings by Bradley et al. (2013) indicated that effective employee conflict management was predicated on the manager's application of the resolution strategies they possess. Experience and knowledge affords managers the ability to have patience and wit to handle even the most complex of situations. Managers have "to be willing to listen, people tend not to listen because they feel they are always right about something" SP4 added.

Companies that have experienced managers are able to use that to their advantage by having those managers pass on best practices to their employees (Lee & Hyun, 2016); and to extend the knowledge of the literature, SP2, SP9, SP11 mentioned that it is important that managers coach and mentor employees so they are all well trained and everyone is better equipped to deal with conflict. Civilian small business managers identified that having situational leadership is a strategy that aids in resolving employee conflict. One of the ways that situational leadership can be a strategy in resolving conflict is to not only implement an appropriate leadership style to the situation, but to be firm in whatever leadership style the situation calls for. It is postulated in the framework that leaders have to bold in their decisions when dealing with parties that have conflict with one another, but in doing so may cause favor with one and out of favor with another (Jackson, 1993). *Having strong leadership in a manager* is a strategy that is visible by



employees. SP2 suggested “do not beat around the bush and be candid, because it wastes time” and SP5 also added that “I run a strict store, if I hire someone, I let them know that if you start conflict then I will write you up or let you go.”

SP1, SP2, SP4, SP5, SP6, SP9, and SP11 explained that, as a manager, he or she must work with the employee to let him or her know he or she did wrong. If things cannot be resolved then the manager must turn to disciplinary actions. Poitras et al. (2015) found that 27% of their participants stated that their manager was able to facilitate a conflict resolution, and most of their participants indicated that managers need to have the knowledge and skill to clarify a situation, bringing all parties to a compromise. To further extend the knowledge of the literature, managers also have to be able to react to different situations in the workplace and treat each one on a case-by-case basis while working to resolve conflict.

Managers may be expected to work with employees who have differing personalities. This strategy confirms the premises of the RGCT framework in the sense that conflict is developed within the workplace because of diversity (Brief et al., 2005); and to effectively resolve conflict, managers have to understand the diverseness of each employee and that of the workplace to best gauge how to treat each situation. Information in company documents that were collected and analyzed postulated that managers should cultivate positive relationships between employees to resolve employee conflict. One company document stated, “the most important criteria is you have a positive attitude [...] and the ability/desire to learn and develop your talent to its fullest.”

An excerpt from another company document that was collected during the study stated managers, “establishes effective working relationships with supervisors and fellow employees. Shares and accepts information. Works to understand others' points of view, even when different from his/her own. Adapts positively to changes in workload and priorities. Takes positive action to promote teamwork”, which postulates that managers should cultivate positive relationships. When personalities clash, it could have a negative impact on employees, and subsequently the organization, which is why it is vital for managers to be able to understand how to cope with a constantly changing workplace (Qadir & Khan, 2016).

According to SP7, “sometimes you have sensitive employees so you have to use judgement when dealing with different employees, know your employees and their personalities.” Managers need to be able to alter their decisions and actions to get the most out of their employees and to achieve the best possible results for the organization. *Making situational* decisions is based on what is presently occurring in the workplace, the people involved, and the circumstances surrounding the matter that will optimize the outcome (Waldman & Bowen, 2016); and was established in the subsequent participants’ accounts.

According to SP9, a strategy for managers to resolve conflict is that “you have to be able to adapt, and understand each employee and how to diffuse the situation”. SP2 gave an example of how if managers incorporate the strategy of being sensitive to employee personalities and the conflict they are experiencing, then they would be able to resolve employee conflict when they have an issue with one another because a

personality clash. These findings from the study also solidified Singleton's et al. (2011) account in the literature review that managers use of conflict resolution strategies need to bring clashing viewpoints together for betterment of the organization. Managers should be prepared to acknowledge and work with different personality types and styles because it is an effective leadership strategy to resolve employee conflict.

Many of the participants in the study indicated that they use conflict management strategies that are comfortable to them and those that they have knowledge of. SP10 indicated that they "learned from experience, trial and error and from past superiors"; SP6 stated, "you learn as you go and see what works for you based on your own judgement"; and SP3 said they resolved conflict by "going off what I think is right and what I think is going to work to obtain a positive outcome". However, not all leadership styles are effective for every situation, which means leaders that are effective in one business may not be effective in others (Kalaluhi, 2013). Katz and Flynn (2013) suggested that managers have little knowledge on managing employee conflict and that organizations have to use external resources to resolve internal conflict as a result. Implementing a conflict management training program will reduce the amount of employee conflict and its intensity in the workplace as well as increasing productivity amongst employees (Leon-Perez, Notelaers, & Leon-Rubio, 2016).

All participants indicated the importance of having conflict resolution training for managers, and the value is that it would provide better guidance for managers to be equipped with strategies to handle employee conflict and situations as they arise. The preceding evidence supports the notion that HR departments and organizational leaders

should develop conflict management training that will enhance strategies for managers to better resolve employee conflict (Canaan Messarra, Karkoulian, & El-Kassar, 2016). The literature supports the findings of the study in that participants suggested the need for a training program so they know how to identify and understand conflict when they see it, deal with different type of situations without having to guess, and handle the conflict in line with the vision of the organization. Another advantage of having conflict management training is that it could improve employee productivity and collaboration (Ayoko, 2016).

Several participants also suggested that real world scenarios would be beneficial in a conflict management training program. SP2 added that, “there should be real classroom training vice online training because online is boring and you only look forward to the end to passing a quiz”; SP10 stated “Training using real world scenarios would help being able to problem solve”. SP3 also added, “Look at having real classes for training vice online training so that you get to talk to other managers instead of just reading it”. SP4 added that, “reverse role play training or scenario based type of training on how they would resolve conflict when faced with different situations would be beneficial”. Katz et al. (2016) suggested that real-world, scenario based training is valuable because the nature of conflict is chaotic and nonconforming, therefore, having training that make individuals use logic, reasoning, and critical thinking would be more realistic for managers to experience. Leadership and training is needed for managers to effectively resolve employee conflict.

According to SP8, for managers to better understand the conflict, they need to get past emotions, keep focused, and try to find out what the real problem is. SP5 added that “once the employees figured out the problem, they realized that they have more in common than they thought they did.” Managers can use this conflict resolution strategy to sort through the information that their employees are telling them and get to the basis of the problem, so that the resolution is indeed beneficial to all parties. The responses from study’s participants confirmed the perceived conflict tenet further aligning Campbell’s (1965) RGCT. A perceived threat and perceived conflict leads to more awareness of the situation; managers need to understand the real problem to address it appropriately (Jackson, 1993).

Conflict resolution strategies that are implemented only as a quick fix may not achieve the results desired. When the underlying issue or real conflict is realized, the resolution strategy implemented as a result could improve the situation dramatically (Yarbrough, 2017). This aligns with the conceptual framework in the sense that managers have to be cognizant of what their employees want; their desire for competing resources which may or may not be fulfilled may lead to employee conflict (Echebarria-Echabe & Guede, 2003).

According to SP3, “you have to find out from the employee what it is going on before you take action; listen, talk about it, and find out what it is causing the problem.” SP9 also added that, “as soon as a problem arises, you have to get on top of it so that it doesn’t escalate.” Participants noted that the strategy of identifying there is a problem early and taking action to resolve it will mitigate the negative impact it could have on

others in the organization. Recognizing there is an issue and addressing employees concerns when they bring them to managers help develop trust; “employees develop trust in management and know they are respected and they are more likely to come to me with problems because they know they will be heard” (SP8).

As demonstrated in this theme/strategy, situational leadership is an important component to dealing with conflict. This is demonstrated through having a strong manager who can make situational decisions. In addition, it also became evident that more training for managers is needed, including a real-world application to many of the instructions and examples—a notion that is also well supported in the literature.

**Strategy 3: Creating a positive organizational culture.** The final managerial strategy that I identified for resolving employee conflict is creating a positive organizational culture. Business 1 Human Resources Manual stated that employees, “build positive relationships by treating [everyone] with fairness and honesty, through good times and difficult times. Treating its [employees] right continues to be a key to success and is the responsibility of all employees”. The organization “should ensure their standards and standards of excellence reflect the pride associated with and deserving of the business’ culture” (Operations Manual Business 4). Based on the findings from the analysis of information from the company documents on conflict resolution, having a positive organizational culture fosters respect amongst employees which reduces tension in the workplace and reduce employee conflict.

In addition to the manual, many employees expressed the same ideas regarding *culture and a positive atmosphere*. Civilian small business managers in this study

implemented conflict resolution strategies to allow them to maintain a positive and healthy organizational culture. According to SP11, “Conflict affects the employee emotionally, mentally, and physically [;] their productivity level would be affected because they are not doing their job the way they are supposed to because they are thinking about the situation and the conflict.”

When dealing with conflict resolution, it is vital that managers *listen and respect* the information that employees are presenting them about the conflict (Fusch & Fusch, 2015). Confirming the literature, SP8 posited that, “validating the concerns of the people involved helps me to diffuse the situation and allow for a civil respectful resolution.” SP4 added:

I like to use the shoe on the other foot strategy; I always tell the person who is taking something personal that before you take it personal, just stop, put the shoe on the other foot, if it was you and then run that same scenario through your head and that tends to eliminate the issues.

By *empathizing*, managers that resolve employee conflict are able to get to the heart of the problem and identify the underlying needs and wellbeing of an employee (Poitras et al., 2015). Empathizing with employees can be a useful strategy in resolving employee conflict.

Part of being an effective manager is *building team cohesiveness* and understanding each employee’s perspective, not only when dealing with conflict but understanding their beliefs and perspectives in general (Poitras et al., 2015). The findings from the research extends the information from the literature, according to SP6, “group

gatherings help out because at the end we are like a family, we hang out with one another and we can learn each other and how we are.” SP4, SP5, SP6, SP7 suggested that practicing team building strategies and keeping the workplace as unified as possible will help to build personal relationship, which will help minimize conflict. SP5 added, “if there is no teamwork then you can’t run a shift and you can’t have communication and to get through the day because you have to work in unison to make the operation go smooth.” Therefore, part of creating a positive organizational culture to resolve employee conflict, according to these managers, is to implement team building strategies in the workplace.

The literature supports the findings as there is an association between increased employee conflict in the workplace and decreased work productivity; therefore, improving the organizational culture may help to reduce employee conflict (Mirbahaadin & Tamini, 2017). Managers who seek to understand and educate themselves on diversity will have a positive impact on innovation and performance on the culture of an organization (Andersen & Moynihan, 2016). Campbell’s (1965) RGCT included the characteristics of individuals belonging to a group and the negative effects of feeling not part of the organization. Understanding some of the tenets of RGCT including favoritism, diversity, perceived threats, and perceived conflict could positively impact how managers create a positive organizational culture in order to reduce employee conflict in the workplace.

The vision and goals of a business can be either negatively or positively impacted by its culture. SP10 indicated that, “important strategies for conflict resolution should



include what the company's goals and policies are." According to SP8, "there has to be rules to reduce chaos and everyone needs to know who is actually the boss and not go over the rank and order"; SP10 added, "employees should know what the owners expectations are [to] know what the company wants [employees] to do in certain situations.

Jackson (1993) indicated that *hostility*, a tenet of RGCT, postulates that individuals value the perception of being part of a group and the conflict that having differing goals would bring to individuals vice having a common goal which could reduce conflict. Designing goals that may make employees' primary concern the success of the organization is all within the control of the business (Mehdi, Raza, Raza, & Usman, 2017); and aligns with the conceptual framework in that when individual goals can be aligned as a mutual goal or vision, employee conflict will be reduced as a result. Statements provided by the participants also provided useful data to support why participants felt having a company vision was an effective strategy to reduce employee conflict.

In addition, having a *hierarchy* that everyone understands may help to create a clearer vision of organizational leaders. Managers normally receive some kind of management training handbook, literature, or guidance before assuming their position. This information needs to be carefully read and analyzed by managers to understand what organizational policies are so they can better enforce them. "There are a ton of policies and knowing the policies will let you know what you can and cannot say; without knowing the policies, you cannot reprimand someone or guide them to what the vision of

the company is” (SP1). This preceding statement confirms the information from the literature review of Lipsky and Avgar’s (2010) that the organization has to provide either directives or a clear vision for managers to use to better resolve employee conflict. When everyone is working toward a common goal, with the intent of accomplishing the organization’s goals, then it will be hard to stray from success. Also, the strategy of having a company vision or working toward a goal may help reduce employee conflict because employees are thinking about what is in the best interest of the company, not themselves. For these reasons, a clear company vision can help create a positive organizational culture.

Creating a culture of positivity within the workplace stimulates innovation (Cegarra-Navarro, Sánchez-Vidal, & Cegarra-Leiva, 2016); and extending the literature, managers in this study suggested that working with their staff to attain the knowledge required for everyone to be able to mitigate negative perceptions is beneficial to resolving workplace conflict. According to SP7, “[positivity can] make them turn their attitude around, if they have a negative attitude and they can turn their attitude around then it would make the situation better no matter what.” Based on the experiences of the managers in this study, the strategy of exuding positivity may perpetuate itself in a healthy work environment and lead to increased productivity and a decrease in employee conflict.

Another method of implementing a positive attitude, SP3, SP5, SP7 added, is that managers should listen to employees explain themselves and give their side of the story. Then, managers should give them positive reinforcement on whatever the situation and

that will pay off over time. Providing an organizational culture that is positive is important in a business, the company is to provide its employees with the tools and training needed to prosper and understand the value of the mission and how it supports the military and their families (Company vision and mission document of business 2).

The strategy/theme of creating a positive organizational culture was also a necessary step in reducing conflict. Positive cultures support productivity and help employees excel. Listening and respecting employees, empathy, and team cohesion are also important elements in achieving a positive culture.

### **Additional Findings of the Study**

Conflict resolution is intended to bring a mutual resolution to opposing parties, and, in order to find commonality, there has to be some movement or change between the opposing parties (Webb, Rossignac-Milon, & Higgins, 2017). Five out of the 11 participants (45%) in this study reported that employee conflict is not prevalent in their organization and that, in fact, be considered healthy for the business. Each of these organizations was selected based on reputations for resolving conflict. However, when employee conflict does exist, managers must be able to employ appropriate strategies to have the most beneficial impact on the organization (Mirbahaadin & Tamini, 2017).

As evidenced from the interviews, managers attributed conflict in the workplace to employees having poor attitudes, interpersonal issues, miscommunication, and bringing their personal issues to work. SP9 shared that “employees tend to share information about their own lives creating conflict with people who may not be interested in their lives because people come to work and want to leave everything else out of the

picture.” These managers felt that conflict in their workplace led to poor productivity, sabotage, and employees ultimately quitting. SP5 added that “employees would call out if they knew they would be working with a certain individual.” Other explanations for employee conflict included disrespectful behavior, competition of resources, poor management, rumors, competition for resources, and demeaning behavior.

When conflict was present, it created a hostile environment, a decrease in productivity, employees created false implications or allegations on one another and/or they refused to work. SP3 added that, “instead of having a positive mind, they will be trying to avoid tasks and have a negative idea about everything.” These particular perspectives support Jacksons’ (1993) findings that whenever people experience these actions the likelihood increases that conflict will arise. This information is relevant to the study because the information provided by the participants on the strategies they used was directly impacted by the type of conflict experienced.

All participants reported that training on conflict management is needed at all levels of management to provide them with the type of strategies that could be used to resolve employee conflict. SP10 stated that training is necessary, “because it would help the managers deal with certain situations better and we would know what the company expects managers to do in certain situations (i.e., listen, document it or go up the chain of command),” which aligns with the situational leadership and supporting organizational policies. Three of the 11 participants (27%) conveyed that conflict in their workplace does not have a negative impact on productivity. Six of the 11 participants (55%) stated

that employee conflict is a top priority for them when compared to other operational commitments.

The negativity resulting from conflict in Business 1 was more toxic than the other businesses. SP9 stated that “someone punctured all of the bag in the box products that carried the syrup for the fountain drinks.” I expected that all the businesses would have similar cases of negativity, but, in fact, they suffered differently because of the organizational culture, individual characteristics of the employees, or the conflict management experience of their managers.

The majority of the participants from Businesses 3 and 4 stated that the level of productivity did not decrease due to employee conflict because employees cared more about their money and tips they received and the more customers they worked with, the greater the earning potential. As a result, competition of resources seemed to perpetuate conflict in these business cases which is also aligned with the conceptual framework. After analyzing the data, the following items emerged that were surprising and unexpected:

1. Poor leadership did not have a high frequency of being cited as the cause of employee conflict in the workplace.
2. Only one participant received formal conflict resolution training.
3. Only one participant mentioned generational difference as a cause of employee conflict.

4. There was no mention of the military or the stipulations that are normally associated with being on a military base that influenced participants' view of how they handle employee conflict.

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore conflict resolution strategies civilian small business managers used to reduce employee conflict. There were three main themes identified in the research through data analysis that were also identified in the existing literature. Applying effective communication, situational leadership, and creating a positive organizational culture may be beneficial to civilian small business managers that are operating businesses on a military installation to resolve employee conflict. Previous researchers indicated that employees who work on a military base are less likely to report conflict and issues involving minor situations (e.g., unfair discrimination, as compared to major violations or issues, such as a legal breach; Near, Rehg, Van Scotter, & Miceli, 2004). The information from this study might be able to help civilian small business managers on military bases with their resolution of employee conflict in the workplace.

The strategies realized from the findings of this study might provide organizational leaders of businesses that operate on a military base with a foundation for analyzing their conflict management programs. These results are applicable to Human Resources Offices and organizational leaders of civilian small businesses on military bases. When an organizational culture is clearly defined, employees are more apt to want to come to work and be part of the organization, which results in an increase in

innovation, productivity, and net profit (Peterson, 2015). Organizational culture was one of the themes that participants stated could be used to mitigate or resolve employee conflict. When employees are in turmoil, they are less likely to provide good customer service and subsequently the overall performance of business operations suffer (Cording, Harrison, Hoskisson, & Jonsen, 2014). Having a positive culture to work in also improves employee attitudes and conduct (Hassan et al., 2011). Therefore, HROs and organizational leaders need to set the precedence on how businesses will be run in the beginning and it will aid managers when it comes to dealing with employee conflict. Some participants of this research study stated that by laying the ground rules of how the company operates helped them with resolving employee conflict.

Managers, company training representatives, and organizational leaders could apply information gained from this study on how situational leadership plays an integral part of a manager's ability to resolve employee conflict. Eighty-six percent of employees who had experienced conflict also reported it and tried to manage employee conflict themselves (Van Den Broek & Dundon, 2012). Participants from this study also expressed that as a manager, in order to be successful resolving employee conflict, they have to be able to engage each situation appropriately and treat each case as its own. Equipping managers with the tools necessary to resolve employee conflict is a strategy used by organizations to deal with health of their business (Way et al., 2014). In regards to situational leadership, managers should be able to deal with differing personalities, adapt to a fluid work environment, and maximize the productivity of their employees by getting the most out of them.

If business leaders consider the findings from this study, then they might be able to provide their managers with strategies to deal with employee conflict by applying effective communication. Often, employee conflict is not managed until a grievance is communicated as a last resort or made official by an employee; at which time some managers are ill equipped to handle such situations (Lipsky & Avgar, 2010); and the failure of management to resolve conflict leads to employee resignation (Gilbert et al., 2013). Positive communication is the foundation for a cohesive workplace (Zealand et al., 2016). Effective communication will allow managers to collaborate with one another toward common goal, confront one another in a tactful manner to resolve differences, and remain unbiased to obtain all of the necessary information to effectively manage employee conflict. Consequently, when conflict is not communicated effectively or is unmanaged it may lead to retaliation or fear of other members of the organization and managers have to be conscious of what is occurring internally (Near et al., 2004).

The financial health of a business and its overall productivity are important factors for business leaders when assessing their organization (Giberson & Miklos, 2013). Managers should consider the effect that conflict has on employee performance and operational effectiveness and take action to ensure successful operation (Hillman, 2014). Implementing practices that will help business managers provide sustainability will demonstrate corporate responsibility, community involvement, employee engagement, and regard for their products and services, and (Epstein & Buhovac, 2014). As employee conflict becomes more prevalent, the information produced as a result of



this study should encourage stakeholders of civilian small businesses on military bases to reassess conflict resolution programs that are required of their managers.

### **Implications for Social Change**

This qualitative multiple case study could affect positive social change because civilian small business managers dealing with employee conflict can use the strategies of this study to reduce conflict in their workplace and maximize the success of the company. Being able to manage conflict within the workplace could benefit individuals with their relationships, team building, and conflict resolution outside of the workplace, which could contribute to positive social change (Parker, 2015). When companies are financially successful, they are able to create positive social change by infusing communities with funds or nonmonetary aids that could be used for the betterment of the community (Steiner & Atterton, 2014). Successful small businesses play a major role in the civic community relationship aspect (Halbesleben & Tolbert, 2014); these businesses also increase the quality of life of families and increase social capital (Sarasvathy, Menon, & Kuechle, 2013). The findings from this study may contribute to positive social change because resolving employee conflict by the use of situational leadership, creating a positive organizational culture, or having effective communication can lead to increase in productivity, better working relationships, and unity, which all results in an increase in profits. An increase in profits from civilian businesses on a military base would mean more funds to be reinvested in quality of life programs for government employees, service members, and their families that work and/or reside on the base, which boosts community morale. When these civilian small businesses are profitable, they allow

services members and their families to benefit from increased discounts on products and services that they offer.

There are several other opportunities that exist based on this study that could influence positive social change. The techniques and styles that each leader possesses and use distinguishes them from others; however, different styles and techniques are appropriate for certain situations and conversely some styles produce negative results (Latham, 2014). Appropriately managing conflict will not only improve employees' performance, but decrease their stress, (Fortado & Fadil, 2014). Using these strategies may help individuals to decrease their stress level allowing them to better manage personal conflict and enabling them to foster positive relationships with others.

Unresolved conflict distorts the dynamic within the workplace and creates an atmosphere that negatively impacts productivity (Russell, 2013). In order for employees to want to be productive while at work, there needs to be civility established in the workplace by employing effective conflict management strategies (Gatut & Jiwa, 2013). Creating a culture where individuals feel comfortable creates a healthy environment, which fosters team building and innovation amongst one another. This may also foster community support and interaction that will help to strengthen relationships (Bode, Singh, & Rogan, 2015). Therefore, addressing employee conflict and the detriment it can have on an employee's attitude and the organizational culture is a potential positive social change that stems from this study.

The Regulatory Flexibility Act mandates that agencies consider the economic impact of their actions on small businesses and local governments (Federal Register,

2015). Because of this act, there will be a significant impact for managers that expand their conflict management skills so that they could improve employee productivity, subsequently improving profitability and having an overall positive impact on the local economy. The damage and costs that employee conflict causes organizations establishes a need for better resolution strategies (Reio & Trudel, 2013). In order for employee conflict to have a positive affect overall, it must be effectively managed by managers and other organizational leaders (Singleton et al., 2011). Improving the conflict management strategies of managers will allow resolution to be made that will be in the best interest of all stakeholders, to include, businesses, families, and communities.

### **Recommendations for Action**

The goal of this study was to gain knowledge and strategies civilian small business managers who work on a military base use to resolve employee conflict in the workplace. Conflict in an organization could be healthy if purposed to create business efficiencies, but when conflict becomes a personal issue among employees, conflict has a negative affect on the business (Kirti, 2016). Strategies that emerged were effective communication, situational leadership, and organizational culture. The findings from this research provide business strategies that contributed to conflict resolution.

Business leaders on a military base or those business leaders that have an affiliation to a military base for fiscal purposes should utilize the findings from this research. In the United States, employees spend on average 2.1 hours a week dealing with conflict, leading to an estimated total of \$359 billion paying for resolving conflict in their business rather than the execution of their business' function which diminishes work

productivity (CPP Global Human Capital Report, 2008). The findings of this study revealed that managers within these types of business cases yearn for training on how to effectively resolve conflict. Most of them had not had any formal training and have learned to handle conflict on their own, whether it is from researching it on the Internet or just keeping the organization's best interest in mind. Managers resulted in going to the Internet to ascertain how to deal with conflict because of the lack of training they were given (CPP Global Human Capital Report, 2008). Business leaders could educate themselves and their organization on how conflict is started and what their managers could do to implement strategies and programs to reduce conflict in the workplace.

Community stakeholders, including civilian business managers, corporate leaders, Human Resource Offices, and military base commanders need to pay attention to the results of this study. The application of effective conflict resolution strategies will help organizations improve employee productivity and business operations.

These following actions are recommended as a result of this study:

- Create a culture of transparent and positive communication
- Create a positive organizational culture where employees feel comfortable addressing issues with management
- Conduct leadership training on situational leadership
- Develop a management training course that includes conflict resolution

The results of my study will be published and available for all audiences to use the information of this study. Information learned in this study could potentially benefit businesses that are having conflict within their organization amongst individuals and

factions within. Community partners and participants from this study will receive a two-page summary of the results of the findings upon their request. As an individual who works in the business industry on a military base, I expect to receive requests for information on my research that would benefit business on the base. I will share the findings of my study through personal communication, by mentorship of managers who I oversee, and by implementing these strategies in my own work.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

This study has several limitations that will provide future researchers with an opportunity to extend this research. Limitations identified in this study were that the results were limited to managers who work on a military installation and who have been in their position for at least 6 months within businesses that have been operating on a military installation for more than 5 years. Limitations are boundaries or exceptions to the study that pose weaknesses that restrict the findings of the results (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The purpose of this study was to explore the strategies civilian small business managers use to reduce conflict and improve employee productivity. Further research should be done to address the limitations of this research or focus on specific delimitations to add value to existing research.

For further research, I recommend conducting a study comparing conflict resolution strategies of companies that operate on a military installation versus companies that operate outside a military installation. The presence of being on a military installation may bring perspectives that are differing than that of individuals that work outside of a military installation, which may result in different findings. Because this

study was conducted on civilian small businesses on a military installation in Southern Arizona, future research should also include civilian small businesses in different regions of the United States to determine if results are applicable on a broader scale.

The focus of this study on the conflict resolution strategies was limited to only managers, and not receiving input from the employees or executives does not provide a holistic perspective of the problem. The methodology and design of the study may also have limited the study. Expanding the research to a quantitative study or even a different design may add further value to the strategies that managers use to manage employee conflict and determine the significance of each strategy relative to its impact on employee productivity or business' profitability. The use of a survey instrument would allow a larger and broader sample size for data analysis. Most of the participants indicated that they did not receive any official training or education on how to effectively manage employee conflict. Because leadership is vital to any business that wants to achieve success (McLaren, 2013), the findings of this study may provide insight for human resources directors and business executives to include conflict management in their management training.

### **Reflections**

During the course of my DBA Doctoral Study process, there were personal and professional challenges that I had to face on a constant basis. Throughout the process I met other students who later became friends, as well as instructors who helped me through the process. The process was arduous, and having the right team to help played a role in my success. I was able to gain a better understanding of civilian small businesses

on military installations in Southern Arizona. Because I am in the military and have patronized many of these types of businesses, I never realized the pressures as well as the perks that these businesses have because they are operating on a military installation.

Although I have dealt with conflict quite often in my work duties, I relied, however, on existing literature and the research to fill in gaps and explore the research topic. My topic, as well as the method and design, changed several different times during the course of the Doctoral Study process. Once I began with the interviews, participants felt comfortable sharing information that could potentially have a positive effect. The nature of the qualitative study allowed me to search for deeper understanding of skills and strategies these managers used to manage conflict and it helped to mitigate any biases.

There were plenty of times when the information could have taken me in a different direction, but keeping a journal as well as following the Interview Protocol, helped me to stay focused and mitigate the potential for any preconceived notions. For example, the experience, situational awareness, and open communication that participants had from being exposed to military personnel added insight to their careers, which is contrary to what I thought. Now, I view all interactions that I have with civilian personnel on a military installation impactful, regardless of how short or inconsequential it may be because of the indirect effect it might have on the community. It was fulfilling that I can add insight to a topic that does not already have a great deal of research. I realized from the interaction of the interviews that the participants were committed to both the

organization and the individuals within the organization and would be open to any suggestions on how to improve managing conflict.

### **Conclusion**

In the United States, 36% of employees repeatedly experience conflict in the workplace, and a majority of managers' time is spent on handling disputes (CPP Global Human Capital Report, 2008). The findings from this research revealed that civilian small business managers on military bases could resolve employee conflict in the workplace by using effective communication, applying situational leadership, and creating a positive organizational. According to Rajalakshmi and Gomathi, 43.8% of employees feel their work productivity would increase if conflict was better managed within their organization (2015). The outcome of effective conflict management can stimulate creativity, innovation, changes, and may even lead to better relations between people, which may produce higher efficiency and productivity (He et al., 2014). Effective workplace management requires high-level conflict-resolution awareness and skills of their managers to be successful (Roodin & Mendelson, 2013). Based on the experiences of the participants, civilian small business managers on military bases have a challenging time resolving employee conflict in the workplace because of a myriad of reasons and should apply the above strategies where necessary. Employees should want to come to work and feel a sense of respect and sociability in the workplace because they have the assurance that their managers would be able to resolve workplace conflict.



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### Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. Based on your experience, how prevalent is workplace conflict?
2. What strategies have you used to manage employee-related conflict?
3. What strategies did you find work best to manage employee-related conflict?
4. How did your employees respond to your conflict resolution strategies?
5. What strategies are most valuable when resolving conflict in your workplace?
6. What are some of the positive outcomes you have experienced when you are able to implement conflict resolution strategies?
7. What else would you like to add regarding conflict resolution skills that civilian small business managers use to improve employee productivity?

## Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant #: \_\_\_\_\_

## Instructions:

1. Introduction Script: *Thank you for participating in this case study. Your participation will allow me to explore conflict resolution skills civilian small business managers use to improve employee productivity. Please take a moment to review the consent form. This is the same document that was provided to you before this interview. [Participant will review consent form]. This interview will be audio recorded and I will be taking notes as well; it should not take any longer than an hour. If the interview goes beyond an hour, we could continue at your discretion or at a later time that will not inconvenience you. Any of your personal information that was received will remain confidential as well as your identity. If there are no questions at this time, please sign and date the form so that we can proceed with the interview. [Address any questions that are asked]. Would you like a copy of the consent form? As a reminder, I would like to remind you that you can withdraw at any time during the interview process and if there is a question you do not feel comfortable answering, you can refrain from.*
2. Organize and document paperwork:
  - a. Date the interview protocol form.
  - b. Assign a participant # and input on the interview protocol form and the demographic questionnaire, i.e. SP1, SP2, etc.
  - c. Have participants to fill out the demographic questionnaire
  - d. Document the participant # on the note taking paper.
3. Start Interview [Start the audio recording device]:
  - a. State the date and the participant #
  - b. Start asking the interview questions
  - c. Watch for non-verbal cues and document on note paper
  - d. Ask follow-up or probing questions as appropriate
  - e. Paraphrase as needed
4. Conclusion of interview:
  - a. Thank participant for their time
  - b. Stop audio recording device
  - c. Remind the participant about member checking and discuss possible dates and times for follow-up questions and member checking
  - d. Review participant's contact information
  - e. Inform the participant if they should have any questions after this interview to contact me at my phone number and or email address.



## Appendix C: Letters of Cooperation

TJ Dunbar

May 10, 2017

Dear TJ,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled Conflict Resolution Strategies Used by Civilian Small Business Manager's on Military Bases within our business. As part of this study, I authorize you to conduct face-to-face interviews with any managers and to utilize the space or facilities you need to conduct these interviews. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting and that this plan complies with the organization's policies.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the student's supervising faculty/staff without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,

---

Signature

---

Title of Individual

---

Name of Business

## Letter of Cooperation from Commanding Officer of the Installation

TJ Dunbar

March 10, 2017

Dear TJ,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled *Conflict Resolution Strategies Used by Civilian Small Business Manager's Aboard Military Bases* aboard this installation. As part of this study, I authorize you to conduct face-to-face interviews with any of the managers, supervisors, and associates. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting and that this plan complies with the organization's policies.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the student's supervising faculty/staff without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,

Name of Individual

Commanding Officer

## Appendix D: Invitation for Participation

10 May 2017

To: Managers

Subject: A Research Study of Importance

My name is TJ Dunbar and I am an active duty service member in the Marine Corps and a student at Walden University pursuing a doctoral degree in business administration. I am conducting a research study on *Conflict Resolution Strategies in Civilian Small Businesses Aboard Military Bases* and I am requesting your participation. I understand that your time is valuable. The questions will take approximately 45-60 minutes to answer.

I am seeking to interview Managers on the military installation who fit the following criteria:

Managers/supervisors must have at least six months of experience in their current role within the organization and work in a civilian small business based establishment that has been in existence for at least five years.

Your participation and experience will be essential to the research being conducted. During the course of this study, I will conduct either phone or face-to-face interviews with those selected. At the end of this study, I will share results and findings with participants, other scholars, and the agency senior leadership if desired. I hope that conducting this study on conflict resolution will benefit both employees and business organizations on military installations by identifying opportunities to enhance the conflict management skills of their leaders.

There will be no incentive or compensation provided for your participation. Participation in this study is voluntary and will be confidential. No identifying information (name, department, position, etc.) will be collected. If you are interested in participating in the study, please contact me at xxx-xxx-xxxx or xxxx.xxxx@xxxx.xxx.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this request.

Best Regards,

TJ Dunbar

## Appendix E: Demographic Questionnaire for Participants

Participant Code: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What is your current position (executive, director, manager, supervisor, etc.)?
2. How long have you worked at the company?
3. How long has your company been operating on this base?
4. How long have you worked in the current position?
5. Do you have any affiliation with the military? Explain.