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NAVIGATING CONFLICT DURING PERIODS OF CHANGE IN HIGHER EDUCATION:
DECONSTRUCTING ACADEMIC LEADERS' CONSTRUCTION OF MEANING

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate School of Leadership & Change
Antioch University

In partial fulfillment for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

by

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March 2023

NAVIGATING CONFLICT DURING PERIODS OF CHANGE IN HIGHER EDUCATION:
DECONSTRUCTING ACADEMIC LEADERS' CONSTRUCTION OF MEANING

This dissertation, by Tyler G. Olson, has
been approved by the committee members signed below
who recommend that it be accepted by the faculty of
The Graduate School in Leadership & Change
Antioch University
in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

NAVIGATING CONFLICT DURING PERIODS OF CHANGE IN HIGHER EDUCATION: DECONSTRUCTING ACADEMIC LEADERS' CONSTRUCTION OF MEANING

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Navigating departmental and organizational conflict is an essential function and responsibility of an academic unit leader (dean, associate dean, director, or chair) in higher education institutions (HEIs). During periods of organizational change, conflict tends to increase in complexity and difficulty—in part due to resistance to change—making it more difficult to manage in a constructive manner (Marcus, 2014). Much of the literature that looks at the academic unit leader and conflict focuses on personal conflict styles (or modes), types of conflicts encountered, and training on techniques and skills for conflict resolution and management. Missing from the literature is research that examines academic leaders' constructive-developmental mindsets (i.e., meaning-making structures) when dealing with and navigating conflict within their division (or institution) and the relationship between one's developmental mindset and their approach to engaging and navigating complex conflict. This study examines how nine academic unit leaders construct meaning when experiencing and navigating conflict situations amid organizational change (which HEIs experienced at an unprecedented level in 2020 and 2021). Additionally, it examines the relationship between how one constructs meaning and their capacity for constructive engagement and navigation of conflict. The primary finding from this study supports the hypothesis that academic leaders who demonstrate complex developmental mindsets hold a greater capacity to engage and navigate complex conflict situations in more deliberate and

potentially constructive ways. Additionally, data from the research supports the notion that as an individual develops an increasingly more complex developmental mindset, their capacity for cognitive empathy (i.e., perspective-taking) increases. The study employed a multimethod approach, incorporating multiple case studies and a modified critical incident technique. Data were collected through the Subject-Object Interview (Lahey et al., 2011), a modified critical incident interview, and a loosely-structured closing interview. Each of the nine leaders participated fully in all three interviews in this order. This exploratory study contributes to the continued scholarly discussion on leaders navigating conflict and change in HEIs. This dissertation is available in open access at AURA (<https://aura.antioch.edu>) and OhioLINK ETD Center (<https://etd.ohiolink.edu>).

Keywords: higher education, leadership, constructive-developmental theory, subject-object interview, critical incident technique, multicase study, academic leaders, conflict resolution, organizational change, empathy, perspective-taking

Dedication

To my past, present, and future students,

I am grateful for your contributions to my evolution.

I engaged this effort with you in mind,

and with a deep hope that you may grow your spirits to swell with compassion and empathy,

as your minds continue evolving to overflow with wisdom and insight,

as we collectively aim to improve this fragile world.

To Victoria,

that we may continue to actively evolve our spirits, hearts, and minds

toward a place where we can further empower one another and our community

to love more fully, care more deeply, and act more intentionally

in the/our work of caring for people and the planet.

I love you deeply, hon.

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with various perspectives and contexts for conflict resolution, management, and transformations in ways I had never considered.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

A primary deficiency in the current approach to conflict management in colleges and universities is the failure of institutional stakeholders to consider the *underlying assumptions and beliefs* that lead to conflict in the first place.

—Bess and Dee (2014, p. xiv)

In the opening paragraph of Buller (2015), he draws attention to two competing notions regarding higher education's relationship with change. First, he states, "it's a little bit odd to regard change in higher education as a topic in and of itself because higher education by its very nature is constantly changing" (p. xi). Secondly, he points out the disconcerting notion that "higher education doesn't handle change particularly well" (p. xi). Perhaps this perceived lack of success in handling change "well" is connected to a related issue explored less explicitly in the academic literature—the connection between change and conflict. In this study, I will explore this connection—between navigating change and navigating conflict—specifically looking at where academic leaders may have deficiencies in constructively navigating conflict during periods of organizational change (which in higher education is ubiquitous, to Buller's point). It may not be that leaders lack the ability to deal with conflict; instead, it may be tied to the complexity of their minds and their deep meaning-making structures (tied to the concept of consciousness). Conflict is complex, even in initially perceived simple forms. It can be especially complex when it occurs during periods of change. Navigating conflict, especially when tied to change, requires a high level of intelligence and a complex mind (Kegan, 1994).

For over a decade, I have worked in higher education, first as a graduate research assistant and then as a teaching assistant at a large state university while working on my master's in

conflict resolution. During this time, even from a limited perspective as a part-time employee, I witnessed multiple departments and their leaders struggle to navigate institutional change and interpersonal conflicts that occurred in these contexts (ironically enough, I observed this struggle with change and conflict within the Conflict Resolution department).

Shortly after completing my master's degree, I accepted a position at a large urban community college, where I have worked for nearly a decade. Currently, I am an academic program manager for a Conflict Resolution and Peace Studies program at the same college (I also teach part-time in this program). I have worked with several associate deans and academic deans during my time at the college. I have witnessed similar struggles among leaders as they struggle to navigate their departments through periods of change and the conflicts that concurrently and naturally arise. As one with an educated and trained eye for noticing and deciphering conflict, I recognized a pattern; there appeared to be a distinct relationship between navigating institutional change and a leader's capacity to navigate conflict constructively and competently in interpersonal relationships within departments, across divisions, and among various stakeholders. This prompted me to explicitly identify a phenomenon that was becoming clear from my perspective: when change occurs in higher education, conflict inevitably coincides, and some leaders demonstrate the capacity to navigate these conflicts constructively, while other leaders appear to lack specific skills, abilities, and perspectives to do this well. Moreover, I thought that perhaps it is not a lack of skills and abilities that inhibits their constructive capacity, as it may appear at face value, but rather the need to develop a more complex consciousness or internal meaning-making system.

My interest in the intersection of conflict and change emerged in 2016 as I participated in an eight-month-long internal leadership development program at the college where I work. Throughout this program, many sessions hinted at developing leaders to increase their “soft skills” to navigate conflict; however, only one two-day workshop overtly touched on effectively engaging interpersonal conflict constructively. The training was thought-provoking, yet the communication best practices taught were rigid, scripted, and overly simplistic for addressing potentially complex conflict situations. Also, no genuinely usable mechanism built-in held participants accountable to practice and develop the skills presented beyond the training intentionally. Additionally, just before participating in this leadership development program, I read Kegan and Lahey’s (2009) *Immunity to Change*, which sparked a new line in my thinking around how one’s meaning-making system impacts their capacity to understand and navigate complexity. Kegan and Lahey’s work resonated with me deeply as I began to see how one’s aptitude for navigating conflict appeared to have a solid relationship to one’s ability to navigate complexity.

Problem Statement

Higher education institutions face a myriad of serious dilemmas that require significant, intentional, and strategic change if they are to survive and thrive. This is aptly captured in the opaque mantra: *change or die*. For the last several decades, universities and colleges have managed to stay alive while adapting and evolving, arguably at a slower rate than the rest of society’s organizational social systems (particularly when compared with the for-profit and business sectors). This slow evolution, it can be reasoned, impacted increases in tuition costs, diminished access for students with lesser means, preserved a reliance on archaic and clunky

information and technology management systems, and contributed to a lack of progress pertaining to diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice. At this moment, colleges and universities are forced to navigate a period in our world's social timeline where there is an assault on science, reason, and the pursuit of truth. These three threats take direct aim at the core values of higher education. A large portion of the greater public's trust in the long-respected institution of higher education, especially in the United States, has been eroded, contributing to this existential threat (Jaschik, 2018), thus contributing to complex conflict.

Moreover, higher education deals with two additional obstacles that have escalated extensive and profound change. The first is the COVID-19 global pandemic. The second is the call for action and change regarding policies and practices that address racial justice and equity within institutions at all levels (from hiring processes and practices to student selection processes and practices, to funding sources and names on buildings, as well as a myriad of other areas). Higher education as a system and model is currently facing the need to change—a metaphorical rock bottom—like it has never seen before in the history of academic institutions. If it does not, it may die, at least in the form it is currently recognized.

Looking forward, leadership in institutions of higher education may require not only structural and systemic changes to maintain existence and effectively serve the needs of stakeholders (i.e., students, staff, faculty, and the greater community) but also strategies to overcome the myriad of complex threats expressed above that the institution of higher education is experiencing. I posit that higher education leadership may also require an *evolution of the mind*—the development of higher forms of consciousness—for those in leadership positions across the institution, at all levels, to survive and thrive. This would require leaders to become

more adaptive, agile, and transformational-minded (Kegan & Lahey, 2016).

Constructive-developmental (CD) theorists Kegan¹ and Lahey (2009) suggested that this shift in the mind does not just come from learning more skills; instead, it requires a change in consciousness from less complex to more complex structures of the mind. Rooke and Torbert (2005) claimed that heightened levels of consciousness equip leaders to navigate complex challenges more effectively, enabling them to understand and navigate complexity in a way that previous mindsets did not allow.

Developing *conflict-conscious* and *conflict-competent* leaders to guide and support their departments and institutions through these times of continuous change is perhaps one of the most critical challenges facing higher education leaders today.

Purpose Statement

This study aimed to highlight how department-level academic leaders' constructive-developmental mindsets influence their ability to navigate conflict during periods of organizational change. Additionally, this research intended to provide an additional subset of theoretical scaffolding with which to explore the connection between theory and practice, serving to aid in addressing the question of how leaders can more constructively navigate conflict during periods of change in higher education institutions (HEIs). Through this study, I sought to illuminate and describe how the participants' constructive-developmental meaning-making structures—what I simply refer to as their *mindsets*—influence their ability and capacity to engage in interpersonal conflict constructively. The concept of the “mindset” in the context of

¹ Kegan is credited with coining the language of “adult constructive-development” and for establishing its initial theoretical framework.

this study refers to the form of one's deep psychic structure, which is the foundation and lens through which an individual constructs meaning. Additionally, in a practical sense, I aimed, through this study, to further the expansion of knowledge and understanding in this field, to support the advancement of developmental education for leaders in HEIs.

Research Questions

Within the context of department-level academic leadership in higher education, this study addressed one primary research question and two secondary questions:

1. How do the leaders' developmental mindsets (orders/stages of adult development) affect their meaning-making in conflict situations?
 - 1.1 What is the relationship between leaders' developmental mindset and their approaches to conflict?
 - 1.2 How, if at all, do the leaders' developmental mindsets influence their actions when engaging, responding to, and navigating conflict?

Introduction to Areas of Intersection

The study primarily focused on three intersecting areas, expanded upon in Chapter II. The first area looked at research and literature on mid-level or department-level academic leadership in higher education. Leadership at the departmental-level functions differently than at the higher or lower levels of leadership in an HEI. Additionally, leaders in the role of a dean or associate dean navigate power dynamics from multiple directions. They are typically not the policymakers. They usually do not hold significant power to introduce and lead institution-wide initiatives. Still, they are called on to implement and hold faculty and staff accountable to change in policies and initiatives that come from the top-level leadership (i.e., the executive leaders and

the board of directors). On the other end, faculty also hold a distinct relationship to this leadership position in that they commonly report directly to an academic dean or associate dean; however, they may have more collective power through their union or senate to drive policy change and other initiatives than the dean-level leaders. This role conflict makes the position of academic dean, associate dean, or department director particularly unique compared to different roles in an HEI (Leaming, 2002; Morris & Laipple, 2015) and when compared to positions in other organizations outside higher education. Therefore, navigating change and conflict in this role requires a unique set of skills and perspective and, perhaps, as I theorize, a more complex developmental mindset.

The second concept integral to this study is organizational and departmental conflict. Multiple studies estimate that managers spend between 20 and 40% of their time dealing with conflict (Center for Creative Leadership, 2003, as cited in Runde & Flanagan, 2013). Academic leaders are not immune to conflict. In fact, mid to high-level leaders in HEIs may spend just as much, if not more, of their time navigating conflicts than actively carrying out their designated and assigned responsibilities, especially during periods of change within an HEI. A limited number of studies examine academic leaders' relationship to conflict in HEIs. One modern study looks specifically at educational leaders' conflict management styles and modes (Stanley & Algert, 2007), and some literature examines conflict and power dynamics in HEIs (Feltner & Goodsell, 1972; Wolverson et al., 1999). Nevertheless, a dearth of research seeks to recognize on a psychological level—especially from a constructive-developmental perspective—how academic leaders make sense of conflict and navigate conflict within their departments.

Third, the role of deep structures of consciousness and their relationship to effective leadership gained some attention in recent decades (Berger & Fitzgerald, 2002; Berger & Johnston, 2011; Drath, 2001; Drath & Van Velsor, 2006; Kegan & Lahey, 2001; McCauley et al., 2006; Rooke & Torbert, 2005). To a certain extent, this research area provides a critique of theories that argue for traits and skills as the leading indicators of good leadership pertaining to conflict (as one may expect, this reciprocated critique has contributed to philosophical tension among scholars and practitioners in the field). Constructive-developmental theory suggests that it may be just as important, if not more, to look at the developmental mindsets of leaders in relation to understanding their efficacy and success in navigating complex problems and systems.

Research Design

I incorporated multiple methods for this study to form my overarching methodological design. The two methods incorporated were multiple case study analysis and an adapted version of the critical incident technique (CIT). To gather the data to inform the analysis for these methods, I utilized the subject-object interview (SOI) followed by a tailored form of the critical incident interview, which I reframed and referred to as the critical conflict interview (CCI). The SOI, developed by Lahey et al. (1988), is an adult development assessment instrument designed to provide data that is utilized to identify where an individual is in their developmental journey (i.e., to determine their constructive-developmental mindset). The critical incident interview, or the CCI, is an adapted and modernized version of Flanagan's (1954) critical incident interview, which I used for identifying and exploring specific conflict situations the participants encountered. Additionally, I included a third, semi-structured open interview, which provided

space to ask follow-up questions and allowed time to debrief the interview experience with each participant.

Nine academic departmental leaders from various institutions participated in this study. My primary intent at the onset of this study was to gain a nuanced understanding of how an individual leader's developmental mindset affects their meaning-making capacity in conflict situations.

My primary focus was to develop a series of small-scale case studies utilizing the multiple data collection procedures listed in the previous paragraph. Each case study focused on one individual and their experiences navigating conflict in their institution. I applied the interview methods summarized in the previous paragraph to gather data to explore the connections between one's developmental mindset and how it influences an individual's thoughts and actions when in conflict.

The first two interviews, the SOI and CCI, were conducted separately, in this order, with approximately two weeks between each interview. Each of these interviews lasted approximately an hour and a half. The third interview, informed by the first two interviews, was intended to allow me to ask follow-up and clarifying questions. I utilized this interview to gather additional biographic and demographic information on each participant. The third interview was conducted approximately two weeks after the second interview and ranged in length from 40 minutes to one hour. I individually conducted all 28 interviews over three months. All nine participants completed the interviews in the intended timeframe of approximately six weeks. The interviews were conducted over Zoom, and only the audio of the interview was recorded to Zoom's cloud database. These audio transcripts were immediately downloaded from the cloud, stored on a

protected file on my personal computer, and then deleted from the cloud. I also used a handheld MP3 recorder as a backup. Following each interview, I uploaded these to a separate protected file on my personal computer and immediately deleted them off the recording device. I hired an independent transcriptionist to transcribe the audio files.

The SOIs were coded, analyzed, and scored following the method developed and described by Lahey et al. (2011). The analysis and scoring were completed with the support of a colleague who had been trained and certified as a reliable evaluator of the SOI through the organization Minds at Work. This will be expanded upon in Chapter IV. The CCIs were coded and analyzed following the adapted approach of the critical incident method. I retained the support of another colleague to aid in the coding and analysis of the CCIs, which will be explained in greater detail in Chapter IV. The third interview was not coded in full; however, relevant portions of some participants' third interview were incorporated into the CII coding process. Other relevant data from the third interview was incorporated into the individual case studies and the critical incident analysis. Data from CII and the closing interview were also considered in the SOI analysis in cases where they provided relevant content. In addition to the interviews, I successfully solicited either a resume or CV from each participant (with one exception), which I utilized to inform my understanding of their career timeline. To a limited extent, information from the CV or resume aided in informing and contextualizing the analysis and interpretation phases of the research.

Scope, Context, and Participants

As stated, the study included nine individual mid-leaders in various HEIs located in the United States. Each participant was employed at the time of this study by a college or university

in the role of an academic dean, associate dean, department director, or department chair. All participants had faculty and/or staff directly reporting to them. Moreover, all participants shared the experience of navigating the obligatory changes and adaptations HEIs endured during the first year of the COVID-19 global pandemic. (Initially, I intended to simultaneously focus attention on conflict linked to institutional changes in policies and practices concerning racial equity within the participant's institutions; however, this was not a central focus for most participants. Therefore, it was relegated to a theme within the study but did not elicit enough attention to garner preferential attention.)

The participants in this study came from a mix of different types of institutions, summarized as follows: community colleges, private universities, public universities, and a military college. The participants represented a mix of various academic divisions, which included: arts and humanities, business, communication, education, ethics, leadership, and general undergraduate studies. All the participants worked with and served both faculty and students associated with undergraduate or graduate programs. The region where the institutions were located was not of chief concern when selecting participants for the study; however, six states were home to the institutions with whom the participants were associated.

Assumptions

As I approached this study, I acknowledged two primary assumptions. First and foremost, the participants in this study will speak honestly and transparently about their experiences with respect to conflicts they encountered and navigated in their leadership context, truthfully speaking to their experiences from their own perspective, not embellishing or leaving out key details. Secondly, this study assumed that participants would demonstrate and represent a variety

of different meaning-making structures (i.e., developmental mindsets) determined by the SOI and assessment. The findings confirmed the second assumption, which will be examined at length in Chapters IV through VI.

Limitations

Additionally, there are several limitations to a small-scale multi-method study of this size, scope, and complexity. First, this study was intended to be exploratory in nature. The results of this study are not meant to be generalized. Instead, the study's purpose is to aid in supporting the development theory to be built upon in future research, as opposed to providing conclusive results that can be applied broadly and with moderate certainty. Secondly, the study was designed to provide a window into the individual participants' meaning-making structures and the navigation of conflict within their unique context. In Chapter IV, I explore and articulate the pertinent findings from the individual case studies with little comparative analysis. In Chapter V, I look collectively at the themes that emerged from the coded and thematized data gathered in the CCIs, while also linking it to the SOI results of the participants. Thirdly, nearly all the data collected for this study were self-reported; therefore, it is considered subjective, except for the data gathered and analyzed for the SOI (as multiple reliable raters can confirm it). Thus, the reporting of the actual incidents was susceptible to revisionist recollection on the part of the participants, as well as conscious and unconscious bias and/or error, unintentional or intentional. Finally, as one working with constructive-developmental theory, my aptitude for interpreting, understanding, and applying this complex and still evolving theory is vulnerable to misinterpretation and gaps in understanding. To address this in part, as stated previously, I collaborated with another certified SOI scorer to analyze the individual SOIs.

Statement of Positionality

I came to this dissertation research with a specific set of lenses, experiences, and identities that shaped my approach to the study. First, I was in a unique position in that I was not a member of the group of participants included in my research. In this way, I was an outsider, which perhaps provided me with a more objective perspective, though with a viewpoint that may have been less attuned to the power dynamics and nuances of the leaders' positions and roles. I have worked in higher education for over a decade and worked closely with academic deans, associate deans, directors, and to a lesser degree, department chairs. Yet, I have not held any of these positions.

My experience and expertise in interpersonal, intragroup, and small-scale intergroup conflict, as well as leadership and change, uniquely positions me to conduct this study. Additionally, I completed the Minds at Work Subject-Object Interview and Assessment certification in April 2020 (see the certificate of completion and certification program description in Appendix A), qualifying me to conduct, interpret, and score the SOI.

Concerning my social identity, I am a white middle-class male. I recognize that this shapes my perspective and may shape participants' relationship with me as a researcher and readers' perceptions of my work and approach. I am a socially liberal, fiscally moderate (depending on the issue), identify as a spiritual non-theist Quaker, and am deeply committed to the values of social justice and equity. Additionally, I grew up in rural, blue-collar farming communities. My educational experience has been predominately liberal-leaning, and I recognize that these identities and experiences deeply influence how I show up in the research process and my interpretive lens.

Social constructivism will predominately guide my ontological and epistemological perspectives throughout this study. I believe that reality is a co-created social construction. Moreover, I value the notion that there may be an objective reality; however, humans will always be subject to this reality to an extent and therefore do not have the capacity for a genuinely objective perspective. Humans are always subject to their reality, to varying degrees, based on their developmental mindset, even as we construct the meaning of this reality together, based on our collective yet still limited perspectives.

Significance of Study

As stated in an earlier section, the institution of higher education is experiencing an unprecedented period of involuntary change at this moment. There is a moderate amount of research and literature on how leaders in higher education navigate change effectively; however, the literature primarily focuses on high-level leaders instead of divisional academic leadership. Additionally, relatively little research looks at the psychological elements regarding how academic leaders navigate conflict during times of change and how mid-level academic leaders navigate conflict during periods of change in their institutions in general. This study explores these areas in a limited yet focused capacity. Moreover, this study looks below the surface of leaders' traits and skills, honing in on the deep psychological structures of meaning-making that shape how these leaders make sense of the complexity they are navigating.

Resistance to change is a significant cause of conflict in higher education. Harnessing the ability to understand and navigate this resistance constructively may be one of the essential requirements of a leader in this contemporary climate. Navigating change constructively in any context requires a heightened sense of awareness concerning the system's complexities within

which one is navigating. Leaders who are further along in their developmental journey have a greater capacity to understand and navigate these complexities (Berger, 2011; Drath, 2001; Kegan & Lahey, 2009, 2016; McCauley et al., 2006; Rooke & Torbert, 2005; Torbert, 1989).

Additionally, it is worth noting that the design of this study is unique. It utilizes two psychological methods from different psychology fields and will use them hand-in-hand to make sense of previously linked phenomena, though not studied in depth.

A significant change in HEIs often comes from periods of crisis (Guskin & Marcy, 2002). The more profound question I considered throughout this study asked: who has the developmental mindset and mental complexity to navigate this space—or period of instability—effectively? I hypothesized that those with more structurally complex developmental mindsets are better equipped to navigate conflict constructively and effectively. This study provides valuable insights into this notion; however, it does not provide comprehensive or conclusive results, as it was not designed with this intention.

Still, the institution of higher education is experiencing multiple crises simultaneously, and we need leaders with the complexity of mind to constructively and effectively navigate the inevitable conflicts that have arisen and will continue to rise for the foreseeable future.

Organization of Chapters

This first chapter introduced the study, outlined the problems to be explored, introduced the methodology, and framed the study's aim. Specifically, this study aims to understand better how department-level academic leaders' constructive-developmental mindsets influence their ability to navigate conflict, paying attention to conflict that occurs during periods of organizational change.

The second chapter situates the study in the literature by reviewing relevant literature on conflict, conflict, and HEI leadership, leadership in HEIs, and constructive-developmental psychology theory.

The third chapter describes the multi-method qualitative research design, which supported the development of nine small-scale case studies, a limited multiple case study analysis, and the collective critical conflict analysis.

The fourth chapter presents the nine individual small-scale case studies framed as vignettes, informed by the data collected from the set of three interviews with each of the participants.

The fifth chapter presents the analysis and interpretation of the data primarily collected through the CCI while drawing links to the results from the SOI and the demographic information collected in the third interview.

The sixth and final chapter provides a summary of key findings and connects these findings to previous research and theory. This chapter also identifies important implications for future research, the development and evolution of theory, and leadership practice in HEIs. Finally, it highlights the study's limitations and identifies perceived gaps.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

If we are to be effective in handling conflict, we must start with a way to make sense of it and to embrace both its complexity and its essence.

—Mayer (2012, p. 3)

Heifetz (1994) differentiated in his work between the two types of change challenges that individuals' experience, which he framed as "technical" and "adaptive" challenges. Technical challenges deal with learning a skill, framework, or process. These challenges are not necessarily simple; for example, writing code well enough to be employed by a leading tech company or learning how to perform a sophisticated surgery effectively. They are technical in that a concrete set of skills and knowledge is required. On the other hand, Heifetz discussed adaptive challenges, which are more complex and have no simple solution. These challenges may require a more profound shift of consciousness to a more complex mental state of development to generate the perspective necessary that allows one to see and make sense of the complexities threaded throughout the challenge.

Over the last half-century, conflict resolution scholars and practitioners have emphasized the importance of technical skills (e.g., active listening, negotiation, mediation, paraphrasing, and perception checking). Suppose one learns how to negotiate well, actively listen effectively, identify the interests which inform one's position, or *fill in the blank*; this will enable one to become an effective conflict resolution practitioner. However, I argue, as do others before me (Coleman, 2018; Mayer, 2012, 2015; McGuigan & Popp, 2016), that conflict is often complex, and though it may require technical skills to a certain extent, to navigate complex conflict constructively, may require an adaptive approach, perhaps more so than technical. To navigate

complex adaptive challenges effectively and constructively, one may benefit from a complex meaning-making system—i.e., a developmental mindset (McGuigan & Popp, 2016). Adaptive challenges in organizations, by their very nature, will involve interpersonal conflict. This study will explore the role of developmental mindsets' impact on leaders' capacity to navigate these complex conflicts, particularly highlighting conflict that emerges during periods of change, be they “received” or “intentional” (Buller, 2015).

Even the emphasis on “conflict resolution” implies technical solutions—problem-solving methods along the lines of algebraic equations. *Plug in X and B here, and run the formula, and the answer will appear. One only needs to identify the correct equation for the proper context!* (This focus on technical solutions was precisely what was being taught in the two-day workshop I referenced in Chapter I.) However, many experienced conflict engagement practitioners will confirm that resolution is often not as simple as I described. In conflict, especially when there is a moderate amount of complexity contributing to the problem, rarely is there a quick fix. In complex conflict situations, specifically during times of change, simple solutions authentically address underlying dynamics contributing to the conflict situation are uncommon. Instead, it takes a complex mind—a more expanded consciousness—to take on adaptive problems adeptly.

Navigating conflict constructively does require specific technical skills. I posit that perhaps one's developmental mindset and the capacity to take on adaptive changes are just as important as the technical conflict resolution skills when navigating conflict, change, and the complexities these phenomena bring to an organizational leader, as they complement one

another.² Moreover, I propose that this is especially important to consider in the context of academic leadership in higher education.

To this point, *conflict resolution* can be a problematic frame for engaging conflict, and one that I will use deliberately yet sparingly throughout this dissertation. One way in which it can be problematic is, when used, it often implies that a conflict *can* and *should* be resolved. Additionally, when a conflict involves layers of complexity, there are more dynamics and issues to address in order to achieve a genuine and comprehensive resolution. In my ten-plus years of working, teaching, and studying in the field, I have learned and observed that complex conflict is rarely ever comprehensively resolved, especially when rooted in needs, values, and identities. Even when it appears that resolution has occurred, lingering tension and conflict *may* persist (often below the surface). A problem may be solved, but the underlying conflict (or tension) does not simply vanish, especially within workplaces and organizations such as higher education institutions.

Instead of conflict resolution as a primary concept and framework, throughout this study, I will utilize “conflict engagement,” which does not put any value on whether a resolution is obtained or not. Instead, it respects that conflict is dynamic, complex, and fluid. One can “solve problems” in relation to conflicts, but the conflict may still exist, which is normal and acceptable. I will expand on this in the subsequent section.

² It is worth noting that one’s developmental mindset could be considered to play a more critical role in one’s capacity to constructively navigate conflict, as it is the foundation on which we construct meaning, allowing one to develop technical skills, and to determine which technical tool or skill to utilize in each unique conflict situation.

I will also refer to “navigating conflict” as a neutral term for engaging conflict without forcing a resolution. *Navigating* helps to internalize the notion that conflict is more than just a thing one can resolve and then move on from. Instead, conflict is often an ongoing aspect of a relationship. It is a dynamic and ongoing journey. It is not something to get past but something to continually consider, keep an eye on, and engage when necessary. At times it will be up front and center, and other times it will recede into the background.

During my master’s degree, one of my professors had a saying that has become a mantra for me. Whenever someone in class would ask him, “what is the best way to deal with this conflict?” After a purposeful pause, Professor Stan Sitnick would reply by saying, “Sometimes, maybe, it depends.” For several years after taking courses with Professor Sitnick, I struggled to understand this statement’s intention fully. Then, a few years ago, it clicked for me. I finally saw the genius in this response. In essence, Stan encouraged us to recognize that every conflict is unique and complex. *There is no absolute right way*. It requires a complex mind to understand this, a level of consciousness that can think beyond the concrete. This makes sense now. My deep structures of meaning-making had not yet evolved to recognize complexity in conflict. Often in conflict situations, individuals are quick to veer into concrete thinking, attempting technical approaches, when faced with adaptive challenges requiring a complex mindset to navigate the complexity. As will be discussed later in this chapter, this is particularly true of conflict characteristics in the context of HEIs.

Through a set of small case studies, this dissertation will explore in-depth the constructive-developmental mindsets that participating individuals in mid-level academic leadership roles bring to conflict and how these deep structures influence meaning-making in

conflict. The meaning-making system affects an individual's thinking, decisions, behaviors, and actions in conflict situations, particularly looking at conflict that surfaces during periods of organizational change. This study refrains from focusing heavily on the technical skills associated with navigating conflict constructively (though it identifies and examines them in relation to an individual's mindset). Instead, it explores leaders' developmental mindsets in conflict.

Few studies have looked at the constructive development theory in relationship to conflict, and no studies have been conducted in the context of higher education.

Theoretical Frameworks

In this section, I briefly provide a historical contextualization for the field of conflict studies, looking at the construct of conflict, its different orientations, and definitions, and offer a salient characterization/explanation for this study. Next, I explore the literature on conflict and leadership within the context of higher education, including literature that examines the context of this study, including academic departmental leadership (e.g., deans, associate deans, directors, and chairs). Following this, I review the literature on constructive-developmental (CD) theory. Within this portion of the review, literature on conflict and CD theory is explored, particularly looking at consciousness and complexity related to navigating conflict.

Framing Consciousness: A Brief Orientation

Consciousness, in the context of this study—and in the context of CD theory—relates to that which an individual is consciously aware of, can take perspective on, can look at and make sense of from a detached position, and can relate to as “object” (Kegan, 1982, 1994).

Additionally, consciousness can be contrasted with the concept of *unconsciousness*, which refers

to that which an individual is not consciously aware of—that which exists but is unseen by the self, for it is “subject to” the self.

The “development of consciousness,” as previously referenced, and which will be explored at greater length in coming sections, concerns the notion that the mind can (and does) evolve over time, and this evolution (i.e., the constructive-developmental journey) is facilitated through making sense of one’s environment—external and internal—in incrementally more and more complex ways. As one’s mind evolves toward more complex forms of consciousness the deep structure of the mind simultaneously and incrementally transforms and expands to “see” more, to be conscious of more (i.e., the mind’s scope of awareness increases and more is seen and related to as “object” than previously experienced). Moreover, it is important to note that this orientation to consciousness must be differentiated from the denotation used by cognitive psychology and the neurosciences in reference to “cognitive” growth and development (i.e., the growth and development of cognitive abilities such as skill development, language learning, and information processing).

Throughout the following sections and chapters, I use the language of “consciousness” sparingly; however, when I refer to the “development” or “evolution” of the “mind,” I am referring to the development and evolution of consciousness and its increasing complexity.

Origins of Conflict Field

The study of conflict as a discipline rose in the 1950s and 1960s in the wake of World War II. It has since transcended all social sectors of academic study and established subfields (e.g., business, management, politics). In large part, the interpersonal focus areas of the field are grounded in the field of psychology, as the study of conflict deals with understanding the

motivations behind why people and groups take the positions they do, fight for their beliefs and values, how they defend and advocate for their interests, how they protect their identities, and how they communicate in conflict. The research application extended to the fields of management, communication, and leadership studies, which are of particular interest to this study—for the psychology of individuals and groups directly informs the practices of conflict-related communication, management, and leadership.

The historical narrative of the emergence of the conflict studies field as a stand-alone discipline is—perhaps surprisingly—rife with conflict. Various major disciplines attempted to claim the field of “conflict resolution” post-World War II, leading to “disciplinary territoriality,” which, as McGuigan and Popp (2016) stated, “plagued the founders’ ability to develop a unified theory of conflict” (p. 32). This interdisciplinary conflict and tension exist in the field today and partly cause the discipline’s inability to transform into a cohesive discipline (to this point). Early academic advocates and researchers included psychologist Kurt Lewin, social psychologist Morton Deutsch, economist and systems theorist Kenneth Boulding, sociologist Johan Galtung, and many others. McGuigan and Popp (2016) provide a comprehensive overview of the history of the discipline.

The language and research concerning the role of conflict in social interactions existed long before the study of conflict emerged as its own discipline. Nearly every social science discipline throughout modern history explored and continues to explore the phenomena of conflict to varying extents at the interpersonal, intergroup, or intrapersonal levels.

The discipline and study of conflict is often recognized as *multidisciplinary* (individuals from multiple disciplines working together and drawing from their disciplines), *interdisciplinary*

(integrating knowledge from various disciplines and combining methods from these disciplines), and *transdisciplinary* (intentionally integrating different disciplinary lenses to create a unified lens, which transcends the disciplines) endeavor. From anthropology to sociology to psychology, from sociology to political science, from philosophy to law to history, all these disciplines have directly addressed the notion of conflict in the social sphere. Too often, academics and practitioners struggle to work within these intentional, integrated approaches and may only work in a *cross-disciplinary* way (looking at other disciplines from their own disciplinary perspective), failing to integrate perspectives. This study will take on a genuine transdisciplinary approach to the research, incorporating multiple perspectives to make sense of conflict in the context examined.

Orientations to Conflict

Conflict is an inevitable and naturally occurring phenomenon in human relationships (Mayer, 2012; Rahim, 2001; Wilmot & Hocker, 2007). Conflict is unavoidable and a fundamental aspect of the human experience. Conflict shows up in many different forms and stems from various causes. In the Western world, conflict is generally viewed as a negative concept that can be prevented or avoided (Runde & Flanagan, 2013; Wilmot & Hocker, 2007). However, conflict is not inherently negative or destructive (Coleman & Ferguson, 2015; Fisher et al., 2011; Gerzon, 2006; Mayer, 2012, 2015). Conflict stems from people and things being in opposition to another perspective or thing (Coleman & Ferguson, 2015; Wilmot & Hocker, 2007). Conflict is complex, partly because a myriad of variables plays into any conflict dynamic, and therefore there is no simple algorithm for successful and constructive engagement (Coleman, 2018). Wherever two or more are gathered there subsists conflict of some shape or size, whether

acknowledged or not. Framed as conflict or as one of the myriad synonyms for the concept (e.g., tension, disagreement, violence, distrust, different points of view, resistance to change), there are several working notions or approaches concerning effective ways for addressing interpersonal conflict (which will be expanded upon in brief in the next section).

There are countless definitions for conflict, though before exploring these, it is helpful to ask *why* conflict exists. Deutsch (1977) stated, “A conflict exists whenever incompatible activities occur. The incompatible actions may originate in one person, group, or nation . . . an action that is incompatible with another action prevents, obstructs, interferes, injures, or in some way makes the latter less likely or less effective” (p. 10). Mayer (2012) succinctly stated that “[conflict] is seen as arising from basic human instincts, from competition for resources and power, from the structure of societies and institutions people create, from flawed communication, and from the inevitable struggle between classes” (p. 8). This broad framing of conflict covers all bases, from interpersonal, to inter-group, to inter-state and international. From this view, I move to explore the various accepted definitions for conflict itself. Burton (1997), speaking from a human needs theoretical perspective, articulated that conflict exists when people’s basic human needs are not being met; therefore, conflict in and of itself is a problem to be solved by diligently working to meet individual and societal human needs. Coleman and Ferguson (2015) stated that conflict is what “happens when things are opposed—when different interests, claims, preferences, beliefs, feelings, values, ideas, or truths collide” (p. 1). Pruitt and Rubin (1986) asserted that “[conflict] means perceived divergence of interest, or a belief that the parties’ current aspirations cannot be achieved simultaneously” (p. 4). Simerly (1998) stated that

“conflict occurs when there is a disagreement over such things as ideas, goals, methods, and values” (p. 2).

Building an understanding of why conflict occurs, Wilmot and Hocker (2007) defined conflict as “an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interferences from others in achieving their goals” (p. 9). Rahim (2002) frames conflict as situations where individuals have opposing goals or incompatible interests related to views, principles, needs, behaviors, beliefs, and feelings. Amason (1996) described conflict as a multidimensional construct that culminates in either dysfunctional or functional results and outcomes.

I have articulated a working definition from these definitions of what conflict is and why it exists. *Conflict exists when an individual or group’s interests, in the form of needs, values, and/or identities, are threatened or perceived to be threatened—unwelcome, ignored, or spurned.*

Reframed, conflict *is* the threat or perceived risk/threat to an individual or group’s needs, interests, values, and/or identity. Even this articulation of conflict is framed negatively. Perhaps there is an opportunity for a constructive frame that would permit individuals to think of conflict constructively. Conflict could be articulated as an *opportunity* to explore the perceived differences in needs, interests, values, identities, and/or experiences of another in an effort to address the problems between individuals and groups in a constructive and potentially transformative way.

From this articulation of why conflict exists and building on the definitions of others, I will use a general definition of interpersonal conflict as *an acknowledged, felt, or expressed*

struggle or tension which exists between two or more parties who perceive incompatible goals as related to parties' needs, interests, values, identity, behaviors, and feelings.

Mayer suggested, “[a] framework for understanding conflict should be an organizing lens that brings a conflict into better focus [a theory]. There are many different lenses we can use, and each of us will find some more amenable to our own way of thinking than others” (2012, p. 4). I ultimately see this as an objective of my research and work, to contribute to research that illuminates constructive and transformational lenses for understanding and engaging conflict, which may provide insights to aid individuals and organizations in developing more nuanced and complex ways of making meaning of conflict in a constructive manner, to equip and empower interested parties with the developmental mindsets and capacity to engage conflict constructively.

Approaches to Conflict

Conflict Resolution

Historically, academics and practitioners alike have embraced the language and concept of *conflict resolution*, which emerged as the predominant orientation to conflict engagement work in the middle of the 20th century (during the same time as the emergence of postmodernism). It makes sense, to an extent, that this concept would be embraced. During the 1960s, when in term came into vogue, the Vietnam Conflict was going on, the Civil Rights movement was in full swing, and the *peace and love* culture of this era was largely *anti-conflict*. Conflict was viewed as negative (which remains valid in Western culture today). In part, the field(s) of study and practice that examined and studied interpersonal, intragroup, and intergroup conflict may have adopted the term “resolution” because it resonated with the predominant

sentiment toward *conflict* at the time: *conflict is inherently negative and harmful; therefore, it must be addressed with the intent to resolve and eradicate it.*

Conflict resolution as an orientation to addressing conflict can be constructive. However, this must be examined with the recognition of nuance, as comprehensive *resolution* may not fully be attained in many contexts (an issue may be resolved, but tension often may remain, and conflict often arises again pertaining to a related problem or another matter). Therefore, engaging in a “conflict resolution” process potentially sets disputing parties up for failure. Resolution is attainable and can be sought out in some cases; however, the outcome might not look like a resolution, or it might not be resolved in the minds of all the parties (positively enabling a rippling of resentment). Historically, conflict resolution does not always ensure or favor an equitable outcome for all parties (Mayer, 2012, 2015). It assumes that the resolution is a success if an agreement is made. I posit that this approach may be too quick to overlook the value equity in an agreement or resolution—especially in *complex conflict*.

When people develop their mental complexity—an incremental process—they develop the capacity to see the myriad dynamics at play that make it challenging to develop a simple and equitable resolution. This is not inherently a negative development; rather, it can be empowering when an individual’s mind develops to a level of consciousness where the once simple becomes more complex, for it paves the way for more transformational and dialectical thinking and genuinely equitable processes and outcomes when navigating conflict.

Conflict Management

Conflict management is a concept embraced and beloved by the business, leadership, and consulting communities, which deal directly with conflict. It inherently recognizes that

resolution is not always possible, and therefore conflict must be *managed*, especially the destructive elements. Conflict must be controlled. It focuses on limiting the negative expressions of conflict and elevating its positive features (Rahim, 2002). Thus, effectively managed conflict can generate healthy, creative, and productive workplaces, whereas negative responses to conflict may decrease constructive outcomes.

Conflict management is a beneficial approach for addressing conflict in many contexts. It often incorporates conflict resolution-type outcomes. Nevertheless, it too can be a narrow approach to understanding and engaging conflict. It may influence an individual or leader to overlook under-the-surface contributors to conflict pertaining to non-task-related conflict (especially avoiding perceived negative conflict).

Conflict Transformation

Conflict transformation is a concept and orientation to conflict coined by Lederach (1997), which emerged from his work with inter-group conflict (e.g., dialogue-centric and facilitated processes). Lederach (2014) stated that “conflict transformation is a comprehensive orientation or framework that ultimately may require a fundamental change in our way of thinking” (p. 2). He went on to say that “[a] transformational approach [to conflict] recognizes that conflict is a normal and continuous dynamic within human relationships” (p. 10).

Bush and Folger’s (2005) seminal contribution to the theory and practice of conflict transformation specifically focused on the transformative potential and power of mediation. Two notable and relevant threads are woven throughout their work concerning the notion that people can change the way they relate to conflict (a conscious choice) by seeing the positive or constructive possibilities in conflict, and that people can change the way they relate to one

another by focusing on the humanity of others. Connected to this second notion, they posited that there are two “important dynamic effects” at the heart of a transformative approach, which are *empowerment* and *recognition*. As they explained:

In simplest terms, *empowerment* means the restoration to individuals of a sense of their value and strength and their own capacity to make decisions and handle life’s problems. *Recognition* means the evocation in individuals of acknowledgment, understanding, or empathy for the situation and the views of the other. When both of these processes are held central in the practice of mediation, parties are helped to transform their conflict interaction—from destructive to constructive—and to experience the personal effects of such transformation. (2005, pp. 22–23)

Conflict transformation is focused on intentionally and actively working through conflict with an emphasis on the constructive potential for shifting the way people relate to one another (with an emphasis on the humanization of one another). It seeks to consider the deeper structural and cultural issues (and values) at play in a given conflict situation while centering empowerment and recognition for the parties/stakeholders involved. Conflict transformation is complex for many to wrap their mind around because it is a more complex orientation to engaging conflict. It requires a more complex mind (or order of consciousness) to frame a conflict situation as a potentially transformative and dynamic process, often without bookends.

Conflict Engagement

In this study, the term “conflict engagement” will be used primarily, for it encompasses all these approaches to dealing with conflict. As Mayer (2012) suggested, conflict engagement is appropriately differentiated from conflict avoidance. As an academic department leader in higher education, one will not last long in this role if they are continually avoiding conflict. As will be explored in more depth in the coming paragraphs, academic leaders in HEIs are constantly faced with the responsibility of engaging conflict. Sometimes their engagement leads to resolution.

Sometimes, it requires management. And perhaps (not practiced often enough) leaders can engage conflict in such a way that it becomes transformational.

In addition to emphasizing the concept of conflict engagement in framing this research, I choose to use “navigating conflict” as the active approach to engaging conflict. These terms, “conflict engagement” (*engaging conflict*) and “conflict navigation” (*navigating conflict*), are neutral. They allow for conflict to be resolved, managed, engaged with the possibility of movement toward transformation, and even *escalated* when and where appropriate and viable.

Conflict in Higher Education Leadership

Within the context of higher education, conflict is widespread and inevitable. From top to bottom, conflict prevails throughout the hierarchy of an HEI. Colleges and universities are typically complex, loosely coupled organizations (Algert & Watson, 2002; Bess & Dee, 2014; Stanley & Algert, 2007) with unique leadership and power structures compared to other organizations. Many institutions have a mix of unionized and non-bargaining employees, rely on multiple funding sources, and have a distinct and wide array of stakeholders to serve. When conflict arises within a loosely coupled complex system such as HEIs, it is often complex (Algert & Watson, 2002; Stanley & Algert, 2007) and will require intentional engagement and management to handle it constructively. “[Complexity] is heightened even more so in a university setting where tenure, priority of discipline, and lack of clear accountability measures limit conflict management tools available to leaders and managers” (Stanley & Algert, 2007, p. 49). To constructively engage and navigate conflict in higher education, particularly in the role of an academic leader, an effective leader must develop and occupy a heightened sense of consciousness to navigate complexity in a viable and equitable manner. This study explores how

a leader's developmental mindset aids or inhibits them in understanding and then navigating the complexities of conflict during organizational change in higher education.

Sources of Conflict in Higher Education

Conflicts in HEIs revolve around a variety of issues that directly impact academic departments, such as institutional policy, academic assessment (Bess & Dee, 2014), declining budgets with an increased burden to generate revenue (Garrett & Poock, 2011), an increase in regulation and accountability which accounts for increased time spent on paperwork and navigating bureaucracy (Morris & Laipple, 2015), ongoing ambiguity and role conflict (Wolverton et al., 1999), and constant new initiatives and changes brought into the equation from various stakeholders in the institution (Buller, 2015). Additionally, it must not be overlooked that the influence of #MeToo, #BlackLivesMatter, and other social movements geared toward promoting equity and social justice are currently influential sources of conflict in HEIs. And the polarized political divide in the United States and worldwide contributes to increased conflict and tension in HEIs. The causes of conflict in higher education are varied and are often rooted in competition for resources (Bess & Dee, 2014), such as funding, student enrollment, acknowledgment, and prestige.

When speaking about the causes of conflict in HEIs, Idris et al. (2017) stated:

Individual behaviour causes many conflicts. Several conflicts are originated by personal dimensions. Worries, fears, concerns, apprehensions, intense feelings, qualms, uncertainties and deep anxieties of individuals originate conflicts. Personal dimension includes adverse reaction, fidelity, renunciation, credibility, self-esteem and other components like the sense of worth. (p. 156)

Idris et al. (2017) examined conflict within the context of Pakistani universities. The general causes of conflict in higher education do not discriminate based on national or ethnic

context, even though the specifics might look different based on national and cultural context.

They went on to posit:

The appearances of most of the conflicts are due to personal aspects or value aspects and these are constant. It is very important to understand deeply the values, standards and philosophies of other individual or group for the reduction of tension between or among the parties or individuals or groups. Negotiations, discourses, discussion, approving investigations, mediations and constructive communication are the most vital methods and procedures to resolve conflict on the basis of values. (p. 156)

Bess and Dee (2014) stated that a “primary deficiency in the current approach to conflict management in colleges and universities is the failure of institutional stakeholders to consider the *underlying assumptions and beliefs* that lead to conflict in the first place” (p. xiv, my emphasis). When only looked at based on interests and positions, conflict misses out on the assumptions, beliefs, and values that inform the interests and positions people take. The leader who holds a more evolved meaning-making system may be adequately equipped with the capacity to recognize and understand the underlying motivations and complexities and have the developmental ability to take the perspective of other stakeholders in the situated conflict.

Department Leaders and Conflict

The literature on conflict in the context of higher education, particularly at the academic departmental leadership level, is inadequate. What does exist is research on skill development for administrators (Stanley & Algert, 2007), navigating systems and structures (Kezar, 2001; Schuster et al., 1994; Tierney, 2006), and where there appears to be the most literature is in the area of improved communication (Bess & Dee, 2014; Del Favero, 2003; Hickson & McCroskey, 1991; Kezar, 2001; Schuster et al., 1994; Stanley & Algert, 2007; Tierney, 2006; Trombly et al., 2002). Even research on conflict management styles among department leaders is scarce

(Gmelch, 1995; Gmelch & Carroll, 1991; Peterson, 2018; Stanley & Algert, 2007). Stanley and Algert (2007) stated:

[Unprecedented] pressures such as declining public funding for higher education, increasing student enrollments, increasing external demands for accountability, and rising expectations for increased external funding require superior leadership to shape constructive responses to conflict. The leadership position that offers and requires interaction with faculty is the department head or chair. Given the above challenges, the leadership of the department head in transforming the faculty is critical to an institution's future and mission. (pp. 49–50)

As they implied, academic department leaders must take a transformational approach to navigating conflict with faculty, which centers relationships, common values, and intersecting interests in the conflict navigation process. I posit that this is beneficial, if not essential, that this occurs with other stakeholders, such as staff, fellow administrators, external stakeholders, and in some instances, students.

Often, the department leader is responsible for managing and navigating this conflict transformation process (Bess & Dee, 2014; Stanley & Algert, 2007; Stanley et al., 2005). Additionally, the role of a department leader or head is characterized as “ambiguous” because they are obligated to carry out multiple roles and duties simultaneously (Stanley & Algert, 2007). Three of the predominant roles these leaders carry are that of the academic, the administrator, and the leader (McLaughlin et al., 1975), which can and do lead to misperceptions of role responsibilities from the perspectives of their associated faculty, administrators, staff, and other colleagues (as well as individuals on the exterior of the organization, such as partners/spouses, family, and friends). Bowman (2002) asserted that

[in] the broadest sense, [department leaders are] expected to function as managers or leaders, or both? In a narrower sense, are they expected to serve in roles as diverse as resource manager, instant problem solver, spokesperson, deep listener, motivator, enabler, meaning maker, systems designer, and cultural rainmaker? (p. 158)

Lumpkin (2004) stated, “It is vitally important for department chairs to learn to manage their time, stress, and the conflict inherent to their role” (p. 46). Conflict resolution and management skills are essential to the position. Additionally, a complex meaning-making structure (a complex mind) increases one’s capacity to make sense of the complexities inherent in conflict situations. My research will look at this relationship between developmental mindsets (level of consciousness) and the capacity one holds to navigate conflict and its complexities.

Stanley and Algert (2007) suggested that literature on conflict management, in particular, is insufficient in this context, as conflict resolution is the preferred orientation to addressing conflict, particularly within higher education contexts. Worth noting, the literature on conflict transformation in this context appears to be nonexistent, as far as I could ascertain.

Stanely and Algert’s (2007) research showed that department chairs are neither equipped with the critical skills for effectively engaging conflict nor aware of their conflict management style. Peterson (2018) examined the conflict styles (Kilmann & Thomas, 1975) of academic and student affairs deans and found that they were much more integrating (collaborative) than compromising in their approach to engaging conflict. Dominating and avoiding conflict were the two lowest conflict styles for deans at four-year and two-year colleges. Perhaps the dean role attracts individuals who value and seek collaboration, whereas faculty are often considered more conflict avoidant or competitive (dominating).

Bennett and Figuli (1993) posited that department heads are among the most complex and challenging positions one can hold in an HEI. Franken et al. (2015), referencing Lapp and Carr (2006), stated that:

[Lapp and Carr] have identified middle leaders as being synchronistically both master and slave as they enact the complex roles of being a subordinate to those in more senior leadership and management roles, an equal amongst middle leaders holding comparable positions and a superior in relation to those they are assigned to lead. (p. 191)

Franken et al. (2015) highlighted that mid-level leaders (chairs and deans) have a structurally complex role. Tension to retain loyalty to the faculty agendas and the need to function within their more significant role, “they are caught between a university culture of line management within a hierarchical framework and professional need for cooperation and collegiality within their department or area of responsibility” (p. 191).

Morris and Laipple (2015) concluded in a separate study that while academic administrative leaders receive training on how to deal with grievances as it relates to institutional policies, there is a gap in training (and development) for leaders in the “nuances of behavioural and conflict management” which they suggest may be more critical than training on grievance policies. They stated that “[administrators] can read policy documents; interacting with a tearful or raging faculty member standing in your office is quite another matter” (p. 249). They go on to say that effective “leadership is critical both in terms of immediate crisis management and in improving the overall working climate of the organization—which in turn may reduce the likelihood of personnel actions reaching crisis proportions” (p. 249). They suggested that leaders need training in how to navigate these conflicts. I posit that beyond this, it would be illuminating to compare how these academic leaders deal with conflict and where they are in terms of their developmental journey; especially when considering Morris and Laipple’s (2015) statement that “[academic] leaders are expected to operate and produce results in an increasingly complex climate” (p. 242).

Inman (2009) stated that “evidence also suggests that development [programs] in higher education largely focus on generic leadership skills, which, although important, do not focus enough on individual development needs” (p. 419). Inman (2009) also pointed out that the “areas in which leaders requested most development was in dealing with people” (p. 424). To this point, the role of mediator or conciliator is often overlooked by the dean, and “faculty morale can be damaged perhaps more by departmental feuds than by any other type of confrontation” (Feltner & Goodsell, 1972, p. 699). Bess and Dee (2014) posited that conflict, especially between faculty and administrators, is predominantly derived from differences in philosophical perspectives and beliefs and is exacerbated by the *otherification* of the disagreeing identity group (e.g., faculty come to see administrators as “other” or “enemy,” and vice versa). Therefore, academic leaders require the skills and sufficient complexity of mind (a dynamic structure and process of sense-making to navigate difficult conflicts that arise within their departments. Because there are many dimensions to keep straight in conflict, this is, in part, what requires the complexity of mind and a heightened level of consciousness to be attuned to the myriad layers/complexities all at once. Leaders’ developmental mindsets must increase to hold the capacity within one’s meaning-making system to navigate this space constructively.

Constructive-Developmental Theory

This section explores constructive-developmental (CD) theory, focusing on Kegan’s subject-object theory. This theory is core to the study. Different theoretical approaches will be referenced, which both complement and critique Kegan’s constructive-development theory.

CD theory stems from human developmental theory and the work of Baldwin (1906/1975), Piaget (1936), and Loevinger (1976). As a neo-Piagetian, Kegan (1980) first

proposed “constructive-development” as a term for this area of focus in adult developmental psychology—focused on the evolution of meaning-making throughout the lifespan. CD theory is premised on the notion that humans actively construct meaning to understand their experiences, relationships, and circumstances and that over time, individuals can develop—or evolve—to higher stages, orders, or mindsets (Basseches, 1984; Cook-Greuter, 1999; Kegan, 1980, 1982, 1994; Torbert, 2004). Each new level of development transcends and includes the previous stage (i.e., mindset) to understand in more complex ways the experiences, relationships, and circumstances one is faced with (Cook-Greuter, 2000; Kegan, 1982, 1994; Loevinger, 1976; Torbert, 1972, 1987). Van Deusen (2014) explained that CD theory “is an ongoing process of development in which different meaning systems evolve over time, both as a natural unfolding as well as in response to the limitations of existing ways of making meaning” (p. 37). This organization of meaning adheres to the notion that an individual’s complexity increases throughout development (Kegan et al., 1998). As stated by Kegan (1994):

The general idea of “ways of knowing” derives from the tradition of constructivism. It implies that we are active in our apprehension of reality. We do not just passively “copy” or “absorb” already organized reality; instead, we ourselves actively give shape and coherence to our experience. Constructivism implies that there is a consistency or holism to our meaning-making. Each apprehension on our part is not merely a response to a momentary stimulus. Instead, from moment to moment and across different spheres of living, our ways of knowing share the design of a common organizing principle or system. (p. 215)

McCauley et al. (2006) stated the essence of constructive-developmental theory as:

Constructive-developmental theory [takes] as its subject the growth and elaboration of a person’s ways of understanding the self and the world. It assumes an ongoing process of development in which qualitatively different meaning systems evolve over time, both as a natural unfolding as well as in response to the limitations of existing ways of making meaning. Each meaning system is more complex than the previous one in the sense that it is capable of including, differentiating among, and integrating a more diverse range of experience. (p. 635)

Constructive-developmental theories utilize the notion of orders, stages, or mindsets to classify individuals' development. As one progresses in the evolution of their mind, their capacity for making sense of complexity increases, and therefore their capacity for thinking in more complex ways increases simultaneously. For leaders in organizations navigating change, it is highly beneficial, if not necessary, to have developed a complex mind (Berger & Johnston, 2011; Kegan, 1994, Kegan & Lahey, 2009; Rooke & Torbert, 1998, 2005). As this study will explore, I argue this is not just true for dealing with change but also for navigating conflict.

Kegan's CD theory is a psychological theory grounded in Jean Piaget's stage theory of human development. Kegan extended Piaget's theory and applied it to adult development. In part, continuing the work of Baldwin (Cahan, 1984), Piaget further conceptualized the notion that as humans develop, they grow in their conscious awareness and cognitive abilities to understand and make sense of complexity.

Kegan posited that there are qualitatively different stages, orders of consciousness, or developmental mindsets defined by what a person can view as object versus subject. There are six total stages, beginning with 0 (zero), and most individuals, by adulthood, develop into stages 3 through 5 (Kegan, 1994; Kegan & Lahey, 2009). For my work, I refer to these development stages or orders as "mindsets" (though I occasionally use the language of stages or orders of consciousness). This intentional decision aims to minimize some value-based judgment assumed when utilizing overt hierarchical language. However, I am not dismissing or diminishing the hierarchy on which CD theory is based, for it is a fundamental principle of the theory's structural validity (which many developmental and cognitive theorists critique). Kegan (1994) suggested that the developmental framework he conceived does not inherently concern the orders or stages.

Instead, as he described, the orders or stages (i.e., mindsets) provide structure for making sense of this movement toward greater complexity sequentially and progressively. These are the evolutionary milestones in an individual's developmental process. Yet, it is essential to note that each individual's development process is unique to that individual. The process of constructive development is dynamic, with back-and-forth movement between systems of the mind; therefore, development is not rigidly linear.

Kegan (1982) articulated three main threads of development: cognitive (how we process), interpersonal (how we relate to others), and intrapersonal (how we relate to ourselves). This is particularly important because CD theory does not solely focus on the cognitive line, differentiating it from pure cognitive psychology. Instead, it seeks to understand all three threads in relationship to one another. Moreover, for this study, all three are equally important in making sense of conflict and navigating conflict. Additionally, I emphasize these three areas as “threads” of development to show that they are woven together. In theory, one may be more advanced in one area, but developmentally, their most advanced mindset will only be equilibrated to the point of the least developed thread. As Kegan argued, these threads of development progress at a similar pace because they are, to some extent, dependent on one another.

Subject-Object Theory

At the core of Kegan's theory is the notion that the way an individual makes sense of the world around them is tied to how one constructs the self in relation to others and the world around them. Each stage or mindset is predicated on what the individual interacts with as object, as compared to what is subject to the individual. This epistemological notion of the *subject-object relationship* is core to Kegan's theory. Kegan (1982) framed the “object” aspect of this

framework refers to what one looks at (i.e., the distal self), whereas the “subject” refers to the filter or lens one uses to look at something (i.e., the proximate self). Kegan and Lahey (2009) use a simple illustration to illuminate this:

Young children, for example, are still subject to their perceptions, so when something looks small to them (like cars and people viewed from the top of a tall building), they think it actually is small. Three-, four-, and five-year-olds will look down and say, “Look at the tiny people!” Children of eight, nine, and ten can look at their perceptions. They will say, “Look how tiny the people look!” (p. 51)

This example illustrates how young children cannot differentiate perception from reality. As mentioned, they are still subject to their perceptions, whereas slightly older children can distinguish perception from reality to a greater extent. This ability to differentiate is to view something as “object,” where it is separate from the self-concept (and perceptions). What was once subject—that which is so interwoven to a child’s way of making meaning of the world—becomes object when the individual develops the capacity to make sense of a situation in a more complex way, recognizing that their perception is limited and may initially contrast reality.

As an individual’s mental complexity increases, they gain the capacity to recognize the filters and lenses they once used to interpret reality. An individual gains the capacity to “*look at* what before [they] could only *look through*” (Kegan & Lahey, 2009, p. 51). This “subject-object” relationship is essential to understanding Kegan’s constructive-developmental theory and the five primary mindsets the theory suggests. Like other living organisms, the theory posits that humans seek greater coherence in their organization, which is the inherent catalyst for evolution (Kegan, 1982). This compulsion for greater coherence influences individual development as one works to construct meaning by “making sense” of the world with increased nuance as one takes in new information and has new experiences. In other words, through new “sense-making,” when

interacting with external information and experiences, the individual's meaning-making structures *may* shift and evolve (yet, evolution is not automatically given, as each individual's process of constructive development is unique and often unpredictable). What was once "subject" becomes "object," and distinctively new subject material takes its place. This is the evolutionary progression of the subject-object relationship that takes place within an individual.

It is important to note that this evolution does not take place solely as an internal practice; instead, as Kegan (1982) stated, this development of the mind occurs by:

[locating] a prior context which continually elaborates the distinction between the individual and the environment in the first place. This is a conception whose meaning and implications we will grow into gradually; it is admittedly complicated and unlike the way we are accustomed to thinking . . . it does not place an energy system within us so much as it places us in a single energy system of all living things. Its primary attention, then, is not to shifts and changes in an internal equilibrium, but to an equilibrium in the world, between the progressively individuated self and the bigger life field, an interaction both sculpted by and constitutive of reality itself. (p. 43)

Kegan (1982) refers to this process as "equilibration." It is the process of seeking greater coherence through "a process of adaptation shaped by the tension between the assimilation of new experience to the old 'grammar' and the accommodation of the old grammar to new experience" (Kegan, 1982, p. 43). The individual understands and makes sense of the world's distinctive aspects based on how they construct the "self" in relation to their world. This relationship evolves in complexity as one's mind continues to develop and evolve.

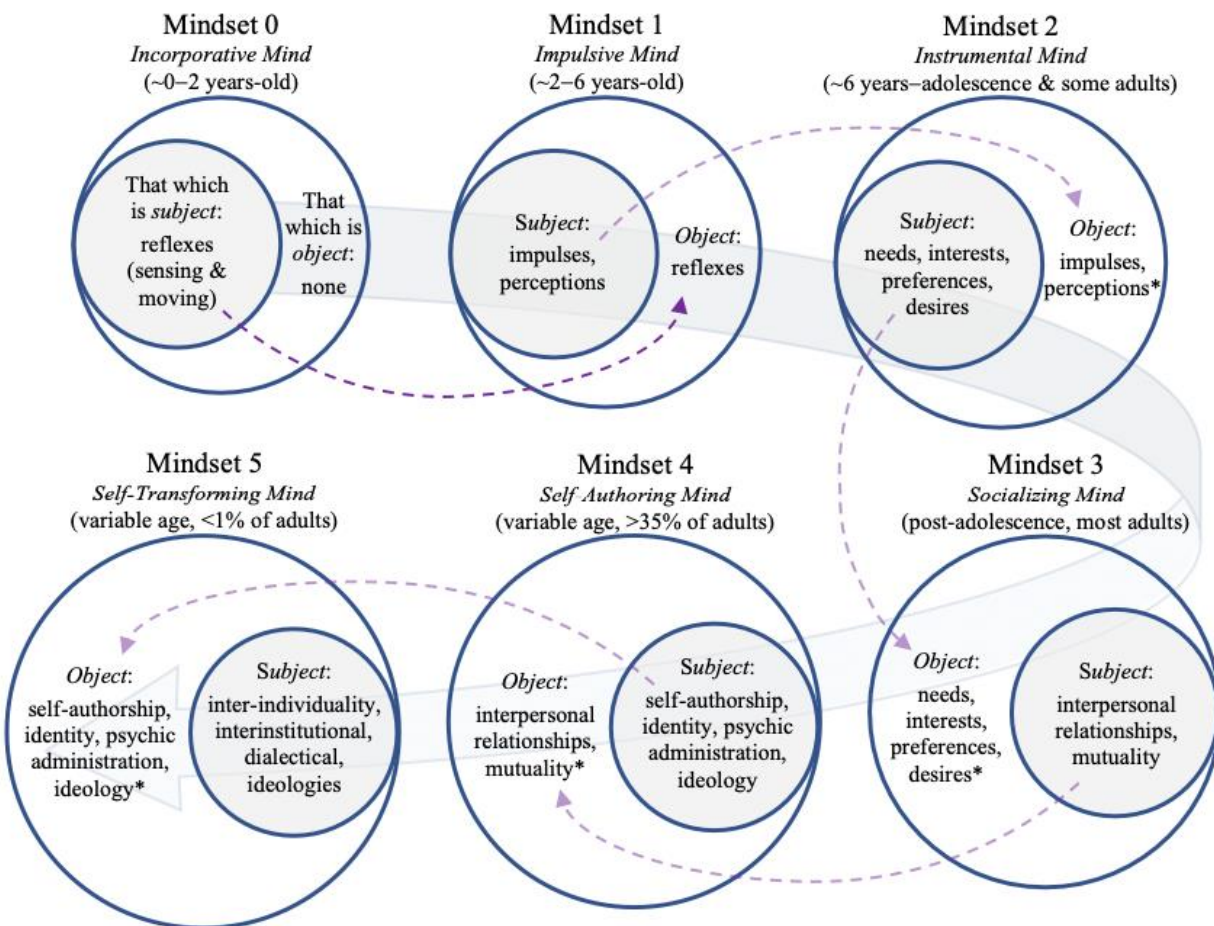
In this relationship and *process*, "subject" refers to aspects of reality that the individual is *subject to*, in that they are so close to the individual "self" that they are embedded unconsciously or subconsciously (not yet conscious). When a person is subject to a preconscious phenomenon (existing implicitly or unconsciously), it is so close to them that they cannot consciously differentiate or separate themselves from it to view it objectively. Individuals do not

yet have the capacity to see or reflect on the aspects of reality they are subject to. The individual is “run” by what is *subject to them*, the thoughts and feelings that control them (Lahey et al., 1988). Some aspects of reality that are subject to self are unconscious assumptions about reality, self and others’ nature, unconscious values and identities, unconscious fears, and unconscious biases. That which is subject to the self exists as—or becomes—the unseen tools one uses for making sense of the world, tools that are hidden from one’s consciousness yet actively relied upon to construct one’s reality (Kegan, 1982, 1994; Lahey et al., 1988).

The concept of “object” signifies the aspects of reality that one holds the capacity to consciously separate from themselves, think about, and reflect on, which is no longer embedded as a part of the “self,” and therefore, can be differentiated from the self. They are the aspects of one’s reality that an individual is fully conscious of, can see, analyze, and choose to utilize, identify with, or choose not to. That which is object in relationship to the self are the visible and observable tools one can draw on to make sense of the world, and one can mold or disregard at will. They are the thoughts and feelings we can examine in ourselves, understand, make sense of, and articulate (Lahey et al., 1988). Examples include the identifiable and conscious assumptions about reality, the nature of self and others, one’s chosen identities and values, one’s identifiable fears, and the bias and assumptions one is aware they rely on for making sense of the world around them. As Yeyinmen (2016) stated, that which is object “represents the tools that the person consciously uses to make sense of experiences such as by questioning, testing, and molding them to bring greater coherence to [their] understanding or otherwise achieve [their] aims” (p. 24). In summary, the self can only consciously act upon that which is object, for what is subject to the self is not known to the conscious mind.

Kegan (1982) posited that the object creation and subject loss process corresponds with *subject loss* and *object creation*. As one lets go of that which is subject, it becomes object. For example, at the instrumental mind (the second mindset in Kegan's developmental progression), an individual may feel a need to develop a more robust and more secure relationship with their father. However, they would not be able to articulate what is causing them to feel this way or recognize it as a need or desire, but they have it. This inability to identify, articulate, and reflect on this need or desire is a sign that this felt experience is subject to them, as they cannot take an objective perspective on it (i.e., view it as object). As this individual's mind develops a more complex structure of consciousness, one will develop the capacity to eventually recognize and articulate this need or desire and reflect on why they feel this way; it has become object. What was once subject to them is now object, for it is observable. This is an indication of the mind's structure becoming more complex, which now includes the socialized mind (Kegan's third mindset in the developmental progression of consciousness).

This is the process of evolution that occurs by seeking out greater coherence of organization, promoting the advancement or evolution of one's meaning-making structure toward a more complex and sophisticated mindset. The more one can *see* and *relate to* as object, the greater complexity of the mindset one develops. Figure 2.1 shows the mindset progression as the subject becomes object and new subject material takes its place. In this figure, the purple line represents the shift from what was once subject to object, as the subject is now replaced with a new, more complex lens for making meaning. The more advanced mindset one demonstrates the more complex their meaning-making structure is (i.e., the more complex form of consciousness they have developed).

Figure 2.1*The Developmental Progression Consciousness: The Movement From Subject to Object*

Note. This figure draws from the work of Kegan (1982, 1994) and Torbert (1987).

Kegan (1982) described and outlined CD theory's five cohered orders of consciousness (i.e., stages or equilibrated mindsets), which I call developmental mindsets. Below is a summary of each mindset corresponding with the developmental progression shown in Figure 2.1 (except the first mindset). These summaries of the developmental mindsets draw from framing and descriptions used by Berger (2011), Kegan (1982, 1994), Kegan and Lahey (2009), Lahey et al. (2011), and Yeyinmen (2016):

- ***The Impulsive Mind (Mindset 1):*** This mindset exists in early childhood, where the individual does not hold a level of consciousness that enables them to separate between themselves and others and where there is no genuine sense of permanence.
 - That which is *subject* to the individual (subject): perceptions (the imagined), social perceptions, and impulses
 - That which is *object* to the individual (object): movement and sensation
- ***The Instrumental Mind (Mindset 2):*** This mindset is prominent throughout childhood and into early adolescence, where an individual can differentiate the self from others. In this mindset, the individual will primarily pursue outcomes they perceive to be beneficial to themselves. In this mind, the individual is motivated primarily by their own needs and interests and cannot consciously take the perspective of other individuals. Moreover, they view conflict in black and white, good or bad, right or wrong, with little space for gray areas and situational nuance.
 - *Subject*: the concrete (actuality), point-of-view, and enduring self-factors (needs, interests, self-concept)
 - *Object*: perceptions, social perceptions, and impulses
- ***The Socializing Mind (Mindset 3):*** This mindset typically emerges in late adolescence or early adulthood and shifts from viewing others as objects to relying on others for one's own meaning-making. In this mindset, the individual looks at others to derive meaning, specifically regarding values and constructing meaning around self-significance. In this mindset, individuals develop the capacity for genuine empathy toward others and recognize differences in worldviews. Additionally, in this mindset, there is a tendency to

avoid conflict or overly accommodate others' perspectives to preserve the relationship that is the primary source of meaning-making.

- *Subject*: abstractions (ideals, values), the interpersonal (mutuality), and inner states (self-consciousness, subjectivity)
- *Object*: the concrete, point-of-view, and enduring self-factors
- ***The Self-Authoring Mind (Mindset 4)***: This mindset typically emerges in middle or later life, though not all adults evolve to this stage. It is a shift from relying on others for meaning-making to self-authoring one's own meaning. Individuals who demonstrate this mindset create meaning based on their deeply held personal values and beliefs. They are no longer dependent on others to affirm their self-worth. They can understand themselves in connection with others and as an individual entity, separate from the collective. They exhibit the capacity to take others' perspectives beyond basic empathy and hold their perspectives distinct from others'. This mindset exemplifies a modernist philosophical approach, where the individual can see systems as objects and how they fit into the system.
 - *Subject*: abstract systems (ideology), institution (social and relational regulating forms), self-authorship (identity, autonomy, self-regulation)
 - *Object*: abstractions, the interpersonal, and inner states
- ***The Self-Transforming Mind (Mindset 5)***: This mindset is the most complex in Kegan's framework and the mindset most equipped to meet the demands of the modern world. However, most adults never fully embody this mindset, even though a growing number of adults are evolving to this stage (compared to decades past). At this stage, the

individual moves from being motivated by their self-authored values and truths to genuinely valuing plurality, complexity, and nuance in social systems. They are open to conflict, notably emotional conflict, which enables internal dialogue. Conflict is also approached dialectically in the mind and is seen as an opportunity for learning and growth. This mindset exemplifies the postmodern philosophical approach.

- *Subject*: dialectical, interinstitutional, self-transformation
- *Object*: abstract systems, institution, self-authorship

Within each transition from one equilibrated mindset to another exists four substages, or markers, in one's shift to a new highest form of consciousness. These can be defined as "distinct subject-object balances" (Yeyinmen, 2016, p. 27), of which there are twenty-one, not including the "0" stage (Kegan, 1980). These substages signify where one is in the process of reaching coherence or equilibrium of the subject-object balance (see Table 2.1).

Table 2.1

Equilibrated Mindsets/Stages and Substages

Mindset/stage (equilibrated S-O balance)	Substages between each equilibrated mindset			
1	1(2)	1/2	2/1	2(1)
2	2(3)	2/3	3/2	3(2)
3	3(4)	3/4	4/3	4(3)
4	4(5)	4/5	5/4	5(4)
5	no articulated substages beyond 5			

Note. Lines represent the direction of development.

As is shown in Table 2.1, when a mindset demonstrates an equilibrated subject-object balance, it is scored and represented by a whole number (e.g., “3” or “4”), whereas when one’s meaning-making structure demonstrates two systems simultaneously (i.e., two minds simultaneously), it is scored or represented with one of four combinations of the two numbers (i.e., the two numbers representing each demonstrated mindset). Using “X” and “Y” as placeholders for numbers, the descriptions below provide a brief key for understanding how the substages between are represented, corresponding with the second column in Table 2.1. These brief descriptions are supported by Lahey et al. (2011).

- **X(Y) substage:** The once equilibrated X mindset (system) continues to govern one’s meaning-making, yet the individual begins to perceive a possible new way of making meaning beyond their ruling system. A Y-ish element or system is present; however, the inability to construct meaning from this potentially emerging system leads one back to rely on the X mindset.
- **X/Y substage:** The X system of the mind continues to be the stronger system, but the Y system—the newer system—is now actively contributing to meaning construction. Though the Y system is fully present, the process of meaning-making will “slip back” or defer to the stronger preceding system X. The X mind is still the predominant system.
- **Y/X substage:** The Y mind switching places with the X system is another incremental move, wherein both systems are actively contributing to meaning construction; however, instead of deferring to the previously prominent X system, an individual now demonstrates the capacity to lean into the Y system for constructing meaning (instead of slipping back).

- **Y(X) substage:** The Y mindset is now predominant and the ruling system for constructing meaning, and the X system is no longer able to rule without the consent of the Y system. However, there is a demonstrated tenuousness in the mind's construction of meaning at this substage, credited in part to the maintenance of the Y system as differentiated from system X.

As stated earlier, Kegan (1980, 1982) posited that the theory and subject-object framework is not fundamentally focused on the mindsets (or stages) and instead, he emphasized that the mindsets—the evolution to increasingly complex equilibrated structures of meaning-making wherein the self obtains balance with the external environment—are mileposts in the developmental process. For this reason, it is essential to emphasize the substages, the transition between mindsets, wherein the growth of the mind is incremental (as highlighted in Table 2.1, the subsequent description of the substages). In my research, I will locate where individuals exist on this trajectory. This is done by utilizing the subject-object interview to collect data for this analysis.

CD Theory and Conflict

The literature on CD theory is full of mentions of conflict, particularly as it relates to considerations on how the individual understands and relates to interpersonal conflict and internal conflict from their most complex meaning-making system (e.g., mindset). Pertaining to adults, nearly all the literature focuses on mindsets three through five, as this is where most adults exist. For Kegan (1980, 1982, 1994), conflict was a central subtheme of his work. He addressed how the different mindsets make sense of and relate to conflict in different ways. He explained that as an individual evolves toward a more complex meaning-making system, they

become more equipped to deal with conflict with less fear and avoidance (or “threat-based” unconscious framing) while developing a more healthy or constructive relationship to the role of conflict in one’s life—interpersonally and intrapersonally. This *reorientation* or shift in one’s relationship to conflict tends to emerge with the growth of self-authored mind (the “4” mindset). Individuals are typically conflict-avoidant in the socialized mind (the “3” mindset) because they are subject to their interpersonal relationships and often seek harmony (depending on the context and environment). Conflict is experienced as a threat to relationships (or is perceived this way). Whereas, at the *self-transforming mind* (the “5” mindset), individuals tend to embrace conflict, for it provides an opportunity for internal and interpersonal dialogue or conversation to occur, which promotes expanding perspective and growth.

Kegan and Lahey (2001, 2009, 2016) also explored the role conflict plays, not only in how an individual makes meaning but also in how one’s meaning-making evolves in complexity by actively and deliberately engaging conflict at the point of one’s growing edge of consciousness. These conflict conditions for the mind are referred to as *optimal conflict*, and they posited that by actively engaging and navigating conflict within these conditions constructively contributes to the evolution of one’s mind toward a more complex form of consciousness.

Conflict and Consciousness

Specific research that focuses on meaning-making and conflict is limited. Only a few individuals have written in depth in this area, and much of their work is theoretical in nature (McGuigan, 2007, 2009; McGuigan & McMechan, 2005; McGuigan & Popp, 2007, 2012; Nan, 2011). Nan (2011) articulated, “consciousness, dynamics of consciousness, and consciousness structures are fundamental to how we understand and engage in conflict and conflict resolution”

(p. 239). (Worth noting, Nan, unlike Kegan, Lahey, McGuigan, and others, challenged the notion that development is hierarchical and instead posited a horizontal approach to the study of consciousness.) Mayer (2012) stated, “If we are to be effective in handling conflict, we must start with a way to make sense of it and to embrace both its complexity and its essence” (p. 3). The role of consciousness and understanding its impact on how individuals make sense of conflict is a new territory that is necessary to explore. This exploratory research will shed further light on the relationship between consciousness and conflict.

McGuigan’s (2007) dissertation where CD theory was central to understanding how disputing parties made sense of conflict during a long-standing regional conflict. This study occurred in British Columbia, Canada, with disputants in a cross-cultural conflict steeped in resource access and equitable policy and practice issues. In this study, McGuigan interviewed 20 participants who were stakeholders in the ongoing dispute, utilizing the subject-object interview procedure and rigorous structural analysis to examine “each subject’s level of consciousness [as it] impacts on his or her creation of meaning within conflict” (p. iii). McGuigan utilized color concepts of development, which correspond with Kegan’s stages or orders of development. He used the subject-object interview procedure as the metric to assess individuals’ deep structures. The study’s findings showed that at more complex states or mindsets (represented in colors), an individual is more equipped to engage conflict constructively. McGuigan stated that “[when] analyzed through the lens of Kegan’s constructive-developmental (CD) theory, the interviews indicate that the participant’s beliefs about conflict are the interpretive viewpoint through which they construct the meaning of their River Conflict experience” (p. 229). Moreover, McGuigan suggests that the indigo stage (Kegan’s self-authoring or stage 4) is the requisite mindset

required for effective and constructive conflict resolution. As McGuigan stated, “[the] Indigo stage and the stages beyond offer the necessary complexity of mind to inform constructive and long-lasting conflict resolution actions” (p. 232). McGuigan reiterated that in his study, 13 out of the 20 individuals had not yet developed to this level (only seven had developed fully into the Indigo stage, or fourth mindset, or beyond).

In their article, “Consciousness and Conflict (Explained Better?),” McGuigan and Popp (2012) presented and explained the critical role of consciousness and consciousness development as it relates to navigating and mediating conflict, particularly complex conflict. They articulated that consciousness is “a process, a moment-to-moment awareness of *being*” (p. 232). The authors demonstrated that one’s level or stage of consciousness impacts how a person understands what occurs in a conflict. They argued that traditional approaches to conflict resolution—those taught by both practitioners and academics—might only be effective when the disputants make meaning at certain stages or levels of psychological development (e.g., conventional and post-conventional). The authors also introduced the framework of “The Four Quadrants of Conflict,” which they explained in detail and is core to the integral model of conflict. They argued, citing Wilber (1995), that “every conflict, and every *experience* of conflict, has both exterior surfaces that can be directly observed and interior depths that must be grasped introspectively” (p. 236). They concluded the article by stating:

Conflict is inevitable and in fact necessary. It is fundamental to the evolution of consciousness on every level. Without it we do not grow; we become stagnant. Too much of it leads to devastation and destruction. Coming to a broader, more inclusive understanding not only of the measurable dimensions of conflict but of the experience and *meaning* it holds for the people involved can open up untold possibilities for constructive and even transformative ways to engage it. (p. 256)

Understanding the role one's developmental consciousness plays in interpreting and understanding conflict is essential. Even more noteworthy is the notion that it is through the engagement with conflict that individuals grow and develop more complex developmental mindsets. Citing Kegan (1994), McGuigan and Popp (2007) stated that "conflict is a challenge to our pretense of completeness" (p. 236). Conflict is critical to our growth of consciousness (e.g., our developmental mindsets) as it provides an opportunity and impetus for transformation in the way we construct meaning in our lives. Engaging conflict deliberately at the growing edge of the individual mind's capacity enables one to grow and develop the complexity of one's mind which enhances one to potentially navigate greater complexity in conflict.

CD Theory and Higher Education

Most of the research and literature focuses on students and their development as it relates to their identity (Bohon, 2015; M. K. Brown, 2008; P. G. Brown, 2016; Egley, 2001; Khan, 2010; MacFarlane, 1991; Stone, 2014) or development in connection to a specific program at an HEI (Boes, 2006; Chan, 2016; Frosch-Erickson, 2018; Keane-Sexton, 2018; Lamon Burney, 2010; Rhode, 1999) or specifically as it relates to faculty (Glisczinski, 2005; Robbins, 1999; Simmons, 2007). The literature pertaining to the focus of this study, academic department leaders, is particularly limited. Only one study showed up as somewhat relevant to the focus of this study.

Yeyinmen (2016) looked at how three participating leaders in higher education—individuals recognized as "effective change agents" and showed an aptitude for complex thinking—utilized their ability for complex thinking to lead change in their work contexts within

higher education. Yeyinmen's research, presented as a multiple-case study, identified six "action strategies" for how these leaders tapped into their complex thinking:

- dynamically balance autonomy and oversight;
- create shared frames illuminating larger realities;
- engage and reorient the community;
- co-construct and dynamically interpret goals;
- cultivate strategic relationships grounded in mutual trust; and,
- create conditions that help people weather uncertainties, build new identities, and shape the future (Yeyinmen, 2016, pp. xiii–xiv).

Core to Yeyinmen's research was the connection to Heifetz's adaptive versus technical challenges. Yeyinmen showed how these leaders who effectively lead change rely on their complex thinking to approach adaptive challenges. All of these leaders, who participated in the subject-object interview metric, were assessed as being between the self-authored mind (mindset "4") and the self-transforming mind (mindset "5") and, therefore, more advanced in terms of Kegan's orders of development. Because of the small sample size of the study, the results are not generalizable. Yet, Yeyinmen draws strong connections between how advanced one is in terms of Kegan's CD theoretical framework and their capacity to lead adaptive change in complex HEI contexts.

Closing Argument

Existing research on how individuals make sense of conflict is limited. Individuals in mid-level academic leadership in HEIs are required to engage conflict continually. This requirement to engage is especially true during periods of change. However, the literature shows

that many academic leaders in HEIs are not equipped to engage conflict constructively. The literature suggests that this may be due to the lack of conflict and communication skills training. I posit that another important element related to this problem may be related to leaders' developmental mindsets.

Research exploring leaders' meaning-making in conflict, particularly during organizational change, may illuminate new insights on the relationship between developmental mindsets and one's capacity to navigate conflict. This research can inform practices on the development of programming that supports individual mindset development among academic leaders.

CHAPTER III: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose. It is a seeking that [the one] who wishes may know the cosmic secrets of the world and they that dwell therein.

—Hurston (1942, p. 91)

This inquiry aimed to explore the relationship between academic leaders' developmental mindsets and how they respond to and navigate conflict while primarily focusing on interpersonal conflict within the context of change in organizations of higher education. This study addresses one primary research question and two secondary questions:

1. How do the leaders' developmental mindsets (orders/stages of adult development) affect their meaning-making in conflict situations?
 - 1.1 What is the relationship between leaders' developmental mindset and their approaches to conflict?
 - 1.2 How, if at all, do the leaders' developmental mindsets influence their actions when engaging, responding to, and navigating conflict?

The working hypothesis I held when I embarked on this research journey considered the notion that there is a relationship between an individual's developmental mindset—based on Kegan's (1982) constructive-developmental trajectory of meaning-making in adults—and how the individual constructs meaning when experiencing and navigating conflict. Additionally, I posited that the more complex one's developmental mindset, the greater one's capability to navigate complex and difficult conflicts constructively and effectively.

To explore these questions, I proposed a multiple-method qualitative approach, which integrated multiple case study—or “multicase study”—analysis and modified critical incident technique as the primary methods. The multicase studies were framed as small-scale or “mini-case studies,” with each case focused predominantly on an individual’s meaning-making experience when navigating “complex” conflicts. Nine mid-level academic leaders participated in the study. An individual mini-case study was constructed for each participant from the data collected in the three differently structured interviews conducted with each participant.

This chapter provides a rationale for the research methodology design. It provides an overview of the origins of the methods and instruments used to gather and analyze the data. Finally, the latter half of the chapter focuses on how these methods and research instruments were utilized in this study, including a detailed description of the process and steps from conception to completion.

The Rationale for a Multimethod Qualitative Research Design

In the early stages of my research design process, I framed the design as a phenomenological multicase study, which integrated multiple interview techniques for data collection and multiple methods of analysis. Shortly after delving into my research process, while in conversation with my faculty chair, I recognized that the way I framed the design did not represent the full scope of my intended approach. Instead, the method I had designed and carried out was that of a multimethod approach, which paired the phenomenological multicase study methods with an inductive critical incident analysis.

Research employing multimethod designs (also referred to as “multi-method” or “multiple methods”) add additional layers of complexity when compared to single-method

designs. There exists an ongoing debate among researchers and methodologists as to what qualifies as a multimethod design, as it is often used synonymously with mixed method design (Anguera et al., 2018).

Morse (2010) explained that multimethod studies involve multiple forms of qualitative research or multiple forms of quantitative research. In comparison, mixed-method studies utilize both qualitative and quantitative forms of research and emphasize the use of triangulation to draw inferences. Priola (2010) explained that multimethod research approaches are grounded in “a methodological research strategy that includes more than one method of collecting data [and/or] more than one method of analyzing the data. Such methods can be based on qualitative techniques, quantitative techniques, or a mix of both” (pp. 579–580). Additionally, Hunter and Brewer (2015) explained that:

Multimethod research may be broadly defined as the practice of employing two or more different methods or styles of research within the same study or research program rather than confining the research to the use of a single method. Unlike mixed method research, it is not restricted to combining qualitative and quantitative methods but is open to the full variety of possible methodological combinations. (p. 187)

Creswell (2015) articulated a similar approach to understanding the difference between multimethod and mixed-method research, stating:

Mixed methods further is not simply the collection of multiple forms of qualitative data (e.g., interviews and observations), nor the collection of multiple types of quantitative data (e.g., survey data, experimental data). It involves the collection, analysis and integration of *both* quantitative and qualitative data. In this way, the value of the different approaches to research (e.g., the trends as well as the stories and personal experiences) can contribute more to understanding a research problem than one form of data collection (quantitative or qualitative) could on its own. When multiple forms of qualitative data (or multiple forms of quantitative data) are collected, the term is *multimethod*, not mixed methods research. (p. 3)

Brewer and Hunter (2006) suggest that the foundation and motivation behind employing a multimethod research design should be based on recognizing that “different research methods offer possible solutions for one another’s problems” (p. xi).

Hesse-Biber et al. (2015) considered another complexifying element when considering multimethod research design, as they spoke to the ordering of value placed on each method incorporated into a multimethod design. They suggested:

[In] a multimethod research design a qualitatively driven project may call on a *second qualitative method as its auxiliary component*: the second qualitative method would take on a secondary role (qual) in the service of a primary QUAL method. The addition of a second qualitative method would serve a supplementary function in that it answers a different question, but its primary aim is to support the core qualitatively driven approach and question. This qualitatively driven design would be called a *multimethod* design by its use of two different qualitative methods. (p. 6)

Anguera et al. (2018) took umbrage with valuing one method over another. Instead, they suggested “that *multimethod* studies are characterized by the coexistence of different methodologies” (p. 2763), implying that multimethod research should not favor one method over another but instead view each method as individually valuable.

Hesse-Biber (2010) also stated that multimethod design signifies “the mixing of methods by combining two or more qualitative methods in a single research study . . . or by using two or more quantitative methods in a single research study” (p. 3). In other words, a study that utilizes multiple qualitative methods clearly qualifies as a multimethod study.

Research Design

In this study, I utilized a multimethod design that fits within the parameters the scholars cited above outlined. Moreover, I intentionally sought to incorporate the perspective of Anguera et al. (2018) by not overly prioritizing one method over the other. Instead, I sought to maintain

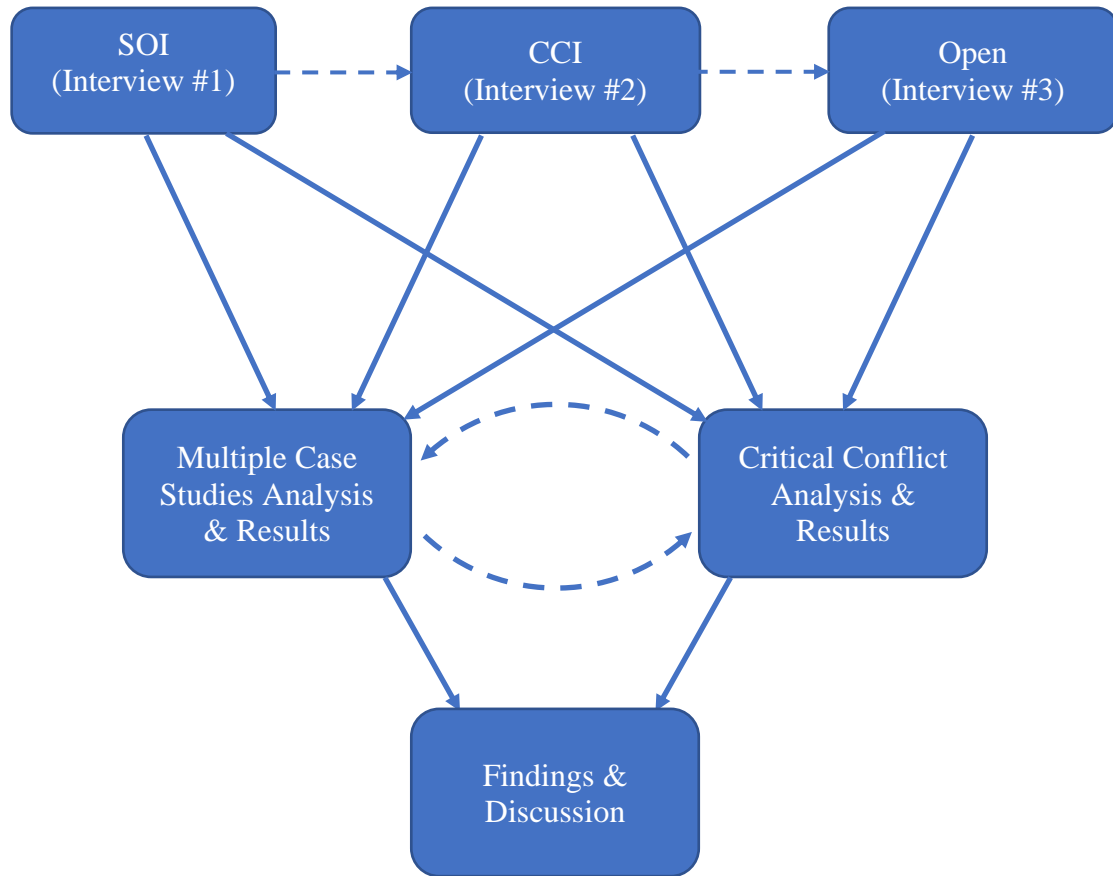
the view that each method utilized in this study was equitably valuable in providing insight into the questions I explored.

For data collection, I employed three semi-structured interviews, the subject-object interview (SOI), a modified critical incident interview (CII), and what I framed as the closing interview. Each interview process is described in this chapter. The data gathered through these interviews informed the two primary methods of analysis—multicase study and modified critical incident technique (CIT).

I further qualified the methodological design utilized in this research as an *integrative* approach to multimethod research (see Figure 3.1). I incorporated material data gathered from the three interviews to inform both the multicase study analysis and the critical conflict analysis (represented by the upper set of six solid arrows). Additionally, each analysis process was not conducted in a silo, as the analysis from each iteratively informed the other (represented by the curved dashed arrows). The results from the two sets of analyses then informed the findings and discussion (represented by the lower set of two solid arrows). This differs from utilizing multiple separate methods to collect and analyze data. Each set of analyses and its results can stand alone, yet each is intrinsically linked and informed by the other.

Figure 3.1

An Integrative Model of Multimethod Design and Analysis



In the subsequent subsections, I will describe each method and procedure involved in conducting this multimethod study, starting with the multicase study method followed by the critical incident technique. This is followed by a detailed description of the process of implementing the research design.

Multiple Case Study

Yin (2014) stated that “[as] a research method, the case study is used in many situations to contribute to our knowledge of the individual, group, organization, social, political, and

related phenomena” (p. 4). Furthermore, the case study methodology deals with questions of *how* and *why*, often focusing on contemporary issues or events (Yin, 2014). Creswell and Poth (2017) defined case study research as:

[A] qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case themes. The unit of analysis in the case study might be multiple cases (a multisite study) or a single case (a within-site study). (p.1)

Yin (2014) suggested that single and multiple case studies are “two variants of case study design” (p. 18), employing the same overarching methodological approach. Stake (2006) posited that single case study research, though not comparative, is always “studied with attention to other cases” (p. 4), though the connection may be implicit, or else it would not be of interest, for there would be no greater context within which to understand the phenomenon. This comparison is made explicit to understand a more significant extrapolated phenomenon within the multicase study’s broader, more complex context. This distinction supports the notion that the multiple case study is intended to provide potentially more generalizable theoretical advancements. Single case study methods, particularly, are taken to task for their narrow focus and lack of application and generalizability concerning other situations (Stake 1995, 2006; Yin, 2014). Yin (2014) stated that “[the] evidence from multiple cases is often considered more compelling, and the overall study is therefore regarded as being more robust” (p. 57).

Stake (2006) utilized the language of “quintain” to signify the “object or phenomenon or condition to be studied” (p. 6) in a multicase study, which he clearly articulated to be the “target, but not the bull’s eye” (p. 6). For my research, I identified the *quintain* as the *meaning-making that occurs during interpersonal conflict* (i.e., the structure of consciousness).

In my research, utilizing multiple cases allowed me to explore and compare various leaders' experiences in conflict within their unique contexts. A comparative case study is a form of multiple case study. Yin (2014) classifies the comparative case study as a form of compositional structure to the research. This case study involves conducting individual studies, analyzing and synthesizing them individually in an iterative way, and examining the cases in comparison with one another, identifying emerging themes (Mills et al., 2010).

My research aligns with aspects of a comparative multicase study; however, a comparison is not the sole aim of this method of analysis. Instead of generating a robust comparative section within the multicase study results, in Chapter IV, I briefly summarized takeaways in the case study section, then integrated relevant findings in the comparative portion of this research, which was reserved for Chapter V (the second results chapter) and utilized a modified critical incident analysis to explore the data and themes which emerged from the multiple methods. Thus, this study did not employ the conventional comparative case study approach to a detailed extent. Instead, it was modified to fit the aims of this study. This will be expanded upon in the forthcoming sections.

Stake (2006) discussed the difference between *intrinsic* and *instrumental* case studies. Intrinsic case studies focus on learning about a particular case, whereas instrumental case studies seek general understanding. Taking an instrumental approach aligned with the aim of this study. My research interest focused less on individual participants; instead, I sought to examine their experiences to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

Yin (2014) posited three different purposes of a case study: *explanatory*, *descriptive*, and *exploratory*. Explanatory case studies seek to explain a situation or phenomenon. Descriptive

case studies aim to describe the situation or phenomenon. Exploratory case studies seek to understand the emerging situation or phenomenon better and can lead to the generation of new theoretical insights or directions for future research. This third purpose aligned with the aim of this study. My study was instrumental and exploratory, utilizing aspects of a comparative structure when conducting and analyzing the multiple case study research.

Utilizing multicase study as one of the methodological approaches allowed me to identify boundaries for the study while allowing for flexibility of inquiry and exploration within determined limits (Stake, 2006; Thomas, 2011). Given that this portion of the study was framed as instrumental and exploratory, this provided a certain amount of autonomy within the framed boundaries to investigate areas that were not initially on my radar—permitting the freedom to explore within the predetermined scope of the study.

Each individual case study utilized multiple procedures for collecting data (i.e., the SOI, the CCI, and the open-ended interview), which is common in case study research (Creswell and Poth, 2017; Stake, 2006; Yin, 2014). The collected data was analyzed and interpreted at the individual case study level, presented as individual mini-case study vignettes. The comparative portion of the analysis was integrated into the findings presented in Chapter V.

Critical Incident Technique

I employed a modified critical incident technique (CIT) and analysis as a complementary methodological approach—separate yet approached as an equitable in potential value. My rationale for utilizing CIT was grounded in the notion that in its contemporary form, it can be used as a methodological approach for capturing the “micro-incidents” (Holloway & Schwartz, 2014) that occur in conflict situations or scenarios. Conflict, by its very nature, is often complex

in that one must account for multiple factors, current and historical, to make sense of how an individual engages—responds or reacts—to a given conflict situation. Therefore, when studying conflict, especially when looking at interpersonal dynamics, it necessitates one to focus attention on objective interactions and behaviors as well as the micro-interactions, including the thinking (e.g., perceptions and decision-making processes) and behaviors of the interviewee and the observed behaviors of the other stakeholders (as viewed through the lens/stage of the interviewee) in the conflict situation. Moreover, utilizing data from the modified CIT approach to analysis also proved beneficial in gaining insight into the linkages between an individual's construction of meaning in conflict with their thinking and behaviors by viewing. I chose this as a different methodological approach that would aid in illuminating the complexity of the conflict scenarios that I sought to examine because of its potential to aid in highlighting the microelements that contribute and play a part in each conflict scenario.

Critical incident technique, in its original form, was conceived through a positivist perspective (Chell, 2004), however, in the decades following Flanagan's (1954) original formulation and application of CIT, other researchers have modified and applied the method utilizing a constructivist or postmodern perspective (Butterfield, et al., 2005; Chell, 1998, 2004; Holloway & Schwartz, 2014), which has become more common since the period in which Flanagan first developed and utilized this method (Butterfield, et al., 2005). Moreover, Chell (1998) highlighted how CIT could be modified and utilized within a constructivist paradigm as an investigative instrument, acknowledging that it can be an effective approach for exploratory research.

Flanagan (1954), when articulating his original approach, set a standard of capturing a minimum of 100 incidents to demonstrate validity and reliability. Again, this was based on a positivist paradigm. As my research is grounded in a constructivist perspective, reaching this number of 100 incidents was not of primary concern. Rather, I aimed to reach a point of saturation (what Flanagan referred to as *exhaustiveness*), where the participants were no longer expressing “new perspectives or meanings” (Holloway & Schwartz, 2014, p. 6). This approach is common within research grounded in the constructivist perspective (Holloway & Schwartz, 2014).

The primary data source for the modified CIT analysis was the critical conflict interview (CCI), an interview designed to elicit material from the participants pertaining to their unconscious responses and conscious thinking, as well as the actions and behaviors they exhibited while navigating and engaging in conflict situations. As addressed earlier in sections, there was a self-reporting and perception bias on the participant’s part, which I sought to maintain a conscious recognition of throughout the interview and analysis processes.

Procedures for Data Collection

The procedures I employed to collect the data utilized in this study were phenomenological practices that supported the case studies’ construction and critical incident analysis. These procedures include the subject-object interview (SOI), what I reframed as the critical conflict interview (CCI)—a modified version of Flanagan’s (1954) critical incident technique’s interview process—and a closing interview. These three approaches are detailed below. In this order, the interviews took place over the course of a month to six weeks per

individual participant (the interviews for each participant overlapped, and the entire interviewing process took four months).

A total of 27 interviews were conducted, three per each of the nine participants. All interviews were transcribed by a professional transcriptionist, who verified in writing that they had dispensed the audio and written transcriptions once I secured them. The first two interviews were then coded according to the coding process outline for each interview (the SOIs were coded according to their protocol, and the CCIs according to the protocol outlined for them). The third interview was not coded in full; however, there were three cases where portions of what the participant highlighted in the third interview provided relevant data for the critical conflict analysis and were thus incorporated into the CCI transcripts to be coded as a part of the related conflict scenario. The third interview, the closing interview, was used primarily for gathering additional information, clarifying the timelines of the conflict scenario, and debriefing the interview process with each participant. Additionally, the third interview was utilized to collect supplementary demographic and contextual data used in the case studies (Chapter IV) and incorporated into the descriptors section for the critical conflict analysis (Chapter V).

The only additional data sources utilized in this study were the curricula vitae of the participants, which were requested at the end of the interview process, and basic information on the HEI where each leader was employed. The basic information on each HEI was found through the institution's public-facing website. The vitae were utilized primarily in the introduction of the case study vignettes and for the demographic information reported in Chapter V. I did conduct an informal online background check to ensure that each of the participants was employed at their

respective institutions (this was conducted as a Google search and a review of each institution's website).

Upon completion of the data collection and the retrieval of the transcripts from the transcriptionist, the first phase of analysis I focused on was the development of the individual mini-case studies. The dual focus of the case studies was to describe the complexities involved in each conflict scenario the participants detailed. Additionally, in the individual case studies, I incorporated the developmental mindset(s) through which the participant primarily constructed meaning (from the SOI analysis) as a means for initially exploring the relationship between each individual's meaning-making system and the thinking and behaviors they demonstrated while navigating each conflict scenario. Once the nine mini-case studies were completed, a collective analysis was conducted, wherein comparisons were made and discussed as a part of Chapter V.

I utilized COSMOS Corporation's procedural model for multicase study research as a primary reference for designing the multicase study procedure portion of the research (visual figure of model found in Yin, 2014, p. 60). The model outlines three phases for conducting multicase study research, and within each phase, there are multiple components. Phase one focuses on defining and designing the research, beginning with theory development which informs the selection of cases (i.e., the rationale and parameters for participant selection) and the overall design and protocol for data collection (i.e., the design of the interviews and process of conduction). Phase two involves the preparation, collection, and initial analysis, which in my case encompassed the preparation for each interview (i.e., the communication, scheduling, and set-up), the conducting of the three interviews with each of the nine participants, and the process of writing up the individual case reports (i.e., the nine individual vignettes). This procedural

model incorporates a feedback loop, which promotes and enables iterative adjustments to be made regarding the design and process should “important [discoveries occur] during the conduct of one of the individual case studies” (p. 59). I utilized this mechanism to make micro-adjustments to the interviews, mainly related to revising and reframing specific questions in the CCI. However, these adjustments were minimal, and I credit this to the learning and significant adjustments to the design that came from conducting the pilot study.

The primary adaptation I made that strayed from a ridged adherence to the COSMOS Corporation’s procedural model occurred in phase three. Phase three of the model includes the second level of analysis and the conclusion process, which involves four specific and linear steps, “draw cross-case conclusions,” then “modify theory,” followed by “develop policy implications,” and conclude with writing up a “cross-case report” (Yin, 2014, p. 60). Instead of drawing cross-case conclusions to influence theory modification for developing policy implications, I incorporated these final steps into the critical conflict analysis results in Chapter V and the discussion portion of Chapter VI.

After completing the mini-case study vignettes, the critical conflict analysis was conducted. This followed the critical incident technique and analysis framework coined and outlined by Flanagan (1954), though several modifications were made to this method, described in the coming sections.

Validity

Given the nature of this study as exploratory and employing a multimethod approach to the research, validity as an overarching notion is primarily concerned with the research quality (Yue, 2010). Additionally, a judiciously designed multimethod study by description incorporates

method triangulation, which supports the study's validity. This section addresses the validity of the multiple methods employed.

Multicase Study Validity

Case study research proposes a unique challenge when it comes to assessing validity. As Yin (2014) stated, in case study research, “[your] goal is to design good case studies and to collect, present, and analyze data fairly” (p. 3). This requires that the researcher demonstrate that they are designing a sound study following a “rigorous [and explicit] methodological path” (Yin, 2014, p. 3), which helps protect against threats to the study's validity.

Yin (2014) suggests four validity tests for judging the quality of research:

- *Construct validity*: identifying correct operational measures for the concepts being studied
- *Internal validity*: seeking to establish a causal relationship whereby certain conditions are believed to lead to other conditions, as distinguished from spurious relationships
- *External validity*: defining the domain to which a study's finding can be generalized
- *Reliability*: demonstrating that the operations of a study [such as] the data collection procedures—can be repeated, with the same results (p. 46)

I constructed and employed a research design that met all these validity tests in this study. The thorough literature review supported construct validity, which supported the specific concepts studied. Internal validity was demonstrated through the use of triangulation between the multiple methods employed to examine the concepts from multiple angles. External validity was defined within the context of higher education academic leadership. Finally, reliability pertaining

to the case study portion of the research utilized interview procedures that have been used widely in other research (though they were deliberately modified to fit the intent of this study).

Critical Incident Technique Validity

Traditionally, the critical incident technique, as initially detailed by Flanagan (1954), suggested using multiple reliability checks to ensure the research results were valid. Flanagan's original positivist perspective on research differs from the constructivist perspective I approached this research with. Moreover, this study design relied on a significantly modified version of the CIT method. Butterfield et al. (2005) suggested that there are multiple ways to account for credibility and validity when utilizing CIT. For this study, I employed four of the suggested "credibility checks" detailed by Butterfield et al. (2005), which included:

- **Independent extraction:** I enlisted a research partner to support the coding process wherein we identified elements of the "critical conflicts" as defined by the study's parameters. My research partner for this portion of the study reviewed and independently coded approximately 42% of the total CIT related transcripts (10 of the 24). (This accounted for the notion of independent extraction.)
- **Exhaustiveness check:** During the first phase of categorizing, I routinely noted when a new concept or incident type emerged. (Exhaustiveness of categories reached the 85% marker of reviewing the coded incidents.)
- **Category review:** The research partner I enlisted to help with the initial coding and categorizing provided feedback on the relevancy and accuracy of the categories at multiple points throughout the early phases of analysis.

- **Descriptive validity:** I ensured the accuracy of the accounts by audio recording the interview sessions and transcribing them prior to analysis.

Additional Validity Measures

Concerning the administration and interpretation of the SOI, a validated instrument (Lahey et al., 2011; Stein & Heikkinen, 2009), the interviews were transcribed and then analyzed and scored by a certified SOI scorer and me following the recommended procedure detailed by Lahey et al. (2011). Each of us successfully completed the Adult Development Assessment: The SOI three-day intensive in-person training through Minds at Work (facilitated by Drs. Deborah Helsing and Annie Howell). Following the training, each of us completed the Reliable SOI Scorer certification process, which required successfully scoring five SOIs independently within one substage of the preestablished verified score for each interview.

Additionally, the research design incorporated elements of triangulation by requiring that all participants complete three differently structured interviews, which produced data that was compared and contrasted to what the participants had demonstrated and shared in their other interviews. As stated earlier, I clearly defined this study's domain, identifying where the findings would be appropriately generalizable within the context of higher education and beyond. I designed a study integrating protocols and instruments that can be replicated with different participants or repeated with the same, where similar outcomes should result. Moreover, I explicitly make connections to findings from outside research in the analysis and discussion phases.

Pilot Study

From April through June 2020, I conducted a limited pilot study as a part of my Individualized Learning Achievements, employing the first two interview techniques, the SOI and CCI, detailed as my research methodology (the interview protocols were revised for the dissertation study). It was determined after completing the pilot study that adding the closing interview with being a beneficial element in that it would provide additional space for follow-up questions, collection of additional biographic and demographic information, and an opportunity to debrief the interview process with each participant, bringing a sense of closure for the participants. I designed and conducted the pilot with the intent to test the preliminary version of this research design. I solicited four participants who work—or have recently worked—in higher education for the pilot study. All four participants were individuals I had established relationships with, which allowed for a level of comfort and preestablished rapport when testing the interview process out for the first time. I conveyed to each participant that the study would consist of two hour-long interviews: the SOI and the CCI. With this group of four, I intentionally experimented with interview order, randomly selecting two participants to receive the SOI first, followed by the CCI, and the other two participants received the CII first, followed by the SOI.

Subject-Object Interview (SOI) Process

My first interview was an SOI with an individual who worked as a program manager at a medium-sized research institution in Ohio. This first interview attempt did not proceed as planned (in part because it was conducted late in the evening during the middle of the workweek, and we mutually decided to postpone). This experience confirmed that it is important to schedule these interviews earlier in the day or at a time when both interviewee and interviewer have the mental energy to be fully present. We rescheduled for the following week and completed the interview (though there was insufficient conclusive data to determine a reliable final score).

I conducted the subsequent three SOIs as planned, each allowing for an hour-long period. The instructions and preparatory work were shared via email roughly 48 hours before the interviews to give participants time to review and reflect within close proximity to the interview time. The preparatory work consisted of reviewing the ten prompts for the SOI, which I adapted from their original form to aid in priming participants to reflect on experiences where conflict was present. The SOI allows this practice (Lahey et al., 2011).

After completing each SOI, I hired a transcriptionist to transcribe each of the SOIs (I did not do this for the CII). Within three weeks after conducting each interview, I scored each interview (for those who did the SOI first in the interview sequence, I waited until after they had completed the CII to assess and assign their score). In Table 3.1, I provide basic demographic data on the participants, the SOI score, and the interview order.

Table 3.1*Pilot Study Basic Demographic Information and SOI Score*

Participant pseudonyms	Age category	Gender	Role type	Subject-object score	Interview order
Charlie	Mid 50's	Male	Tenure track faculty	Range: 4 to 4(5)	SOI → CIT
Kim	Mid 40's	Female	Associate dean (former)	Range: 4(3) to 4	SOI → CIT
Liam	Early 40's	Male	Vice president	Range: 4(5) to 4/5	CIT → SOI
Olivia	Late 30's	Female	Program manager	Range: 3 to 3/4	CIT → SOI

Note. Because I did not work with a certified scorer to determine interrater reliability, I am only presenting the SOI score as the range instead of a single conclusive score.

This experience of administering and interpreting the findings of the SOI provided a supportive learning opportunity before the formal research process. It gave me a chance to look back and see where I could have asked more carefully formulated and relevant questions that would have elicited the data required to come to a more definitive score.

I did have a difficult time with one other interview, though, not in its scoring but rather in the interview process. This individual was a “talker,” and there were many times when they said something I wanted to follow up on but did not get the opportunity to because they were on to the next thought. This took place in my second interview, utilizing the SOI. I returned and read the transcript after the fact and before the SOI with the participant. I took time to reflect intentionally and made notes where I could have stepped in and redirected the conversation or dug more deeply into how they constructed meaning within the context of what they shared. Additional time in this interview would have proved valuable. The suggested SOI time allotment is an hour and a half (Lahey et al., 2011), as opposed to one hour, which I practiced in the pilot

study. For the dissertation research design, I planned for an hour and a half. Moreover, after this interview, I referred to the SOI guide (Lahey et al., 2011) to review best practices and strategies for dealing with someone who tends to talk a lot.

The other interviews proceeded smoothly, based on my perception. I became more comfortable with the process, and the relational dynamics, and when appropriate, interjected to ask questions that aimed to uncover the deeper meaning behind what the participant was reflecting on. In my final SOI, I felt the most confident. When I solicited feedback on the interview process, here is what the final participant shared regarding my interviewing approach:

I felt like your interviewing was great. I was comfortable; I felt like you were really listening and engaging with me; I felt encouraged to share as much as I wanted. Your follow-up questions were helpful and continued moving the conversation. I think you're an excellent interviewer.

Critical Conflict Incident (CCI) Process

The overall process for practicing the CCI followed a similar timeline and flow as the SOI. As previously mentioned, after securing the four participants for this partial pilot study, I randomly selected two of the individuals with whom I conducted the CCI first and the SOI second (the other two participants' interviews I conducted in reverse order). This intentional experiment aimed to explore how, or if, the order of the interviews impacted results and/or the researcher's bias. Based on my experience, it did not have a considerable impact either way. To ensure consistency with the participants where the SOI was conducted first, I did not score the SOI before conducting the second interview, the CCI (this was replicated in the dissertation research). This aided in buffering my bias in the second interview (though I had a general sense of where the participant would score in each case). Additionally, based on this pilot phase, the SOI tended to promote rapport building with the participants and supported an easier transition

from one interview to the next (though I must note that I already had established healthy relationships with all the participants before they participated in this pilot study, but the SOI supported deeper affinity). For this reason, the dissertation research design positions the SOI first and the CCI second in the interview order.

Unlike the SOI, there is no standard structure for the CIT interview protocol (i.e., the CCI). I developed a protocol based on what I learned from suggestions in the literature. I modeled some of my questions and aspects of the over protocol after Barkouli's (2015) interview protocol. Additionally, I did share prompts designed to prime participants to think about "difficult conflicts" during times of organizational change, which I sent to each participant via email approximately 48 hours before our scheduled interview time.

The critical conflict interviews progressed smoothly. The questions I formulated landed well with the participants. I gathered extensive data in a short amount of time. However, I perceived that the interview protocol I designed was overly scripted. In hindsight, I would have left out several questions (in fact, many of the questions I skipped over, either because the participant organically responded to them without any prompting or there was not enough time). Based on this experience, I revised the CCI protocol for the dissertation research. Additionally, some of the possible questions I included in the CCI would perhaps be better suited for a third interview, which added to the rationale to support the design of a third additional interview in the final research design.

I designed the interview protocol to elicit critical incidents (or, in my case, incidents related to conflicts), allowing the participant to give these incidents or conflicts context, and build insight into how they both experienced and made sense of the conflict they highlighted. I

learned, or rather it was confirmed, that, unlike the SOI, the CCI might require a more directive approach at times, especially early on in the interview process. This was anticipated, as the purpose of the SOI is to elicit data that concerns one's structure of consciousness. In contrast, the CCI elicits content regarding the specifics of an experienced conflict situation. Upon reflection, I found that I need to be more explicit and deliberate in framing my aim in this portion of the study (Chell, 2004).

I did not transcribe the four CCI interviews for this pilot portion. This decision I made while in consultation with my advisor. We determined that it was unnecessary, given the time constraints and the primary purpose of this portion of my learning. Instead, I took detailed notes (and I did record the interviews). In my fundamental analysis, I preliminarily identified 44 implied incidents, 33 unique, and nine experienced by one or more individuals (see Table 3.2). Only three of the incidents were experienced by three of the four participants, and all four participants explicitly experienced no identified incident. Most of what I identified as incidents were related to "actions and behaviors from other parties" that caused an escalation of tension and conflict (this could be considered a category). I imagine that if I were to do a thorough analysis of the transcripts, several other incidents would emerge (in hindsight, most of what I identified in the pilot phase linked to external behaviors, whereas in the main study, I focused more on the internal experience). Even what I captured shows my own bias as a researcher, as I was keen on identifying elements that caused or escalated conflict and tension. A few other categories began to emerge for this data, such as behavior and communication of self, thought patterns, emotions experienced by self, and changes (e.g., external factors, context changes, new leadership, and budget changes). Recognizing my own bias in this phase further supported the

need to support another individual's objective perspective when analyzing and coding the data from the CCIs, which I did employ for the principal study.

Table 3.2

Preliminary List of Identified Critical Incidents Among Participants in Pilot

Appealed to emotions	Inflammatory comments	Powerplay*
Chair “didn’t say anything” or intervene	Lied to me/us	President didn’t say something and step up and lead
Communicated inappropriately	Meeting with ombudsman	Released (sacked)
Communication went out to others in the organization*	New dean of college	“Stone cold” behavior
Decision not to “get emotional”	New VP	Surprised by hostility from program head
Decision to “learn from this”*	No response or direction from leadership	Told to do something—lead an initiative*
Demeaning comments/ behavior	Overstepped power	Unethical demands
Felt pulled too many ways at once	Overt micro-aggressions	Union contract required no communication
Felt threatened**	Passive-aggressive behaviors and communication**	Went behind back*
Filed complaint	Played victim	
Incompetency*	Perceived personal attacks	
Inconsistent behavior	Posturing**	

Note. Asterisk (*) denotes incidents identified by two participants and a double asterisk (**) refers to incidents identified by three participants.

In terms of other changes to the protocol for the CCI, I opted to employ the tool of the double-arrowed timeline (Chell, 2004) and have participants identify indicants on the timeline in relation to the moment of heightened change and anxiety (e.g., the inception of COVID-19). See Figure 3.2. This was added to the principal study with the intention of supporting the process of identifying incidents by providing a visual aid that supports reflection on the events that occurred around or during the time of change. Moreover, I did roughly 50-minute interviews with my subjects for this portion of the pilot. As detailed in the primary study, I did allow up to 90 minutes for the CCIs, which provided slightly more time and more robust data.

Figure 3.2*Conflict Timeline Reflection Prompt*

Conflict Timeline

Instructions: Identify, along the timeline below, 3 to 5 “difficult” and/or “critical” conflicts (as describe in the accompanying email). Each conflict you select may exist over an extended period of time with escalations and de-escalations. Attempt to identify the precipitating event(s) on this timeline that set in motion the conflict in each of the 3 to 5 situations you have selected. Additionally, if you find it helpful, I encourage you to identify subsequent critical points in the life of the conflict(s) along the timeline (especially if it persisted over an extended period).

March 13, 2020 (COVID-19 declared as a national emergency in US)

The Present

Note: The conflicts you identify may have no direct relationship to the emergence of COVID-19 in the US. This date and event is primarily used as a reference point to roughly one year ago.

Pilot Process Reflections

Overall, this was the learning experience I had hoped for, as I felt properly prepared and equipped to initiate the primary study. Additionally, I was able to hone my interviewing skills progressively from interview to interview. I perceive that my skill set fits the interview styles utilized for this study adequately. Not only did the interviews flow relatively well, but they produced some insightful preliminary data that supported the preparation of my dissertation research design.

The Primary Research Process

This section details the primary research process, beginning with an overview of the study’s timeline, followed by designations for participants, data collection and analysis procedures, and ethical implications.

Study Timeline

In December 2020, I defended the proposal and was approved to conduct the research. In January 2021, Antioch University's ethical review board approved the study. By the end of January, I began soliciting participants for the study by distributing a prescreening survey via email and social media for interested participants.

Within less than a month, 22 individuals completed the survey. I carefully reviewed each potential participant. In selecting the individuals, I aimed to have a diverse and balanced group of participants. In the review process, I considered each potential participant's leadership role, the department and/or division they worked in, the geographic location and type of HEI they were employed by, and demographic information, including age, gender, race, and level of education. I reached out to 10 participants, requesting their participation. Initially, all 10 agreed to participate. However, due to extenuating circumstances, two individuals backed out. As a result, I reached out to one more individual, who agreed to participate in the study.

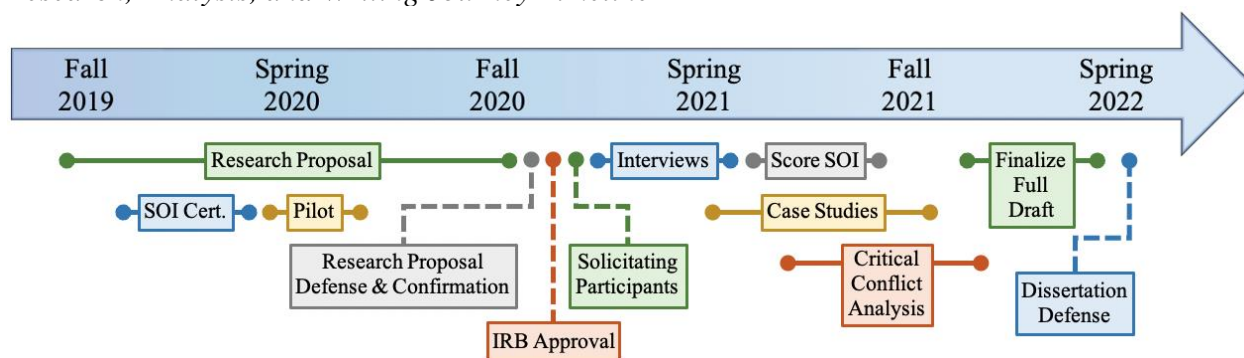
From February through April 2021, I conducted three interviews with each of the nine individuals. Each interview was conducted via a secure Zoom meeting. I elected to record only the audio of the interviews, which were transcribed by a paid transcriptionist between each interview. The first interview conducted with each participant was the SOI, followed approximately two weeks later by the CCI, and the interviews concluded two weeks later with the closing interview. Beginning in May 2021, I started the process of analysis.

The first analysis phase was working with an individual certified SOI scorer to analyze and score the SOIs. We met five times throughout the summer and fall to compare our individual scores for the nine participants and select an agreed-upon score for each participant. We finished

this phase in October 2021. The second phase overlapped with the first phase and the interview process; in that I began outlining the individual case studies once I had completed all three interviews with a participant. I completed one case study draft every two to four weeks over the summer and into the fall. I completed the case studies in November 2021. In July of 2021, I began working on the third phase of analysis, which I refer to as the critical conflict analysis (CCA), which utilized data from all three interviews and the participants' SOI scores. The CCA was a modified version of the critical incident technique analysis process. For this phase, I also worked with another individual who supported coding, thematizing, and categorizing the data from transcripts from the CCIs. This was completed in January 2022. See Figure 3.3 for a comprehensive timeline.

Figure 3.3

Research, Analysis, and Writing Journey Timeline



Research Participants

I intended to solicit six to eight participants for the research who exhibit diversity in dimensions of social identity (age, ethnicity, gender, and race), institutional context (community and junior colleges, liberal arts colleges, and universities, as well as state and private institutions), departmental context (arts, business, health care, humanities, social sciences, STEM, etc.), role (academic dean, associate dean, department chair, and director), time spent in

role, and comfort level in dealing with or navigating conflict dynamics in their current position. I also accurately anticipated a variation in developmental mindsets demonstrated (between the *socialized mind* and the *self-transforming mind*). I initially identified seven primary criteria for participants, as outlined below:

- Participant leaders were in the role of an academic leader at an HEI, specifically in the position of an academic dean, associate dean, department director, or department chair (if significant tasks were administrative).
- Participant leaders held their position or a similar leadership position for at least one year.
- Participant leaders oversaw department faculty or other administrators with direct reporting to faculty and staff.
- Participant leaders had earned a terminal degree (e.g., PhD, EdD, JD, DBA) or was currently working to complete a terminal degree. (One participant did not meet this criterion but was deemed a fit for the study based on total years of experience in HEI leadership).
- Participant leaders acknowledged that conflict engagement (management or resolution) is a significant aspect of their role as academic leaders and could identify recent conflicts they had recently or currently were navigating that they would be willing to detail for this study.
- Participant leaders acknowledged that conflict naturally arises during periods of organizational change in their institution.
- Participant leaders committed to fully participating in all three interviews in the timeline indicated (over a month to a month and a half).

These criteria ensured that participants qualified for the study and exhibited adequate parallels in role and experience to compare and contrast the data and findings attained in the multiple case studies.

Soliciting Participants

I recruited participants for the study by reaching out through my already established networks with an initial email invitation to consider participating or sharing with colleagues and networks (Appendix B). Individuals interested in participating in the study were prompted to fill out a prescreening survey (Appendix C). Beyond email, this was disseminated through social media outlets, including Facebook and LinkedIn.

The email invitation provided a modified description of the study, criteria, and expectations for potential participants and a link to an online vetting form. Interested parties were asked to complete the short online form, which aided in the selection process, and ensured that participants met the criteria outlined in the previous section and provided initial demographic information to aid in the selection process. Through the selection process, I consciously considered the aspects of diversity previously mentioned to build a well-rounded and diverse group of participants intentionally and consulted with my chair multiple times before making formal requests to participate. As stated earlier, nine individual leaders agreed to participate in the study, all of whom successfully met the obligations of the interview process in an adequate and timely fashion. (An example of the email inviting identified individuals to participate is found in Appendix D.)

The Procedures of Data Collection

This section details the procedures and sequence of data collection. Starting with the subject-object interview (SOI), followed by the critical conflict interview (CCI), and concluding with the closing interview. Before the first interview, participants were contacted via email (see Appendix E) and to provide informed consent for all three interview portions of the study by signing the consent form (see Appendix F).

Step 1: Subject-Object Interview

As the principal researcher, I conducted nine 70 to 90-minute interviews for the first interview, employing a slightly modified protocol for the SOI (see Appendix G) intended to prime participants to relay situations and experiences related to interpersonal conflict. Modifications to the SOI have precedents (Lahey et al., 1988, 2011; McCauley et al., 2006; Yeyinmen, 2016). The modification I made included the additional prompt “conflict” in addition to the ten other prompts.

Referring to the research questions articulated at the beginning of the chapter, the first question relates directly to Kegan’s (1982) work of understanding the mind’s deep structures, which inform an individual’s construction of meaning (i.e., “way of knowing”). This is measured by linking an individual’s demonstrated meaning-making structure to the developmental stage (Lahey et al., 2011). The SOI is a tool used for uncovering an individual’s meaning-making structure (Lahey et al., 2011), also referred to as “orders of consciousness” or in this study, as “developmental mindsets.” I utilized the SOI in my research as the primary research method for gathering data to identify each participant’s developmental mindset.

I determined that the SOI was the essential first step in the data collection sequence for two primary reasons. First, in the pilot study, there did not appear to be any difference in the interview process for the participants when they participated in the SOI or CCI first or second (my data set was limited to four SOIs and four CCIs). Secondly, the SOI appeared to be the more enjoyable and fulfilling interview, based on the written and verbal feedback received from the participants in the pilot study. Other researchers have made this observation (Lahey et al., 2011; Yeyinmen, 2016). By positioning it as the first interview, I intended that it would aid in building rapport with the leaders and increase engagement and retention of participants throughout the study, which appeared to have some positive effect in an intended way.

Step 2: Critical Conflict Interviews

A second interview, a modified CIT, was conducted roughly two weeks after the SOI interview. As previously stated, I utilized a modified version of the CIT for the second phase of data collection. In its modified version, I refer to it as the critical conflict interview (CCI). This interview was semi-structured and aimed at uncovering the data related to individual participants' thinking and behaviors in conflict situations they identified (see Appendix H). Through this interview, participants' subjective experiences with complex and difficult conflicts in their context were explored. Additionally, this interview was utilized to gather information on the types of conflicts experienced and their causes. This interview was 70 to 90 minutes in length. Participants were contacted via email roughly 48 hours before the second interview (see Appendix I) and asked to engage in limited preliminary work, which asked them to identify three to five "complex or difficult" conflicts they had experienced in the past year by utilizing the Conflict Timeline: Reflection Prompt (see Figure 3.2, p. 78).

The CCI aided in generating data related to the types of conflicts participants experience and the causes or motivations underneath the surface of the identified conflicts and supported identifying the thinking and behaviors of the participants when they were required to engage and navigate these conflicts as leaders within their professional context. The CCI gathered relevant and meaningful data; however, the analysis traditionally recommended for CIT was utilized to an extent, but was also shifted, given the exploratory nature of this study. In large part, this decision was due to the proposed size of my research. Modern CIT methods suggest that sample size is not determined at the onset of a study but is satisfied once a point of saturation is met (Butterfield et al., 2009). Due to the small sample size of this study, seeking a saturation point was not relevant. Instead, the technique was utilized to collect relevant data for the case studies. Some comparative analysis of themes was conducted, but thematic analysis in a traditional CIT sense was not deemed the most appropriate way to report the findings of this study.

Step 3: Closing Interview

A third and final interview was conducted with participants two weeks after the CCI interview was completed. This interview took 40 to 60 minutes per participant and was informed in part by the first two interviews. It was loosely structured, and the interview protocol (Appendix J) provided guidance for the final session. The purpose of this third interview, as previously discussed, was to provide space for the researcher to ask follow-up questions that may shed light on the data already collected and help contextualize the conflicts. Additionally, this interview provided the opportunity to ask clarifying questions to participants about the culture of their department and institution, the structure of their institution, and their perception of the power dynamics at play in their institution while navigating conflict (and specifically dynamics

that directly impacted them and their department or division). Finally, it provided an opportunity to ask clarifying questions regarding demographic and biographic information and to conduct a short debrief of the interview process.

Post-Interview Process and Data Analysis

As interviews were completed, I submitted the recordings to a transcriptionist to aid in the transcription process. As they were completed, I provided the participants with an opportunity to do a member check. I asked them to provide feedback or corrections within two weeks of receiving the transcripts. Out of all nine participants, only one participant provided feedback which was utilized in the analysis and write-up process. The other participants acknowledged receiving the transcripts from their interviews. I also followed up with each participant at the end of the study with an email thanking them for their participation (Appendix K).

The first phase of analysis focused on the construction of the mini-case studies presented in Chapter IV. This analysis incorporated the SOI score, the narrative descriptions of each participant's conflicts detailed in the CCI interview, and relevant anonymized biographic and demographic information obtained from the closing interviews and the participants' CVs.

As previously mentioned, I worked with another SOI-certified scorer for validity purposes. We followed the recommendations for interrater reliability suggested by Lahey et al. (2011; see Appendix L for scoring sheet templates). We each reviewed, coded, and scored the transcripts of the interviews separately and then consulted with one another to determine an agreed-upon score. There was only one individual whom we did not initially identify within one substage of each other. In this case, I went back and reviewed her scores and determined that the

certified scorer I worked with had identified the individual's subject-object balance more accurately than I did. Table 3.3 details our independent and final scores in consultation with one another. The process of scoring the individuals took place over several months, as we finalized consulted and finalized scores for each individual as I prepared to construct their respective mini-case studies.

Table 3.3

Subject-Object Balance Scores in Consultation with Certified Scorer

Participant pseudonym	Principal researcher's initial range or score	Certified scorer's initial range or score	Final score through consultation
Brian	3/4 to 4/3	3/4 to 4/3	4/3
Christine	4/3 to 4(3)	4/3	4/3
Devin	4(3)	4(3)	4(3)
Emma	3/4 to 4/3	4/3	4/3
James	4	4	4
Kevin	3/4	3/4 to 4/3	3/4
Lisa	4 to 4(5)	4	4
Nasir	4	4	4
Tamera	4	4	4

Note. Initially Christine was determined to construct meaning from a “4(3)” mindset and Lisa from a “4(5)” mindset, though upon review, Christine demonstrated a “4/3” mindset and Lisa demonstrated a “4” mindset.

From June to November of 2021, I constructed the case studies utilizing an iterative process, wherein I began each case study by outlining contextual information on each participant. Following this, I initially integrated the SOI score into each case study and identified pertinent quotes from the interviews. I concluded the construction of the case studies by doing a final detailed critical read-through with the individual's demonstrated subject-object balance in

mind to ensure that it was adequately represented in the case studies. The nine participants detailed a total of 24 individual conflict scenarios, an average of 2.66 conflict scenarios per individual. Most individuals described two or three conflict scenarios. The three exceptions to this included Brian, who only detailed one multifaceted conflict, and James and Tamera, who each detailed four conflict scenarios (their last scenarios were brief yet deemed relevant).

Following the development of the individual mini-case studies, I shifted my attention to focus on the CCI analysis. For this analysis portion, I worked with another individual (a coding partner) who supported coding, categorizing, and preliminary analysis of the data from the CCIs. The individual that supported this portion of analysis had experience as a coder and had worked in higher education, primarily in student affairs, and brought a perspective to looking at the data differently than my own.

Before the coding process, I divided the nine CCIs into individual conflict scenarios, constituting 24 unique conflict scenarios (each of which I incorporated into the nine case studies). Next, I developed a coding process and resource guideline (see Appendix M). I then worked with the coding partner, first orienting them to the coding process. We separately coded 10 of the same individual conflict scenarios (41.7% of the total conflict scenarios). We employed a mix of *in vivo* and *descriptive* coding throughout this process. The conflict scenarios selected for this initial portion of the analysis were chosen because, contextually, they mostly represented the spectrum of conflict situations (i.e., various roles of participants, contexts, dynamics, and conflict types) detailed by the participants. Upon completing the first four conflict scenarios, I calculated the frequency wherein we coded the same excerpts to determine the level of

agreement. I utilized the percentage agreement equation, as described by Syed and Nelson (2015):

$$P_A = \frac{N_A}{N_A + N_D} \times 100$$

Based on the coded material from the first set of conflict scenarios, wherein we coded four separate conflict scenarios, our initial total rate agreement was 68.18%. This was lower than the predetermined desired rate of agreement (a minimum of 75% agreement). At this point, we employed an iterative process of convening to compare and contrast the coded material as a means of collaborative honing in on the relevant material. After reviewing and discussing the codes from the first four scenarios, corrections to the coded material were made. We replicated the process for the subsequent three conflict scenarios, which produced an agreement rating of 75.57%. Finally, we repeated the same process for three more conflict scenarios, and an agreement rating of 89.66% was calculated. This iterative process aided in honing what was deemed codable material versus material not relevant to the study. A complete breakdown of the rate of agreement is detailed in Table 3.4. The total collective agreement based on the equation above produced an agreement rate of 76.29%.

Table 3.4*Rate of Agreement for Coded Conflict Scenarios*

Coding round	Conflict scenario	Oder coded	Number of agreements (N_A)	Number of different (N_D)	Agreement by individual scenario (P_A)	Agreement by round (P_A)	Total agreement (P_A)
First	1	1	29	15	65.91%	68.18%	76.29%
	2	2	34	19	64.15%		
	3	3	13	3	81.25%		
	4	4	14	5	73.68%		
Second	1	5	52	18	74.29%	75.57%	
	2	6	29	8	78.38%		
	3	7	18	6	75.0%		
Third	1	8	24	2	92.31%	89.66%	
	2	9	34	5	87.18%		
	3	10	20	2	90.91%		

Following this process phase, I individually code the remaining 14 conflict scenarios.

Once all the conflict scenarios were coded, a total of 1,009 unique conflict incidents were applied between all 24 conflict scenarios, along with 132 unique antecedents and 30 impacts. We also coded for reflections pertaining to the conflict scenarios, which accounted for 53 unique coded excerpts. In total, 1,224 unique codes were applied. (Note: the codes from the first ten conflict scenarios with two coders were adjusted accordingly so that no coded material was double counted.)

At this point, I again solicited the support of my research partner, and we began to group codes based on themes, followed by subthemes. Following an iterative process similar to what we employed to assess and hone the agreement rate of coded excerpts, I selected code sets from different conflict scenarios used in the previous phase. To support this process, I also developed a category reference document (see Appendix N), which we used as a reference during the

categorizing process. The document was a working reference list, which we both had access to edit. It was initially developed from the themes that organically emerged during the early phases.

We started by individually categorizing excerpts from Emma's first conflict scenario. Out of the 39 categorizable codes, we individually categorized 22 identically for an agreement rate of 56.41%. Following this, we met to compare, contrast, and discuss differences in our assignments into categories. After discussing our independent code allocation to the categories, it was determined that 12 of the 39 codes could have been coded both ways. The categories close enough for coding purposes to be considered synonymous and, therefore, could be grouped (e.g., "advocated for [something]" was considered to be similar enough to "approached or confronted individual/group" depending on the contextual information provided). Thus, once adaptations were made, the adjusted agreement rate for the first data set in this phase was 87.18% (i.e., 34 of the 39 codes were categorized similarly).

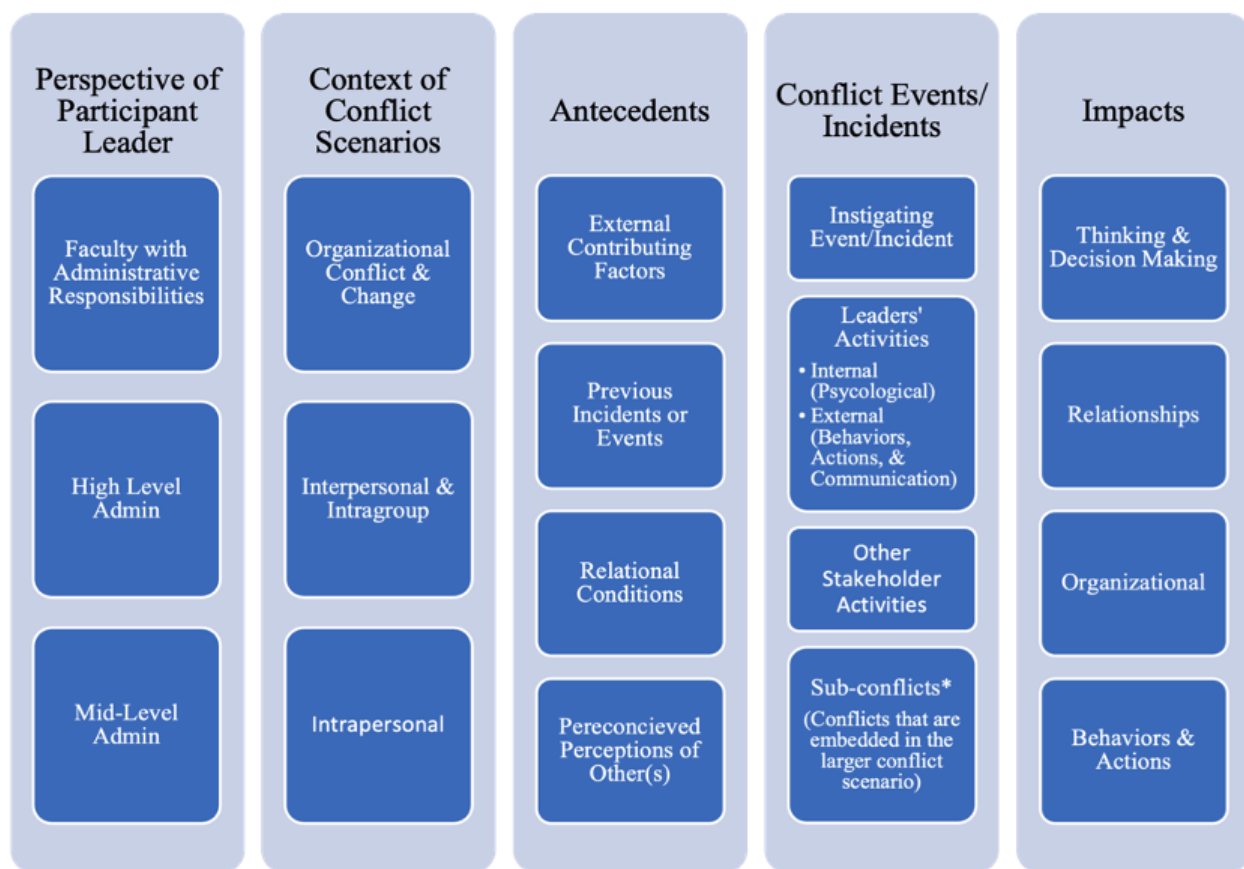
At this point, I realized that some of the categories were still too broad or imprecise, at which point I worked to narrow and clarify the categories. I also began grasping the sheer scope of the data being analyzed and realized that I would need to hone the analysis even further before writing up the findings section. Moreover, I also recognized that some of the coded data could be interpreted to fit multiple categories or double-coded, which would need to be accounted for where relevant.

After revising the category reference document, I provided my research partner with a randomized assortment of codes with the excerpts for contextualizing purposes and asked her to categorize them independently, as I did. Once the 74 coded bits were categorized, I calculated our rate of category agreement, which was 81.08% (i.e., we categorized 60 of the 74 the same).

At this point, I continued to categorize the rest of the codes independently, I then preceded to further group according to themes and subthemes, at which point I solicited feedback from my research partner, who affirmed the thematic divisions (many of the themes had already emerged during the earlier phases which already had involved the research partner). Figure 3.5 provides a high-level view of the categories, themes, and select subthemes that emerged from the data.

Figure 3.4

Summary of Categories and Themes From Critical Conflict Interviews



Note. The “Sub-conflicts” theme dealt with conflict interactions embedded in the larger conflict scenario but could also potentially be considered standalone conflicts.

Following this, and in consultation with my chair, I made the decision to deemphasize the themes produced from the categorizing process, which aligned with the traditional form of CIT analysis, and instead focus on the linkages between one's subject-object balance (i.e., developmental mindset) to one's thinking, decision-making, and where relevant, participants behaviors and actions for the second results chapter (Chapter V). In doing so, I focused primarily on making sense of the subcategories formed under the primary category titled "Conflict Events/Incidents," explicitly examining the theme of "Leaders' Activities," which included internal and external activities.

Ethical Implications

Given the nature of this study and the confidentiality assurances I took to abate the possibility that participants' information would be made public, the risk to the individual participants was negligible. All information about the participants and the institutions they are employed at was made anonymous in the subsequent chapters. All participants signed an informed consent letter wherein they confirmed that they knew what was expected of them in each of the interviews, that their information and anything they said or communicated would remain anonymous, and that they had the right to remove themselves from the study at any point. With this information communicated, all nine participants who agreed to participate in the study successfully completed their obligation within the timeframe initially outlined and agreed to.

There are risks involved in all research that relies on human participation, yet the risk of participating in this study was minimal. Additionally, the study's design and the interviews involved proved to be insightful and empowering to the participants, as eight of the nine participants conveyed having a positive experience at the conclusion of the final interview.

CHAPTER IV: NINE MINI-CASE STUDIES

Change means movement. Movement means friction. Only in the frictionless vacuum of a nonexistent abstract world can movement or change occur without that abrasive friction of conflict.

—Alinsky (1971/1989, p. 20)

The first three chapters of this work set the stage for what is explored in the final three chapters of this dissertation. This chapter presents the nine individual mini-case studies which focus on the conflict scenarios that each of the academic leaders chose to detail for this study. The case studies vary in length, as the participants detailed one up to four separate conflict scenarios during the interview process.

In terms of chapter organization, I intentionally ordered the vignettes to show the progression of complexity in the developmental mindsets based on Kegan's rendition of the constructive-developmental journey. The first mini-case study provides an overview of Kevin's three conflict scenarios while intentionally drawing linkages between his navigation and engagement of these conflicts with his demonstrated developmental mindset, which was assessed at "3/4" (signifying a prevailing socialized mind and existing yet subordinate self-authored mind). Emma, Brian, and Christine's case studies follow Kevin, in this order, all of whom were assessed at "4/3" (signifying a prevailing self-authoring mind and subordinate yet active socialized mind). Next, Devin's case study is presented, who was assessed at a "4(3)" (signifying a prevailing self-authored mind and minimally influential socialized mind). Devin is succeeded by James, Nasir, Tamera, and Lisa, respectively, who all were assessed at "4" (signifying an equilibrated self-authored mind).

At the conclusion of the individual case studies, I provide a brief analysis of the case study findings and a summary of the chapter. Chapter V, the subsequent chapter, continues to build off the findings from the mini-case studies, synthesizing and integrating the findings from this chapter and the critical conflict analysis process.

Kevin “3/4”

Kevin found his way into higher education after retiring from a career as a K-12 educator and administrator. Shortly after retiring, there was a teaching position that came open, working with a principal preparation program. He was offered the position and taught in the program for a half-decade before the program was sunset. At this point, he transferred into an undergraduate education program, which was discontinued shortly after he joined the program. Following this, he moved to teach in the undergraduate studies online program, which he eventually became the faculty chair of, and the position he was in at the point of the interviews for this study. As Kevin shared when reflecting on his journey into higher education, “I didn’t apply for anything. I just kind of moved along, and [here] I am.”

Kevin completed a PhD in his sixties, shortly before participating in the interviews for this study. He expressed that he had been interested in earning a PhD, but it was not until he became faculty chair that the opportunity to pursue this interest became a viable option. He earned two MEd degrees in education and a BA in education.

Kevin lives in the Midwest yet works with faculty and students from all around the United States. In this role, Kevin supervises roughly two dozen affiliate faculty (i.e., nontenured faculty) and adjunct faculty. He schedules and assigns courses (approximately twenty to twenty-five plans each term), supervises faculty development programming, runs program evaluations,

and participates in multiple university-wide committees. At the time of his interviews, he had been in this role for about a year and a half.

Kevin shared how he grew up as a “Minnesota Methodist,” which he described as a “non-confrontational Methodist, let’s-do-good-for-people kind of background.” He grew up attending a Methodist church, but his family had a negative experience that led to them leaving the church. Still, this cultural-religious experience significantly influenced his upbringing. Moreover, Kevin stated that he grew up in a middle-class liberal household. Both of his parents earned master’s degrees; however, his mother did not work while he was growing up and instead took on the role of a stay-at-home mother. Still, the importance of education was ingrained in him early in life. Kevin spent the first eight-year of his life as a “white kid” in the “Jim Crow South” before his family moved to the Northeast and then to the Midwest, which significantly influenced his development and worldview.

Due to the nature of his work as a faculty chair of an online program, Kevin shared that from his perspective, the onset of COVID-19 did not have as drastic of an effect on his work and department, especially compared to other higher education programs and in fact may benefit the online program, as people begin to see the value in online education.

Kevin’s Meaning-Making Structure

Kevin demonstrated that his meaning-making structure included the two systems of the socialized mind and the self-authored mind. He was not equilibrated at one mindset; instead, he alternated between minds, thus a “3/4” score using the scoring method explained by Lahey et al. (2011) for the subject-object interview (SOI). This score indicates that the socialized mind was

more prevalent (stronger) than the self-authored mind; however, both were actively and consistently displayed.

Kevin demonstrated throughout the SOI that he places significant value on receiving validation from others he respects or looks up to, signifying the influence of the socialized mind on his meaning-making. An example of where this showed up for him was after describing a situation where he advised a student on a financial aid-related issue and he realized after the fact that he had provided inaccurate information. Kevin shared that he was upset when he realized this had occurred and that it would negatively impact the student. When questioned on how this made him feel, he stated:

Terrible. Just really bad and really upset . . . Because I feel like I've let that person down. That I'm responsible for something bad that's about to happen in their lives and they don't even know it yet. And also, that somehow, I have to correct it, and that will also make me look bad for not understanding what I was saying in the first place. So, it's all bad.

In this example, it is not the feeling “bad” that indicates the strong influence of the socialized mind; rather, it is guilt and self-blaming he conveys, joined with the emphasis on the perception that this would look “bad” for him in the eyes of others. Moreover, he revealed that he felt responsible for the student’s feelings, which is indicative of the socialized mind.

When asked in the SOI, “How do you know that you’ve done something well?” Kevin responded:

When I get some validation from other people, but mostly it's whether I feel it was as good as I could do at that time. I like to learn how to do new things and [then] do them. And I don't expect perfection, but I expect it to come out well. It's not going to be perfect. And I'm going to see the flaws in the flow of whatever it is, but I expect it to look good. I don't know how I know, except that just it looks like what I expected it to look like.

Here, Kevin acknowledged the need for validation from other people to know when he has done something well. He highlighted that he sees his internal gauge as being more important; however, he was unable to articulate how he knows something turned out “good” other than it meets his expectations. This indicated the presence of the self-authored mind at play, though it was still subordinate to the socialized mind, as the socialized mind holds a predominant place in his meaning-making system based on what he exhibited throughout the interviews.

Furthermore, Kevin demonstrated a limited capacity to think abstractly, frequently using “good” and “bad” to explain complex feelings and situations, indicating a level of unconscious intolerance toward shades of gray and ambiguity. These are characteristics that can be associated with the socialized mind.

Throughout his interviews, there are moments that look like he has a self-constructed theory or ideology from which he derives meaning and which influences his thinking and behaviors. Objectively this guiding ideology appears to be linked to the notion of helping and empowering others (i.e., students and faculty). However, he demonstrated throughout the interviews that this potentially still-forming self-authored ideology was a secondary influencer in his meaning-making. If it were predominated, he would demonstrate reliance on this more consistently.

Vignettes of Kevin’s Conflicts

In the second interview with Kevin, the critical conflict interview (CCI), he described three conflict situations that he navigated since the onset of COVID-19, though the first situation involved some pre-pandemic lead-up. This section provides vignettes of each of these conflict situations, followed by a short discussion highlighting the implications drawn from each of the

scenarios and connecting them to this study's aims of examining the influence of an individual's meaning-making structure when they are engaging conflict.

Conflict 1: Faculty's Responsiveness to Students

Not too long after taking over the chair position, Kevin became aware of one of the department's affiliate faculty member's tendencies to be unresponsive to students in her classes (all her classes were online), and students were expressing their frustration in the form of complaints to the department administration. Additionally, one of the administrators gave him an unsolicited heads up when he became aware of this situation, sharing that "[There's] a lot of trouble with her." Kevin expressed that he did not want to approach the faculty member with any unnecessary preconceived bias in response to this comment, so he consciously suspended his judgment. As he stated, "Not having any personal experience, I didn't necessarily want that [comment] to color my view."

Kevin scheduled a meeting with the faculty member to discuss the issue. Additionally, he consulted with a lawyer, and the university's general counsel was looped into the situation to approach the situation delicately and prevent litigation. On the faculty member's part, she asked the disability support services to join the conversations as a witness, as she conveyed the reasons for her lack of being present and responsive with her class, which she attributed to her mental health status (Kevin did not disclose any specifics regarding her mental health, other than to share she had a high level of anxiety and self-identified as being neurodivergent). From Kevin's perspective, the conversation was constructive, and they came to an agreement on how to proceed, which would allow her to continue teaching in the program.

He explained that the situation appeared to be improving for several months following the meeting and the agreement. However, a few semesters later, she was absent and unresponsive to an entire class for four to five weeks. At this point, COVID-19 had spread throughout the United States. Again, the students had reached out to their advisors, inquiring about what was going on with her. The situation was worse than the previous account a few semesters earlier. At this point, Kevin reached out to meet with her again. Initially, she resisted, expressing how uncomfortable and anxious she was the last time they had met. Genuinely wanting something to work out, he involved a third party to help with problem solve the situation. Moreover, Kevin showed compassion earlier in this situation, conveying to her that if she were to get official documentation, they would be able to explore options for accommodations (something that he explained had been presented to her in the past). However, she failed to pursue this option actively.

In this second meeting, they came to an understanding that she would finish the class; however, he informed her that she would not be assigned to teach the following semester. This upset her. Again, the university did not have tenured faculty, and as an affiliate faculty member, she was on a three-year contract cycle. Moreover, she also taught with another program at the university, so her not being assigned courses in Kevin's program did not exclude her from teaching in other programs at the university.

When asked about how he felt as he navigated this situation and what he experienced internally, Kevin shared:

[The] first time, I was really nervous about talking to her and worried about hurting her feelings and all that. The second time, I was more a concerned that I handle the situation in a way that led to a successful outcome, because I was pretty sure what I wanted that outcome to be.

Kevin did his due diligence in this situation. He shared, “I did go to the provost and HR to have them involved in discussions, so I didn’t get anybody in trouble.” Moreover, he shared:

We were able, based on [her] track record and the history and the lack of responsiveness to the students, to pull the class and tell her that she just wasn’t going to be able to teach for us for the next three months or whatever it was, two and a half months. And we would pay her affiliate contract and expect her to live up to her obligations until all the students were graded and so on.

Kevin demonstrated the capacity to empathize with the faculty member, sharing that she “was clearly feeling victimized.” He went on to state, “that’s not on me. I don’t want to victimize anyone. I like to be a nice guy.” He also shared that she expressed she felt “targeted” by the earlier mentioned administrator, implying there was perhaps some unconscious discrimination occurring based on her ability status.

Kevin was not at liberty to terminate her employment at the university; however, he expressed that he would not hire her to teach in the undergraduate online program in the future. Toward the end of the CCI, he lamented:

In some ways, it felt like how the hell did this happen? I’m the chair and we’re seven weeks in and students haven’t [sic]—shouldn’t I know that sort of stuff? So, I felt a little guilty about that. But then, and this is going to reflect badly on me, but I also felt like I needed to deal with it in the best way possible for the students and the university and get her out at least temporarily.

Developmental implications for conflict from this vignette. In this initial conflict situation, Kevin demonstrated his amicable nature. He desired for the situation to be resolved quickly, and he placed significant emphasis on not wanting to hurt her feelings. His discomfort with interpersonal conflict paired with the notion that in his mind that he was responsible in part for her feelings is a strong indicator of the predominate role the socialized mind (over the self-authored mind).

Moreover, when the situation escalated in the second instance of her not being present and responsive toward her students, he demonstrated the ability to muster up the courage to confront her and dictate the terms. This response appeared to be motivated first by the desire not to look bad in other people's eyes and secondly to do what was best for the students in the program—he desired to do right by them. This secondary motivation indicated some influence of the self-authored mind in his construction of meaning in this situation.

Conflict 2: Ongoing Tension With Difficult Affiliate Faculty

The second conflict he dealt with involved another affiliate faculty member who taught in his program. The conflict dealt with an ongoing situation he constantly had to navigate, one which appeared to cause him increased anxiety as it continued to exist. He described the individual as having some “personality issues.” Kevin explained that she did her work well, but she was “a little harsh on students.” From his articulated perspective, she believed that she did everything exceptionally well and made sure all the other faculty knew this by voicing this regularly. In department faculty meetings, she dominated the meeting time, as he shared, “she’ll take up twenty minutes of the twenty-five [minute meeting] talking about all the great things she’s done,” and then question all the faculty who were not doing work to the same standard that she had for herself. Moreover, in his first interaction with her during an all-faculty meeting, he shared that “she had been extremely outspoken and almost rude at times, and aggressive—verbally aggressive.”

Kevin openly struggled with managing her and the relationship and expressed a sense of dread whenever she joined a meeting. As he stated, “So it’s like when I see her little square light

up on Zoom, I'm like, 'Oh God!'" Insinuating that he was not pleased to see her, as he anticipated that she would forcibly control the meeting.

In the months preceding Kevin's participation in this study, the university's online affiliate faculty were in the process of forming their inaugural faculty assembly. Full-time faculty had determined there should be affiliate faculty representation in the university-wide assembly, so elections were staged for programs to nominate representatives. Initially, the faculty member whom Kevin had identified as causing turmoil was one of two affiliate faculty in his program to run for the position. From his perspective, "nobody wanted her to be one of the two [affiliate] faculty assembly reps" from their program; however, she and only one other person was running at the time, so Kevin decided to recruit additional affiliate faculty to run against her.

Kevin succinctly reflected on his intention, rationale, and the outcome of the voting process in stating:

I have tried to cultivate or encourage others within the program to speak up and speak out at meetings and just talk about things they're doing as well. There are two people who really dominate and she's one of them. But she's also kind of abrupt and rude, and the other [individual] is sweet [yet] dominating . . . We [faculty chairs] were counting votes as they came in because nobody really wanted to have her show up once a month to tell us we were doing everything wrong. And she lost by like one vote, so everybody was happy with that.

Kevin's desire for harmony and the influence of the socialized mind was evident here, especially in the final words of the excerpt, "she lost by like one vote, so everybody was happy with that."

Kevin shared that he did not hear from her after the election results were released regarding the results. He continued to communicate with her during the monthly faculty meetings in his department and via email when she brought a concern or issue to his attention.

On more than one occasion, she expressed that she is not compensated enough for the quality and quantity of work that she puts in. Still, it was clear that Kevin was relieved that she was not elected as an affiliate faculty representative to the online faculty assembly. He implied that he could manage the other communications with her okay.

Developmental implications for conflict from this vignette. This interpersonal conflict, a conflict of personalities caused significant distress for Kevin, as the faculty member's personality and communication style disrupted his desire for harmony within the faculty group. Again, he demonstrated discomfort with interpersonal conflict and tension, and instead of addressing it directly, he indirectly—yet strategically—choreographed a workaround.

Kevin did not exhibit empathy toward her emotionally or cognitively—he did not demonstrate a conscious effort to take her perspective in this instance. However, he showed some ability to empathize with his fellow faculty and to an indeterminate extent take their perspective as he shared that they did not want her to serve on the online faculty assembly. Though there was grey space here in that it was difficult to determine if he was genuinely taking the other full-time faculty's perspective in this matter or if he was projecting his own discomfort with the affiliate faculty who was running for a faculty assembly seat onto the other faculty members. It appeared that in his mind his perspective was differentiated from the other faculty members, yet his perspective may have been more entwined with what he perceived the others than he was consciously aware of.

From a conflict engagement standpoint, Kevin avoided any direct confrontation with the individual and instead worked behind the scenes to find and carry out a solution that he was most

comfortable with. Though he demonstrates a 4ish system (the self-authored mind), the socialized mind distinctly prevails in his internal resolution.

Conflict 3: Institution-Wide Academic Program Reorganization

The third conflict situation that Kevin highlighted in the interview process dealt with the institution-wide reorganization of academic programs. The university has several campuses in multiple states and was in the early stages of the academic program reorganization process at the time of the interviews for this study. Kevin explained that one of the primary reasons for this reorganization initiative, as he understood it, was to “reduce administrative overhead” to address the financial stress the university was experiencing.

Kevin described how the different campuses historically functioned independently of one another, particularly as it relates to administrative oversight, even when the campuses offer the same class. As a result, the same course based on one campus may cost significantly higher than another course at a different campus. Moreover, in recent years, the online undergraduate program has functioned, to an extent, as independent of the campus, logistically appearing to be its own campus. This move is intended to shift from campus-based to more centralized program-based scheduling, course fees, and leadership. It would organize programs under “schools” as opposed to campuses. For example, with this change, all undergraduate psychology courses would cost the same once fully implemented, no matter what campus a student is affiliated with or if they are registered as an online student. Moreover, the leadership for each program would be overseen university-wide by the same administrator (i.e., dean or director), as opposed to having a separate administrator for each program on each campus. He explained that:

The idea is to kind of bring things together as rationally as possible. Bring down the tuition at the West Coast schools because they’re too high. The faculty pay is the same

way. The faculty who live and work in [on the West Coast] get paid almost the same as faculty who live and work in [the Midwest]. The cost of living is probably close to double in [the West Coast cities].

This process was causing conflict, from Kevin's point of view, in part because faculty were being told what will happen but were not provided any genuine opportunity to give input, causing them to feel disgruntled. An aspect of this, which Kevin insinuated, was the fear among some faculty that programs will be cut, and since there was no tenure option, faculty may lose their jobs, as could administrators.

Kevin explained that he has not actively engaged in the conflict and tensions surrounding this reorganization process for the most part. He shared that he had strong working relationships with his supervisor, the provost of one of the campuses, and the individual selected to direct the school under which his program would fall. Moreover, he did share that the faculty who work within his department are not addressing the situation "too aggressively." He went on to state, "I think there's an attempt to get along and work for what's best for the students." Moreover, he stated that "[Perhaps] in some ways, the fact that the administration has been problematic at times gives us [the faculty] a common kind of enemy to work against." Kevin went on to describe his feelings and thinking about the situation:

I feel like over time [it] will work itself out and there's isn't a whole lot I can do about it now . . . [It is] sort of beyond my pay grade. I go along. I sit there quietly while they talk about what classes they want to exchange with themselves. I figure in time, it'll work itself out that we'll have more things more together. Right now, it's really a transition year.

Here Kevin demonstrated that he was comfortable passively receiving other leaders' proposals and vision for the reorganization. He did not want to get his hands dirty and did not

demonstrate agency in this context or even articulate the notion of what he would like to get out of the situation.

Developmental implications for conflict from this vignette. Kevin showed that he preferred to go with the flow in this complex conflict-filled process of institutional reorganization. His meaning-making in this situation can be attributed to the more prevalent socialized mind. Structurally, Kevin did not appear to demonstrate a significant influence of the 4ish system in this case. He showed some capacity to distinguish multiple points of view from other stakeholders, a characteristic of a 4ish system; however, he appears to construct himself as a passive recipient of other individuals' advice (3ish), where he has no say in what is happening. This is the prevailing characteristic of a socialized mind.

Regarding his relationship with conflict in this context, he demonstrates that he was most comfortable letting others handle the tough conversations. This indicates, at least on some level, an internal tendency toward conflict avoidance.

Case Study Findings

The first two conflict situations that Kevin described were limited in their complexity compared to most of the conflicts the other participants in this study expressed (as will be demonstrated in the preceding case study vignettes). The first two conflict situations were primarily interpersonal in nature. Kevin showed that he experienced significant internal discomfort in each case, which motivated him to seek out swift resolutions, conceivably at the expense of more deeply understanding the situation from multiple perspectives, considering the larger context, and working through the issues in collaborative and/or transformative ways.

In the third conflict scenario, Kevin avoided any potentially difficult conversations and instead looked to and entrusted the complex and potentially conflict-laden conversation to others. He readily relinquished his opinion and perspective on the matters at hand and rationalized this by saying it was “above his pay grade.” This *go with the flow* mentality is indicative of his desire for harmony and structurally a demonstration of the strong influence of the socialized mind in the structure of consciousness.

For Kevin, challenging (difficult and/or complex) conflict was understood as a *felt* or *perceived* threat to the harmony of the social system. This way of relating to conflict is indicative of the prevalent influence of the socialized mind. In the first scenario, disharmony occurred for his students, who voiced their concerns with the uncommunicative faculty member. In the second scenario, disharmony occurred within the faculty community when the affiliate faculty member was present in meetings. In the third scenario, he was protecting himself from experiencing discomfort and conflict by not engaging in an invested and sincere manner.

Kevin demonstrated the presence of a 4ish system (self-authored mind), particularly as it related to empowering students and faculty, however, it was not demonstrated to supersede the socialized mindset’s predominance or drive his internal resolution in any of the conflict scenarios described.

Kevin’s approach was indirect and conflict-avoidant unless compelled by an external influence to address it head-on (such as the expectations of his role at the university). He demonstrated limited ability to look at and engage the situation in a complex and systems-minded way in these situations. On an interpersonal level, he exhibited an ability to

affectively empathize with others, though this was limited when he personally felt a high level of discomfort and tension toward the other party.

See additional elements and characteristics pertaining to key areas of this study demonstrated by Kevin in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1*Summary of Key Findings for Kevin*

Key Areas	Elements and Characteristics
Mindset (i.e., meaning-making structure)	<p>The socialized mind is the slightly stronger meaning-making system, though it is modified by the presence of the self-authored system.</p> <p>Demonstrated a “3/4” mindset (supported by interrater SOI evaluation)</p>
Meaning-making features exhibited	<p>Self-generated personal ideology (emerging): Helping and empowering others</p> <p>Featured qualities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often looked to others for validation • Often concerned with how he looks in the eyes of others • Expressed a strong desire for harmony and collaboration • Occasionally felt a sense of responsibility for how others feel (i.e., demonstrated a subtle sense of guilt) • Showed strong emotional empathy (affective empathy) toward others and demonstrated some perspective-taking (cognitive empathy) • Able to rely on his own internal authority yet tended to defer to external influences for direction (i.e., other esteemed individuals), especially in difficult conflict situations • Capable of constructing and articulating a point of view independent of others, though demonstrated a tendency to lump his point of view together with others’
Orientations to conflict	<p>Espoused approach: Accommodates others’ interests and seeks to resolve conflict</p> <p>Demonstrated approach: Tendency toward accommodation and avoidance, though assertive if required of him (especially by external influences); passively strategic when seeking to protect the harmony of the social system and his own interests</p> <p>Moderate congruence between espoused and demonstrated approaches</p>
Theory applied (actions and behaviors demonstrated)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Followed protocols and adhered to organizational norms • Assertive when it was required by an external influence (and demonstrates moderate discomfort in this approach) • Navigated situations employing moderate strategic thinking • Showed a propensity to stay in his “own lane” and not “rock the boat”
Gaps and limitations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Struggled to see the value in another’s perspective when noticeably different from his own • Limited capacity for complex forms of thinking and systems thinking when in conflict • Limited capacity for seeing creative opportunities in conflict situations
Additional insights/implications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focused on harmony among others • Concerned with maintaining personal comfort in conflict situations • May not account for the impact of his decisions and actions on the larger stakeholder group or system • Limited capacity for systems thinking

Emma “4/3”

Emma’s journey into higher education leadership is anything but traditional. She is a first-generation college graduate who first earned a two-year degree in accounting through a correspondence course while her husband was in the military. In her late twenties, Emma’s family settled in a Midwestern metropolitan area, and she started a job at a university bookstore as a cashier. At that point, she restarted her undergraduate education from the beginning, eventually earning a bachelor’s degree in business administration. Prior to this change, she had worked as a manager in a big box retail store while her husband served in the military.

At the university, she worked in several different support staff positions over a decade. She was eventually promoted to a director position, where she oversaw the undergraduate programs in the business school. She completed an MBA at the university the same year she started in a director position in the business school. Emma continued to work in the director role for nearly a decade. She decided to leave the position in the late 2010s after significant changes occurred in her department, which significantly impacted how she conducted her role. She shared at multiple points throughout the interviews that had these changes not occurred, she would likely still be in the same position. She found deep meaning in her role as the director, especially in the relationships she built with the students in the department.

She left this role for a new position as an associate dean for the mathematics and business programs at a community college. At the time of this study, she had been in this role for approximately four years. The same year she made this change, she started a part-time PhD program focused on higher education administration and was actively working on her doctorate during the interviews for this study.

Emma's Meaning-Making Structure

At the time of this study, Emma constructed meaning near the middle of the journey from the socialized mind toward the self-authored mind and was determined to construct meaning from the “4/3” mindset. She was not equilibrated at one epistemological structure (mindset) but instead alternated between the two.

Her socialized mind showed up when she demonstrated the need for validation from others that she admires and respects, showing a reliance on external authority for standards, expectations, validation, and belonging. Emma did not demonstrate that she spends significant amounts of energy considering what others are thinking, though when experiencing interpersonal tension or conflict, she displayed a propensity to defer to and rely on the socialized mind, for example:

[When] people are mad at me, it makes me sad. When people are unhappy with me, it hurts me like a little girl. It causes me anxiety. Like, I'm up at night. I need a lot of positive energy in my life. It's like when my boss says, “Oh, you did a good job,” I don't think he knows how much I need to hear that.

Her self-authored mind showed up more frequently throughout the interviews, which is one indicator that it is the stronger mind (thus the “4/3” score versus a “3/4”). Moreover, more telling than frequency was that the self-authored mind showed up as the predominate mind that she leaned into especially when navigating conflict. Additionally, she demonstrated the capacity to hold others' points of view objectively, and she related them as separate from her own. This capacity is structurally different from constructing meaning from the socialized mind, in that she demonstrated the ability to view as object what was once subject to her (i.e., identify another's perspective as separate from her own and consciously mediate between her own and others' perspectives).

She demonstrated susceptibility to the temporary loss of her self-authored system when empathetically attuned to others' interests, especially those whom she respects (or in positions of power and influence). However, she demonstrated that she could rely on her own self-generated values and take responsibility for a decision even when contradictory to another's. She could take perspective on and responsibility for her 3ish system and its role in her meaning-making process.

Moreover, she demonstrated her ability to reflect on when she was influenced overtly by the socialized mind and reflect on it objectively, a critical sign of movement beyond the 3ish system toward the 4ish system of the mind. One such reflection from her SOI is provided below:

I remember being in my 20s thinking, I don't know where I'm going to land on issues. I was such a flip-flopper. I didn't really know. But then as you go through those stages of life, and you figure out who you are and what you stand for and what your convictions are and what your values are. And I don't know what age that happens, but there's a point where you're like, you know what, this is who I am. I'm no longer guilty because I'm not taking my kids to church anymore because that's not who I am. That's not what I'm going to do. I know that this is the values I have politically and spiritually and as a mother, and in my career, this is how I view things that I want in my life. And be pretty confident about where I stand in those convictions. But I think that takes a level of maturity and I remember wishing I had it at one point and being grateful when I reflected back at one point thinking, yeah, I think I have that now.

She demonstrated a "4/3" score on the SOI, indicating that her self-authored mind, the 4ish system, exercises more influence than the 3ish system. Additionally, her socialized mind, the 3ish system, is still influential and may take a prominent role in certain situations (e.g., in some conflict situations), however it is now modified by the self-authored mind.

Vignettes of Emma's Conflicts

During the second interview, the Critical Conflict Interview (CCI), Emma detailed two distinct conflicts. The first one took place in the year preceding the interview, and the second's

origin goes back several years, yet the aftermath of which she continued to navigate at the time of the interview. This section will provide vignettes of each of these conflicts, followed by a brief discussion pertaining to the implications drawn from the conflict scenarios and how they relate to the aims of this study.

Conflict 1: Faculty Conflict Over Textbook Selection

Before the onset of COVID-19, Emma dealt with a difficult conflict with a tenured faculty member, leading to the faculty union's involvement. The conflict centered around textbook controversy, in which an adjunct faculty member chose not to assign her campus required textbook for the course he was scheduled to teach. Emma understood his reasoning for not assigning this textbook. The required textbook was written by one of the college's tenured faculty members, a professor based out of her campus and who worked in her division. The textbook was required in this specific course on her campus; however, it was not required in the same course on other campuses.

Initially, Emma reached out to the distraught faculty member, who conveyed his frustration at the break in protocol. However, he did not show a willingness to communicate with her directly and immediately went to the faculty union. His lack of willingness to work through this situation directly with her proved to be a point of frustration for Emma.

From Emma's perspective, the textbook itself was only part of the conflict at hand. She conceded that the textbook was not particularly well written, and it lacked supplementary materials, which, as she shared, "somebody who teaches full-time and has been doing so for 20 years, may not need the ancillaries as much as somebody who does it part-time." The adjunct faculty who assigned a different book argued that the required text did not provide sufficient

ancillary material; hence he chose a different text. Additionally, Emma identified the adjunct faculty as an exemplary educator and someone who built an excellent rapport with students and agreed that she understood his need for a textbook that more thoroughly supported his ability to teach the course content and teach it well.

According to Emma, the adjunct faculty member was candid in his stance, stating: “If I have to use that book, just let the [faculty] coordinator know that I’m not going to teach using that book [sic].” She did not want this to happen and explained that:

I just thought that was pathetic to let that happen . . . I thought this is wrong. This is the wrong answer, and it doesn’t serve a higher purpose to defend the book. The book is not worth defending, but this guy and the talent that he brings is [worth defending].

Additionally, Emma identified that for the tenured faculty, the situation quickly digressed into a power-based conflict. For him, the issue was not just about the textbook conflict; rather, it was about “his authority over” the text selection and “his pride of authorship,” as he was the author of the required text. Furthermore, she perceived a “conflict of interest” in requiring the book he wrote to be used by all adjunct faculty at the campus, especially when the quality was not to the standard of other textbooks.

In response to this debacle, Emma became inventive in her approach to resolving this conflict and suggested to her supervisor, the academic dean of the campus, that the adjunct faculty’s assigned course be moved to a different campus, one where this specific textbook was not required. She clarified that action went against standard procedure, but she did not want to lose this adjunct faculty, as she explained it was “the best thing to do for the students, [not] to lose this guy.” As she conveyed, her dean backed her in this unconventional solution, saying, “Oh yeah, it makes perfect sense. Do it. Do it.”

Emma voiced that she would not have pursued this option without the backing of her dean. However, she felt compelled that this was in the best interest of the students to take this action. Reflecting on this experience, Emma shared:

But I still feel like this is unresolved conflict with the full-time faculty member and I'm going to have to figure out how to get back [to a workable relationship] with him and I don't think that's going to happen while we're remote. I think it's going to take a long time. But I also feel like if it happened again today, I probably wouldn't do it again, because I knew doing it once was a little out of bounds. I won't do it again . . . But if I had to do it again [for] the first time, I would have, which is really different from my normal take. It's very different. Usually, I'm a rule follower and I stay within the bounds and respect the whole full-time faculty thing. Even when it doesn't make sense to me, it's like, it's fine. I'm not going to argue with their right to make decisions and their academic freedom, even when it impinges upon other people's academic freedom. Because that's the rank that they've earned and that's fine and I'm not going to change that myself.

For Emma, this situation points to her evolution toward greater self-authorship. She identified what she believed to be in the best interest of the students and tried to address the situation in a slightly disruptive way (something she historically would not have done). As she stated later, "If my boss and my chain of command didn't support it, I wouldn't have done it. I'm not going to do that. I want to keep my job. Politically it was dangerous, but I did anyway."

Developmental implications for conflict from this vignette. In this conflict situation, Emma leaned into her self-authored mind to push the boundaries to support something that she believed was the best thing for the students. She found a creative workaround to the situation as a way of resolving the initial conflict, even though she was not following the correct procedure. She recognized that she would have likely not done this without the support of her academic dean; however, she was compelled to do it and followed on her own values and personal ideology in taking action.

From a conflict standpoint, she allowed herself to become creative and strategic in her problem-solving process, but only after she consciously permitted herself to do so. She also went to her supervisor to gauge the viability of this unorthodox solution and garner his support. Moreover, it is not just what she did that demonstrates to her developmental mindset, but the process and manner in which she constructed meaning that led to this action. Additionally, her expressed need for support from her dean to act, even though she knew what she believed to be right in this situation, demonstrated how her 3ish system was modified by her 4ish system (demonstrating her “4/3” mindset).

Conflict 2: Navigating Faculty Members Unwilling to Change

Similar to Emma’s first conflict, the second conflict she depicted dealt with a tenured faculty member in her department that escalated to the point where the faculty union became involved. As Emma described it, not long after assuming the role of assistant dean at the community college campus, she noticed a trend in the student complaints directed toward faculty that were coming across her desk. She went as far as counting the number of complaints she had received in her first year in the role, and 88% of the complaints made by students in the academic divisions she oversaw were about the same faculty member (out of nearly fifty complaints during this period).

As an associate dean who expressed a commitment to student success, she realized that *something* was going on with this faculty member that needed to be addressed. She initially decided to reach out to the faculty member after consulting her supervisor, the academic dean. In the initial meeting, Emma attempted to engage the faculty member in a constructive conversation to address the reasons for these complaints coming from students. As she described:

I try to talk to her about it. She's very reluctant and resistant and defiant. When I had complaints coming in, I made suggestions. I said, do you try this? Do you try that? She was so offended that I was interfering with her academic freedom and who did I think I was, and I have no right to tell her how to teach her class, and on and on and on.

The faculty member resented the feedback and did not want to engage with Emma and chose instead to bring the issue to the faculty union, which led to Emma's first experience meeting with a union representative. When the meeting was first scheduled at the representative's request, she did not realize why they were meeting. She reflected on this initial meeting saying, "the union rep came to see me, and I thought we were just meeting, and it was very nice." Then, at one point, Emma asked the union representative, "Are you here to talk about something? Did something happen?" The representative responded in the affirmative and proceeded to discuss the situation with the faculty member who had made the complaint. Emma described this conversation, saying, "she told me [what was going on], and then she kind of blew it off. She kind of made it seem like not a big deal, but then she said, 'But it's my job to say this and this and this and this [sic].'"

However, the conflict persisted and escalated, and after several additional meetings with the union, the union president became involved. At this point, Emma explained that she felt like every week, a student was making a complaint about the faculty member, and the professor was "kicking people out of class left and right for different things."

She met with the union president, the union representative, and her academic dean in this process. The faculty member was invited to the meeting, but she declined it, conveying that she was paying the union to do this work and did not need to be there. In this meeting, Emma laid out the full extent of the conflict from her perspective. She had a list of all the complaints and all

the names of the students who had made them—plus other relevant information—and shared it with those in the room:

This is what I want to do. I want to boil all this down to a single sentence and say, the goal of all of this is to reduce the number of complaints that come to my office. She's offended that I'm talking to her students. She's offended that I'm involved. She's offended that I'm making suggestions . . . All I want to do is bring down the number of complaints. She can do that using my suggestions or do it some other way, it doesn't matter. But if we can just agree that this is too many complaints, that will be a starting point. That's where I think we would agree.

Emma negotiated with strength and intention and did so in a kind and well-intentioned way. She held a clear notion of what a constructive outcome would look like and conveyed it. Her approach was backed by her notion of what is suitable and right for the students. In this sense, the conflict was not about her. She could easily overlook the issues with the faculty member, but in her mind, it was a matter of what was best for the students, which gave her the strength to pursue this. At the same time, she felt strongly that she “needed to have [a] card for her.” The “card” was the power check. Emma needed to convey to the professor that she did not hold all the power. She stated:

I think just being able to show her that she didn't hold all the cards, even though I didn't have any intention of playing my card, because I didn't think we would get to that, it was really important to show it to her. Because in the power dynamic, I think that kind of broke the shell on the power dynamic.

Eventually, a meeting was convened with the union, the academic dean, the faculty member, and Emma. In this meeting, the union members—the representative and the president—helped to mediate a resolution. At one point, they had to caucus with the faculty member. An agreement was formed, which focused on specific performance and practice changes on the part of the faculty member in the classroom to reduce the number of complaints students were filing. Emma reflected that this was the outcome for she had hoped.

Since then, the tensions and complaints from students have decreased. As Emma stated, “Students aren’t getting kicked out of her class left and right because now she sees that she was not using the drop for non-attendance appropriately.” She went on to reflect:

So things are so much better, but we wouldn’t have gotten to where we are now—and a lot of people would say we still have a long way to go gotten—but we wouldn’t have gotten to where we are now without working through that huge drama that it took a lot of time and people and effort to get her to that point . . . and it was terrifying to see her go through that horrible meeting where she experienced every emotion at the heights of feeling.

In this process, Emma showed a willingness to work with the union and demonstrated a consciousness around the perspective that the conflict was not about her but something greater, the students’ needs and success. Emma credits the people she was working with in helping this work out the way it did. She went on to reflect on the nature of her relationship with the faculty in her department, as well as how her relationship with this faculty member has progressed since the high point of the conflict, stating:

I’m there to serve them. They’re not there to serve me. So, no. I think some who are friendly, like colleagues, have that interpersonal dynamic going on. I have that with some of them. But the ones that cause problems don’t care. It’s my job to care about them . . . she didn’t care about me. Although, she did look at my son’s puppies pictures the other day and asked me later about how the puppy was doing, which was huge. Huge! That was really big. During this pandemic, every once in a while, I call her about something and I always have to plan an hour because once I get on the phone with her when the pandemic hit, she just wants to chat, chat, chat. Isn’t that interesting?

Throughout the interview, Emma demonstrated how she continued to make a conscious effort to take the faculty member’s perspective and understand what motivated the professor in an effort to enhance Emma’s ability to communicate with her (indicative of the “4/3” mindset). Emma described this in one portion of the interview by saying:

I really have been trying to figure her out and I sort of got a picture in my mind about what motivates her and I’m trying to get behind what drives her. Because my goal isn’t to

argue with her, my goal is to reduce the number of student complaints. So, managing her takes up a lot of my time still to this day. She has to be managed. And that's what she needs. Some people need positive affirmations daily. That's a way to manage somebody if that works for you. She needs to be managed in a different way.

Toward the end of the interview, I began to ask her, "do you find that when you know you're supported, you're . . ." And she responded without me completing my question by stating, "More creative. You can be more creative because when you're not supported, you have to stay in the box."

Developmental implications for conflict from this vignette. It is clear that the escalation of this conflict was initiated by Emma, as she wanted to do what was right and best for the students. In order to do this, the faculty member had to be confronted and compelled to change some of her practices. This became a more complex conflict when the faculty union became involved, which could have influenced Emma to back down. However, she demonstrated that her personal and professional values were influencing her capacity to stand her ground and work with the faculty union in an assertive and collaborative manner in order to resolve the situation with the faculty member. Emma demonstrated that her self-authoring mind could move her toward facing a conflict straight on, though she did require validation and support from her academic dean (3ish). In to navigate this conflict, she intentionally and consciously worked to take the perspective of the faculty member with whom she was in conflict to better understand what was motivating her position and actions. This enabled her to strategically negotiate and eventually collaborate with the faculty union, ultimately getting much of what she desired out of this situation.

The tension with the faculty member was still not fully dissipated at the completion of the interviews, and Emma acknowledged that the relationship would be a work in progress for years

to come. Still, she did state that she saw significant changes with the faculty member, as fewer and fewer students were being “kicked out of class” and filing complaints against her.

Additionally, Emma acknowledged that their relationship has become more cordial.

Case Study Findings

In this case study, the two conflicts that Emma detailed contextually were quite similar, in that the primary individuals that she found herself in conflict were faculty within her department. Each of the conflicts did not come about because of significant external or internal organizational changes, but rather they were conflicts that emerged based on conflicting perspectives on how to approach important issues or problems that came to the attention of Emma as the associate dean. These conflicts were more relational in nature than organizational and therefore qualified as interpersonal conflict.

From a predominate self-authored mind, Emma was influenced by her personal values—what she saw as the right thing to do. In both cases, it was she that initially confronted the faculty member, escalating the conflict. She was not prompted to do this at her supervisor’s or anyone else’s request, but instead, her own self-authored system empowered her to take up each of these causes. Still, in both dynamic conflict situations, she did seek approval from her supervisor, the academic dean, and expressed that it was necessary for her to have his support and verbal approval in order to *feel* confident in addressing these issues. She knew internally what she needed to do, yet still leaned on her socialized mind in part, in order to receive the external validation, she needed to take action. Yet, even in deferring to the 3ish system, it was modified by the 4ish system of the self-authored mind.

Emma expressed her discomfort with interpersonal conflict many times throughout the interview process. She values harmony in the work environment, and conflict at its face value, from her perspective, is a sign that there is a lack of harmony. However, she demonstrated that she has the capacity to engage conflict in a constructive manner—being mindful of what is best for the students as well as the faculty and adjunct faculty that work in her division. The evidence from these interviews suggests that her willingness to engage conflict was dependent on whether or not the position or actions of the other party were in contrast with her self-generated values or personal ideology.

See additional elements and characteristics pertaining to key areas of this study demonstrated by Emma in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2*Summary of Key Findings for Emma*

Key Areas	Elements and Characteristics
Mindset (i.e., meaning-making structure)	<p>The self-authored mind is the moderately stronger meaning-making system. The socialized mind still is influential but no longer predominates.</p> <p>Demonstrated a “4/3” mindset (supported by interrater SOI evaluation)</p>
Meaning-making features exhibited	<p>Self-generated personal ideology (emerging): Doing what is fair and best for others</p> <p>Featured qualities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relied on her own internal authority, yet in conflict situations, would still question herself and at times looked for validation from an external source (i.e., other esteemed individuals) • Demonstrated self as the evaluator of own personal standard (though supplemented by others in authority) • Articulated her own point of view as different from others • Fluctuated between feeling guilty or responsible for another’s perspective and not feeling guilty or responsible, depending on context and various dynamics • Showed strong emotional empathy (affective empathy) toward others • Demonstrated keen perspective-taking (cognitive empathy), but required significant mental effort • Fluctuated between holding others’ perspectives internally and externally, depending on the context and/or the relationship • Consciously worked to distinguish other individuals’ values and interests from her own
Demonstrated orientation to conflict	<p>Esposued approach: Collaborative and problem-solver, yet does not like conflict</p> <p>Demonstrated approach: Assertive and collaborative, especially when her stance or perspective was validated by another individual whom she respects; predominantly perceived conflict as negative; a strategic thinker and exerted significant mental energy to understand the underlying interests and perspectives of others</p> <p>Moderate congruence between espoused and demonstrated approaches</p>
Theory applied (actions and behaviors demonstrated)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consciously works to take the perspective of the individual with whom she is in conflict with • Actively assertive, especially when compelled by self-derived values and goals (and especially when knows is supported by supervisor) • Demonstrated creative and strategic problem solving • Moderately adhered to protocols and organizational norms, though diverged at points when internally compelled to approach a situation differently • Navigated situations employing moderate to considerable strategic thinking (though required significant mental energy when situations were especially complex)
Gaps and limitations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires some external validation, especially in conflicts where there are important power dynamics to consider and when her approach may contradict established procedures and protocols • May struggle to see the value in others’ perspective when different from her own (though can understand it cognitively)

Additional insights/implications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires significant conscious effort to take others' perspectives • Consistently emphasizes how she feels in situations
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Brian "4/3"

Brian took a meandering journey before finding his way into higher education and eventually into leadership as a director of an education program. Brian was drawn into higher education because he sees the value of centering education in our society to bring about social justice and social change. Prior to pursuing a career in education, Brian had a nearly decade-long career as an attorney on the West Coast and realized that working in law was neither his passion nor something he particularly enjoyed. However, practicing poverty law influenced him to pursue a vocation in education and eventually in higher education leadership.

In the late 90s, he pivoted from law into education, working as a program director and primary school grade teacher, before transitioning into higher education in the mid-2000s. During his time as an educator, he earned a master's in teaching and a doctorate in education. In reflecting on his shift into higher education, Brian shared:

I moved into higher ed mostly because of the opportunity to sort of challenge myself . . . I [choose] institutions that had a social justice focus and mission . . . I feel like I want to be in institutions where I feel like I'm providing students who maybe wouldn't otherwise have the opportunity for an advanced degree to complete one. That's kind of where I am. It's kind of very similar even to my K-12 work . . . I can help bring about social change in some way through education.

Since pivoting into higher education, Brian has worked at five different institutions in faculty and administrative leadership positions. It is worth noting, since earning his EdD in the mid-2000s, Brian returned to earn a second liberal arts master's degree, demonstrating the value he places in ongoing education.

Brian worked at his current institution, a private non-profit, multi-campus university with campuses in multiple states for approximately a year and a half at the time of the interviews for

this study. The institution hired him as a director to lead the formation of a new doctoral program. He held the academic dean position for a doctoral program at another institution before this move. He worked in that role for over a decade. He explained that he left his previous institution in large part because of interpersonal conflict with another individual at the institution. Additionally, he shared that he “[loves] starting new things,” and he would have the opportunity to lead a new initiative in his new role. Shortly after joining the university, he took on an expanded role as a dean overseeing several programs, which was about to embark on a reorganization process while still maintaining his director role. This dean role was a newly established university-wide position that oversaw several programs.

Brian is a first-generation college graduate who grew up on the West Coast and was raised by an extended family member for a significant portion of his early years. He identified primarily as white, though acknowledged that one of his parents was Latinx. Additionally, he self-identified as gay and spoke to his experiences as a marginalized individual based on his identities as a gay man and half-Latino. These social identities influenced his social justice-minded worldview and personal value system.

Brian’s Meaning-Making Structure

Brian constructed meaning from both a self-authored mind (4ish system) and a socialized mind (3ish system), while the self-authored mind was demonstrated to exercise more influence within his meaning-making structure. He places significant emphasis on his need to receive feedback and validation from others, especially in the professional context. However, he exhibited the ability to take perspective on his socialized mind while leaning into his self-authoring mind. Early in his first interview (the SOI) he stated:

I think I've always been someone who's tried to achieve. A lot of the goals I set out to do are probably based on others' approval and what others say a successful person should be, in terms of whether it's having a really good GPA or becoming a professional, just all that. I do think that I tend to have others' vision of what success is painted for me.

This reflection indicates a socialized mind at first glance. However, his ability to look at this objectively hits at a slightly more complex meaning-making system, demonstrating the presence of a 4ish system.

By looking at other bits from the SOI, and as we dug deeper into examples of how he constructs meaning, he spoke to his intersecting social identities as someone who is both gay and half Latino. As he reflected, he connected his experiences of navigating life with these identities to his commitment to advocating for equity and social justice. Toward the end of this reflection, he stated:

Definitely, my commitments aren't just sort of like I'm woke, and I just know that I'm supposed to do this. It's sort of like . . . I just have sort of an internal navigation that's leading me in this direction. I don't tell people about it for the most part. I just let them make whatever assumptions they want to make about where I'm coming from.

This “internal navigation” that he objectively can take perspective on—though still in a limited way—indicates the presence of a 4ish system, as he articulates a theory of self.

Moreover, imposter syndrome came up several times in his SOI, and the way he framed this was based on how others perceived him. He shared his experience of what he refers to as “imposter syndrome,” which was based largely on the expectations and perspectives of others.

I think that that's probably just my own imposter, like knowing where I came from and seeing some self-doubt that I would say I doubt myself to some extent, but more so I'm more concerned that people aren't going to see me for what I really can do.

The self-authored mind does show up more strongly as he demonstrates a self-generated ideology tied to social justice and advocating for people who hold limited power within a given

social system. Brian provided an additional example from his SOI, which aids in revealing the marginal authority of the self-authoring mind over the socialized mind, as he stated:

So, I would say that although there are certain outward pieces of what success is that are imposed on me, I suppose, and that I try to meet, there's also sort of an internal part that makes me even feel better that no one else really notices, but I know for myself that it adds to my success.

This statement is revealing, as here Brian takes responsibility for the presence of a socialized mind influence in his construction of meaning, yet it is modified by the self-authored mind, supporting the “4/3” mindset designation. Brian can take perspective on the influence of his 3ish system and view it objectively. It plays a role in his construction of meaning; however, it is the capacity to view it as object and transcend it by leaning into the 4ish system that demonstrates the self-authored mind is slightly strong than the socialized mind—thus the “4/3” score.

Moreover, the second and third interviews with Brian for this study confirmed the “4/3” score, with the self-authoring mind holding marginally more influence in this construction of meaning. Several examples will be highlighted in the following section.

Vignette of Brian's Conflict

Unlike the other participants in this study, Brian honed in on one complex ongoing conflict scenario that he has been working to navigate for the entire previous year previous to the interviews for the study. However, throughout the interviews, he touched on multiple conflict situations under the larger umbrella of the ongoing organizational change initiative. In 2019 Brian started in a new leadership role, as he shifted to a different institution of higher education, where he was hired as the lead administrator for an education program. Shortly after his hiring, he and his new colleagues were notified that the university planned to undergo a significant

reorganization of the program along with other similar programs. This process included stakeholders from across the institution.

As Brian shared, this would be “a major shift, major change for the whole university.” With the pronouncement of this reorganization process came a significant amount of resistance from both faculty and staff. In his case, Brian became involved in meetings with other academic leaders at the institution collectively tasked with making this change happen. He shared from his perspective that there was “really no direction—or very little—other than just make it happen.”

Shortly after these planning for change meetings were underway, the small group of program heads were tasked by university leadership to determine their own leadership structure. The group determined that electing one individual as the point person made the most sense instead of equally sharing the leadership responsibility. Eventually, Brian, the newest member of the university, was voted by the small group of leaders tasked with engaging in this process to assume the responsibility as the lead, in part because he had the experience at this level of leadership at his previous institution. This initial step in the process involved some interpersonal conflict, specifically with one of the other department administrative leaders who, as Brian perceived, attempted to “undercut” him because they aspired to be nominated to lead the group. Brian reflected on this dynamic by stating:

[The individual] had preferred to be the [nominated leader], even though they didn’t say so at the time, that’s just sort of an ongoing—I wouldn’t even categorize that as something that’s particularly difficult or critical for sure . . . It’s really a matter of personality and just sort of clashing a little bit. It’s something that’s very manageable for me. I don’t feel like it’s creating anything for me other than some annoyance and really testing my patience and that sort of thing.

Though this person tested Brian’s patience, the tension was minimal compared to what he had to navigate with several of the other stakeholders and department leaders, in that this

individual was at the very least in support of the reorganization plan and vision. He explained that within this small group of leaders, a few individuals in this group were “absolutely against it happening.” He continued to speak to this by sharing that the other program leaders oversee “whole programs that then have their own faculty. I don’t know what kind of communications are going on there, but they’re definitely not fully supportive of it. So, there are conflicts at every step of the way.”

One of the first tasks Brian assumed in this process was to complete a comprehensive review of the programs’ budgets. He began pulling budgets together, going through everything in preparation for the reorganization process; however, the resistant program leaders were dragging their heels and not providing him with the information he needed in a timely fashion. He reflected on this dynamic in saying:

[The] people who are the most against the [reorganization] have not even set up a meeting with me yet to go over their budget and it is due [soon] and I’ve sent multiple emails. The other [individuals] right away responded and I’m meeting with them [sic]. But [the others are] just not being cooperative about that. There’s really no choice for them to do this, but I feel like it’s kind of making my life very difficult. I don’t think it’s necessarily an overt conflict at this point. Like, I’m not in some sort of fight with them, but I feel like we’re in conflict, but maybe more—I don’t know if it’s more of a passive aggressive thing, but they’re just not following through and they’re making me ask repeatedly for a meeting so we can talk about the budget.

This resistance caused frustration for Brian, as their actions directly impacted his ability to complete essential tasks in this reorganization process. Furthermore, he recognized conflict not just as fighting but instead insinuated that there was tension between himself and the individual stakeholders who were—as he expressed—passive-aggressive in their form of resistance to the changes.

Brian expressed that one of his intentional approaches for constructively navigating the change process was getting to know the faculty and staff in the involved programs across the university and building rapport with them. His initial step in this approach was attending the programs' faculty meetings and introducing himself. He expressed that part of his intent was to hear from other stakeholders, not just the program leaders, and provide them with a space to air their concerns regarding this initiative and to engage in some conversation around the opportunities that would come with this reorganization.

After having met with all the faculty groups, his next step was to organize a virtual event that would bring faculty together from the different campuses, providing them with an opportunity to interact with the larger group of faculty. However, the program leaders who were nonresponsive regarding the budgets were again not cooperative. Brian implied that this was another act of resistance toward the overall aim of the reorganization process. This led to an increased feeling of frustration for him. However, he stated that this did not derail him from the work, as he shared, "I'm just trying just to keep it moving forward anyway." Eventually, he scheduled the meeting without the input of the program leaders, who never responded.

Though Brian felt frustrated by this display of passive resistance, he transcended his feelings and demonstrated the ability to empathize with and take the perspective of the resistant parties. In doing so, he separated their negative feelings toward the institution's reorganization initiative, as he articulated:

They're sort of angry at the university. It's not really so much at me. Honestly, they're not blaming me for anything. They're not saying, why are you doing this? They know that I'm being forced to do it. At least that's how they're looking at it. I actually want it to happen. I think it's a good thing. Maybe that's because I'm new and I don't feel like I'm giving up anything. I feel like they each feel like they're giving up something with this change. Because they're used to having their local campus be sort of the hub of

everything. That's their identity. And I understand it. They're worried about what that's going to mean.

Here he highlighted what perhaps was the crux of the underlying conflict in this situation. People felt and perceived that the changes were forcing them to give up something essential. He conveyed that the individuals opposed to the reorganization perceived the change as threatening their interests and identity. They did not have a clear vision of where the end of this process would lead, and this uncertainty influenced their worries and fears.

Moreover, looking at the structure of what Brian conveyed, he demonstrated characteristics of a 4ish system in this situation. He constructed a point of view independent from the other individuals while also integrating their viewpoints into his own, now more expansive perspective. He also refrained from taking their feelings and behaviors personally, understanding that their own systems of meaning were distinct from his. Moreover, he empathized with them without feeling guilty or responsible for their feelings, recognizing that he was not responsible for their experience.

Brian also highlighted that another crucial element that contributed to the tension and conflict at the institution regarding this change was directly related to its timing. The reorganization plan was announced and initiated in close proximity to when the COVID-19 pandemic arrived and began to spread rapidly throughout the United States. He highlighted how faculty and program administrators were already stretched thin adapting to the new environment, particularly regarding adjustments in teaching and learning. Moreover, Brian emphasized the reality that people's anxieties were high as they dealt with more complexity and uncertainty in the workplace and their personal lives. This again demonstrated his capacity to take others' perspectives and empathize with them.

Brian expressed that he felt the immense pressure of successfully leading and navigating this process with the programs he oversees, and it was compounded by the reality of working through this during a global pandemic. He shared that “the additional layer of fear and resistance that comes from the unusual nature of [the] structure of our university and the times that we’re in with the pandemic.”

Beyond working to build rapport with the various program’s faculty and staff, one of the other ways Brian approached the resistance to change and the conflict associated with it was to reframe the reorganization as an opportunity that could be beneficial to all parties and programs. He provided this example of a constructive reframing of the change:

I use the analogy of the European Union. I said, “Look, we’re going to sort of spill the share of resources across boundaries, figure out budgetary how to have faculty be able to work in more than one program, maybe students take courses across the university in different ways, and work together in positive ways. Maybe we could get better marketing if we’re like a unit and we can all benefit from marketing as a school of education.” Just things that. “But otherwise, still maintain your culture within your [program]. I’m not going to try to interfere [and] micromanage individual programs. Things can sort of operate that way, as they have been.”

This demonstration of reframing the situation with a more constructive bend sheds light on his collaborative orientation toward working through conflict. Moreover, he appealed to the stakeholders’ interests and affirmed some preservation of the unique cultures within the individual programs.

Another layer that impacted Brian personally was the “pressure from above,” as he brought his concerns and the obstacles he was facing to high-level leadership concerning the administrators and faculty’s resistance. As he articulated:

They want me to get outside of my sort of nice guy approach and be a little bit more top-down. They’re not saying I have to do that, but I would say that some of the suggestions for how I would approach something are precisely the reasons why faculty

don't respect some of what's happening from above because it is very sort of top-down authoritarian from their perspective. And that's not how I operate. So, I feel like I'm kind of between the faculty and then the upper administration.

A relational approach to leadership was core to how Brian leads, which he perceived as being in contradiction with the top-down hierarchical form of leadership he perceived to be embedded in the institution's highest level of leadership culture. He shared that the high-level leaders were not necessarily pressuring him to be more authoritative and forceful in his approach; however, as he stated, there is an "expectation that I get this done."

Moreover, Brian conveyed the feeling of being caught in the middle, acting in a sense as a liaison between, and an advocate on behalf, of both upper-level leadership at the university and the midlevel administrative leadership and faculty. This tension of functioning both liaison and advocate, contributes to the muddled dynamics of the situation, which further increased the sense of tension and conflict. He expanded on this by stating:

I think that there is some element of [program members] wanting me to be more aggressive toward upper administration and be sort of an advocate and a champion for things like, let's slow this down or let's not do X, Y, or Z. And I would say that makes me really uncomfortable too. I don't want to be in conflict with my boss, who is telling me one thing and then . . . So, I'm still trying to navigate how to deal with that.

This constant tension and conflict clearly put stress on Brian. As one who vocalized his discomfort with conflict at several points throughout the interview process, he expressed that he especially does not like being involved in interpersonal conflict—as he described:

I don't like being in conflict, at least, with people, with individuals. That's one reason I got out of law because it was really built on conflict. I definitely understand that it can be healthy to have differences of opinion and ways of doing things and sort of come to something better through that diversity of viewpoints and stuff. But when I think conflict, I think more of its sort of two ways of doing things, or ideas sort of bumping up against each other and then trying to figure out where there's going to be some give or some take . . . There can be a lot of discomfort with that from me. Because probably my inner child is probably telling me, "Just give them what they want. Don't fight. I'm not a fighter."

. . . But I understand this is what the expectation of me is as a professional, so I have to sort of take on the role of a person who is confident and strong in moving forward the agenda.

In this statement, Brian demonstrated both the socialized mind and the pressures and expectations from the outside, influencing his construction of meaning in conflict situations. Moreover, he expanded on how he understands conflict and his discomfort with interpersonal conflict (a characteristic that can indicate the socialized mindset's presence and influence on one's meaning-making).

When asked to describe his thinking and process for making decisions during this ongoing process when there are competing interests, especially when specific stakeholders are making unworkable requests, he shared:

I weigh whether or not something is realistic based on my experience with the situation and the people involved. If it's totally unrealistic, why would I—it's almost like I feel like I have X amount of free tickets or something that I can use if they'll stay within the good graces of the leadership above me so that I have to save them for things that I think are important. By important, I would mean, I would say, what's good for student learning, what's good for the programs academically. I have to say, that's my main interest. I do care about faculty, as well, but I would say, for me, it always comes down to the student piece . . . And of course, what's important for faculty in the sense that if they're not happy, if they're not getting what they need, the resources they need, then the student experience isn't going to be good. But I think that to the extent that I would pick a battle over something for faculty, it's ultimately through the lens of, so what does this mean for students? . . . I feel like I have a limited amount of times I can do something like that. So, I just kind of always have to weigh how important is and then if it's realistic at all, given what I know that the situation to be financially.

Not only does Brian demonstrate a capacity to make sense of complex relationships and dynamics in this statement, but he also demonstrated a self-generated ideology, which involved advocating for what was in the best interests of the students and their learning. Again, this demonstrated the self-authored mindset's influence in his meaning-making system, enabling him to hold the desires and interests of the other stakeholders in a secondary position in his mind.

In line with this, Brian stated that “I definitely pick my battles.” He assesses these battles—these conflicts—based on his personal ideology of seeking to improve situations for students (or framed more generally, doing what is best for and advocating for the interests of those in lower power positions within the social system), how realistic a position or request is of being accomplished, and by considering the amount of “free tickets” he holds at the time (as mentioned in his account above).

Moreover, he shared that “I like trying not to assert power over people and instead be more part of the team, but also just showing that I have a skill set that could be useful.” This is in line with his relational and collaborative approach to leadership (as well as his personal ideology). Additionally, he demonstrated self and social awareness concerning his social identity and how others perceive him, as he stated:

I was trying not to be the white guy who came in and took over. I didn’t want to be perceived in that way and I always try to not be perceived in that way. I don’t know if anyone really felt that, but I tend to not carry myself that . . . I think maybe the fact that I’m gay takes a little bit of the edge off of my maleness . . . I think it changes the perception among people. And plus, yes, I’m white, but I’m also Latino. I’m half Mexican American. It’s so funny because . . . I’m someone who is often, just even if you don’t really know me, you just meet me and say, “Oh yeah, he’s a straight white guy.” So, I understand that that can carry a lot of different things. Probably in the circles in which I move, it doesn’t necessarily carry—because people are much more critical thinkers in terms of the people that I’m around.

In this same vein, Brian spoke to his emotional intelligence stating, “I think I have good emotional intelligence, and I think I can sort of figure out where people are at that moment.” He explained that he intentionally endeavors to “keep tabs” on people and what is going on in their lives, and the stressors and pressures they are dealing with at any given time. With this insight, he explained how he tries to “calibrate how I’m going to interact over something that might be a

source of conflict based on what I think their emotional state is at that moment or what they're going through or how they're likely to respond."

This capacity to empathize and take the perspective of others in a genuine way enables him to adapt his responses to conflict situations on an individual level. As a relational leader, he consciously seeks to meet people where they are. This approach he extended not only to faculty and program leaders but also to students.

In ending, Brian reflected on a course he recently taught within the first year of the pandemic and explained that he navigated the course with the intention of being "very flexible" with the students while also pushing the students to put in the effort.

I was trying to figure out where they were. Because I knew each student had different things going on, whether they were teachers trying to navigate teaching on Zoom or they had kids or they had COVID themselves, whatever, and so you try to deal with that. So, I would say that would be a source of good, I don't know if it's conflict, but controversy within the program, is trying to figure out, again, what's best for students. But also, I think what's best for students is also delivering a high-quality program and making sure that they're prepared to write their dissertation and all that.

Case Study Findings

The crux of the complex conflict(s) Brian navigated in the early stages of this reorganization process dealt with individual administrative leaders and faculty who were obstinate and resisting the changes that were in process. This resistance made Brian's role significantly more difficult, heightening the tension between him and the uncooperative leaders and faculty. Perceivably, the administrative leaders of the various education programs perceived some threat to their interests and their faculty's interests. They were slowing down the process with the conceivable hope that this organizational change effort would fizzle out and the current structure and mode of operation would remain intact.

As an individual who demonstrated the presence of both the socialized mind and the self-authored mind, Brian was influenced by each of these mindsets at different moments as he navigated the early stages of this organizational change process. However, time and time again, when challenging decisions or actions had to be taken, he leaned into his 4ish system, which validated the influential role it occupied in his personal meaning-making system.

From a conflict perspective, when his personal ideology was threatened or perceived to be threatened, he tapped into his assertive powers, even though this was uncomfortable for him. Though he vocalized his discomfort with interpersonal conflict multiple times and at one point referred to himself as a conflict “avoider,” he demonstrated the capacity to not let his feelings of discomfort overwhelm him and was able to engage the conflicts directly if it was deemed important to him. This *important enough* evaluation can be attributed to a rising self-constructed theory of advocating for the interests of the students in the programs (i.e., those with limited power in this social system). He demonstrated this capacity, though he did not show that these were conscious decisions (which would point toward a 5ish system).

Moreover, Brian demonstrated a keen ability to empathize and genuinely take the perspective of others while consciously recognizing and evaluating them as separate from his own. He did this not by making assumptions based on individuals’ roles, social identities, and the accompanying stereotypes. Instead, he practiced a relational form of leadership (which may be linked in part to his 3ish system) wherein he sought to build relationships and get to know the individual people he was working with.

See additional elements and characteristics pertaining to key areas of this study demonstrated by Brian in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3*Summary of Key Findings for Brian*

Key Areas	Elements and Characteristics
Mindset (i.e., meaning-making structure)	<p>The self-authored mind is the moderately stronger meaning-making system. The socialized mind still is influential but no longer predominates.</p> <p>Demonstrated a “4/3” mindset (supported by interrater SOI evaluation)</p>
Meaning-making features exhibited	<p>Self-generated personal ideology (emerging): Advocate for those who hold limited power within the context of a social system</p> <p>Featured qualities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relies on own internal authority in many conflict situations, especially if there is a threat or perceived threat toward his personal ideology • Consciously recognizes the influence validation from others influences him (especially those who are in positions of power above him or who he respects) • Articulates his own point of view as different from others • Demonstrates limited accounts of feeling guilty or responsible for another’s perspective or feelings (depending on context and relationship) • Showed strong emotional empathy (affective empathy) toward others • Demonstrates keen perspective-taking (cognitive empathy) but required significant mental effort • Consciously works to distinguish other individuals’ values and interests from his own
Demonstrated orientation to conflict	<p>Espoused approach: Collaborative, picks his battles, though a confessed conflict avoider (especially uncomfortable with interpersonal conflict)</p> <p>Demonstrated approach: Strategic in his approach to conflict, only engaging in conflict that he deems are important (or required by his role); tends to “pick” battles that he perceives threaten his values and goals; strategic and relational in his approach to difficult conflict</p> <p>Moderate congruence between espoused and demonstrated approaches</p>
Theory applied (actions and behaviors demonstrated)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consciously works to take the perspective of the individual involved in a conflict (and to an extent those who will be impacted by the outcomes) • Takes intentional actions to foster collaboration • Can be assertive, especially personal ideology vulnerable/threatened • Works diligently to build relationships and rapport with other stakeholders • Can reframe a situation where conflict and tension are present and help others to view it from a more constructive and positive perspective • Exerts significant amounts of energy thinking through a conflict situation, and part of this energy is used in seeking to understand where others are coming from and what their motivations are
Gaps and limitations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appreciates external validation from others he respects, which if absent may lead him to refrain from engaging in certain situations • Self-conscious and occasionally feels like an imposter
Additional insights/implications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires significant conscious effort to take others’ perspectives, but is capable of this • Does not appear to take resistance personally

Christine “4/3”

Christine’s journey as a faculty and administrative leader in higher education institutions takes a familiar arc. After completing high school, she attended a large public institution in the Midwest for her bachelor’s degree. Following this, she worked for a short time in a coordinator position at a business school, where she had her foray into teaching. In the early 2000s, she completed her master’s degree in communication studies and went on to earn her PhD in the same field two years later. While working on her PhD, she worked as a graduate assistant, teaching courses in communication studies. With a doctorate in hand, she adjunct taught while seeking a permanent faculty position. In the mid-2000s, she accepted an offer to teach at a large public university in the Southwestern part of the United States as an assistant professor, eventually being promoted to associate professor and chair of the communication studies department. She taught at this university for over a decade before deciding to return home with her family to the Midwest.

In the region she grew up in, she landed a position as an assistant dean of liberal arts at the local community college. She worked in this role for nearly a year before securing another tenure track associate professorship at a medium-sized private Christian liberal arts and sciences university in their communication studies department. During the interviews for this study, she received confirmation that her application for tenure had been approved and that she would be promoted to full professor in the summer of 2021.

In addition to her duties as an associate professor, Christine served as the communication studies department chair, working with both undergraduate and graduate students. She was hired

with the understanding that she would assume this position immediately upon joining the university. As the chair, she was responsible for leading the department's faculty.

Christine has received many awards for her teaching and leadership. Moreover, she has published over a dozen articles and book chapters and takes pride in her scholarship and research. Christine is a white Christian woman, and she confirmed that these are aspects of her social identity that play a significant role in how she sees the world (characteristic of the 3ish system).

Christine's Meaning-Making Structure

Christine proved to be one of the individuals who initially was difficult to score, as some of the language she used was characteristic of the self-transforming mind; however, when attuned to the actual structure behind the language, it became evident that her predominate system of was that of self-authored mind, though her socialized mind maintained a notable influence. Thus, her determined SOI score was "4/3."

She demonstrated how she seeks to rely on her own internal authority; however, she showed that this was occasionally compromised by her desire to ensure that others are content or happy. She explained that she could differentiate between various aspects of herself and others, yet simultaneously demonstrated some blurs these lines in her mind, especially when navigating complex conflict. She demonstrated that she relates others as their own autonomous entities, propelled by their own psychological system of knowing (4ish system). Yet, she struggled at times to make this separation, as at times she *personalized* others' feelings and perspectives when in conflict situations, which she associated with "over empathizing." She openly grappled with this while reflecting on and describing her conflict scenarios. As she expressed:

It's been something that is so hard for me to let go of, and I think that I spend a lot of my thoughts dwelling on what motivates people to do things and how I can develop this understanding and empathy. And I think I do it too much sometimes. I do lean on it, and I do think that it's helpful, but for me, it's always been a challenge on where I'm going to draw the line so that it doesn't continue to be this handicap for me that takes me into over empathizing and then forgetting about what I needed out of it in the beginning.

Christine shared that her “natural inclination” is to “over-empathize.” This tendency especially comes into play if “I’m not being mindful . . . And I know that about myself.” This recognition of her inclination to over-empathize when she is not *being* mindful demonstrates a meaning-making structure transitioning from the socialized mind to the self-authoring, as she possesses the capacity to view this part of herself as an object. Still, this requires a “mindful” and concerted effort on her part.

At one point in the interview process, as she discussed the influence of mediation training and practice on her ability to engage conflict constructively, she shared an insightful anecdote:

After I started practicing mediation, I realized that there are going to be times when I’m never going to get to the bottom of something. And it should be okay sometimes for me to encounter someone and encounter their behavior and encounter their communication and just be okay with the uncertainty of not understanding where they were coming from or why, and still not internalizing it, but accepting it and tolerating it in a way that I don’t have to keep doing all these mental gymnastics, trying to do all this cognitive stuff to try to figure out what’s going on. There’s a way around it. And so, for me, it’s been this journey to try to figure it out.

Here she demonstrated that she recognizes the limitations of her still-present socialized mind. She demonstrated here and at other points throughout the interview that she does not need to understand and internalize the other’s point of view in ways where she becomes attached to the outcome. She recognized that she could just *let it be*, for it was not her own. It is not part of her but rather can be separate from her (4ish system). This recognition shows a shift to meaning construction wherein the 4ish system is incrementally stronger than the 3ish system. Yet, it is

critical to note that in some cases, she internalized and took responsibility for others' feelings, confirming the presence of the socialized mind (as will be examined in the forthcoming sections), yet, as is characteristic of the "4/3" mindset, even when she deferred to the 3ish system, her meaning-making was modified by influence the self-authored mind.

Vignettes of Christine's Conflicts

In the second interview, the critical conflict interview (CCI), Christine detailed two distinct complex conflict situations she navigated during the previous year. She was still navigating both conflict situations at the time of the interview. This section will provide vignettes of each of these conflicts, followed by a brief discussion pertaining to the implications drawn from the conflict scenarios and how they relate to the aims of this study. In Christine's case, the conflicts she describes are connected to changes at the college and in her department.

Conflict 1: Journeying Through New Territory With a Challenging Colleague

The first complex conflict Christine identified for this study dealt with navigating how her department handled a "revision of promotion and tenure guidelines" at the university, more specifically, how she navigated the relationship with a lecturer in the department who insistently asserted her own opinion and interests into a discussion point within the department.

Earlier in the academic year, several new classifications for faculty positions were proposed and approved by the university's faculty senate. The new classifications included a tenure track technical-type professor designation, a non-tenure track assistant designation, and a track for promoting lecturers (though not directly into a tenure track position). Initially, Christine did not put much thought into this new development, as she did not see it impacting her

department in any significant way other than the possibility of promoting a lecturer, which she viewed as an appropriate and potentially beneficial outcome for the department.

Following the approval from the faculty senate, she and other department faculty members thought it pertinent to include discussion around this change in the next department meeting; therefore, it was added to the agenda. During the department meeting, she perceived that the other faculty and she were of the same mind, specifically that the tenure track position had no immediate relevance to the department. However, there was one dissenting voice, the lecturer in their department. This individual expressed that she saw the need for another tenure track position in their department and saw the technical professor position as an avenue to creating a new tenure track line.

As Christine explained, the faculty senate proposed and accepted the new tenure-line specifically for one of the university's healthcare-related programs. The healthcare faculty wanted to hire a practitioner for their program. This role did not require a doctorate (all other tenured and tenure-track faculty at the university are required to hold a doctorate or another terminal degree). Christine's department did not offer any programs of study or courses that required this type of professorship.

Even though she held this understanding, as did many of the other faculty members in her department, the topic of this position kept coming up in subsequent department meetings. As she stated, "I was having a sense that there was still a lot of tension and unresolved feelings about it, so I wasn't pushing a decision by the department, and I don't like to take votes if I don't have to." Moreover, she explained that the norm in the department is to come to a consensus (whereas decisions at the faculty senate level are voted on).

After some time, the conversation in department meetings began to move on from this agenda item; however, Christine found out later that the individual pushing this issue was the department's lecturer, who taught a few of the introductory classes in the department. Christine realized that the lecturer pushed for the adoption of this new tenure-line largely because she had not earned a terminal degree (I will refer to the lecturer as "Riley"). Riley had earned a relevant master's degree yet expressed no interest in earning a terminal degree.

Eventually, the lecturer brought the matter up herself in one of the meetings, and Christine recalled her saying, "I see [the new classification] as a way for somebody like me who deserves to be tenured but doesn't have a path forward" to achieving tenure at the university. This was when it became more apparent to Christine why the department was unable to fully move past this matter as she elaborated:

I was very uncomfortable with this being the vehicle that someone like her would get tenure at the university. Because the tenure and promotion guidelines at the university level determine that you should be terminally degreed in your discipline and that you should have a record of research that accompanies your time at [the university], and she did not have either of those things.

Moreover, Christine referenced a conversation she had with the department dean, stating that the dean "told me she would never hire anybody as an assistant professor if they didn't have a PhD" in a relevant field, "and that you can't get promoted unless you're doing research."

The requirement for research became a point of contention in this conflict dynamic, as the lecturer repeatedly asserted that she had done research, yet, Christine pushed back, stating:

I think you're doing scholarship, but this is not peer-reviewed research. And it specifically asks when you get promoted for at least two peer-reviewed journal articles in your research area in order to be promoted. So even if we do this, what I feel like we're doing is setting you up in a system that was created in the spirit of something else. And you're not going to be successful unless all of a sudden you just start publishing in peer-reviewed journals.

This response from Christine upset the lecturer, and she countered again, stating she was “doing research.” Christine countered back, reiterating the distinction between scholarship and empirical research. Christine proposed exploring the lecturer advancement option, which Christine stated Riley would qualify for. At this point in the meeting, the tense conversation escalated, and the lecturer, in the presence of all the faculty, “indirectly diminished the importance of a terminal degree,” which all the other faculty had earned. Providing more insight into the conflict situation itself, Christine reflected on this situation and stated:

I know that they weren’t necessarily offended in an outward way because they understand that she’s a valuable part of our department and that she’s frustrated because she feels like she can’t get anywhere in our promotional structure in our department. And at the same time, I feel like what she’s lacking is an appreciation of how transformative a terminal degree is and what that means to both students and the university when you have that as part of someone’s responsibilities. But what happened, at least at that last meeting, was that she’s like, “Just because I don’t do research doesn’t mean I shouldn’t get tenure.” And [a] lot of us we’re thinking, we’re hired on the premise that we’re going to contribute new knowledge to the discipline, not like write a blog that has no references in it and call that research.

Following this exchange, Christine implied that a conversation among the faculty followed the lecturer’s proclamation and shared that she perceived the lecturer beginning to understand where the faculty were coming from. Christine shared how she responded, saying:

I ended up telling her, in the nicest way possible, that I cannot be comfortable making the argument to insert this clinical line into our promotion and tenure guidelines because I don’t see how people are actually going to be able to use it in our department and get promoted. I feel like we’re setting people up for failure.

Christine explained that there appeared to be a mutual understanding following this meeting among all parties involved. Christine wrote up a draft report and sent it to the dean. However, it was never reviewed to her knowledge. At this point in the timeline of this scenario,

it was a few months into the COVID-19 pandemic, and the university's leadership was preoccupied and in crisis management mode.

Sometime after this series of department meetings and the dynamic conflict with the lecturer, the department received approval to hire a tenure track faculty position for specific classes associated with one of the core programs in the department. A program that the lecturer had played an essential role in developing. The lecturer made her frustration known. From Christine's point of view, her anger was motivated by the fact that this newly approved position would not be a lecturer position, preventing her from being qualified to apply. Additionally, Christine shared:

But on top of that, she was mad that—I didn't tell her not to apply, but she very vocally said at a couple of the meetings that she already knows that she shouldn't apply because she already knows we're not going to hire her because we don't think that what she does is research. So, it's kind of [those] little digs, constantly little digs in the meetings toward all of us.

Christine expressed that this ongoing and layered conflict situation with Riley was constructed of many minor conflicts building up over multiple years. She provided examples of actions that contributed to the buildup of tension in addition to what has been highlighted in this vignette. She explained how the annual review process for Riley was a constant point of tension, in large part because Riley held two distinct roles at the university, wherein she reported to Christine and the office of one of the executive-level leaders at the HEI, complicating the professional and supervisory relationship Christine had with her. Yet, Christine was responsible for her annual review. (As Christine lamented, much of what Riley reported in her portion of the annual review had no direct connection to her responsibilities as a lecturer in the department.)

Moreover, before Christine joined the institution, Riley had worked as the interim department chair (now Christine's permanent role). She had made it clear that she thought she deserved that position permanently, further adding to the complicated dynamic between Christine and the lecturer. When Christine was hired and assumed the faculty chair position, Riley neglected to mentor her and support her as she learned and adapted to this role, as was the university's protocol.

Riley also copied the dean of the college—who in the reporting hierarchy was in the role above Christine—on an excessive number of her email communications, especially when she sought to bring attention to her accomplishments. Additionally, at the time of Christine's interviews for this study, there was an ongoing side conversation that Riley would potentially be promoted to a higher-level position within the provost's office while still maintaining a teaching position in the communications department.

The lecturer expressed, both explicitly and implicitly, on multiple occasions that she held a drastically different vision for the department. She sought a more siloed approach to the division of teaching responsibilities among the faculty, where each faculty would exclusively teach within their focus area and program track. Christine understood that Riley wanted students in the various departmental tracks to only take classes from the professors associated with that focus area. The professor of a particular focus area would also only advise students in that track (e.g., advising all the students in their focus area, teaching all the classes in that area, overseeing staff). Christine's philosophical and structural approach drastically differed from this in that she desired to foster collaboration among the faculty and cross-pollination among the students (e.g.,

she sees the value of working together as a faculty group and students taking their core coursework from a variety of different faculty).

An additional layer of tension Christine expressed concerned Riley's relationships at the university. She attended the same church as many of the employees at the college, including the dean. Christine shared, "I know she goes behind my back because she goes to the same church as the dean, and I know they have a relationship outside of the organization."

Throughout the interviews, Christine demonstrated that she empathized with Riley and intentionally sought to understand where she was coming from and what was motivating this behavior.

Her feelings of value, in my mind, seem to be attached to outward praise by other people in the workplace. And her ego is very fragile, in my mind. And I don't mean that like she has a problem. I just mean that it's something that is difficult for me to deal with because it's hard to give her compliments because she constantly does it on her own. I don't even get a chance to do it. I feel like when I write her review, it's so much of praise and ego stroking that I don't necessarily have to do with other people's reviews, just to make her satisfied with it. But it's not my style. I'm adapting a lot to accommodate being her supervisor in a way that's uncomfortable even for me sometimes . . . I feel like I'm constantly dealing with her, this one person in my department who feels like she does a better job than anybody else. Who feels like I could never hold a candle to what she would be capable of as a chair. There's all these things that keep popping up for me. So, it really is a problem for me, and I don't know that it's a problem for anyone else.

Here Christine took perspective on where Riley was coming from while also articulating that she perceived what Riley needed was not in line with her leadership and management style (i.e., she is not one to engage in "ego stroking"). Christine demonstrated the capacity to take perspective on her frustration toward Riley's motivations and behaviors. Yet, she admitted to continuing to accommodate her, even when she implied that she did not want to. In this example, though her 3ish system may prevail at times in this relational dynamic, it was modified by her

4ish system, and she could see the 3ish system as object (taking perspective on this part of herself and critiquing it). Additionally, even though she can understand the motivations of this other person, she was unable to resolve or transform this conflict and was caught in an uncomfortable conflict management circle she could not break out of. There appeared to be a part of her that thinks if she just tried a little harder to accommodate Riley, the conflict would eventually work its way to resolution (demonstrating the 3ish system). Yet, consciously, she recognized that it *probably* would not work out.

Christine also demonstrated the capacity to take perspective on her own interpretation of the behaviors Riley exhibited, stating:

Normally, if I just try to have empathy for someone and I just really try to understand, it must be frustrating if she really believes that she's making more contributions and better contributions than everybody else, but she [feels] like she's barely recognized. It really must be a frustrating situation for her. How can I help her with it? And I feel like I try. I try to point her in this direction or praise her.

Developmental implications for conflict from this vignette. Christine's current meaning-making structure caused significant internal conflict which she struggled to constructively navigate in this particular case. She exerted significant mental energy trying to navigate this relational dynamic constructively. This demonstrates, to an extent, the tension between wanting to fully overcome the influence of the socialized mind while it still held influence in her meaning-making. She was trying to *will* her still self-authored mind into a place of prominence. In this case, her socialized mind held a significant pull, yet it was still modified by the active presence of the self-authored mind. Additionally, this tension may have been caused in part by her personal ideology, of helping others, especially when resolving conflict.

Conflict 2: Reconciling How to Support New Faculty Navigating Institutional Obstacles

Christine's second conflict scenario involved the new tenure-track faculty member mentioned in the previous vignette. After agreeing to join the institution at the mid-point of the academic year, the new faculty conveyed that there was a discrepancy with her paystub. Based on what she understood as her agreed-to-salary based on her contract, the amount of compensation she had received within the first few months of taking the position did not align with her calculations.

The university hired the professor, a respected professional with a terminal degree, for the newly approved position relatively quickly, with the goal of having new professor join the department mid-academic year. The institution was still actively navigating the pandemic, but the university had laid off people and cut back salaries, which made this hiring odd timing, especially in terms of optics. Moreover, Christine expressed that beyond the timing of the hire, as the faculty chair, she was not involved in the salary negotiation for this individual. The department's dean handled this.

The new professor and Christine connected immediately, and Christine sought to support her during the transition and as she found her footing at the institution.

Within a short period of time, the new faculty member confided in Christine that she was concerned about her salary. Her initial payment was significantly less than she had anticipated based on her negotiated salary. She initially refrained from conveying the details of the situation to Christine because the dean told her that she was not supposed to discuss her salary with other employees. Christine insinuated during the interview that the culture in their department, especially as it related to pay, was secretive, and she disagreed with this approach. Initially,

Christine recommended that the faculty member contact the human resources individual who oversaw payroll, giving her the individual's contact information, as they might be able to help sort this matter out.

Following this exchange, the department's dean reached out to Christine and asked her how the adjustment was going for the new faculty member. Christine responded by saying:

I think she's adjusting fine. I know toward the beginning, when she first got here, she did have some questions about her paycheck and how everything was configured, so I don't know if anybody got a chance to talk with her about that.

At this point, the tension began to escalate as the dean began to ask Christine biting questions, which Christine paraphrased as, "What do you mean? What kind of questions? What did she tell you? What information do you have about this?" Then the dean proceeded to justify the new faculty member's higher salary than others in her department. This was not the issue for Christine. She simply wanted to ensure that the new professor had the support she required to sort out the discrepancy in her pay. Christine went on to describe what she understood to be the problem in this situation:

Essentially, what I see happening here is that there's a conflict that's unaddressed because [the new professor] is afraid to speak up about it and say to the dean, "I think they've made a mistake in the way that they're calculating my paychecks." The dean has pretty much told me it's none of my business. I don't need to be involved in it. And I don't believe that the people in human resources have been very helpful . . . So, I feel like because I'm the department chair, and also because I'm [the professor's main support], that I should step in. And I told [her] that. I said, "I feel like my hands are tied because you're asking me not to get involved. And now I feel like I'm not doing anything and maybe your paycheck is short."

In this situation, Christine desired to help and felt a sense of responsibility for the individual (3ish system). She wanted to support in fixing the problem. However, she felt as if she

was being denied permission to assist, which caused frustration. In reflecting on the conflict situation, Christine shared:

Maybe I'm inserting myself where I don't belong, but I just think it's terribly unfair if somebody has made an error. I'm trying to work with her [to problem solve the situation] . . . She's like, "I don't want to make problems. I'm just starting there. I don't want to be coming on to campus and creating all these problems." And so, I'm thinking in my head; sometimes, people know what's best for them. So even though this is a problem for [me], with her possibly not being paid fairly, maybe it's not a problem for her if she doesn't want to do this. It doesn't seem right to me.

This example of Christine taking on and internalizing someone the other individual's problem—or conflict—showed the presence of her socialized mind. It was not so much that she took an interest in the situation in the first place, but rather that she personalized it and felt partly responsible for finding a resolution, even though objectively, she recognized that perhaps she did not need to feel or think this way.

Case Study Findings

In this case study, the two conflicts that Christine detailed were contextually different. In each case, there were different power dynamics at play, the root causes were different, and she demonstrated different actions and behaviors, respectively. The first conflict came to the surface because of institutional changes, yet as revealed, it was more of a personality conflict, thus interpersonal in nature. Whereas the second conflict stemmed from a concern a colleague expressed regarding compensation but revealed that the conflict for her dealt more with institutional and departmental culture and values misalignment related to communication. These conflicts involved interpersonal, organizational, and intrapersonal elements.

In examining Christine's meaning-making, she provided indications of a self-generated personal ideology (characteristic of the self-authored mind), which involved a deep desire to help others. This was a constant theme throughout her interviews.

The expressed "need" to understand people's motivations was emphasized throughout her conflict scenarios, and yet she demonstrated the ability to take perspective on this aspect of herself (the 3ish system), which indicates the presence of the self-authoring mind (4ish system). Initially, I interpreted her "need" or desire to understand others' perspectives and motivations as being an aspect of her self-constructed theory; however, this initial interpretation was inaccurate. This desire did not directly concern her personal ideology, rather her concern for understanding others' perspectives was influenced by the socialized part of her mind, which motivated her to mold herself (again, 3ish) appropriately so as to resolve and bring an end to conflicts more swiftly.

Additionally, she repeatedly insinuates, if she cannot understand someone's motivations and respond to them in a constructive way, this becomes the biggest significant threat to her internally and, by proxy, how she chooses to navigate the situation.

See additional elements and characteristics pertaining to key areas of this study demonstrated by Christine in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4*Summary of Key Findings for Christine*

Key Areas	Elements and Characteristics
Mindset (i.e., meaning-making structure)	<p>The self-authored mind is the moderately stronger meaning-making system. The socialized mind still is influential but no longer predominates.</p> <p>Demonstrated a “4/3” mindset (supported by interrater SOI evaluation)</p>
Meaning-making features exhibited	<p>Self-generated personal ideology (emerging): supporting and helping others (especially with resolving conflict)</p> <p>Featured qualities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relies heavily on her internal authority • The self is the evaluator of her own personal standard (though influenced by how she interprets others’ reactions and perceptions, especially in conflict) • Articulates her own point of view as different from others • Demonstrates several accounts of feeling guilty or responsible for another’s perspective or feelings, but is aware of this and sees the value in not taking responsibility for others’ perspectives and feelings (admits to feeling torn) • Showed strong emotional empathy (affective empathy) toward others • Demonstrates keen perspective-taking (cognitive empathy) but required significant mental effort • Consciously aims to distinguish others’ values and interests from her own
Demonstrated orientation to conflict	<p>Espoused approach: Direct, resolution-focused, works for consensus, and not conflict avoidant</p> <p>Demonstrated approach: Deliberate in her approach to conflict; actively seeks to “resolve” conflict; values and works to understand and consider others’ perspectives (tendency to over-internalize others’ feelings); strategic and professional</p> <p>Moderate to high congruence between espoused and demonstrated approaches</p>
Theory applied (actions and behaviors demonstrated)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consciously and effortfully works to take the perspective of the individual with whom she is in conflict (and showed consideration of those who will be impacted by the outcomes) • Direct yet deliberate with her communication, and does not want to harm others or the relationships when communicating • Assertive but listens and seeks to understand the other’s perspective and feelings first (especially feelings) • Works to build relationships and rapport with others, but also shows strong professional boundaries
Gaps and limitations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can become frustrated when others not as direct in communication as her • Becomes disheartened when she struggles to understand another’s perspective and motivations • Seeks external validation from others in terms of how she perceives them to feel or think, which if absent tends to overly accommodate
Additional insights/implications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admits being overly empathetic (though this form of empathy she refers to deals more with emotional empathy rather than cognitive)

-
- She exerts significant amounts of energy thinking through a conflict situation (prone to overthinking) and a significant amount of this energy is used in seeking to understand where others are coming from and their motivations
-

Devin “4(3)”

Devin was new to his position at a military college on the East Coast. After serving the military for over 30 years, he retired from the military and, in retirement, took a placement in the college’s leadership and ethics program as an associate professor in 2017. After only a few years in this role, Devin was promoted to an administrative mid-level leadership position, working as an assistant dean under the college’s academic dean. This promotion took place at the onset of the COVID-19 global pandemic, and he was thrust into some tenuous situations which were exacerbated due to the virtual working environment.

Devin is in his fifties. He was raised Methodist (which played an essential cultural role in his upbringing). He studied philosophy and with a religious studies minor as an undergraduate student. As an adult, he became an “avowed atheist,” though he makes it a point not to discuss his views on religion or atheism at work and stated that he has no genuine interest in discussing it, as “I want it to be the least interesting thing about me.”

During his tours of active duty in the military, he became interested in leadership development, which initiated his desire to “contribute to leadership development” for folks in the military. Upon retirement from the military, he was drawn to working in higher education, not because of the allure of academia, but rather due to his genuine love toward—and interest in—continuing to influence “leaders be better across the [military].”

Devin is a first-generation college student and earned two master’s degrees in addition to his bachelor’s. Recently he began working toward a doctoral degree in management. Devin

enjoys and finds meaning in much of his work at his institution of higher education.

Additionally, he has come to terms with the reality that leadership in higher education functions differently than in the military—even at a military college.

Devin's Meaning-Making Structure

Devin primarily demonstrated constructing meaning from a self-authored mindset (4ish system). The socialized mind showed up in his meaning-making, but he is aware of it and demonstrated a conscious management of it in most contexts. At times he expressed his occasional longing for validation from others he respects and looks up to. He was, therefore, not fully equilibrated at the self-authored mindset. A self-generated personal ideology was present (a characteristic of a prevailing self-authoring mind). The personal ideology he demonstrated focused on a commitment to growth and improvement, both personally for himself and his organization. Devin was assessed to construct meaning from a “4(3)” mindset.

Some characteristics of this stage of development are his ability to actively take the perspective of others, actively reflect, take responsibility for his own perspective, and an initial capacity to spot the limitations of his still passively present socialized mind (3ish system). He can construct a perspective independent of others; however, he admits to holding other people's views in high regard, especially those in roles above him at the institution. Additionally, he demonstrates the capacity not to take responsibility for others' feelings most of the time (a characteristic of the self-authored mind) yet feels the weight of his decision and actions on others. However, he showed some tenuousness as he consciously worked to justify his actions and their impact on others. Devin's statement below demonstrates this, as he actively sought to engage in empathy and perspective-taking while he spoke to a conflict, he navigated wherein he

was responsible for taking action in demoting two individuals in his department (note: he is speaking in third person here):

But the torn part of me was I get that [sic]. I understood where they were coming from. And I empathize with this idea that, [they are thinking] I've had this title for a long time, the rest of the world sees me as that title. So, this feels like a demotion [for them]. And so, I was empathetic to that. It wasn't going to change their leadership—not behavior, they just couldn't [adapt] so it had to change, but I was empathetic to that piece. But I was torn because I knew what the right answer was for the organization . . . So, the torn piece was that as people, I understood where they were coming from. I don't think it would have been the way I felt, but at the same time, I thought [to myself], "well, [Devin], it's easy for you to say because you've been the [senior officer leading large groups of soldiers]." So, I said [to myself], "that's easy for you to say, [Devin], because you've had titles and you've never had [your title] removed. You never got fired or relieved for cause. So, try to see through their eyes how it feels for a civilian to finally get a leadership position and a title as director, in this case, that you're taking something away from them.

Frequently, while Devin was reflecting on his experience during the interviews he demonstrated elements that might be seen as an equilibrated self-authored mindset. However, when one peels back the language and looks below at its structure, he still has not fully developed into an equilibrated self-authored mind because of the conscious awareness of resisting the socialized mind (3ish system).

Additionally, as he often articulated throughout the three interviews, he has historically held an aversion toward conflict, but that he was realizing more and more that it is not "as bad" once he engages it as he initially thought (and felt). As he stated in the third interview:

[What] I have found in the times that I've taken on conflict head-on early, it's never as bad as you think it's going to be. It's over very quickly. No one hates you. Because that's probably my deep-down fear, is people won't like me anymore, as if this is a popularity contest. But I also don't want to alienate people so they don't talk to me, because people talking to me is very important and telling me what's going on.

He demonstrated that he was aware of the socialized mind in his meaning-making, especially when he experienced conflict with others directly. Yet he demonstrated the capacity to

override this, though he keeps it in check. He recognized the aversion to conflict when it showed up. He could take perspective on it and evaluate it to a limited extent. This is a characteristic of the “4(3)” mindset. The self-authoring system was predominant when engaging or experiencing conflict, but the socialized system he keeps tabs on, as he holds it at bay in reminding himself when he would begin to experience discomfort and tension in conflict situations.

As initially addressed earlier, Devin’s personal ideology dealt with the commitment to finding and addressing problems in ways that contribute to the health and development of the institution and the people within it. He unconsciously filtered his meaning-making through this lens. He demonstrated little capacity to be aware of just how much this self-derived ideology plays a role in his meaning-making and thinking. He does not demonstrate the capacity to question or critique this personal ideology.

Vignettes of Devin’s Conflicts

During the second interview, the Critical Conflict Interview (CCI), Devin detailed three distinct conflicts he navigated during the previous year (some aspects he continued to navigate at the time of the interview). This section will provide brief vignettes of each of these three conflicts, followed by a brief discussion pertaining to the implications and aims of this study.

Conflict 1: Navigating Difficult Relationships During Organizational Restructuring

The first critical and complex conflict that Devin dove deep into centered around an organizational restructuring, wherein a small center at the institution was brought in under one of the institution’s colleges—the college where he is the assistant dean. Devin described the center as engaging in important work; however, the leadership at the center was considered by him as well as high-level leadership at the institution as being ineffective, having problematic and even

toxic leadership, and lacking oversight and constructive leadership. The leaders in this center were seen as enabling a toxic environment, directly impacting the four to six staff members, who were “not happy.”

Additionally, there were leadership changes taking place during the early stages of this process. Devin’s role and responsibilities changed during this period, as he was elevated from associate professor to assistant dean. This occurred in part because the previous assistant dean was in the process of retiring in the spring of 2021 and was absent for critical moments in the early stages due to extenuating circumstances resulting directly from COVID-19. In his own words, Devin describes the situation:

[Just] before I took over this position, [the Center was moved under the care of our school], only because the organization itself inside of the Center was very dysfunctional. The leadership in that organization was very confrontational. They felt threatened for good reasons because people would question their legitimacy and these sorts of things. So, from their perspective, I understood why they were not getting along with the rest of the world. So, at about that point, they were brought underneath us just to have a little bit of adult supervision or leadership.

Under the guidance of the college’s dean, his direct supervisor, Devin was tasked with facilitating critical relational aspects of this process. The then director of the center, a full-time faculty member, and the assistant director were unequivocal in their vocal resistance to this change, a point that Devin highlighted and reiterated several times throughout the interview process. The leaders of the center felt threatened by this change and fought ardently against it.

This process was initiated only a couple of months before COVID-19 hit the United States, resulting in conversations and negotiations through this conflict-ridden process taking place virtually on Zoom. From Devin’s perspective, this venue—the virtual venue—complicated the process. He expressed how difficult it was not to have these conversations in person.

In reflecting on the process, Devin spoke to how initially they gave the individuals the benefit of the doubt, though after he and his dean had done their due diligence to understand the dynamics of the situation, he shared:

Once we started to realize that there's really just two individuals in that organization that had burned so many bridges and thought they were being singled out and all this sort of thing, and they had some good points, but it's just toxic leadership. The conflict we had was what do we do about that? Because if we just let this continue and then continuing the bad culture and the people who are working there didn't like to work for them. They have archivists that worked for them and just—it was horrible.

Once he held a solid grasp of this challenging conflict situation, Devin stated that his perspective and approach to dealing with it led him to reflect:

[How] do we gracefully just remove that title from [the center's director] and he can just go back to [practicing his discipline] and we can sort out the rest? Because . . . they were the biggest threat to [the department] at the [college] . . . The bureaucratic stuff was challenging. It was slow going. But the real challenge was how do I keep these guys on board so that when this is all over, they're actually going to do some work. They're going to be productive faculty members. And how do I convince the rest of the organization that they haven't been fired? Because it looks, and I said this many times, if I were in that person's shoes, I would have felt like I'd been fired because we took his title away. I get it. I knew where he was coming from. We can say all we want, you're not being fired, you're just being moved aside to focus on your research, et cetera. We fired him [from his previous position of director] . . . So, I understood where he was coming from, so we had to kind of make that as gentle as possible for him.

As Devin shows in this portion of the interview, not only was he empathetic and working to understand the perspective of the director in this challenging situation but he was unconsciously influenced by his personal ideology. Moreover, Devin actively takes the perspective of the individual stakeholders involved in the conflict, demonstrating that he can understand their fears and feelings—specifically, how they feel threatened.

After several conversations and meetings over a period of several weeks, with the negative interpersonal tensions ever-present, the director and his assistant were notified that they

would no longer hold the titles. The reaction from the director when he realized he would still maintain his faculty position was one of surprise. He had maintained the incorrect assumption that he would be let go from the College entirely throughout this entire process. His response came as a surprise to Devin as well. To the extent that Devin expressed that had he known there was this misunderstanding earlier, he would have acted quickly to clarify the situation.

Developmental implications for conflict from this vignette. In the course of this conflict, Devin understood the dynamics as tension between what was best for the department in contrast with the interests of the former director of the Center and his assistant. Devin sees his role as first protecting the department from toxic leadership and secondly ensuring that the outcome of the process ensures that the two individuals will continue to contribute positively to the department's work. In a way, the situation presented in the conflict is a threat to his personal ideology, yet he does not consciously identify it as such. Furthermore, another subtle threat that evokes a sense of conflict is the recognition that there is conflict in the first place. In this conflict scenario, Devin expressed that he tends to associate conflict with discomfort. The acknowledgment that there was tension and conflict in the first place, and that he perceived these as threats to his personal ideology demonstrated the presence of a practiced capacity to hold the 3ish system at bay, characteristic of the "4(3)" mindset.

Additionally, Devin consciously sought to be empathetic toward the other stakeholders in this predicament and demonstrated cognitive empathy by actively taking their perspectives. Nevertheless, as he expressed when it came to light that there was an apparent misunderstanding and lack of communication regarding the desired outcomes on the side of him and the dean compared to the director and his assistant, this suggests that there may have been some

projection of his own perspective onto these other two stakeholders. However, it is also important to note that this lack of communication may have been aided by the chaos of the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic and the virtual work environment, as Devin insinuated.

Conflict 2: The Academic Freedom and Publishing Conundrum

Recently the Inspector General's office conducted the regularly scheduled inspection of the College. This takes place every five years and is a comprehensive review of all the programs at the institution. As Devin described it, the findings outlined in the inspection were satisfactory for the most part. However, one of the few areas that needed to be addressed was the pre-publication review process for faculty scholarship. Two challenging questions emerged from this related to Devin's work at the institution: what does academic freedom look like at the institution, and who owns the work upon its publication?

The established protocol was not being followed closely by the institution in recent years due to the process for publication being time-consuming and convoluted. Additionally, as Devin explained, the procedures and expectations were indeed outdated. In part, this was due to the fact that they did not account for publishing content with the advent and proliferation of more informal forms of publishing, specifically publishing on online platforms and social media (i.e., Twitter, blogging, and podcasts).

This particular conflict situation came into the light after Devin highlighted the newly revamped policy related to these two areas in his regular email updates to faculty in his department, several of whom immediately reacted to this highlighting of the issue. As Devin described it, the faculty had not been involved in any conversations surrounding the process of

updating the policy and process, and as a result, were caught off guard and reacted when the administration conveyed the new policy and procedures.

Devin's role in this process morphed from simply being the conveyor of the updated policy and procedures into functioning as an intermediary between the faculty of his department and the administrative leaders tasked with updating the policy. He engaged in conversations with several of his then-frustrated faculty in this space, who felt that their academic freedom was being "threatened." As Devin stated, "I think they [presumed that] because they're inside a military organization that they're going to be censored." However, this was not the intention of the administrative leaders overseeing the revision of the policy. For the administrators, their primary aim in this revision was to address and resolve the issues raised by the Inspector General's office. The faculty felt threatened by the perceived prospect of censorship, which would threaten their academic freedom.

Devin's intended approach to this conflict was to ensure faculty had an opportunity to voice their perspective and offer their feedback. He wanted to ensure their buy-in with the updated policy. As a part of this approach, he wanted to encourage conversation, which he shared is part of his reasoning for including the update in the email he sent out. As he stated, "I think [in] bringing it up, my instinct was that I wanted to have this conversation with them; however, it occurred because I wanted them to know, and I want them to feel that their opinion was valued." When he first started receiving frustrated feedback from the faculty, he thought to himself, "Oh my God, why did I even [include this update in the email]" to the College's faculty.

As he subsequently engaged in conversations with several of his faculty, he found himself directly defending the institution's approach to this issue. In doing this, he also made it personal, connecting himself to the institution's mission.

The other thing I told them was, "Look, I know you're in a military organization you don't want to be restricted, and that if you were at Harvard or some other place, you'd have more academic freedom." I think that's up for debate, by the way . . . but that's just my personal opinion. And I said, "You need to remember that the military people around you, or at least speaking for myself, free speech is one of the few [viable] values that I hold dear. And by the way, is why I served in the military for 30 years to preserve it. So don't forget the people around you or why they might have given the best years in their adult life. It may be just for the reason you're fighting for." That was a little bit of a stump speech, but they're like, "Yeah, I guess we hadn't really thought about that." I said, "Don't preach to me about freedom."

This reaction, to an extent, highlighted his commitment to the health and growth of the institution (associated with the 4ish system). It sheds light on his capacity to see and take responsibility for mediating between his point of view and others. Nevertheless, it also subtly underlines that he attempts not to take responsibility for the feelings and points of view of others—a demonstration of movement beyond the 3ish system.

He demonstrated how he was able to reflect on his own point of view as well as others', and see them as distinct and separate, and showed the ability to evaluate his actions (after the fact) as demonstrated in the following statement, wherein he spoke to how he could have made improvements in his approach and recognizing his perspective was different from the faculty's:

What I probably did poorly is inject my own opinions on what I think academic freedom is. I know what freedom of speech is, I understand that, but I shouldn't have [claimed] that I understand academic freedom any more than I would expect [you, the interviewer] to understand how a standard missile is launched from a destroyer. That's their professional purview and they're right about that. I can understand it. I can hear the words coming out of your mouth. I understand the language, but it doesn't mean I've lived it. I think I gave that vibe in the early days like, "Yeah, I get this, you guys." Like, "No, you don't. We want to talk to you about it." And so, I kind of had like, okay, I need

to really listen, not just pretend to listen and I'll learn something. And I did learn something.

This excerpt highlights his capacity to take the perspective of others to an extent, understanding that they are guided by a different set of ideologies, values, and experiences from which they construct their own meaning and perspective. He did project his own worldview and made assumptions, but he was conscious of this in hindsight. Additionally, unlike what might occur at the self-transforming mind (5ish system), he did not demonstrate the capacity to genuinely integrate their perspective into his. He still saw the other as entirely separate.

This conflict was still in the process of being worked through at the time of the final interview. As Devin shared:

So I find myself in the position, again, as a non-academic, of having to represent. And we had a long conversation with the faculty just the other day, maybe last week, I said, I hear what you guys are saying. They're very dramatic, "This is the hill I'm going to die on. This is academic freedom. It's why I'm here." I'm like, "Okay, I hear what you're saying." And one of the professors, and this is the conflict, she says, "I trust you [Devin], but I don't trust you understand what I'm saying and how important it is to me." She wasn't being rude, but she's like, "I want to talk to . . ." in this case, it's the chief of staff [who is] kind of pulling the merit strings on this program. He's trying to fix the IG inspection bit by bit . . . It's not like they're doing it in private, but the academics don't feel heard and they're like, "I don't think you get what I'm saying. I want to be able to contribute."

Devin reiterated to the faculty member that they can contribute, and it is part of his role to ensure that their voice is heard in this process.

Developmental implications for conflict from this vignette. Devin demonstrates that he makes a conscious effort to empathize and take in the perspective of others. However, his capacity to genuinely take the perspective of others in the moment was sometimes superseded by his own perspective or agenda. At times he projected his own perspective onto the frustrated faculty, which there was recognition of on his part in hindsight. He appeared to unintentionally

frame the conflict as an “us versus them” (administration versus faculty) in this matter (which is likely linked to the culture of the department, as is common in HEIs), and instead of listening deeply to understand faculty concerns, jumped to defend the institution’s leadership’s perspective and actions. He demonstrated that his discomfort with conflict might be a trigger of sorts, which unconsciously influenced his engagement and navigation of the conflict(s), influencing a reactive and defensive approach as opposed to a more responsive approach and initially limiting the capacity for constructive collaboration.

Conflict 3: Terminating a Staff Member as a “Continuation of the Hiring Process”

The third conflict situation that Devin chose to reflect on as a part of this study was connected to the first scenario highlighted. Following the reorganization of the center, Devin was tasked with assessing how the previous employees of the center would fit into the new structure. In the course of this process, he and his dean concluded that the secretary for the center did not bring much value to her role at college. She held allegiance to the former director and assistant director, now removed from their leadership roles with the center. Moreover, as Devin reflected:

She was combative. She had also damaged a lot of relationships. She was in charge of travel and the government credit card, and she just bullied a lot of people on behalf of these two guys for years. And [the dean and I] were starting to get the feel that she was bad news. And then I was just wondering, as the chief administrator, what is she actually doing? And she wasn’t doing much at all, as it turned out. Her tasks were very limited.

With the change of leadership, Devin recognized that it had become his responsibility to direct her and provide guidance to her. However, as someone new to his position and then navigating the new roles and responsibilities after the reorganization of the center, he did not have a clear understanding of her role and responsibilities. He attempted to provide her guidance,

but she kept making critical mistakes that then required extra time and energy from him to clean up.

Not too long into this new dynamic, Devin was notified by Human Resources that she was coming up on the end of her two-year probation period for new hires. As a government employee, it was standard procedure that new employees were on a two-year probationary period, during which they could be terminated at will. This new information prompted him to consult the provost on whether or not to move forward with the termination process. The provost's advice, as paraphrased by Devin, followed as:

Look, I know what you guys are thinking. You think you've failed as leaders that you could have saved this person, you could have led them and had them perform better. You need to stop thinking like that . . . you have an obligation to the U.S. government not to write a 20-year check on a poor performer . . . So, you have a higher obligation to do this before the end of her probation.

This feedback from the provost provided the support Devin, and his dean needed to release her from the college. Early in 2021, he set up a meeting with the individual to convey to her that she would be let go from the institution. Leading up to this meeting, Devin expressed:

This was hard for me because I knew that she liked the job and she needed the money, and I didn't know how it was going to go. She's been very combative in different Zoom meetings and not very appropriate in some others.

He and the dean went into the meeting with her prepared for an "explosion," to the extent that they had arranged to have a security officer outside the meeting room, just in case. Devin explained what was happening in the meeting, and she was handed the letter signed by the provost certifying her termination. She took the time to read the letter. Fortunately, and to Devin's surprise, she refrained from exploding and instead stated, "You know, I was probably never a good fit here."

As Devin reflected on this experience, he took every precaution to ensure that she had no recourse, talking to HR and other colleagues to ensure he was approaching this employee termination appropriately and according to the institution's protocols. Moreover, the HR officer told him, "This is a continuation of the hiring process." Confirming that within the two-year probation period, this was in accordance with the college's policies and protocols.

Through this relatively smooth process, considering what could have been her reaction, Devin demonstrated a mix of the socialized mind and the self-authored mind, again agreeing with where he scored on the SOI. He showed the ability to take her perspective, stating, "[She] was in over her head . . . she was kind of relieved to have that burden off of her."

Developmental implications for conflict from this vignette. Devin's role in this conflict situation was to assess the viability of the secretary and determine the best recourse. Similar to the previous two scenarios, he attempted to take her perspective and empathize with her. He demonstrated some limitations in doing this effectively. He appeared to make assumptions regarding her perspective on the situation, preventing him from accurately understanding where she was coming from. Based on his information in the interviews, there appeared to be a dearth of clear communication between himself and the secretary. However, he did his due diligence in consulting the provost on the viability of releasing this individual to act in accordance with the institution's policy.

Case Study Findings

In this case study, all three conflict scenarios presented a moderate level of difficulty in terms of Devin's capacity to navigate them constructively. He reiterated time and time again his intention to empathize and understand the perspective of the other individuals involved, and yet

he demonstrated consistently that he often made hasty assumptions about where they were coming from. As someone who tended to avoid conflict and who demonstrated this throughout these scenarios, his actions indicated that he lacked some capacity to be comfortably present with others while working through the conflicts. His ability to listen deeply to understand in the moments of tension and conflict became limited when navigating these uncomfortable dynamics.

He did choose to lean on others for guidance, but not necessarily for validation (a distinction between the socialized and self-authored systems). He clearly leaned on his self-authoring mind and demonstrated he was on the latter end of the evolutionary journey from the socialized mindset to the self-authored mindset. He unconsciously relied on his self-generated ideology, yet when his discomfort was especially high, he demonstrated that he occasionally deferred to the socialized mind.

See additional elements and characteristics pertaining to key areas of this study demonstrated by Devin in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5*Summary of Key Findings for Devin*

Key Areas	Elements and Characteristics
Mindset (i.e., meaning-making structure)	<p>The self-authored mind is the primary meaning-making system. The socialized mind's influence is minimal, yet there is an awareness of the formerly influential mind and some demonstrated intentionality not to slip back into this meaning-making system.</p> <p>Demonstrated a "4(3)" mindset (supported by interrater SOI evaluation)</p>
Meaning-making features exhibited	<p>Self-generated personal ideology: commitment to growth and improvement, both personally for himself and for his organization</p> <p>Featured qualities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relies primarily on own internal authority, though reluctantly will look to others for validation • The self is the evaluator of his own personal standard • Articulates his own point of view as different from others • Distinguishes other individuals' values and interests from his own • Showed strong emotional empathy (affective empathy) toward others • Demonstrates strong perspective-taking capabilities (cognitive empathy), however sometimes in the moment may struggle with perspective-taking
Demonstrated orientation to conflict	<p>Esposed approach: Feels uncomfortable with conflict and tends to be conflict avoidant, that is unless it is his responsibility to engage; consciously attempts to reframe conflict as an opportunity in his mind when forced to engage in conflict</p> <p>Demonstrated approach: Initially tentative to engage in conflict situations but when he does is assertive, works for collaborative and win-win solutions; emotionally empathetic and works to take others' perspectives; carefully and confidently works to educate/inform others in the process; strategic and utilizes the influence of his role</p> <p>Moderate congruence between espoused and demonstrated approaches</p>
Theory applied (actions and behaviors demonstrated)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows a tendency toward collaborative and win-win solutions, if not viable will move to mediate conflict (with others) and/or make compromises • Active and consciously seeks to empathize and take others' perspectives • Straightforward in communication and does not pander or coddle • Regularly seeks advice and validation from higher leadership, particularly when working through the process of navigating complex conflict • Creates space for others to air their interests and concerns • Tendency to project own perspective onto others (though has self-awareness around this)
Gaps and limitations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates some insecurity in his ability to navigate conflict (though appears to be tied to tension with earlier meaning-making systems) • Tendency to initially overreact in conflict situations • Initially makes assumptions based on limited information (though aware of this and reflects on this which informs future thinking and communication) • He sees himself as adept when it comes to his capacity to empathize, but he may make assumptions that inhibit his ability for perspective-taking

**Additional
insights/implications**

- Appears to be overly reliant on emotional empathy
 - Occasionally digressed toward a socialized mind when a situation was highly complex (i.e., when in over his head) but self-aware when occurred
-

James “4”

James’ journey in higher education has been a meandering one, which goes against the typical grain or trajectory often assumed for tenured faculty in his position. His foray into a career in higher education started out on the student affairs side of higher education as a resident assistant, which he recalled ignited his vocational journey in higher education. After college, he worked in various student affairs positions at different schools, eventually landing a position as the dean of students, which he held for nearly six years. During this time, he also taught at the institution. Eventually, he found his way to a tenure-track faculty position where he also serves as program director for a graduate program focused on leadership in higher education at a medium-sized suburban liberal arts and sciences university in the Midwest. He has worked at this institution for nearly a decade. When I asked him what prompted this move from student affairs to the academic side of higher education, James stated that “burnout,” was the primary motivation for this change.

James holds a PhD in higher education leadership. He grew up in a Jewish household on the East Coast, and this cultural upbringing and heritage played a part in informing his worldview. He is active and deeply committed to social justice issues and specifically spoke to racial justice and equity, as well as the issues of equity and justice for the LGBTQ+ community. James’ identity as a gay man is a prominent aspect of who he is. As he explicitly and implicitly spoke to this identity and his experiences as a gay man, which in part provided him with

perspective and insight to see and address issues of inequity and injustice as they are presented to him in his work both at the institution and outside of the institution.

For James, his work is not simply a career but a “vocation.” I was struck throughout our three interviews by the passion he brings to his work. Though, he paradoxically stated at points his conscious lack of identifying too deeply with his work at the institution.

James’ Meaning-Making Structure

James primarily constructs meaning from the self-authoring mindset, wherein the individual self relies on their own internal authority. Differentiated from the socializing mindset, which constructs meaning through the filters of the external—opinions and expectations of others—the self-authoring mind relies on an internal locus of control and does not necessitate external input from others in the meaning-making process.

A characteristic of the self-authored mind is that the individual holds an underlying personal theory or ideology, which acts similarly to a compass, guiding and influencing the individual consciousness and indirectly, their thinking and behaviors. This deeply embedded purpose can be seen as self-authored, self-subscribed, and self-claimed values, which become an internal and integral ideology upon which the individual relies to guide them. This ideology or underlying purpose is still subject to the individual, as they may not explicitly and objectively see how it is motivating them in their daily life. It is woven deeply into their unconscious mind by the time they have evolved to this equilibrated mindset. It is still “subject” to him, as Kegan’s theory would suggest. It is not yet “object,” in that he does not yet have the separation to consciously reflect on and critique how his deeply embedded theory shapes his construction on meaning in the moment.

For James, his self-generated personal ideology was concentrated on the pursuit of making a difference, especially regarding equity and justice for marginalized individuals and groups. He actively, though not always consciously, brings this lens to the bulk of his work and life. It directly influences the decisions he makes, the thinking he engages in, and the actions he takes. There is an additional piece, as James stated, when speaking to core values and his orientation toward the work he does, that “to leave an impact . . . [to] leave a legacy behind” is a motivator for him and can be seen as integral to, or another way of framing, his pursuit of making a difference.

It is apparent that he does not spend significant time and energy thinking about how he is perceived by others; rather, he just knows what is “right or wrong” in many contexts. This is not to say he is not impacted by the external perspectives of others at all. Others’ external perspectives can weigh on him, but the question here is *why*? The external perspectives appear to weigh on him specifically when they are in conflict—or are perceived to be in conflict—with his underlying purpose of *making a difference*. In his case, it is not so much about the perspectives, but the unconscious threat to his underlying purpose, which is to have an impact, particularly as it pertains to making an impact in advancing equity and justice in his context, at his institution, and in the greater community.

Furthermore, this excerpt from James’ first interview exemplifies his self-authored mind: Agency is huge for me. Honestly, I was an anxiety-ridden mess yesterday because I was booked into meeting after meeting, after meeting. And—this is real bad—not being able to do what I want when I want to do it is sometimes really hard for me. And I can say that, and I know acutely how bad and self-centered and selfish that sounds. I’m only able to temper it because I actually do know what I do with my time. Like, I do know that I am, as much as I can, using my powers to do good. So that’s really hard for me. It’s important to me to feel like I’m determining my course of action. And so, it’s hard when—like, I’ve been scheduled into six, seven interviews in the upcoming week and three of them, I really don’t feel like I should be there for that. I’m trying to get out of

them. Or meetings where I know I have to be there, but they really have nothing to do with me. What's important to me is to be able to take things as I want to take them. And I chose a career where I could do that.

Vignettes of James' Conflicts

During the second interview, the Critical Conflict Interview (CCI), James detailed four distinct conflicts he navigated during the previous year (some aspects he continued to navigate at the time of the interview). This section will provide brief vignettes of each of these conflicts, followed by a brief discussion pertaining to the implications drawn from the conflict scenarios and how they relate to the aims of this study.

Conflict 1: A Difficult Student

The first conflict James detailed during the CCI involved a master's student, who he stated, "without question, [she was] the most difficult" student he has dealt with at this institution. The interaction with this student originated while James was on sabbatical, when the student took the initiative to reach out to him for support and guidance, sharing that she was bored in her internship and occupied herself with online shopping instead of the responsibilities of the internship. Initially, James attempted to connect her with other individuals who would challenge her, with the hope this would ameliorate her experience in the program.

The following semester, after James returned from his sabbatical, the situation escalated while she was a student in his class. At one point, in front of everyone, openly to the whole class, she stated something to the effect of, "Just FYI, I don't enjoy reading, and I probably won't do it." Moreover, around this same time, multiple unfavorable reports from different sources were coming to James, conveying that people found her "unapproachable." She caught wind of this, and then she actively went to multiple faculty offices, saying, "I heard you can't approach me,"

escalating the situation further. Additionally, she accused a professor of racial discrimination, specifically citing “equal opportunity.” The student was a Black woman. James reflected that there appeared to be no basis for this complaint and that the situation was tied to the professor not accepting a paper from her that was a month late, which led to the student retaliating against the professor with the equal opportunity complaint.

The ongoing situation with the student imploded when a high-ranking employee at her internship site wrote a “scathing email,” which ultimately led to the student’s termination from her internship. (James reflected that this written statement was unnecessary from his perspective.) At this point, because of her dismissal from the internship, along with her not being able to secure an internship for her second year, a “tricky situation” emerged. Technically she was unable to return and continue the program. As the Director, James’s role required that he navigate this situation, and as he recalled contemplating, “[How] do I counsel her out so that I’m not making her ineligible, but that she has some agency in this?”

This was when the COVID-19 pandemic erupted onto the scene in the United States, making it impossible for James to meet with the student in person. Instead, he attempted to connect on the phone and Zoom with the student, but he recalled that “she was being really evasive about it.” They exchanged a couple of emails, though he implied that they were not necessarily constructive.

Finally, the student exited the program of her own will. However, shortly following this exit, James received a press release detailing the now-former student’s appointment to a new job, and the statement included a segment that claimed she had earned a master’s degree at the institution. This was clearly false. Several alumni of the program became aware of this and

expressed their anger and frustration that the student who clearly had not completed the program was saying she had, and she was getting away with it (being rewarded with a job, in fact). This initiated an additional wrinkle in the larger context of this complex conflict, where James reached out to the provost for guidance and ultimately received puzzling advice, claiming this situation had implications related to FERPA and therefore the institution would not do or say anything.

When asked to reflect on the power dynamics at play in this situation, James shared how he grappled with the various dynamics at play, demonstrating complex thinking while also imposing strong judgment toward the former student for their lack of awareness (a characteristic seen in mindset 4, as her lack of awareness paired with her behavior demonstrated a stark contrast in the ways they individually constructed meaning):

So, the racial element is always going to be a piece for me, the gender element will always be a piece for me that I'm going to be very sensitive to. But yeah, I never got the sense that there was any realization or appreciation of any different power dynamic. And that makes it hard for me to approach because she's not seeing it at all. Like, I couldn't even manipulate the power that I held or make it go faster. It sucks. I can't believe she has a job. I can't believe they didn't check that she has a degree.

James followed this reflection up by speaking to the impact the pandemic had on the situation:

I think previously this stuff would have been much more all-consuming. I really do think the pandemic changed that. I just had so many other things to worry about, like, converting my classes. Usually, they take up a lot of prime real estate. This one didn't as much. I really just wanted it over, because there was no route to go. She no longer had an internship, and she didn't have one for next year.

And I definitely was in a place where I maybe wanted to move to resolution a little bit quicker because there was so much else going on. But even as I say that we were pretty much already there, there wasn't much—I think maybe it got me out of some uncomfortable conversations I didn't really want to have any more or didn't really need to have anyway because all the chips had already been on the table.

Developmental implications for conflict from this vignette. James approached this conflict with a sincere interest in the student but recognized his limitations and that he could not force anything on her that she did not want (which frustrated him). He also recognized the limitations of the larger context of the situation with the COVID-19 pandemic in its early phase. His lack of ability to resolve this situation unconsciously conflicted with his self-generated values and his personal ideology. He also demonstrated feelings of frustration and disappointment, though as showed through cynical humor that guilt was not a primary emotion, as he stated, “[She] goes down as a big ole failure, both for her and for me. But also, on some level, I recognize this was not someone I was going to be able to have any effect with.” However, he did not demonstrate guilt,

Conflict 2: An Arduous Relationship With the Dean

James occupies a “really interesting space” in the School of Education, wherein he is the only full-time tenured faculty in the leadership and higher education program. The other full-time faculty teach in the K-12 education program. This creates a dynamic where he is siloed, where there is a lack of shared language and understanding. Since he lacks expertise in K-12 education, and the school he is in primarily focuses on this area, he does not serve on committees in his school. Instead, he sits on “a disproportionate amount of university-wide committees,” one of which is the executive committee of the senate. Two faculty from every school sit on the senate—one senator and one executive senator (a position that requires tenure to hold). This small group of faculty senate members, “seven or eight” faculty members, meet with the university president every two weeks and additionally with the provost every two weeks. As

James stated, this committee “work gives me this power perspective that a lot of people don’t have, [as most] professors are never going to serve on [the] executive committee.”

A few years back, the School of Education hired a new associate dean, shortly after which the dean of the school moved to a different school at the university, and the new associate dean assumed the role of the school dean. This move occurred without the consultation of the school’s faculty. Shortly after the change, two other schools were combined with the School of Education under this new dean. As James reflected, “These schools that have absolutely nothing to do with each other. And we weren’t, as the faculty, involved in any of those conversations. He really systematically divided and conquered . . . the education faculty.”

Additionally, for James, he noted that he had rarely ever worked directly under a straight man in higher education. Though technically, as a tenured professor, “[faculty] really don’t report to anybody,” he was sure to mention. Most of the individuals he worked under were women during his twenty-plus years in higher education, and he expressed his unease working under a man, adding, “I think straight men are weird.”

Conflict with the new dean began to take shape after the reorganization of schools occurred, as James was advocating for his school from his senate role, especially in the executive meetings with the provost, saying:

“Hey, this is not going well for us.” And every time, even during the pandemic, [the new dean was saying], “Obviously, all the schools have received a list of the acceptable classrooms.” [James chimed in,] “No, we haven’t.” “Obviously, all the professors have received lists of . . .” “No, we haven’t.” Like, every time [the dean] said something [to] the provost during our exec meetings, it was embarrassing that I would have to say, “Just FYI, nope. None of that has happened for [the school of education].”

The new dean kept misrepresenting to the provost what had been done for the school of education. This frustrated James and his colleagues, increasing resentment toward the new dean.

Furthermore, the school of education was without a chair during the phases of the pandemic, which influenced James's decision to outwardly advocate for the department.

After this had been going on for a while, it was announced that there was a newly appointed "interim chair" of the school of education. This announcement was problematic for two reasons. First, the faculty of the school did not have a hand in choosing the chair, the dean had appointed her without any input from the school's faculty. Though, the dean conveyed to the provost that he had asked everyone in the department if they would consider the chair position, and she is the only one who had said yes. James stated that the dean had invented this story, stating, "That's a lie . . . She was the only one he asked, and he really [he] conned her into it."

Secondly, it was problematic because, at the institution, there is a precedent for an "interim chair." One is either the chair, or they are not a chair. The faculty handbook does not articulate an option for an interim option for a faculty chair position.

James took the reins, and in the summer of 2020, called a meeting with faculty to vote her in formally as the chair. The vote was unanimous in support of her taking the position formally. James reflected:

I'm sure I strong-armed a little bit because they're all feeling so defeated by everything. I'm not a part of so many of those different pieces, so it doesn't bother me as much. And even still, he still calls her the interim chair.

He went on to say:

So, it's been just kind of an ongoing conflict of navigating this guy who has told the provost he's going to be retiring next year, but none of us believe it. You shouldn't trust in that until you actually see it. It's been really, really, really nutty, and it's like this conflict probably will not have an end until he leaves . . . I really see my responsibility to empower my colleagues. I think they are much more beat down than I am because they're in the K-12 trenches with him.

I want them to have input, but I also want to do the work for them where I know that I'm standing on solid ground and representing them capably and appropriately. I

think that's part of my responsibility and part of the privilege that I have in not serving on all of these other committees and because I sit at these power circles.

I do think this is another example of where COVID is being used as a way to divide and conquer as well. I think because we're not together in one space, there's always a lot of, "We won't even bother you with this because we know you're all busy." "These are our decisions. You do have to bother us with this."

Developmental implications for conflict from this vignette. James is not concerned with the conflict itself; however, he appears to struggle with being torn between his professional obligations and his self-derived personal ideology. This is a critical point to note because at the self-transforming mind, Kegan's 5th stage (mindset "5"), he likely would welcome this as an opportunity for growth, both for himself and others involved. On the other hand, if he was constructing meaning from the socialized mind, his response and ultimate decision to continue or withdraw would come from the influence of others, and he would lean more heavily on colleagues he trusts and respects to sort this out. We see him engage in consulting others to an extent, but the subtext sheds light on the fact that he did this to gain perspective and aid in growing his perspective and understanding as he worked through the paradoxical situation. His consulting provided him with more perspective before deciding for himself.

Conflict 3: Values Conflict and the Higher Learning Commission

James has served as a reviewer for the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) over the last several years, helping to conduct regular accreditation reviews at colleges and universities throughout the United States. Typically, he helped with two reviews each year involved with the HLC. His involvement is outside the scope of his obligations at the institution. In the summer of 2020, he was assigned as a member of a group that would visit a school in the Midwest.

Recently James completed the "team chair training" and decided to ask the team chair for the upcoming visit if he could sit in on the meetings with high-level leadership—with the

institution's president and the board—simply to observe how these meetings and conversations take place. The team chair said, “Absolutely,” and at the time, James was excited about this opportunity.

Thirty days prior to the team visit, James received access to the “assurance agreement” and would be reviewing the section on “mission and purpose.” As he stated:

I often get mission and purpose, which is great for me. I think there are a lot of people who think I work at a faith-based school, which is hilarious, and that I am faith-adjacent, which is also hilarious. And so, they give me the whole section on mission and purpose.

He began to read his section and quickly came to the realization that the school under review was an evangelical school, which immediately raised some red flags. As he shared:

I did not realize it's a school that you would be expelled for being gay, expelled for being trans. That in psychology courses, reparative therapy is taught and mandated [sic]. And that abortion is under their student policy on homicide.

This realization generated immense internal conflict for James, as he went on to articulate:

I agonized over what I should do. Because I also was assigned a section, mine is not to argue their mission and purpose; mine is to ensure that they are living their mission and purpose. So, in some ways, mine is [to] validate that, I just want to make sure you guys are indeed kicking out the trans kids [sarcastically stated]. Okay, good, that's your mission and purpose. And I really didn't know—I agonized. Agonized. Agonized.

He was caught in a dilemma. His values, worldview, and identity were diametrically opposed to the mission and purpose of the institution he was tasked with reviewing. Moreover, he stated:

I really agonized because I felt like I should be able to rise above. I felt like this is my job. This is something I'm being paid to do. It's my service to the field. But at the same time, I just couldn't be a part of it. And I felt like if I said anything critical whatsoever . . . if you Google me, your screen just goes rainbows. Your computer goes gay [sic]. [So] they could easily say anything critical, “Obviously, he came in with a bias.” And so it really was agony.

As much agony as James experienced mulling over how to proceed, it is clear that his orientation to this dilemma demonstrates his self-authored mind. Specifically, the capacity to evaluate his own worldview when compared with others,' as well as the organization he was tasked to review, going against his self-generated theory for his existence—which involves making and leaving an impact, particularly as it relates to equity and justice for marginalized individuals—gave way to a set of circumstances that made it nearly impossible to “rise above.” His self-authoring mind would not allow him to transcend the situation, as his personal ideology influenced his strong response to this situation (someone at a 3ish mindset might go along, as they may feel compelled not to disappoint the HLC). He could not actively be involved in enabling an institution that clearly stood for beliefs and values that were antithetical to his own.

After his agonizing, not long before the visit would be conducted, he had a conversation with the team chair and decided to withdraw from the team conducting the institution's review. He expressed some remorse regarding the situation, mainly that he left the team “in the lurch” since they would now have extra work to do with him as a team member withdrawing (the work of five individuals would now be the work of four).

The grappling James demonstrates in this situation is not so much about the people, rather, it is about the institution and its values. “It's an anti-gay place.” Yet, he still grappled with the professional obligation piece. He had committed to participating in this review with the HLC.

Leading up to the decision to withdraw from the review team, he had brought this question before his ethics in leadership class. However, he stated, “I don't think they really appreciated the depth, the complexity of it. There's such a personal response [from his students], it's an anti-gay place, don't go. They didn't understand the professional obligation.”

Additionally, he brought this dilemma to one of his colleagues, a psychology professor, and solicited his feedback. He said, “Yeah, don’t do it.”

He went on to reflect on some of the deeper complexities that he considered in his decision-making process, stating:

And also, there is that professional, like where you are basically giving them an appeal if you say anything critical yet, you are so public facing gay. It’s not just my identity, it’s part of my job. It’s part of what I teach. It’s part of my writing. Like, I am a gay for pay. I am a professional gay. So it made sense from that standpoint as well. But even I can argue the other side of that. They need to overcome that. They need to trust that people have been trained and they’re being professional. I don’t know.

There’s a part of me that still feels like I should have been able to rise above, even as I don’t want to be a human who contributes to this school being accredited. I’m going to keep jumping back and forth. Even though, I think that these faith-based schools have a really important role in higher education, this is not a role that I want to have to be associated with.

James shows here his ability to take multiple perspectives and see the paradox, even though he ultimately opts out. He is concerned with his personal integrity and meeting his own standards, yet he grapples with the paradox. He goes on to reflect:

And again, it’s that you don’t get paid very much to do these things, compared to the 40 hours in three days that you ended up doing. But I really do see it as a professional obligation to my field. This is service to my field. And also, because there aren’t that many professors of educational leadership who used to be deans of students who care about the student life side. Often, these HLC visits nobody cares about the student life side at all. Whereas I’m like, “Let’s go!”

Developmental implications for conflict from this vignette. Pertaining to the meaning-making in conflict, James shows how he is able to look at a complex situation, see the various dynamics, and make an informed decision. The way he makes meaning, is qualitatively different from how someone in the socialized mind (3ish system) would construct meaning. From an 3ish mind and individual would likely frame this dilemma not as values vs professional obligation, but rather as values vs not wanting to let others down and be perceived as flakey.

Conflict 4: Anticipating Conflict With Curriculum Change Initiative

In James's final conflict situation, he prefaced this portion of the second interview by stating, "this is more of an anticipated conflict." (Though this scenario was an outlier, as James framed it as an anticipated conflict, I deliberately choose to include it, as it demonstrates James' approach to navigating complex conflict.) James described how a committee he chairs at the university undertook the task of reviewing and then advocating for a revision of the qualifications for the general education "diversity" courses. The impetus for this review came from student survey results that provided convincing evidence that the current designated "diversity" courses had very little impact in positively advancing students' cultural competency.

James anticipated that there would be significant resistance from faculty when the committee proposed comprehensive changes to the diversity course. He explained that he anticipated this resistance coming primarily from faculty who did not teach any courses designated as diversity courses. Moreover, he predicted that the resistance and conflict would not be grounded in values or principles, rather, the resistance would stem from faculty feeling overwhelmed, as this proposal for diversity course changes would coincide with other significant curriculum changes that would be brought up in the same meeting. He shared that he anticipated a majority response from the faculty along the lines of, "Holy [crap]! This is a lot of change!"

"And it is a lot of change," James reflected. He had hoped that the changes would not be proposed at the same time, but it did not work out that way. However, given the context and timing, he realized the necessary value of taking a strategic approach to ensuring the committee on diversity courses curriculum secured the support it needed. James briefly described his strategic thinking and plan, explaining the importance of encouraging faculty who support the

changes to individually connect with their school's representative on the university-wide diversity committee and "start greasing the wheels," soliciting their representative's support for these changes. James went on to describe his thinking:

[It's been about] figuring out who [our] allies are . . . I have a good sense of who they are, and many of them are already on my [diversity curriculum] committee. They're also younger, and I worry about that because I don't know that they're going to have the same effect as their colleagues, who are tenured.

In this brief excerpt, James highlighted his process and acknowledged additional dynamics that contribute to the complexity of the situation. He actively considered multiple perspectives, layers, and dynamics that could contribute to resistance and conflict.

In our final interview, approximately two weeks after he initially spoke to this anticipated conflict, I asked him if he had an update. He did, as he shared:

I reached out to my diversity committee and we smoothed the way for that already. That language [for the proposed changes] has passed through the next step. And I think part of that is because we reached out and did some ally building.

James anticipated conflict regarding the changes to diversity course qualifications. In the initial phase, he identified individuals who understood the need for more deliberate qualifications. Through the initial phase, the committee made progress with minimal resistance, which he credits to his and the committee's proactive approach to identifying and building support from allies for the cause.

Developmental implications for conflict from this vignette. James anticipated resistance to change (and conflict) and realized the need to tap into systems thinking so as to proactively identify and address perceived barriers to the approval process, as well as identify and connect with prospective allies to garner support for the initiative. James' demonstration of

systems thinking and ability to anticipate multiple potential ways the situation might play, and objectively consider multiple perspectives and interests, demonstrated his self-authoring mind.

Case Study Findings

From a self-authored mindset, James's approach to conflict is situational. In the four unique conflicts he brought to this study, he takes a different approach. His construction of meaning in each situation demonstrated the self-authoring mind, influencing his ability to adapt to the situation and his capacity to forgo the need for approval from others, enabling him to decide how much time and effort he was willing to devote to precarious conflict-filled situations as they arose (esp., the scenario with the "difficult student"). If it involves implications of equity and justice, showed he would lean heavily into it (as opposed to avoiding or accommodating); especially, and most critically, if he perceived it was within his power to influence a change or constructive outcome. If it is not within his power to support impactful change, or if equity and justice are not prominent aspects of the conflict, he may not devote significant energy to addressing the conflict. Rather, he would opt for quick resolution, as opposed to working toward transformation.

See additional elements and characteristics pertaining to key areas of this study demonstrated by James in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6*Summary of Key Findings for James*

Key Areas	Elements and Characteristics
Mindset (i.e., meaning-making structure)	<p>The self-authored mind is equilibrated (cohered) as the primary meaning-making system.</p> <p>Demonstrated a “4” mindset (supported by interrater SOI evaluation)</p>
Meaning-making features exhibited	<p>Self-generated personal ideology: working to make a difference in others’ lives and have an impact; justice and equity-minded; strong sense of integrity</p> <p>Featured qualities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relies on his own internal authority and way of knowing (strong sense of purpose) • Distinguishes other individuals’ values and interests from his own • Can evaluate his own perspective and the perspectives of others • Demonstrates emotional empathy (affective empathy) though does not dwell on the emotions of others, and does not show guilt or responsibility over others’ feelings or behaviors (as they are not his own) • Demonstrates active and deliberate perspective-taking (cognitive empathy) without overthinking • Makes sense of situations by integrating multiple data points, systems, and perspectives (self-proclaimed “systems thinker”) • Holds strong opinions and judgments, but holds them as his own recognizing when others do not agree
Demonstrated orientation to conflict	<p>Espoused approach: Does not like conflict, but is not afraid to engage it and be assertive and even escalate tension if need be; seeks to problem solve and collaborate with others</p> <p>Demonstrated approach: Assertive when it is important to him and does so deliberately, actively employing systems thinking; tries to resolve conflict, but knows when to quit if not going anywhere; strives for collaboration though tends to take reigns and guide the process</p> <p>Moderate congruence between espoused and demonstrated approaches</p>
Theory applied (actions and behaviors demonstrated)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can take the perspective of other stakeholders, even on the opposing side of a conflict, though often privileges own perspective (esp. goals and values) • Willing to go against the grain of others, even those in higher positions of power and authority • Not afraid to deliberately and strategically escalate conflict • Able to hold multiple paradoxes at the same time when making sense of an issue and deciding how to act • Assertive in responding to issues/problems, especially when action can be taken within his articulated role or scope of understanding • Keen sense of his power and authority, and uses it to benefit his goals and values, always with his students and faculty in mind
Gaps and limitations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attached to personal ideology (values, principles, and way of being), and not see the gaps or flaws in his perspective at times • Can struggle to see the value in others’ perspectives when different from his own (can see the other perspective but may not see the value in it)

Additional insights/implications	Self-assured and confident and not afraid to get into the messy aspects of conflict, though committed to engaging in difficult conflict while being mindful of the relationship (may walk a fine line or cross it deliberately when necessary)
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Nasir “4”

With more than five decades working in the field of education, Nasir brings significant experience to his current work as an academic dean for his university’s college of education. He worked in primary education in an urban school district on the far eastern side of the Midwest—on the cusp of Appalachia—for nearly thirty years before making the transition to higher education. Around the same time, as he made this shift, he earned a PhD in education. This transition took place in the late 90s, and he worked at multiple different institutions of higher education, primarily as a dean and professor before landing in his current position as a dean of a Historically Black College/University (HBCU) university in the Midwest.

Additionally, Nasir took a short sabbatical between his previous position and his current position, during which he contemplated retirement. Ultimately, he returned to work in higher education, and he was in his current role for nearly four years at the time of the interviews for this study. Part of his impetus for returning was that he was individually sought out by his institution, which had specifically identified him as someone who could lead the education program out of a challenging period. He relished this opportunity to return to work in higher education as he realized he was not yet ready for permanent retirement.

In addition to his PhD, Nasir earned an MA in education and completed post-doctoral studies concentrated on school reform and change processes. Nasir described himself as a white Muslim man. He grew up in a middle-class family and learned the value of education at an early age. He takes pride in his leadership abilities and his positive accomplishments.

Nasir's Meaning-Making Structure

Nasir presents a confident certainty in his thinking and communication. He is not swayed by others' perceptions or expectations. At his core, he knows what is "right" or "best" in most situations, which is informed by his self-generated personal ideology. He demonstrated a forward-looking lens to how he approaches situation, which focused on organizational growth and development. Along these lines, he stated several times throughout the three interviews he participated in for this study that he "likes to build" and cultivate impactful programs, specifically in the context of higher education. When assessing his SOI, it was clear that he demonstrated an equilibrated self-authoring mindset, scoring a "4." This score was validated in the two interviews conducted in addition to the SOI. He stated in the SOI that:

I like to see things grow . . . That to me is my job. The institution is bigger than any one person, and the institution should survive you or anyone else. That's the way I look at it. And you should always strive to leave it better than when you came in, which I've always felt like I've done that. And right now, my mission is [my current institution].

Nasir did not just articulate this self-theory of how he is but demonstrated it throughout the conflict scenarios he chose to explore in the interview process (which is a reoccurring theme in this vignette).

Furthermore, Nasir demonstrated a self-authoring mindset as he shared an example of how he had to "exit" several employees, including faculty, when he began his current position because "they were not on board with the mission of the university." He shared how he fought hard to do what he believed was right for the health and growth of the institution and shared he did this "because I knew I was right and I was not going to compromise my students, period." He described that:

I have to take a stand on what benefits my students and what doesn't benefit my students. I'm very clear about that. But that's the greater good of the university. That should be your mission. Your mission is not to make a particular professor's life more comfortable, quite frankly. And that's not why they're there . . . It's like they're almost afraid of growth, which I don't understand. I don't know whether they're afraid of the extra work or whether they're afraid of being in over their head.

Additionally, he reflected on a situation where a former high-level supervisor had written him an affirming note when she moved to a different organization. Nasir shared that he appreciated the note yet stated, "I don't need public accolades or anything else. That's not the point. I'm a very self-actualized person, so that carries me a long way." He demonstrated that he did not require validation and affirmations from others, even those with more power than him. Again, this supported the presence of a self-authoring mind.

At the time of the interviews for this study, Nasir did not distinctly demonstrate a meaning-making system that extended beyond the self-authoring mindset. There were a few points throughout the interview process where he demonstrated characteristics that could be associated with an emergent self-transforming mind; however, when probed around these areas, it was evident that this was not yet the case for him. Moreover, the presence of the socialized mind was not influential when his meaning-making structure was tested in this direction. Again, affirming that he constructed meaning from an equilibrated self-authored mind.

Vignettes of Nasir's Conflicts

During the second interview, Nasir illuminated three distinct conflicts he navigated during the previous year. Aspects of these conflicts he continued to navigate at the time of the interview. The following section will provide vignettes of each of these conflicts, followed by a brief discussion pertaining to the implications drawn from the conflict scenarios and how they relate to the aims of this study. Moreover, Nasir highlights at the early end of the interview

process that the situation following the emergence of the pandemic complicated how he navigated conflict during this period of time. In Nasir's case, all three of the conflicts he describes are in some way connected to large changes at the university or the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. This section will present each of these conflict as vignettes and discuss implications derived from each conflict scenario.

Conflict 1: Identity-Related Conflict With Program Director

At the beginning of the second interview, Nasir stated "COVID has created a lot of monsters everywhere," prior to describing the first conflict situation. Before the pandemic, when conflict would arise, he would sit down with individuals face-to-face to work through the problems and mediate conflicts. However, with the shift to remote work and virtual meetings, it became impossible to have these conversations in person, and as he reflected, "this has just exacerbated it, quite frankly, not being able to [sit down with people in person]." In further painting the picture of how navigating conflicts shifted during the first year of the pandemic, he shared:

I'm on the phone, Zoom, everything, all day long resolving conflict with students and problems and that kind of thing [sic]. It just goes on and on and on. In the past, no. It was resolved. And I have to do it. I have to make contact with them because the issues are getting so out of hand emotionally that once I make the contact with them, in 10 minutes it's resolved. And so [now] I can't not do that. I can't let it fester. I think I had four or five students today I had to bring down from their high drama. [They just] thought it was the end of the world.

After providing this context, Nasir pivoted to reflecting on the first conflict situation that he was dealing with at the time of the interviews for this study. It involved one of his employees, a program director, whom he had placed on an intervention program due to continued ineffective work behaviors and a pattern of failing to meet her job responsibilities. This pattern had started

before the pracademic and became more erratic with the shift to working remotely. Nasir expressed, “her behavior has just been out of control and deliberately obstructing what her job is to facilitate . . . And instead of facilitating things, she’s doing the opposite, doing whatever she can to obstruct things moving forward.”

Nasir provided a specific example of how she had written up several contracts with external partners, and he signed off on them as per protocol. However, she never followed through to make sure the contractual obligations had been completed with the contractors, yet she still paid them out without them completing the work. In his own words, he described his impression of what was problematic about her behavior in these instances, stating, “[This] is government money because it’s all through [a federal grant], which that’s abusing her position and she’s entangling me in that kind of activity. Which in a way it’s almost fraudulent, to be honest.” He continued to expand and share:

So, it’s not like I haven’t been after her about these things, and it’s not like she’s followed through with some of these things. But that one I had to report to the provost because I said, I don’t want this coming back. She did a little hurry-up kind of thing at the end to try and justify the payments. She was supposed to make the payments in June and didn’t make them till August, September. Because the books were closing on that money, on those funds, so she just quickly did payments, not checking to see whether they had done the work or not. Then I hear on the other side from some of the folks that she never gave them proper direction on what to do, but of course, they still got paid. One person was honest and did do a report, and he said that because of COVID, there were certain activities he couldn’t do. That can be forgiven, quite frankly. I don’t have any problem with that, but then the rest of them tried to hide it. And that’s dragging me into those kinds of activities. So, I did report it to the provost, though.

He shared that she had become “very passive aggressive” in her approach to him in recent months and explained that she was “trying to involve other people on campus, that kind of thing, on her fight, trying to get people on her side.” Eventually, she went to HR to air her concerns, which escalated the tension and conflict between them.

Nasir conveyed that there was an identity-based dynamic present in this conflict. As a Black woman, she had made insinuating comments about white people gaining power and taking over the university. As a white man, Nasir perceived that these comments, in part, were directed toward him. He expounded on this element of the situation by stating:

I feel like she still has some issues with me being the dean and her supervisor, even though I have been tremendously supportive of her project and her department verbally everywhere. Financially I haven't questioned the decisions she's made, which I've not been thrilled with all of them, but I've still allowed her to make them, even though I think dollars could be spent in a better way. Particularly during COVID, they could have been. There's no question about it.

Historically, this was an individual whom Nasir had no major issues with. Though he did acknowledge that she had a history of making insinuations that HBCUs "should be only for black people." Nasir is the first white dean in this position at the university, and he expressed some sympathy toward her perspective. However, he was quick to acknowledge that the university is a public institution, and therefore hiring based on racial identity is not in line with the policies. Additionally, he shared, "I'm the highest level of a white person at that university, of any white person. The rest are either at my level or below my level, and the higher-level administrators and the board are all Black.

Additionally, Nasir shared that when she went to HR, it was conveyed to him that she stated that he had discriminated against her. He understood this to be an accusation that she perceived racial discrimination directed toward her. He reflected on this, and stated:

Honestly, that offends me greatly in the position I'm in. Why can't a white person be an administrator in an HBCU, successful administrator in an HBCU? That is a part that I don't like dealing with because I don't believe that.

The racialized aspect to this conflict appears to be a principal point of tension in this situation. Nasir sees himself as an equity-minded individual who understands the impact of

marginalization on not only Black folks, but for other people of color and with other marginalized social identities as well. In a way, being accused of racial discrimination was a threat to his personal values. Moreover, he shared that if he had not understood the impact of marginalization on people of color or feared being the racial minority in an organization, he would have never accepted the dean position at an HBCU. Reflecting further on this, he stated, “I’ve got nothing to fear, quite frankly. I will be honest; the young folks accept me much more readily than someone like this person who is in her seventies because they haven’t lived through those same kinds of experiences.”

After his employee filed the complaint to HR, Nasir filed what he referred to as a “counter-complaint,” in which he detailed and pointed to evidence of her not following through with the duties and responsibilities of her job. He rationalized this action by acknowledging that her quality of work had declined in the previous year and a half (just months before the pandemic emerged). Additionally, he contended, “I don’t want people to confront me about things that I know are not true. Don’t come to me with that nonsense and expect me to just roll over and smile. I won’t do it.”

Filing a complaint with HR was not something Nasir took lightly. He elaborated on the point that he rarely involves HR when navigating through conflict with employees that report to him, only involving HR as a last resort. He shared, “I don’t take employee problems to HR. I just don’t do it. I resolve them myself. The only time I had to is when I’ve had to fire people. I’ve had to involve HR.”

In this case, his countercomplaint resulted in his employee claiming that he had retaliated against her. Moreover, when he met with the HR director, they also used the word retaliate, which irked Nasir even more. In response, he stated:

So, I let her know I was dissatisfied and I was offended by her comment. I'm not going to let stuff like that go. I can't. You can't retain your integrity and allow stuff like that to happen. So yeah, that was a disappointment.

This conflict situation continued to be in process at the conclusion of the interviews for the study. What was clear was that Nasir did not perceive any of his actions as discriminatory toward the employee. He sees himself as an equity-minded individual who consciously does not engage in any discriminatory behaviors.

Developmental implications for conflict from this vignette. In the course of this conflict, Nasir consciously recognized and considered the various dynamics at play (i.e., social identities, the current context, and the influence of historical context). Nasir showed emotional empathy toward the director and demonstrated the ability to take her perspective (cognitive empathy), which influenced his desire and decision to accommodate her and sympathize with her. However, when her behavior posed a threat to his purpose—both professional role and personal ideology—he was compelled to take action.

Conflict 2: Navigating Leadership Changes

The second, more complex, and layered conflict that Nasir presented was directly influenced by the leadership changes that occurred within the past year and a half at the institution. Several of the highest-level leadership positions had new people at the helm, people who did not have the cultural, historical, and intuitional knowledge of the university prior to being hired in these positions. Moreover, with the onset of COVID-19, these new leaders were

not on campus physically on campus for the majority of their first year and a half at the institution, limiting their ability to genuinely learn the lay of the land, build relationships with existing staff and faculty, and understand complex aspects of the institution's culture. As a result, Nasir explained how this directly impacted the programs he oversaw. Particularly, as his programs were growing exponentially, the leadership at the institution appeared to be several steps behind in supporting these programs in the way that he saw fit. In his own words, Nasir stated, "There's a huge disconnect because these are people that were not on our campus, don't understand [the institution], [they] are coming from other universities, and have certain expectations that things are in place based on their experience at their universities."

One particularly significant example of how this impacted Nasir's programs dealt with his perceived lack of support from high-level leadership to support timely new hires in faculty positions as his programs were growing exponentially. Since he had been hired as dean of education, the new online program he developed had exploded in enrollment and was up over 4,000% in enrollment when compared to the first semester (the cohort of students was made up of under 30 enrollees, and at the time of this study was well over 1,000). For the stability and health of the program and regarding the quality of education for the students, Nasir deemed it critically important to hire more full-time faculty quickly. His current faculty at the time was being stretched thin, working overtime to meet the needs of their courses and students.

Moreover, Nasir expressed his frustration and disappointment at some of the hires the new administration made initially following their appointment. Several former mid-level employees of the university were rehired, many of whom he perceived to be ineffective and unskilled at their positions, implying this was part of the reason they left the university in the

first place. Several of the newly rehired individuals “tried to layer on [additional] work” Nasir’s faculty and staff. In this vein, Nasir shared:

We’re nationally accredited and we have certain standards we have to meet, and this just muddles that. And my folks are busy meeting those standards and I don’t want this muddled with somebody trying to create work for their position.

Nasir was quick to bring this to the attention of the new provost, who was among the new leadership unit. Nasir contended to the provost that the rehired individuals in mid-level leadership were making unwarranted requests for irrelevant data, which they could not provide a rationale for in the first place. He sought to protect his faculty and staff from having busy work piled on them, especially when they were already stretched to their limit concerning their current responsibilities and taking into account the vast number of students they were actively working to provide quality education for. Reflecting on this, he stated:

My team are thankful that I advocate for them, and I don’t just try and layer stuff on—ridiculous stuff. I know what’s ridiculous and what’s meaningful, and I won’t give them ridiculous work to do. So, they understand that, and they appreciate it. But sometimes you have to take the hard knocks for doing it.

“I think the president is beginning to understand” the situation, Nasir admitted. However, he explained that the president, especially a newly positioned president, was spending more time out in the community building relationships and raising money for this institution, so the provost oversaw the day-to-day ongoing at the university and its multiple colleges. Plus, Nasir did not work directly with the president, given the structure of hierarchy at the institution, as he explained:

[In the] other two institutions I was at, I worked directly with the president. So, I could walk into [their] office anytime and sit down and discuss issues or problems that were going on and get [their] feedback or get [their] support, whatever I needed. I don’t have that here. I have to go through layers. And that makes it very difficult in my situation because I’m the kind of person I can’t be a status quo dean. That’s not my nature. I have

to be constantly building. And I worked at other universities that appreciated that. This is the first . . . state university that I've worked at that didn't have to operate under those restrictions.

This statement not only unveils Nasir's frustration but also aids in illuminating how his self-authored mind shows up. He held a personally constructed theory of constantly growing and developing things (e.g., programs). The structure of the institution, paired with the new leadership, posed an unconscious threat to his meaning-making system, influencing the felt tension and conflict he experienced.

Moreover, in this case, the provost did not have adequate experience yet. He had no prior experience as a provost and was learning on the job. Nasir expressed that "as a provost who's managing—it's a difficult situation to manage four colleges and all the other parts of it when you've never had that experience."

Nasir shared that he took the initiative to have a conversation with the provost and provide him with additional perspective, as Nasir had assumed the role of provost at one of his previous institutions for a relatively short period, yet he had been at the institution for approximately 12 years before taking on this role.

I explained that to him. I said, it made a big difference. And I understand you're just trying to learn what's going on, what you can believe and what you don't believe. I understand all of that. But I said, you got to, and you've got to be honest with the president when you bring stuff to him. Because if you don't tell him exactly what's going on, how's he going to make proper decisions? He can't.

With the increased enrollment, faculty took on significant amounts of additional work. Nasir explained that they were compensated for their work, but it was at a reduced rate (an adjunct rate after reaching obligatory course load requirements). The reduced rate did add up for many of the faculty, and Nasir anticipated "some pretty big checks" for the pay period, which

included their fall and spring overload pay (well over 10,000 dollars beyond their standard salary for some faculty). However, a problem occurred within the payroll process, and the individual responsible for forwarding the request to payroll, who was outside Nasir's department and was responsible for this step in the process for other departments as well, did not send the request through to payroll, as was protocol. As a result, the additional payout to nearly a dozen faculty did not go through. When Nasir received word of this, he became incensed.

Before payroll processing, he had been notified by the individual that "there were some mistakes." When he contacted her, it turned out that there was only one mistake that she could identify and share with Nasir initially. Following this communication, Nasir rectified the mistakes nearly a week before the processing day. Then the day before processing he was notified that there were two additional minor mistakes. One faculty had accidentally typed in one wrong digit for a course number. Another faculty member made the same mistake as the initially identified unintentional error of claiming they had taught a one-credit course when the recently revised protocol stipulated that the course only counted for half credit. (This revised protocol had not been formally communicated to Nasir and his faculty, thus the unintentional discrepancy.)

Still, the day before processing, Nasir spoke with her and stated that three "mistakes" she identified could be addressed later. Everything else could be processed, and they would address these three issues prior to the next pay period. As Nasir explained, the credit hours that the two faculty members reported were in line with the way his department had determined credit hours for nearly two years preceding this incident. He had all the previous examples documented and planned to argue this point on behalf of his faculty. Moreover, he insinuated that this issue came

on the heels of the new provost's recent hiring, and he stated that the previous provost would approve this credit allocation regularly.

Instead of making the corrections to the three issues and processing all the other faculty members' acceptable requests, the individual with whom he had communicated back and forth on the matter neglected to modify any of the corrections or process any of his faculty's requests.

This negligence further aggravated Nasir, as he stated:

That's when I [got] angry, and the faculty knew it. I wrote them an email of apology and told them that this shouldn't have happened, and I apologize that you're not getting paid [this period]. However, I will try and get you paid [next period].

That's an example where I'll go to the mat on that one [sic]. I called the provost, and I sent him the evidence and I really raised hell. I said, "This is spiteful for whatever the reason she's doing it. She's targeting [our college] for some reason." And by the way, there's another college in our building . . . Their offices are in our building, too. My chair was talking to one of their chairs and she said, "We make mistakes all the time on these forms." In fact, she said, "The forms we sent in this time had 15 mistakes on them." And she said, "This person called me up and over the phone changed the forms and corrected them." So, she says, "Yeah, I know you're being targeted, but I don't know why." I'm like, "Okay, what did we do?"

In reflecting on this experience, Nasir struggled to fully comprehend the motivation behind her actions. She could have easily aided in swiftly rectifying the situation, but instead she exacerbated it. The primary motivation that he could point to was the feeling of resentment that other individuals and departments at the university may have felt toward the college he led. This apparent resentment fueled acts perceived as retaliation. Moreover, he explained that "other departments were having trouble keeping up because we were growing so fast, the support departments weren't keeping up, and they were getting blamed for not keeping up, which it's [their] job." He continued to provide multiple examples of how their growth was impacting other departments who could not keep up with their growth. He continued, expressing that "I think we irritated some people. But they shouldn't have been. Because frankly . . . the fact that we took all

these online students is the reason why we're not laying people off" like many other universities where while navigating the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on enrollment nationwide. Even the college president had previously verbalized this actuality. Nasir recalled him saying, in reference to the online program run through Nasir's college, "This is keeping us going."

As he reflected on this, he attempted to take other department's employee's perspectives on this, though did so through his own lens, stating:

I can't come up with any other reason, to be honest. Because knowing that we basically saved jobs, you think they'd be thankful. In my mind, I would be, but . . . they have trouble with that. They think the university is going to be there and going to be able to keep them employed no matter what, and that's not true. Because we had layoffs before I came [here]. There [were over 100 people] laid off . . .

Even though I've known that I still can't be a status quo dean. I have to be visionary. I have to look to the future. I have to know what I can do, and I have to go ahead and make progress towards doing that. It's something I can't shake. I can't just sit back and do nothing.

Nasir again expressed his heightened frustration and stated that the mistake highlighted by the individual appeared to be a protocol change in how teaching credits were assigned when faculty are teaching an individual or small group of students, with directly influences the pay structure.

Developmental implications for conflict from this vignette. In this scenario, Nasir swiftly addressed the mistakes after initially being notified and did so swiftly, initially seeking to resolve the situation by working together to make the correction. However, the staff member's behavior was perceived as being intentionally undermining by Nasir, and internally this was experienced as a threat toward both the quality and intention of this work, but also was perceived as a threat to him personally. Moreover, his ability to look at the larger pattern of behaviors and greater historical and current context influenced his interpretation of the situation (4ish system)

and contributed to his decision to take an assertive (i.e., competitive) approach to address this situation.

Additionally, he recognized the direct impact of the mistakes on his faculty and effortlessly demonstrated perspective-taking, which influenced his communication approach with the faculty. He recognized how this impacted them, demonstrating wholehearted sympathy and support, but did not feel guilty for what they were feeling (indicative of mindset “4”).

Conflict 3: Faculty Chair Retention and Support

The faculty chair expressed his desire to step down, and Nasir was unsure who to ask but wanted to ask one of the newer faculty members who just loved to teach, so he anticipated that she would not be interested. He asked her. She ended up taking it, and as Nasir reflected, “She’s done a terrific job. She’s very well organized. And when you have as many classes as we have, as many students as we process, you have to be really organized.” He also explained:

[She is] chair of [over 1,000] students. We have chairs on campus who don’t even have 100 students and she’s got [over 1,000]. And she’s managed it well, including hiring a lot of new adjuncts. She can only hire adjuncts. But she’s done that and done that well . . . Given that, she hit a wall . . . and she’s ready to step down. Frustration has just gotten too much.

She managed the role as chair for just under a year before expressing this desire to step down. Nasir explained in our interview that, especially in the college of education, the workload of a chair was significant. Yet, the compensation was well under what was deserved, which contributed to her frustration. He conveyed to her that the university recognized this discrepancy and actively explored options to rectify it.

The week following her declaration of wanting to step down, she called Nasir back and apologized. His response to her was, “You don’t have to do that. We all hit our points where

we're frustrated, and we vent, and that's okay. I'm fine with that. You're not the first person that's done that today, by the way." They proceeded to have a conversation regarding her concerns with the position. Nasir requested that she retain the position for a little while longer until they learned what the university planned to do to address the inadequate compensation for the chair position. Nasir conveyed that she responded by saying something to the effect of, "I know that you'll follow through on that. Okay, I'm willing to just wait a while and sit it out . . . I know you're not just telling me that."

Her response came as encouraging news in his ears. He expressed that had she held firm to her desire and decision to step down, it would have created "a big conflict" with a vacancy in the chair position and no apparent heir to fill the position. In their conversation, he said to her that "I have asked for a second chair. I want to split your duties into two chairs." Moreover, he shared additional context and perspective by stating:

I asked for [a second chair] a while back and I never got an answer. I started asking [several months ago]. Now I got to put in a firmer proposal where I've got to have this done or she's just going to step down, kind of a thing [sic]. I have to save the college, for God's sake . . . I brought it up [earlier this year]. I wasn't very forceful about it, but now I'll get a little more forceful. I told her, I said, "Just be patient I'll work on it."

As Nasir reflected on this encounter with the faculty chair of the college, the exchange shined a light on his eagerness to advocate on his faculty's behalf. He conveyed that this willingness to take action on another's behalf was part of what made him an effective "higher-middle" manager. Moreover, it was clear, based on his rendering of this situation, that this faculty member trusted him to advocate for her. Therefore, she was willing to go along with his proposed plan even though it was not the most comfortable pathway for her. Nasir articulated

a conscious awareness concerning how his willingness to advocate for his faculty builds trust and reciprocity and fosters a sense of being on the same team as he stated:

So, you have to build that kind of confidence in the people that work for you that you will advocate for them wherever you possibly can. You have to have them on your side. You have to have them working with you. They're not working for you; they have to be working with you.

Developmental implications for conflict from this vignette. Nasir expressed immediately expressed empathy toward the department chair (especially cognitive empathy in the form of perspective-taking) yet did not demonstrate that he felt responsible for her feelings. He then asked her to reconsider (a 3ish mind might accommodate her without any pushback so as to not risk the relationship). His commitment to advocating for his faculty and his department was informed by his self-authored mindset in that he was fundamentally propelled by own self-generated values and goals.

Case Study Findings

Nasir demonstrated that he is conscious of the various dynamics at play in each conflict he encountered. From his self-authored mind, he can take perspective on the system's dynamics as well as the interpersonal and relational dynamics, and consider multiple elements when navigating the conflicts he articulated. Nasir showed emotional empathy and cognitive empathy but was not overly occupied by the affect of the others involved in conflict, which aided an approach to conflict that was rational.

Additionally, Nasir explained how he sees relationship building, in part, as “a matter of being proactive” versus “reactive.” He expressed that he does his best not to be reactive to situations and therefore makes a concerted effort to build relationships to prevent situations from escalating. He described various ways he does this. For example, he shared how he does not

simply have an “open door policy” but an “open office policy,” where people are welcome at any time. Moreover, he explained how he avoids calling people to his office, as he sees it as “kind of demeaning,” comparing it to being called into the principal’s office. Instead, he would make an effort to go to people’s offices, where they are comfortable, and approach the exchange in a “conversational way” instead of a “directive way.” He expressed how he is “very deliberate in those actions” and decisions. This demonstrated his capacity to take others’ perspective and consider their interests, seeing them as separate from his own.

Finally, he demonstrated that conflict which could be a threat to his self-authored ideology (building and growing programs or supporting his people) he took more personally and were more difficult to take a more heightened and objective perspective on. This demonstrated how his personal ideologies are still subject to him (congruent with the self-authored mindset).

See additional elements and characteristics demonstrated by Nasir in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7*Summary of Key Findings for Nasir*

Key Areas	Elements and Characteristics
Mindset (i.e., meaning-making structure)	<p>The self-authored mind is equilibrated (cohered) as the primary meaning-making system.</p> <p>Demonstrated a “4” mindset (supported by interrater SOI evaluation)</p>
Meaning-making features exhibited	<p>Self-generated personal ideology: Aims to cultivate and grow programs; will not compromise if negatively impacts students; equity-minded</p> <p>Featured qualities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relies on his own internal authority and way of knowing (strong sense of purpose) • Distinguishes other individuals’ values and interests from his own • Can evaluate his own perspective and the perspectives of others • Demonstrates emotional empathy (affective empathy) though does not dwell on the emotions of others, and does not show guilt or responsibility over others’ feelings or behaviors (as they are not his own) • Demonstrates active and deliberate perspective-taking (cognitive empathy) without overthinking • Makes sense of situations by integrating multiple data points, systems, and perspective • Holds strong opinions and judgments, and initially will not impose them on others, unless deemed necessary within the context of the problem/conflict
Demonstrated orientation to conflict	<p>Esposed approach: Direct and assertive, while also taking others’ concerns and interests into account; seeks fair resolution; considers the larger context; will fight when necessary</p> <p>Demonstrated approach: Direct, assertive, and fair in his approaches to resolving conflict; though, when his personal ideology (values, goals for the department, and treatment of his students and faculty) is seen as threatened will fight and act, doing whatever it takes to address the situation</p> <p>Strong congruence between espoused and demonstrated approaches</p>
Theory applied (actions and behaviors demonstrated)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to hold multiple paradoxes at the same time when making sense of an issue and deciding how to act • Can take the perspective of other stakeholders, even on the opposing side of a conflict, though often privileges own perspective (esp. goals and values) • He occasionally takes a more aggressive approach, when necessary (esp. with matters of justice, fairness, and ethics), and will aside empathy and compassion • Keen sense of his power and authority, and uses it to benefit his goals and values, always with his students and faculty in mind • <u>Willing to push back against those in higher positions of power and authority</u>
Gaps and limitations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attached to personal ideology (values, principles, and way of being), and not see the gaps or flaws in his perspective at times • Can struggle to see the value in others’ perspectives when different from his own (can see the other perspective but may not see the value in it)
Additional insights/implications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-assured and confident and not afraid to get into the messy aspects of conflict, and not afraid of hurting feelings or damaging relationships if necessary

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- Can view others as inferior, when they may lack the experience, intellect, or mindset that he does, though will still respect them unless they threaten something important to him
-

Tamera “4”

Tamera’s career arc in higher education at first glance appears to be a common one. She taught in English as an adjunct faculty member at several higher education institutions as a first step, eventually landing a tenure track position at a Midwestern community college in the early 1990s. While working her way up to full professor, she served in various leadership roles, including serving over a half-decade as the department chair. In the mid-2000’s she shifted into administrative leadership, stepping into the dean of arts and sciences position at another community college in the region. In the years since she has worked at three different community colleges in the role of academic department dean. Her current role is dean of a department that houses creative and liberal arts she assumed in the mid-2010s.

Tamera holds a Bachelor of Science in secondary education and speech communication and a Master of Arts in English. She does not hold a higher degree than a master’s.

One unique and noteworthy storyline in Tamera’s journey is that she overcame significant resistance from her family to pursue her education as the only individual among a large sibling group to earn a college bachelor’s degree (which she did in three years, rather than the standard four), and earned a master’s degree a decade later. Her parents did not actively support her educational efforts. None of her immediate family members earned a college degree. From her perspective, they did not see the value in it. She was brought up in a blue-collar family. Her parents were factory workers whom hobby farmed on the side. As she put it, they “helped with incidentals” while she was in college, and they let her borrow an old “dented-up Chevy”

(which ran on waste oil from the farm). She covered everything else, supporting herself through college. She shared that this experience “taught me a great lesson as to if I wanted to move forward in the career that I had chosen, I needed to make it work for me. I need to earn money and save and find odd jobs and that kind of thing.”

This background plays a role in her work to this day. She shared that she relates to students that come from similar economic or blue-collar backgrounds, who themselves may be first-generation college students. For Tamera, this appears to be one of her deep values, providing others with a quality education to support them in their upward economic mobility.

Concerning Tamera’s role as the academic dean at the time of this study, she oversaw the largest division at the multi-campus community college where she worked. She conveyed that her division had approximately 70 full-time faculty and roughly 200 adjunct faculty.

Tamera self-identifies as someone comfortable with conflict. If it can be resolved, she sees an opportunity in conflict and tries to move the conflict toward resolution.

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, her college was experiencing significant changes in leadership and processes, which contributed to the complex conflicts she spoke to in the interviews. She described in detail three conflict-laden experiences, which will be explored below. In the next section, I will look at the constructive developmental mindset of Tamera, which will be used as a lens through which these conflicts will be viewed as each conflict scenario is explored.

Tamera’s Meaning-Making Structure

Tamera exemplifies the self-authoring mindset. She leans heavily on her own internal authority and is guided by a system of self-generated values, standards, and way of being (e.g., a

theory of self or self-generated personal ideology). This way of constructing meaning is embedded in the self-authoring mind. For Tamera, her personal theory is tied to the notion of striving to “move things forward.” She seeks to continue to push things forward in a constructive way. Below is an excerpt from her SOI that highlights her self-authored mindset as she responded to a question about the role external validation plays for her:

Today, [validation from others is] a nice benefit, but I don’t see that it is absolutely necessary because I know I can forge my own path. I know what projects I need to work on. I know what needs to happen in order to get them done. And I’m confident that that’s going to happen. I know that I can build a good team around that and we’re going to have a product at the end. So, there’s that sense of accomplishment there.

At the time of the interviews for this study, her meaning-making system was assessed to be at the equilibrated self-authoring mindset. She did not doubt or articulate any concern with the limits of her personal ideology at a conscious level and did not demonstrate the capacity to question and take perspective on her own way of making meaning (which could indicate elements of a 5ish system). Yet, in a few instances, she did demonstrate characteristics that my preliminarily point toward an emergent self-transforming mind, in that she did display some capacity to see multiple systems at play and mindfully consider the perspectives of others, though she did not show the ability to integrate them with her own perspective.

Vignettes of Tamera’s Conflicts

During the second interview, the Critical Conflict Interview (CCI), Tamera detailed three distinct conflicts she navigated during the previous year, all of which she was continuing to navigate at the time of the interview. This section will provide vignettes of each of these conflicts, followed by a brief discussion pertaining to the implications drawn from the conflict scenarios and how they relate to the aims of this study. In Tamera’s case, all three of the conflicts

she describes are connected to large changes in the college and are interconnected with one another.

Conflict 1: Pivoting During the Onset of COVID-19 (In a Diminished Role)

Tamera took a big-picture view on the first conflict she chose to highlight in the CCI interview. She spoke broadly about how she and her counterparts (mainly other academic department deans) navigated some of the complexities that either directly or indirectly escalated tensions causing conflict at her institution due to forced changes with what she referred to as the “COVID-19 reboot.” Tamera expressed that she and her counterparts at her institution initially navigated these changes and the corresponding conflicts relatively well, pivoting quickly and making appropriate accommodations for students, faculty, and staff.

The main difficult and ongoing conflict point she highlighted related to course scheduling at the institution during COVID-19. Prior to the inception of the pandemic, the faculty successfully negotiated a new contract, which granted them significantly more power to them when it came to scheduling courses at the institution. This move aligned with the chancellor and provost advocating for a “faculty-led institution.” Before this change, department deans took a more prominent role in scheduling courses. As Tamera portrayed it, following the new contract agreement, faculty became almost exclusively responsible for scheduling.

Tamera described that one noteworthy element that contributed to this conflict in her mind was that “it doesn’t seem as if the right questions are being asked or the right questions are being asked of those who are involved.” In her mind, there was a lack of both communication and a larger systems perspective on the part of high-level leadership regarding scheduling protocols (a quality of self-authored mind), especially in the wake of the new contract (and with

the impact of COVID-19). In part, from her perspective, it appeared that no one was taking responsibility and that there was a lack of direction communicated by the high-level leadership at the institution. Still, she was convinced that the conflict was resolvable, stating:

[The conflict is] up and down, ebbs and flows with this whole particular process. All of this is resolvable. But it's a matter of the timing on when all of these decisions are made because right now is when we are preparing the schedule for all of next year. And is that wasted work? Not necessarily, but it's now going to be twice as much work to put all of that into place. And that affects the admins who are doing all of that, the facilities managers. It affects so many people and I don't think those who are making the decision have that global perspective because they're not thinking in that way.

Tamera suggested that she was thinking in this more “global perspective,” thinking about the interacting systems, whereas other higher-level leaders and faculty were not, at least from what she had observed. In this, she recognized how the scheduling process and planning for the upcoming semesters would impact the students, as she stated, “Students need choices in scheduling,” but deans had not been consulted, “creating a lot of unnecessary work.” This goes against a feature of her personal theory of seeking to move things forward, causing internal conflict for her.

I pride myself on trying to be a good communicator and being very transparent with the decisions that are out there and what's happening. And so, I guess part of my frustration in all of this is when I'm not afforded that same privilege of having the communication strand or having the data strand and things are just sort of pushed on us that I can't communicate that. I can't be transparent about it. I can't let the people who need to know how they should react to it or how we're going to resolve this or how we're going to work this into the schedule. So, some of my frustration comes within that particular piece. But I still try to communicate to the faculty as best as I can, but I'm not going to send them a newsletter because it's redundant at that point. You get too many emails, it gets lost, especially in the remote world.

In this situation, Tamera refrained from speaking specifically to her role in this conflict yet articulated how it was impacting her ability to do her work, particularly in the realm of communication. At times, Tamera also implied that she would sit back and wait for the

responsible individual leaders to act. It was clear that she held a keen understanding of the bureaucracy of the institution and refrained from rocking the boat unless her actions would prove beneficial to the students and the college.

Furthermore, Tamera recognized that many complexities were playing into the scheduling process conflict, such as waiting to hear requirements from the state's governor, faculty neglecting to make decisions in a timely fashion, whether classes would be online or in-person, and whether the social distancing requirement should be six feet or three.

She also held a keen awareness of what her reformed (yet diminished) role was and shared that it is no longer her responsibility to make the scheduling decisions for her division anymore, stating, "It's not my job anymore." In this, she questioned the new structure and its impact on stakeholders:

Who is going to be fielding all of the discomfort and the frustration from those individuals when we have to make that action? And it's like, okay, all right, let's all work together to figure it all out, but it didn't really need to be that way. There could have been a better plan.

Tamera also shared a constructive side effect of the pandemic. She described how the changes and conflicts brought the academic deans closer together. "The conflict has caused us to unite," she stated, and went on to say:

We had not taken the time to understand one another's positions or workloads or frustrations before COVID had hit . . . We just didn't take that kind of time. COVID has—more or less—forced [us] into these weekly sessions . . . We're all giving updates about things that are happening in our areas, frustrations that we are experiencing, and how can we help one another in that sense. So, building that network among the academic deans, I think, is something that we've been forced to do, but I think we've survived very well due to that circumstance.

Here, her capacity to reframe and identify the constructive byproduct of navigating the conflicts with her peers is an area where she took some pride. It was evident that she saw the

value in these reoccurring and intentional regular meetings. Her ability to identify silver linings amid the turmoil showed up in other areas as well.

[Within] that group, I no longer hesitate to reach out to other individuals. I used to always reach out to the vice chancellor because he was my immediate supervisor. I don't feel that I can do that with the provost, because again, we don't know what her position is, so we reach out to one another. In order to get answers and in order to move forward, we are relying on one another and taking advice from one another as to how to move forward. So, I think in building that network, that is one of the success stories that we can pull from all of this.

The other underlying dynamic that plays into this is the newer leadership at the institution. Both the provost and the chancellor are new to the institution (within the last year). She shared how in the past, she would not hesitate to approach the provost with a question. However, she has not built up this relationship, and with the new dynamics around the shift to a faculty-led institution, she appears to be walking this figurative line carefully.

Just being organized and trying to keep it all afloat and moving forward . . . That's just come up within the last two weeks and so I'm spending numerous hours on all of that right now. But it's okay. That's kind of what I think my role should be, even though it was supposed to be faculty-driven. Nope, I'm snatching that back because it's not getting done. You're not asking the right questions, even though it was all provided for you. And we got to get it done. We just have to get it done. We got to move forward, and at this point, I think that might be the next conflict is we're going to have to just say, look, you guys are at such a standstill right now, we've got to get this done. Please let the deans move forward, ask all of the right questions and reboot this for you. We'll see how they react to that.

Here Tamera's self-authored mind was on full display, as she rationalized and acted on her self-derived goals and values.

Developmental implications for conflict from this vignette. Tamera's self-authored mindset informed her drive to be involved in moving things forward, toward resolution, toward improving systems and communication to primarily benefit the students, though also the

organization as a whole. To a considerable extent, she showed that she can and often does take a global or systems perspective on the complexities that play into this context.

She can identify some of the benefits of the complex conflict and change, as she spoke to the growth of the relationships and communication with her counterpart deans as a silver lining that emerged from this difficult period at the institution.

Tamera showed that she is not afraid of conflict and suggested that she was ready to step back into aspects of her roles and responsibilities that were taken away with the reconstruction of her role—specifically with scheduling—so as to “move things forward” (even when she it was no longer her responsibility, she felt compelled to support the scheduling debacle).

For her, conflict appeared to escalate in perceived negative ways when her capacity to live into her way of being (e.g., “moving things forward”) was perceived to be jeopardized.

Conflict 2: New Leadership and Understanding the Shifting Role of the Dean Position and Working With a New Provost

The second complex and ongoing conflict Tamera highlighted, differentiated from, yet overlapped with the first example, and dealt with navigating the relationship and dynamics with the new provost as she and the other academic deans attempted to gain clarity on their shifting role at the institution. As she stated, “we’re almost to a year that [the new provost joined] the institution and we’re still somewhat unclear as to what our role is.” From Tamera’s perspective, this ongoing conflict was “truly a high stakes one,” as she and the other deans sought to understand their shifting roles and what this means for their future at the institution.

The new provost started roughly a year before our interview, and Tamera iterated and reiterated the frustration she and the other deans experienced, tied to the lack of clarity from the

provost regarding their revamped role. In part, this corresponded with the faculty taking on many of the responsibilities historically assigned to the deans, which came out of the new faculty contract (as mentioned in the previous section). These changes instigated significant frustration, which caused Tamera to wonder, “[Do] we have a job? Do we have any future at the institution?”

One of the notable escalation moments came shortly after COVID-19 forced the entire college to work remotely. At the onset of COVID-19 and the shift to working from home, Tamera began sending out a regular newsletter to her faculty with regular updates that included relevant information about their work. Then her newsletter was coopted by the provost—taken away from her control. This caused some hurt feelings on her part, mainly because there was no conversation leading up to this takeover. As she described it:

No recognition of all of the deans who had been [using the newsletter format] because I think I started it, then I would share it with all of [the] deans and say, edit this as you need to send out to your faculty. And many of them did, then all of a sudden, okay, now the provost is going to be doing some of that. It’s like, okay, all right. I guess that’s the way it’s going to be for right now.

Tamera has the largest division on campus and noted that it is nearly impossible to meet with all the individual faculty. She elected to communicate through emails as opposed to hosting large virtual sessions because, as she stated, “I’m not going to be able to hear everybody’s voice.” As individual issues and concerns arose, she navigated them with the individual faculty and her assistant dean. The provost, on the other hand, elected to host large virtual town halls, along with the co-opted newsletter.

Additionally, Tamera shared that since the new provost came in, “several faculty” began going around her and directly to the provost, and then she hears secondhand from the provost

regarding situations that she needs to be involved to address and resolve. She viewed this as a violation of the “chain of command” (though acknowledging her discomfort with using this language). Tamera stated that “I feel like it only perpetuates and escalates conflict over time, and tension,” referring to the violation of the chain of command. She went on to say, “I would rather engage in [it], rather than having my supervisor say, ‘What happened here? How was this resolved?’ It wasn’t resolved because I wasn’t even aware of it.”

This ongoing conflict with the provost was complicated by the new faculty contract, which gives significantly more power to the faculty and enabled the violation of the chain of command to exist and perpetuate, from her perspective. (Which will be addressed more in the third conflict scenario.)

At several points in the interview, Tamera was able to take the perspective of the new provost to an extent while making connections to her role as an academic dean. Below is one example of this:

[The provost has] got too much on her plate, I don’t feel by empowering the faculty to feel very comfortable in [going directly to the provost], I’m [doing] my job to lessen her load. And I don’t think she is seeing the value of the academic deans in helping to lessen her load so that she can concentrate on other things. I just don’t think she’s utilizing the experience and the knowledge and the expertise that the academic deans have by allowing that particular behavior. That really did not occur before when we had a vice chancellor of academic affairs.

As a means of addressing this role uncertainty issue, which impacted the conflict and tension Tamera described, she explained that the deans planned to meet with the new head of human resources to “plead our case.” She continued by stating, “we’ve got so many new people and so many changes, and that way, we just really feel we need to state our case to all of the new individuals.” By doing this, she acknowledged that the deans are going around the provost

(though the provost was aware that there were conversations taking place with human resources regarding the faculty contract). On behalf of her and her counterparts, this initiative demonstrated their desire to work out a compromise that will gain more role clarity and power for them moving forward.

Developmental implications for conflict from this vignette. Tamera held a strong understanding of what her role as an academic dean required of her. Her once clearly defined role shifted significantly with the changes—i.e., hiring a new provost who is seen as a “friend to the faculty” and with the more emboldened faculty because of their new contract. The change was unsettling and uncomfortable for her. She is frustrated and disillusioned and called into question her ability to move things forward, contributing to the conflict.

Her navigation of this conflict was still in process at the conclusion of our interviews; however, it appeared that she saw these changes as a threat to her role and was attempting to advocate for herself and the other academic deans, with the goals of renegotiating the faculty contract to regain some power and influence in the scheduling process.

Pertaining to her developmental mindset, she fully displayed herself self-authored mind as she navigated this ongoing and complex conflict. She held a notion of her role and purpose at the institution and was challenged, and she shifted into a competitive mindset advocating for the reconstitution of the academic dean role. She shows the capacity to take the perspective of the provost and the various faculty stakeholders, acknowledging that not all faculty are viewing these concerns from the same perspective. However, she did not appear to be willing to concede or even fully engage in a collaborative effort with the other side(s), collaborating only with the

stakeholder—the other deans—on her side. Instead, she insinuated that her time at the institution might end if resolution does not come in a manner that she sees as beneficial to her perspective.

Conflict 3: Navigating the Scheduling Process With Newly Emboldened Faculty

Tamera's third complex conflict, referenced in the previous two vignettes, dealt with the fallout for the academic deans from the new faculty contract. The newly negotiated contract stipulated that faculty became responsible for the course scheduling process, which the academic deans previously administrated. Tamera summarized the conflict by stating:

[The faculty] negotiated for [control of the scheduling] process and now it's all in their hands and it's completely falling apart. They don't know what they're doing. They're not asking questions. And it is very much so beginning to impact how we are going to offer our classes in the next year. We have to meet a timeline in order for the students to register appropriately. Every day, every week, something comes out about that because it's been placed in inexperienced hands and those hands then are not asking for advice or direction, and it's prolonging the difficulties that are with that process.

This new agreement led to constant conflict. It was complicated by the fact that many of the faculty did not realize this new responsibility was built into the new contract, causing tension and infighting among the faculty. Yet, as the new contract stipulated, the deans no longer had any say or power in the process, and the once collaborative process, from Tamera's perspective, became nonexistent. As she stated:

I really strive for everything to be collaborative and for us to talk about things, always trying to keep the student at the forefront. That's not happening any longer. And so that decision-making power, it feels like it's been stripped from the academic deans.

As she explained, now there was no real power for the faculty to provide a rationale for scheduling changes. As a result, if there is conflict, the faculty will go straight to the union or the provost if “they're not getting the answer that they want,” preventing constructive conversations scheduling from being had. Clearly showing frustration concerning this new structure and

process, Tamera stated, “So yeah, our power in that sense has been severely diminished. Our expertise and our knowledge has been clearly devalued, and it’s not even considered, even though we try to use data in those decisions. So it’s very frustrating.”

Developmental implications for conflict from this vignette. Collaboration is a core professional and self-generated value for Tamera. The impact of the new faculty contract on her and other deans’ viability to collaborate with faculty and higher-level administrators diminished due to the new contract from her perspective. As she highlighted, significant power was stripped away from her and her colleagues with this development. Tamera did not speak explicitly and in detail about her actions regarding this, though it is evident that these changes have taken a toll. She advocated for a change in the contract, as it was only a one-year contract and would be up for renegotiation. She engaged her colleagues, the other academic deans at the college, leaning on this network and finding a collaborative spirit within them. However, there was much left unresolved as of the conclusion of the interviews with Tamera.

Conflict 4: Navigating Resistance to Change From Faculty

When COVID forced the shift to virtual learning, a significant number of faculty resisted the adoption of online learning platforms and effective practices. Additionally, this was underlined by the fact that faculty had resisted adopting consistent practices for assessing students learning which would aid in contributing data for assessing overall learning occurring at the institution. As Tamera reflected, referring to faculty assessing students learning:

And I think many of [them assessing students’ learning] well. They just don’t [do] that back-end piece and they resist [it] . . . They just don’t [want someone telling them] you have to do this. Because they feel they are an independent agency in that way. So yeah, it’s accountability. It’s providing that data that they are, in fact, moving forward or helping the students move forward. I think it has to do with collaboration. It flabbergasts

me . . . They're just caught in these ruts . . . It's a matter of being proactive. Reactive, I can't [sic]. I don't like that. I'm not comfortable with being reactive to situations.

Tamera shared many failed attempts to communicate and work with the faculty in her division from a collaborative orientation, which was disheartening for her. In all the situations she highlighted, she ascribed this lack of desire to adapt and adopt consistent practices as acts of self-interest on the faculty member's part. She came to this rationale in part through an unwavering practice of seeking to take their perspective and engage them in dialogue. Yet she perceived that there was an unwillingness to engage genuinely in dialogue on their end.

Developmental implications for conflict from this vignette. In this brief vignette, Tamera again demonstrated that when her self-generated (self-authored) values and desired ways of being in relationship with the faculty were impeded, this was experienced as exhausting conflict. Moreover, the self-generated values of being proactive and accountable were also experienced as forms of conflict for her.

Case Study Findings

In this case study, the conflicts that Tamera highlighted were complex and overlapping and resulted from significant internal changes and external influences. The primary change-influenced conflict she articulated centered around the appointment of a new provost at the college and the newly adopted faculty contract. These changes were overshadowed by the onset of COVID-19, which she recognized impacted the way that communication took place at the institution, and drastically impacted the scheduling process.

From the self-authored mind, Tamera leaned on her personal ideology to guide her meaning-making in conflict, which influenced her thinking and behaviors. Protection of self-deemed important elements of her personal ideology appeared to be strongly linked to her

motivations (in these conflict situations), which determined her thinking, decisions, and behaviors. Her unconscious commitment to her personal ideology influenced how she reacted and responded to conflict situations. True to where she was developmentally, she did not demonstrate the capacity to take perspective on this—to critically reflect on her own personal ideology and view it as object. (Being able to articulate a way the self is, in a psychological sense, is different from having the ability to objectively reflect on and critique one's self-generated ideology.) Conflict in a very real sense occurred for her when her personal ideology was perceived and/or felt to be threatened.

In all three scenarios, her responses varied to an extent. They ebbed and flowed, but they were driven by her the aspect of her personal ideology, which influenced the drive to “move things forward.” When her power or capability to move things forward was threatened, this was experienced as an unfavorable conflict.

She demonstrated the capacity to engage in all primary individual conflict styles depending on the context. She collaborated, escalated conflict and asserted herself, avoided becoming too involved in certain contexts, and demonstrated a willingness to accommodate.

One of the unique elements that Tamera shared, unlike many of the other participants in this study, she stated that she is comfortable with conflict. She felt secure in herself, but she did reveal that there were still anxieties and stressors that emerged when she was steeped in complex conflict.

See additional elements and characteristics pertaining to key areas of this study demonstrated by Tamera in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8*Summary of Key Findings for Tamera*

Key Areas	Elements and Characteristics
Mindset (i.e., meaning-making structure)	<p>The self-authored mind is equilibrated (cohered) as the primary meaning-making system.</p> <p>Demonstrated a “4” mindset (supported by interrater SOI evaluation)</p>
Meaning-making features exhibited	<p>Self-generated personal ideology: moving things forward deliberately; strives for collaboration; finds deep meaning in utilizing knowledge and skills for the greater good</p> <p>Featured qualities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relies on her own internal authority and way of knowing (strong sense of purpose) • Distinguishes other individuals’ values and interests from her own • Can evaluate her own perspective and the perspectives of others • Recognizes others as autonomous individuals, but still can lump groups of individuals she is in conflict with as one (though recognizes variance within the other group) • Demonstrates emotional empathy (affective empathy) though does not dwell on the emotions of others, and does not show guilt or responsibility over others’ feelings or behaviors (as they are not his own) • Demonstrates active and deliberate perspective-taking (cognitive empathy) without overthinking • Makes sense of situations by integrating multiple data points, systems, and perspectives • Holds strong opinions and judgments, but does not impose them on others
Demonstrated orientation to conflict	<p>Espoused approach: Collaborative and strives to problem solve with others to find win-win solutions; strategic, empathetic, and cognizant of her role and authority (and its limits)</p> <p>Demonstrated approach: Collaborative first, though when her personal ideology is perceived as threatened or she is unable to fully live into her purpose, values, and role, she utilizes strategically assertive and compromising approaches; will accommodate and avoid if the issue/conflict is beyond her control or influence</p> <p>Strong congruence between espoused and demonstrated approaches</p>
Theory applied (actions and behaviors demonstrated)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With ease can take the perspective of other stakeholders, even on the opposing side of a conflict • She occasionally takes a more passive approach, sitting back and waiting to see how things pan out (though struggles internally with this depending on the issue) • Assertive, efficient, and strategic in responding to change, when action can be taken within her articulated role • Keen role awareness, and rarely steps outside her determined role (though displays a willingness to, if important to her)
Gaps and limitations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attached to personal ideology (values, principles, and way of being), and not see the gaps or flaws in her perspective at times • Can struggle to see the value in others’ perspectives when different from her own (can see the other perspective but may not see the value in it)

Additional insights/implications	Frequent use of the term “collaboration” (could be interpreted as a borderline fixation or strong desire to adhere to the ideal of the notion of collaboration), which may inhibit swift action at times
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Lisa “4”

Lisa’s interest in working in higher education emerged during her undergraduate studies at a public university studying psychology. Initially, she planned to pursue a career as a psychologist, though made a conscious shift to focus on higher education administration while pursuing her master’s degree, which occurred shortly after finishing her bachelor’s degree. She went on to complete a PhD in a college of education, focused on supporting counseling services in higher education.

In Lisa’s thirty-plus years of work in higher education, she held a variety of different roles at a half dozen different institutions, working in her early years as a research assistant and teaching assistant, serving as a tenure-track professor in counselor education, directing various programs, working in the roles of assistant dean and associate dean, before eventually taking on the role of dean of academic affairs at a community college in the Midwest. Additionally, she served for a short stint in the role of interim campus president.

Lisa self-identified as an African American. She is a first-generation college graduate. Both her parents completed some coursework at the college level (and her mom completed an associate degree while she was in college). Lisa identifies as a Christian, though expressed that she does not hold to strict religious practices, and instead focuses on developing her spirituality.

In response to being questioned about what led her down this trajectory in higher education leadership, Lisa shared:

When I came to college for the first time, walking around the campus, seeing how beautiful it was, the trees, the grass, the people, going to classes, feeling enriched by the

knowledge and exposure to new things and different ideas, I knew—that was probably my first full semester on campus—in my mind, I wanted to do something. So, the something I knew right then was to be a professor and spend the rest of my life on a college campus. [College] teaching was that venue to make that happen. It wasn't until some years later when I became an active student leader and exposed to other opportunities did I find out that there was actually an academic program on a master's level that trained you to be an administrator in higher education. So that opened up some additional options and doors for me to stay and built my career inside higher education.

Lisa is passionate about working in higher education, and though her parents did not graduate from college prior to her being admitted to college, education existed as an important value and pursuit in her family. Lisa shared a myth-like story about her great-great-grandfather, who was the first generation in her family lineage to be emancipated from slavery. He had a dream of having educated children and a wife that did not have to work. Eventually, he obtained sixty acres of land, on which he built a one-room schoolhouse for Black children. This story served as an inspiration for Lisa. In sharing why this vocation is important for her, she explained:

For me, I think it comes from a place of what true education, [and] access to education means to me, and the role that it has served in helping people to just build a better life. Not only in terms of the experience of my family and generations and what education meant to them, but also in terms of kind of seeing how so many people's lives, so many communities, so many societies, and just the world, in general, continued to move forth and evolve as they learn, and they understood more as they had more access to education.

Lisa's Meaning-Making Structure

Lisa primarily constructs meaning from the self-authoring mindset as demonstrated in the SOI. She clearly holds a self-generated personal ideology for meaning-making, and she appeared to actively and consciously bring this to her reflections throughout the interview process. For Lisa, the closely aligned values of integrity and authenticity are core to her personal ideology. She emphasized that almost everything that she does, particularly when it comes to conflict and navigating change, is looked at through a lens of integrity and authenticity.

An example of her self-authored mind, she reflected on how she navigates and mediates conflict among faculty:

For me, a lot of it has evolved over the years in terms of gauging the environment, the situation, and the people and the circumstance. For instance, if I am in a situation where I am dealing with maybe mediating a conflict between say two faculty members, my whole self, in terms of who I am in terms of authenticity, isn't as important as understanding what are the needs of these two individuals and what strategy I need to take to get them to the other side of this conflict.

Here she demonstrates the “4” mindset as she takes a perspective on her own perspective and deliberately chooses, for herself, to set aside a part of her values for another, though she experiences a sense of being torn in this instance.

She does not yet hold the perspective where she can critically critique her theory; however, she is aware of her theory—she is no longer full subject to it. Lisa demonstrates her meaning-making structure is evolving, and she is no longer embedded fully in the self-authored mindset.

Vignettes of Lisa's Conflicts

During the second interview, the *Critical Conflict Interview* (CCI), Lisa detailed two distinct conflicts she navigated during the previous year, both of which had come into existence prior to the onset of COVID-19. Some aspects of each of the complex conflict situations detailed she continued to navigate at the time of the interviews. This section will provide brief vignettes of each of these conflicts, followed by a brief discussion pertaining to the implications drawn from the conflict scenarios and how they relate to the aims of this study.

Conflict 1: Navigating Significant Leadership Changes

The first complex conflict associated with significant changes that Lisa highlighted in the CCI emerged over a half decade ago, yet still was ongoing and intensified to an extent at the

onset of COVID-19. In summary, several significant leadership changes occurred in a short period of time at the college campus where she served, during which Lisa found herself appointed to multiple and increasingly higher interim roles over a short period of time. First, she was assigned to the interim dean of academic affairs, followed shortly after by the role of interim Campus President. These appointments were preceded by multiple leaders in leadership roles leaving—some by choice and others due to unrenewed contracts. These changes contributed to significant feelings of frustration and conflict in the campus community. Prior to all these shifts, Lisa had served in the role of an assistant dean for a couple of years. She described her strategic thinking from the time that she was appointed to interim Campus President by explaining:

I had to come up with some goals and a vision in terms of how I was going to help stabilize this campus in the midst of all of this disruption. And of course, with any organization, you have people who were upset because of all of these changes in leadership. What I ended up having to do is, first and foremost, make a decision to address the campus as a whole and to encourage them that although this may seem pretty disruptive in terms of leadership, we are a strong campus and we will survive, and that together we were going to continue accomplishing the goals that we've set as a campus and as a college. [And] to encourage those that are skeptical or felt disenfranchised to join me, to partner with continuing to keep us moving forth until another president is named. [Also] to address the concerns that the health career division had—which is a very strong division—concerning the loss of their leader.

Lisa explained that due to the multiple complexities, and some behind-the-scenes developments, she was not fully able to address every concern. Instead, she implied that she had to be strategic and decisive in her approach to navigating the myriad concerns and issues that were manifest.

One of the divisions significantly impacted by the changes was the health careers division, which dealt with a revolving door of leadership during the preceding several years, and which had a fundamental program in jeopardy of losing accreditation (and had recently

discontinued one of the programs). It became Lisa's responsibility to address and deal with all these conflict-laden issues. In relation to these trying issues, Lisa reflected on the period when she had recently been appointed dean of academic affairs (no longer interim), highlighting the complexity of the situation at hand:

When you have those things going on, you have a lot of finger-pointing, you can have a lot of mistrust, and it can really destroy an organization. Not to mention that I had a new superior who didn't know me, knew nothing in terms of my potential in leadership, and had her own agenda in terms of what she saw as priorities and in terms of trying to figure out what was what politically, who were her allies and so forth. And so I had to manage all of that. I had to manage perceptions. I had to, at the same time, try to keep individuals motivated and focused. I had to deal with the outcome of the loss of the program and talking with different constituency groups, particularly, in terms of addressing the students who were fearful. Many of them were angry because they were concerned about how this would affect them in terms of their credentials and being able to graduate out from the program. It was a whole lot to try to balance and try to address. And I'll be perfectly honest with you, I think it tested my fortitude in terms of strength that I didn't know I had.

Lisa made strides, she hired an associate dean for the health careers division, who helped in "stabilizing and moving programs forward." Unfortunately, within less than a year the new associate dean took on a new opportunity at the college, and it appeared to many of the faculty and staff stakeholders that the cycle of uncertainty and change would continue. Lisa stated:

So once again, I'm dealing with a group of professionals, and faculty are saying, "here we go again . . ." So again, I had to kind of step in and try to address their concerns, feelings, and reassure them that we will continue to move forward.

Strategically and quickly, Lisa assigned an interim to fill this position, an individual who had institutional knowledge of the health career programs, and then shortly after doing so COVID-19 struck, leading to a hiring freeze, and contributing to what Lisa referred to as the "big, long, never-ending conflict." The interim associate dean filled that role for over a year, and

eventually, once the hiring freeze was lifted at the college, was hired to the position full-time, helping to alleviate some of the tension and frustration.

During all this change and conflict, Lisa demonstrated the capacity to take the perspective of the various stakeholders, chief among them the students. She shared that from her perspective the students had invested a lot of time, effort, and finances into their education; into programs that Lisa referred to as “high stakes programs,” because “these aren’t the easiest programs to get [into], and they’re not the easiest programs to get [out of]. And depending on the reputation of your program that you graduate from, it impacts your ability to get employed.” The students were fearful of how these disruptions and issues would impact their future, and they required “continued reassurance that the college is committed to supporting their completion of the program,” Lisa explained.

Beyond the intentional reassuring communication with the students, actions were taken to ensure students were supported. Specialized software was purchased which students could then access free of additional charge, to support and “supplement their learning and mastery.” Lab time was increased, so they had ample opportunities to learn and practice with the equipment. As well, intentional connections were made with additional local healthcare organizations, to ensure students were able to obtain the necessary clinical hours required and prepare them to sit for licensure.

As for taking the perspective of the faculty and staff associated with the health careers division, Lisa shared, there “were so many layers there.” Some faculty were concerned about their positions at the college, especially those who worked directly with the program that was discontinued. Several faculty and staff contributed to “infighting” and finger-pointing. As Lisa

stated, “professional staff were accusing the faculty of being the problem and not meeting the expectations of the program, and vice versa.” Lisa spoke to some of her thinking as she worked to navigate these conflicts, stating:

So sometimes it was about who screamed the loudest. Unfortunately, I had to be very strategic in terms of how I mediated these conflicts because the loss of either one of them was an additional blow to the accreditation. Because you have to have so many FTEs [full-time equivalents] in terms of faculty versus student ratio, you have to have key administrators in key positions within the program, everything from preceptors to coordinators and directors. And so, in some ways, and I hate to say this, at times several of them felt like “I’m in the power position because if I walk away the program is dead.” And so therefore, they didn’t behave in the best light.

Furthermore, speaking largely to the power-dynamics that existed in this ongoing conflict, Lisa elaborated:

[There] were times when there [were] attempts to usurp my authority and power . . . and to distance me from the program. Unfortunately, because of the magnitude of this issue, you also had individuals at higher levels than myself, all the way up to the college president, [who were] involved in intervention with this program. And so there were times when—I’ll be quite honest—in a different situation, I would not have stood for the way that I was talked to by some of the staff or would have even tolerated their behavior. But I had to. That was the directive that came to me. I had to be silent and to endure it so that they would remain with the program, and we could get through the appeals process in terms of us as a college having a united face in fighting for the program.

Here Lisa described a complex and conflict-filled situation, in which she had to set her ego aside and tolerate behavior she would not normally tolerate. There is some resistance on her part here, as she stated, “That was the directive that came to me.” Yet, her ability to take perspective on how this was in contradiction with her personal ideology, and still choose to hold her tongue and “endure” and decide for herself to do this, indicates the self-authored mind.

Additionally, Lisa reflected on how her racial identity factored into this period of tension and change, connecting it to her personal ideology of authenticity and integrity in stating:

In this situation, I was an African American female and there was no other me [sic] that was in a position of authority and supervision, and even at the level of the staff. I don't have a health careers background . . . I know in terms of many times as people of color or oppressed groups, we tend to second guess what we're observing or feeling in relationship to discrimination and racism. I had to force myself to claim my truth, but not give anyone the power to damage me through it all . . . Sometimes we give away our power undeservedly. I had to really fight to not do that. To maintain my integrity, character. To, even at some times, preserve my dignity, even when I was disrespected.

This excerpt from the second interview demonstrates the still strong connection to her self-constructed theory. As she explained her experience and process, there was an element of paradox that emerged. On one hand, she was able to transcend her personal ideology, while also fighting for it. This is complicated by the social-racial dynamics that she articulated, which Lisa is keenly aware of.

Developmental implications for conflict from this vignette. Conflict in this series of events associated with changes at the college and in the divisions, she oversaw showed up in several complex ways. She identified threats to both her and other stakeholders' interests and needs, while also identifying threats to her personal identities, power, and values.

Lisa demonstrated the capacity and abilities to strategically navigate through the complexities of organizational changes and the simultaneous complex relational dynamics. She can take the perspective of others and considers the political ramifications of her actions. She can be decisive and assertive when she sees these approaches as necessary. She demonstrated a willingness to compromise, even going against her personal values because she understood that it was for the greater good. She was able to take perspective on her own perspective, and though she felt torn, she was able to objectively make a deliberate decision that was determined from within herself (not from an external source) demonstrating the self-authored mind. To an extent, this also highlights her capacity for adaptivity.

Conflict 2: Racial Identity and Power With Counterparts

The second ongoing conflict situation described concentrated on the race-related dynamics and behaviors with her counterparts—the other academic deans on the institution’s other campuses. This ongoing conflict primarily took place within the regular meetings she attended with the other academic deans. Lisa described how over the course of her tenure in this role, she experienced the unremitting occurrence of being unacknowledged and uncredited for sharing her perspective and insights in meetings. As she shared in her own words:

I was feeling invisible. I would say something, and they would look to others. Say, for instance, if a question was asked and I answered the question based on what I thought based on my experience, they would turn and look at the other people and, what do you think? Then this whole conversation would go on and I would never be acknowledged of my thoughts. There were even times when a person would say, “Oh yeah, I agree with [Jeffery] and blah, blah, blah, [sic]” and I’m like, but I was the one who said it first and when he repeated it, you said, “Oh, I agree with him.” It’s like [what I said] was erased.

Lisa recognized the link between the behaviors of her colleagues and her identity as a woman and a person of color. She expounded on how other women and people of color also experienced similar marginalization within this counterpart group. However, these situations were underscored by the fact that she always existed in the group as an intersectionally marginalized individual based on these identities, in that there were other white women and other men of color, but in her years of experience in this role, she was often the only woman of color.

In the context of this conflict, Lisa perceived that she was being marginalized based on two of her salient social identities. This marginalization shows up as a form of conflict, in that she experienced this tension as a threat not only to her identity, but to her interests, values, and power as well.

Other matters complicated this dynamic. The nature of the dean counterpart group fluctuated, growing at one point from four individuals to nine, and then eventually back to four, over the course of the several years she served as academic dean. Additionally, as previously mentioned, she took on the interim campus president role for a period of time, and she was less engaged with her role in the regular counterparts' meetings for this period, contributing to the experience of feeling like an outsider. Over the course of the first full year dealing with COVID-19, Lisa emphasized that this experience was compounded.

Additionally, she shared that the experience of being overlooked, and the practices and behaviors of her counterparts, trickled down to their associate deans. She shared one experience that exemplified this:

One of the associate dean counterpart groups they were sending emails for us for our approval, all of us had to approve, and they would leave me off of the emails and so I never had opportunities to weigh in or knew what the conversation was going on. And then I might get it forwarded to me from one of my counterparts saying, "Oh, you didn't get this, but what do you think?" Finally, I said, "You know, I'm getting real tired of being Ralph Ellison's invisible man. If you don't know what that means, do your research. Read a book." One of them kind of wrote me back and was like, "I thought about that, and I should have said something or dah, dah, dah [sic]."

Here Lisa demonstrates that she is willing to call out inappropriate and unthoughtful behavior when it occurs, especially when it is a threat or perceived threat to her identity and personal ideology.

I feel good for the fact that I just called it as I saw it. But I [also think] our relationship, at least on my part, is getting more inclusive now, because now they have to be conscious of behaviors that might not be inclusive. For some of them, I'd like to think that they didn't do it on purpose, they just weren't conscious that they were doing it.

This complex and semi-nebulous conflict was ongoing, though Lisa expressed in her second interview that she perceived it was improving, in the sense that her counterparts were

more consciously aware of their words and behaviors in relationship to her presence on the team. However, in her third and final interview, when this dynamic was revisited, she backtracked on the notion that it was improving, sharing her frustration that the dynamic still had significant room for improvement.

Developmental implications for conflict from this vignette. The conflict that emerged from these experiences was a tension of values and identity which then influence Lisa's ability to have influence and say in important decisions made by the college. Lisa was troubled by the behavior of her colleagues and implied at one point that she tried not to dwell too much on their behaviors. However, not only did this manifestation of conflict a threat to her values and identity but perhaps more noteworthy is the fact that they are posing a threat to her self-constructed theory of striving to be her authentic self and live with integrity. Lisa demonstrated more frustration with regard to this conflict and the behaviors of her colleagues when compared with the first complex conflict she articulated, suggesting that there may be an unconscious hierarchy tied to how the level of threat a conflict presents pertaining to her personal ideology. When her personal ideology is directly threatened, versus indirectly threatened (which is more so the case in the first conflict), she is likely to feel the conflict more.

Moreover, it was apparent in the subtext, that the microaggressions and marginalizing that she was experiencing in this context were emotionally draining and frustrating for her. She gives the culprits the benefit of the doubt, but does not excuse their behavior, and instead calls it out.

Case Study Findings

The two conflicts Lisa detailed in this case study both arose prior to the onset of COVID-19. Each conflict was complex, layered, and unique. The first dealt with institutional change and leadership, whereas the second dealt with what Lisa perceived to be rooted in social identity and discrimination—mainly unconscious bias—specifically pertaining to race and gender dynamics. These conflicts were in process when COVID-19 hit the United States, complicating the process of constructively navigating these issues as the modes of communication shifted and the institution and its leadership were determining how to move forward.

Constructing meaning from a self-authored mind, demonstrating that her self-generated personal ideology centered on living with authenticity and integrity, serving the greater good, and a commitment to justice and equity, which influenced the way she understood the complex dynamics of these conflicts and shaped the way she responded to them. Similar to other individuals making meaning from a self-authored mindset, on a personal level she demonstrated that she experienced conflict as a threat, or perceived threat, to her personal ideology. Yet, she also showed the capacity to take a larger perspective and understand not only how these issues concerned her personally but how they impacted other individuals and stakeholder groups (i.e., systems thinking). Moreover, she showed that she remained mindful within conflict situations and indirectly referenced that at one point the institutional changes and the conflict that came with them provided an opportunity for constructive change at the college. In this way she demonstrated the capacity to take an objective perspective on complex situations and reframe

conflict in a way that was not personal to her, enabling her to think more objectively and practice systems thinking.

In each of the scenarios she reflected on, she demonstrated that she does not just approach conflict in one rigid way. She actively seeks to understand the situation from multiple viewpoints with the institution's social structure and culture in mind before establishing her approach. She is deliberate in her approach to engaging conflict. Yet, she also demonstrated that she is assertive, especially when driven by her personal ideology.

See additional elements and characteristics pertaining to key areas of this study demonstrated by Lisa in Table 4.9.

Table 4.9*Summary of Key Findings for Lisa*

Key Areas	Summary of Demonstrated
Mindset (i.e., meaning-making structure)	<p>The self-authored mind is equilibrated (cohered) as the primary meaning-making system.</p> <p>Demonstrated a “4” mindset (supported by interrater SOI evaluation)</p>
Meaning-making interpretations	<p>Self-generated personal ideology: consistently striving to be her authentic self and live with integrity</p> <p>Featured qualities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relies on own internal authority; the self is the evaluator of own personal standard • Articulates her own point of view as different from others • Distinguishes other individuals’ values and interests from her own and can take perspective on others’ values and interests • Recognizes others as autonomous individuals • Demonstrates capacity to apply systems thinking to problem-solving when navigating and engaging conflict • Demonstrates emotional empathy (affective empathy) though does not dwell on the emotions of others, and does not show guilt or responsibility over others’ feelings or behaviors (as they are not his own) • Can take limited perspective on her own personal ideology but does not actively and critically critique it
Demonstrated orientation to conflict	<p>Espoused approach: Consciously strives for resolution over management of conflict and sees conflict as a natural part of human relationships and organizations</p> <p>Demonstrated approach: Deliberately assertive (calculative), primarily working to bring people into seeing her vision for resolution, yet consciously works to take the perspectives of various individual stakeholders and groups</p> <p>Moderate congruence between espoused and demonstrated approaches</p>
Actions and behaviors (demonstrated)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assertive and directive in responding to conflict and change, particularly when there is a potential threat to her personal theory • Capacity to adapt when and utilize various approaches to engaging conflict and change throughout a process • Able to hold multiple paradoxes at the same time when making sense of an issue and deciding how to act • Keen sense of her power and authority, and uses it to benefit his goals and values, always with his students and faculty in mind • Can take the perspective of opposing stakeholders and of the stakeholders indirectly involved in the conflict, but directly impacted by its consequences • Keen awareness of others’ interests, perspectives, and worldviews
Gaps? Downside?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attached to personal ideology (values, principles, and way of being), and not see the gaps or flaws in her perspective at times • Tendency to see her way of navigating conflict and change as the “right way” • May struggle to take others’ perspectives when the conflict is perceived to be directed toward her social identity (also connected to her personal ideology)

Additional insights/implications	It is hard for her to compromise on her personal theory, but she demonstrates that if it is for the greater good of the organization, she has the capacity to consciously override it and make compromises
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Chapter Summary

This chapter presented each of the nine mini-case studies which looked at the conflict scenarios of each of the academic leaders who participated in this study. Each case study presented and examined the notable details of each conflict scenario while linking the constructive developmental mindset that each participant constructed meaning from to make sense of how their individual CD psychology influenced their navigation and engagement of the conflicts.

As a reorientating cue, the case studies were presented in a manner that paralleled Kegan's developmental trajectory, starting with Kevin, who demonstrated a meaning-making system wherein the socialized mind was still predominate, progressing through the individuals' respective conflicts all the way to Lisa, who demonstrated a meaning-meaning making system where the self-authored mind was predominate. The progression demonstrated the subtle differences in the complexity of thinking at the different mindsets.

The forthcoming chapter, Chapter V, will examine this progression of meaning-making and the paralleled progression in complex thinking and other findings, drawing out additional compelling findings from the research.

CHAPTER V: CRITICAL CONFLICT ANALYSIS RESULTS

Comfort with complexity is part of having a humble curiosity: you see turbulence as intriguing rather than frightening.

—Wergin (2019, p. 168)

This chapter, the second phase in this multimethod research design, explores and analyzes the nine academic leaders' constructive-developmental structures and the influence of their meaning-making within the context of the conflict scenarios they navigated, described in the case studies from the previous chapter. Additionally, this chapter explores the influence of the leaders' developmental mindsets on their internal approaches to conflict. To a limited extent, the external behaviors of the leaders are examined. The chapter explores themes and subthemes that emerged from the data, primarily presenting these findings descriptively. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion and summary of the key findings. Moreover, this chapter builds upon the foundation laid in the previous chapter and provides analysis from an alternate perspective.

As described in Chapter III, all the interviews for this study were transcribed and then uploaded into Dedoose (version 9.0.46 OSX) for coding and analysis, followed by supplementary analysis in Microsoft Excel for Mac (version 16.59).

The first section of this chapter will provide an overview of the participants to contextualize the analysis and findings. Since all the participants were described in detail in the previous chapter in the introductory sections of each case study, the overview found in this chapter will be concise and focus primarily on demographic and comparative information.

Contextualizing the Participants and Their Institutions

Table 5.1 below presents the demographics of the individual leaders and the higher education institution (HEI) at which they were employed at the time of this study. Additionally, the table provides each leader's pseudonym (which corresponds with the name used in the previous chapter), self-identified gender, race, age range category, highest educational degree or status, and Subject-Object Interview (SOI) score.

Table 5.1

Participant Demographics

Name	Gender	Race	Age range	Degree	Additional educational/ degree information	SOI
Brian	Male	White/ Latino	60–69	EdD & JD	N/A	4/3
Christine	Female	White	40–49	PhD	N/A	4/3
Devin	Male	White	50–59	MA	Actively working on DBA	4(3)
Emma	Female	White	50–59	MBA	Actively working on PhD	4/3
James	Male	White	40–49	PhD	N/A	4
Kevin	Male	White	60–69	PhD	N/A	3/4
Lisa	Female	Black	50–59	PhD	N/A	4
Nasir	Male	White	70+	PhD	N/A	4
Tamera	Female	White	60–69	MA	Chose not to pursue a terminal degree	4

Corresponding with what is presented in the table, five participants self-identified as female, and four identified as male. The participants ranged in age from in their 40s to 70s. Two participants self-identified as being within the range of 40 to 49 years of age. Three participants self-identified as being within the range of 50 to 59 years of age. Three participants self-

identified as being within the range of 60 to 69 years of age. One participant identified as above the age of 70. All the participants had earned a master's degree or higher. Six participants earned at least one terminal degree (one participant earned a Juris Doctorate and Doctorate of Education). Two participants were actively working on a terminal degree at the time of the interviews for this study (one a Doctorate of Philosophy and the other a Doctorate of Business Administration). Only one participant stated that they did not intend to pursue a terminal degree (their advanced degree was a Master of Arts). The participants' scores from the SOI ranged from "3/4" to "4." The modal score, the most commonly assigned score was "4," followed by "4/3." The mean score was approximately "4(3)," and the median score was between "4/3" and "4(3)."

As a refresher, the SOI score signifies the constructive-developmental mindset of an individual (synonymous with the terms "structure of consciousness" or "meaning-making structure"). The numeric scores represent the influence and role of meaning-making systems in one's structure of consciousness. Kegan (1980) identified twenty-one stages and substages from the imperial mind (1st mindset) to the self-transforming mind (5th mindset), not including the "0" stage. The substages signify where one is in the process of reaching a state of equilibrium of the subject-object balance pertaining to the five CD mindsets Kegan identified.

As is shown in Table 2.1 from Chapter II, when a mindset demonstrates an equilibrated subject-object balance, it is scored and represented by a whole number (e.g., "3" or "4"), whereas when one's meaning-making structure demonstrates two systems simultaneously (i.e., two mindsets simultaneously), it is scored or represented with one of the four combinations utilizing two numbers (i.e., the two numbers representing each demonstrated mindset). Using "X" and "Y" as placeholders for numbers, the descriptions below provide a brief key for understanding

how the substages between are represented (corresponding with the second column in Table 2.1).

These brief descriptions are supported by Lahey et al. (2011).

- **X(Y) substage:** The once equilibrated X mindset (system) continues to govern one's meaning-making, yet the individual begins to perceive a possible new way of making meaning beyond their ruling system. A Y-ish element or system is present, however, the inability to construct meaning from this potentially emerging system leads one back to rely on the X mindset.
- **X/Y substage:** The X system of the mind continues to be the stronger system, but the Y system—the newer system—is now actively contributing to meaning construction. Though the Y system is fully present, the process of meaning-making will “slip back” or defer to the stronger preceding system X. The X mind is still the predominant system.
- **Y/X substage:** The Y mind switching places with the X system is another incremental move, wherein both systems are actively contributing to meaning construction; however, instead of deferring to the previously prominent X system, an individual now demonstrates the capacity to lean into the Y system for constructing meaning (instead of slipping back).
- **Y(X) substage:** The Y mindset is now predominant and the ruling system for constructing meaning, and the X system is no longer able to rule without the consent of the Y system. However, there is a demonstrated tenuousness in the mind's construction of meaning at this substage, credited in part to the maintenance of the Y system as differentiated from system X.

Table 5.2 presents information on each participant's current role(s), the predefined range of years in their current role(s), the predefined range of years employed professionally in academic concentrated roles in HEIs (in administrative leadership and/or teaching), the generalized designation of the current department or division that they hold a leadership position in, and the generalized category of HEI they are employed by. Three of the participants worked as academic deans at their HEI. Two participants worked directly under an academic dean, one as an assistant dean and one as an associate dean. The range of years spent in the current role spanned from just over one year to approximately 7.5 years, with the average time spent in the current position among the participants being 3.89 years. The range of experience in leadership roles within academic, administrative leadership, or at least half-time teaching responsibilities in HEIs spans from 2 to 5 years, with one individual more than 25 years. The average amount of time spent working in HEIs was 15.28 years, with the median number of 15.5 years.

Table 5.2*Participant Role and Leadership Experience*

Name	Current role	Other role(s)	Years in current role	Aggregate years in HEI(s)*	Department or division designation	HEI type
Brian	Academic dean	Program director	1–2 yrs.	10–15 yrs.	Education	Private university
Christine	Department chair	Tenure-track faculty	2–5 yrs.	20–25 yrs.	Communication studies	Private university
Devin	Assistant dean	Part-time faculty	1–2 yrs.	2–5 yrs.	Leadership & ethics	Public military college
Emma	Associate dean	N/A	2–5 yrs.	10–15 yrs.	Mathematics & business	Community college
James	Program director	Tenured faculty &	5–10 yrs.	15–20 yrs.	Higher ed. leadership	Private university
Kevin	Program director	Affiliate faculty	2–5 yrs.	5–10 yrs.	Undergrad studies	Private university
Lisa	Academic dean	N/A	5–10 yrs.	15–20 yrs.	Academic affairs	Community college
Nasir	Program director	N/A	2–5 yrs.	20–25 yrs.	Education	Public HBCU (university)
Tamera	Academic dean	N/A	5–10 yrs.	>25 yrs.	Arts, comm., & humanities	Community college

Note. The year range accounted for the aggregate work experience of the participants working at least half-time in higher education with academic programs either in academic administrative and/or teaching roles (in contrast to student services, research, community programs, graduate assistantship positions, etc.).

Four of the nine participants had careers outside of higher education that spanned more than a decade. Two of these four participants' previous careers were spent almost exclusively in K-12 education before shifting into higher education. One of the four participants had a brief

career in law before transitioning to K-12 education. The remaining participant of these four spent multiple decades in the military (primarily in leadership roles). Before shifting into higher education, all four had moved into leadership roles in their former career fields. The remaining five leaders spent less than ten years working in areas outside of higher education.

The departments or divisions that the participants worked in varied. Seven out of nine participants led departments or divisions generally classified under liberal arts, social sciences, and humanities. One of the participants worked as an academic dean responsible for all academic departments and programs on the campus they were located, including but not limited to healthcare, liberal arts, social sciences, and STEM. One participant worked as an associate dean for mathematics and business. Additionally, the funding structure and type of institutions ranged. Four participants worked at private universities, three participants worked at publicly funded community colleges, one participant worked at a public university, and one participant worked at a public military institution of higher education. Additionally, the approximate number of faculty within the department or division in which the participants served ranged from approximately ten up to over 100 faculty (this number accounts for multiple faculty designations, including part-time).

The institutions represented by the participants in this study came from three geographical regions in the United States, the Western, Midwestern, and Eastern regions. The greatest number of participants came from the Midwestern region, with seven out of the nine participants working at HEIs based out of a Midwestern state. For the Western and Eastern regions, each had two participants who worked at HEIs with campuses based in these regions. However, there are two caveats to note when considering this geographic breakdown. First,

multiple HEIs represented offered online and distance learning options that enrolled students and employed faculty located all over the United States and students living internationally. Second, a few of the participants worked at institutions with multiple campuses in more than one state or region. (I elected not to include these specifics in the tables, to support the anonymity of the participants in this study.)

I present this contextualizing information to convey the varied experiences, contexts, and additional information that demonstrates a wide range of perspectives among the leaders who participated in this study. Though this study does not focus on these aspects in detail, they provide greater context for interpreting the data and analysis presented in the succeeding sections.

Contextualizing the Conflict Scenarios

Using the transcripts from the critical conflict interviews (CCIs), which were conducted as the second interview with each participant, I considered several ways of framing and isolating conflict incidents presented in the data. As a part of the preparation for the CCI, I had asked participants ahead of time to reflect over the past year and identify three to five “complex” or “difficult” conflicts they had experienced. Each participant framed the complex or difficult conflicts based on their unique understanding of what qualified a conflict as such. The framing of this was intentional and in line with the primary research question. I intended that they would interpret this prompt through their own meaning-making systems. I encouraged participants to consider conflict scenarios they perceived as having a strong relationship to organizational changes; however, I did not require that the conflicts they identified were directly related to organizational change. This deliberate decision came from the intention to focus less on change

and more on their meaning-making in conflict. The result produced a considerable variety in the conflicts each participant shared.

Additionally, I intentionally deviated from the traditional CIT approach to isolating individual incidents and instead followed the participants' distinctive framing of each conflict scenario. This was a deliberate modification, and I realized in the initial phase of analysis that the implication behind the frame of a "complex conflict" as opposed to simply saying a "conflict," implied that there might be multiple isolated and/or connected conflict incidents that contribute to the whole of the overarching complex conflict. Nearly every complex conflict framed and described by the participants incorporated several conflict incidents, which when combined, contributed to the construction of what the participants identified as a complex conflict. One participant made a particularly apropos comment at the onset of her CCI, stating, "There's a bunch of, I think, smaller conflicts embedded in this [conflict situation]." She then went on to detail her complex conflicts. This sentiment proved true for eight of the nine participants. (Intriguingly, a finding that is considered in Chapter VI was that the single participant who did not explicitly touch on multiple "smaller conflicts" in each of the three conflict scenarios he described was the individual who demonstrated the least complex meaning-making structure of the nine participants. This individual was the only participant in this study who demonstrated a predominant socialized mind.)

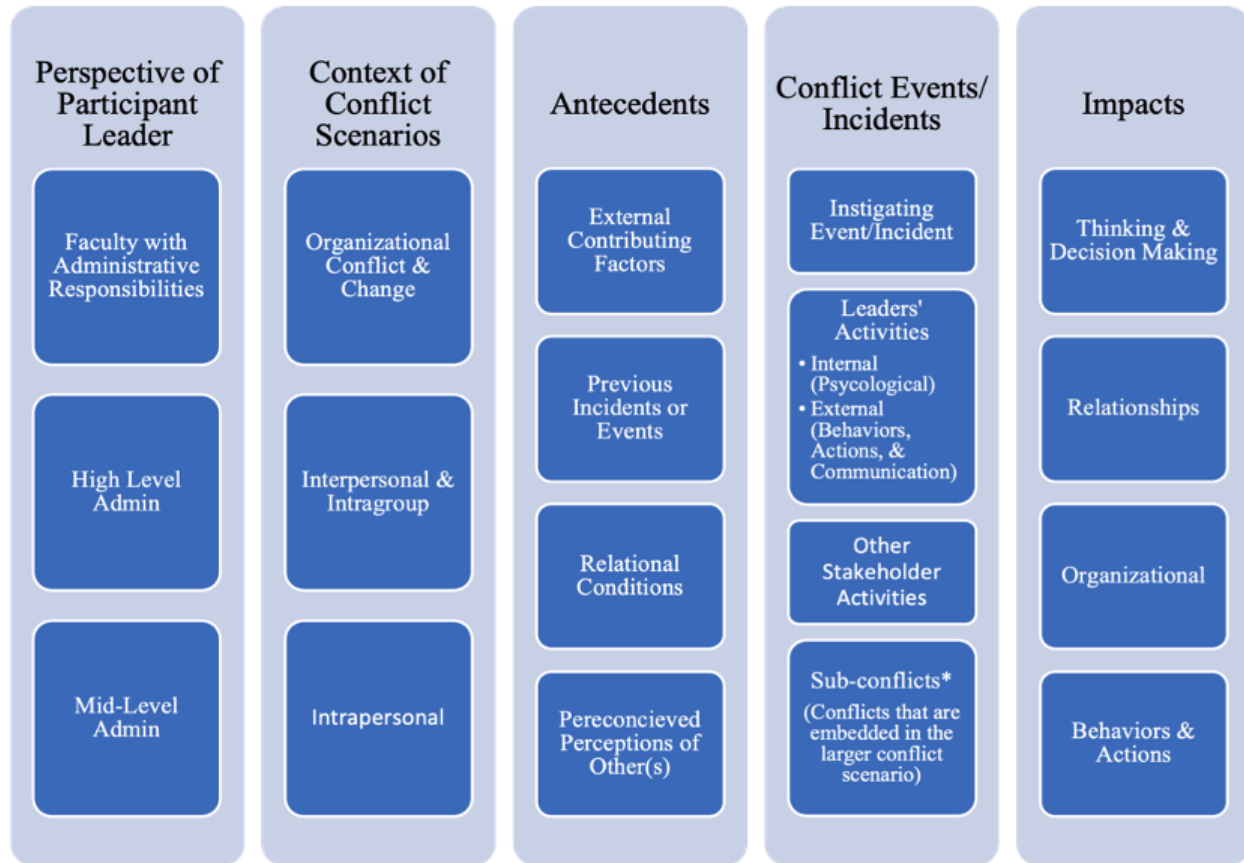
From the nine CCIs conducted, 24 total complex conflicts were presented. I deliberately chose not to break these 24 conflict scenarios down into isolated incidents to prevent taking emphasis away from the individuals' experiences with what they articulated and understood as complex conflict. However, within each of these 24 conflict scenarios, with the support of a

colleague, we isolated 1,009 incidents based on the detailed approach we took to the coding process. Furthermore, we identified 132 unique antecedents and 30 impacts. We also coded for participants' reflections pertaining to their experience within the conflict scenarios, which accounted for 53 unique coded excerpts.

After categorizing the conflict incidents or episodes and additional coded material into categories, followed by themes, followed by subthemes, the organized data produced were utilized to inform the analysis and synthesis, which informed the findings discussed in the proceeding sections. Figure 5.1 provides a simplified summary of the categories, themes, and subthemes established utilizing the coded data (this figure was first presented in Chapter III).

Figure 5.1

Summary of Categories and Themes From Critical Conflict Interviews



Note. The “Sub-conflicts” theme dealt with conflict interactions that were embedded in the larger conflict scenario but could also potentially be considered standalone conflicts.

The following section provides initial context for each of the 24 conflict scenarios, based on what each participant conveyed as the activating events or the impetus for each conflict scenario. This data fits within the subcategory of “Instigating Event/Incident” within the “Conflict Events/Incidents” category found in Figure 5.1.

Activators of Conflict Scenarios: Incidents and Events Inciting the Conflict Scenarios

Utilizing the information collected primarily through the CCIs, 24 unique incidents (or events) articulated by the participants were cited as activating the conflict scenarios. These incidents were instigated externally (outside of the leader's self) and/or internally (within the leader's mind) as described by the individual participant. Table 5.3 displays the initial source of conflict based on the framing of the participants. Of the 24 total conflicts, 12 (50%) were triggered by some form of organizational change. In contrast, eight were instigated in interpersonal interactions. Two were identified as being prompted by barriers due to existing organizational policies and norms, and two by internal or intrapersonal conflict.

Table 5.3

Incident and Event Activators of Conflict

Source of initial conflict (leading into larger conflict scenario)	Number of incidents
External sources	22
Organizational change	12
<i>Leadership change/s</i>	4
<i>Guideline or procedure change</i>	3
<i>Organizational restructuring</i>	3
<i>Covid-19 response</i>	1
Behaviors and actions of other/s	8
<i>Individual behavior/s</i>	6
<i>Group behavior/s</i>	2
Current policy and norms barrier to interests	2
Internal sources	2
Internal tension derived from identity-based conflict	1
Internal tension derived from values-based conflict	1
Total	24

Note. Nineteen of the 24 individual conflict scenarios involved multiple overarching conflict types.

In the context of this study, five primary conflict types were identified during analysis: interpersonal, intrapersonal, intergroup, intra-group, and organizational. Interpersonal conflict refers to a conflict between two or more stakeholders tied to individual differences in interests, values, needs, and/or identity. Intrapersonal conflict in this study refers to conflict that stems from one's own internal struggle to navigate perceived incompatible values, identities (social and role-related), and interests with that experienced externally (i.e., within the context of the social system they are a member of). Intergroup conflict pertains to conflict between two separate stakeholder groups, which within this study stems primarily from different interests or sub-cultural values (e.g., faculty and administrators). Intragroup conflict refers to tensions within a department or division; wherein there are a variety of differing perspectives, interests, values, and/or needs. Organizational conflict applies to system-wide conflict—directly or indirectly—affecting all stakeholders (e.g., organizational changes in high-level leadership, policies, reporting structures, and organizational structures).

Overall, the participants described 11 (45.8%) of the conflict scenarios as predominately interpersonal in nature, involving one or two other individuals. Thirteen (54.2%) of the total conflicts involved significant interpersonal conflict. Five (20.8%) of the conflicts were largely intergroup conflicts, with 13 (54.2%) of all conflict scenarios involving intergroup frictions. Four (16.7%) of the total conflicts were presented primarily as organizational, with nine (37.5%) involving substantial organizational friction. Three (12.5%) of the conflicts were predominately framed as intragroup conflicts, with six (25%) involving considerable intragroup friction. Only two conflicts were described predominantly as intrapersonal conflict; though, based on how intrapersonal conflict is understood in this context, every conflict scenario involved some form

of intrapersonal conflict. Intrapersonal conflict was especially apparent when the conflict situations opposed or threatened a leader's self-constructed ideology (i.e., the leader's self-generated personal ideology). Additionally, for the three individuals who demonstrated the strong influence of the socialized mind ("3/4" and "4/3" structures), the intrapersonal experience of conflict was especially prevalent in each scenario. As will be expanded upon in the subsequent sections, even though a conflict may have been initially identified or described in one fashion, how the participant related to the conflict and made sense of it internally did not always align with how they initially framed it.

The following section explores the linkages between leaders' developmental mindsets and their construction of meaning in the conflict scenarios and the relationship to their thinking and engagement of conflict.

Leaders' Structures of Consciousness and Their Behavior in Conflict Scenarios

Synthesizing data collected from all three interviews, Table 5.4 utilizes this information to convey in a concise yet comprehensive way the developmental mindsets associated with each of the leaders and the essence of each conflict scenario as shared by the leaders. Additionally, it provides an example of the self-talk and thinking associated with the conflict scenario and summarizes each individual's demonstrated approach to addressing the situation. The table is structured in such a way as to show the progression of complex thinking and nuances in response to the various conflicts articulated by the leaders, beginning with the individual who demonstrated the least complex structure of consciousness of "3/4" at the time of the study—based on Kegan's hierarchy of constructive developmental structures of the mind—up to the highest structure of consciousness of "4" demonstrated by a participant in this study. The

self-talk and thinking column is comprised of direct quotes from the CCIs that provide insight into how individual leaders construct meaning, which is shown to influence each leader's approach to engaging and navigating conflict. In the proceeding section, I explore the progression from the "3/4" structure to the "4" structure, exploring the role of each leader's constructive developmental stage or substage in their conflict engagement approach.

Table 5.4*Conflict Scenario Bits With Abridged Analysis of Individual Approaches to Conflict*

Name & scenario #	Dev. mind	Conflict scenario context	Self-talk & thinking behind approach	Demonstrated approach to conflict
Kevin (1)	3/4	A faculty member in his department neglected their teaching responsibilities for weeks at a time. Students complained to staff members that the faculty was absent. It was a reoccurring problem.	<i>First time, I was really nervous about talking to her and worried about hurting her feelings . . . The second time, I was just kind of angry, I guess, frustrated that we're back here again.</i>	Initially, Kevin showed empathy toward her and tried to take her perspective and accommodate her. When the situation reoccurred, his approach switched, as he realized he could not let the behavior continue, eventually relieving her from teaching responsibilities in the department.
Kevin (2)	3/4	Affiliate faculty in his department initiated the formation of a representative council—one of the faculty running for a council position he deemed ill-suited to represent the faculty.	<i>I was doing it in the spirit of openness, really. I was desperate to open it up. But part of it was that I really wanted to make sure . . . that everybody felt included. And if it happened that she did not win the election, that would be even better.</i>	Kevin observed that the faculty member tended to dominate the conversation in department meetings, contributing to tension and inhibiting others' sharing opportunities. Deliberately, he recruited others to run for the representative position, hoping to prevent her from obtaining this leadership position. He succeeded in this.
Kevin (3)	3/4	The program he directs and teaches became involved in a university-wide reorganization process.	<i>That's sort of beyond my pay grade. I go along. I sit there quietly while they talk about what classes they want to exchange with themselves this year.</i>	Kevin saw tension/conflict within his faculty related to the impending structural changes but consciously avoided any involvement.
Emma (1)	4/3	An adjunct faculty stated his desire to Emma use a course text that the tenured faculty did not sanction. The adjunct expressed that he would not teach if obligated to use the insufficient required text.	<i>I moved the class, which, you can't do that. But I had support to do it. I thought it was the right thing to do because keeping this adjunct in the class is the best thing to do for [the college]. [The] best thing to do for the students . . . Usually, I'm a rule follower and I stay within the bounds and respect the whole full time faculty thing.</i>	Emma consciously decided to breach standard protocol and move the course to another campus that would allow the adjunct faculty to use his desired text. She did this with the knowledge that there would be backlash from faculty. She consulted her supervisor and earned his support prior to acting.

Name & scenario #	Dev. mind	Conflict scenario context	Self-talk & thinking behind approach	Demonstrated approach to conflict
Emma (2)	4/3	One tenured professor in her department received an overwhelming number of complaints from students, which was problematic.	<i>I really have been trying to figure her out and I sort of got a picture in my mind about what motivates her and I'm trying to get behind what drives her. Because my goal isn't to argue with her, my goal is to reduce the number of student complaints.</i>	Emma initially confronted the professor, stating her course load would be reduced unless student complaints decreased. This led to union involvement. Emma worked collaboratively with the union to negotiate an agreement with the professor.
Brian	4/3	High-level university leadership proposed a plan to reorganize divisions at the university. Division leaders were responsible for identifying a leader and working with one another to implement this significant change. Brian was selected as the leader among the associated divisional leaders.	<i>I feel like I'm kind of between the faculty and then the upper administration . . . There can be a lot of discomfort with that from me. [Because] my inner child is [telling] me, "Just give them what they want. Don't fight. I'm not a fighter." . . . But I understand this is what the expectation of me is as a professional, so I have to . . . take on the role of a person who is confident and strong in moving forward the agenda. But at the same time, trying not to be top-down about it or authoritarian in any way. Trying to pull people along with me by explaining why we're doing the way things are doing, how this can be helpful.</i>	Brian was elected the de facto leader for the change process, he deliberately worked to build relationships with faculty and divisional admins, aiming to gain their buy-in. He attempted to overcome significant resistance from the many of the divisional admins, though admittedly struggled to do this with select admins, in part because he did not want to damage the relationships. Additionally, he reframed the indented outcome for faculty, highlighting the upside of a change in structure. (This process was ongoing at the conclusion of his interviews.)
Christine (1)	4/3	The university approved a revision to guidelines for hiring tenure-track positions. This incited a lecturer in her department—who had not earned a qualifying terminal degree necessary for tenure—to advocate for a tenure-track position that they would qualify to assume.	<i>Normally, [I] just try to have empathy for someone and I just really try to understand. It must be frustrating if she really believes that she's making more contributions and better contributions than everybody else, but she [feels] like she's barely recognized. It really must be a frustrating situation for her. How can I help her with it? And I feel like I try. I try to point her in this direction or praise her. [But it isn't working.]</i>	Christine, as department chair, initially accommodated discussion within department meetings, though the lecture was the sole individual pushing this agenda. After a few meetings and an increase in tension, she stated her rationale for why the new tenure track position would not fit, and explained that even if it did, the lecturer would not qualify for it. Additionally, she indicated that the senior lecture position was a viable route for the lecturer.
Christine (2)	4/3	A newly hired tenure-track professor in the department	<i>I really want to do a good job if I'm supposed to be . . . entrusted with something, whether that be running a</i>	Christine, as the new professor's mentor, sought to help the new professor address this

Name & scenario #	Dev. mind	Conflict scenario context	Self-talk & thinking behind approach	Demonstrated approach to conflict
		confided that she had a concern regarding her compensation. The professor shared that she had signed a contract for a specific salary, but initial paycheck did not reflect this amount. They were significantly lower than she anticipated.	<i>department, mentoring a new faculty member, being a parent to someone. I don't like being placed in a situation where I feel like I'm not going to do a good job, or that I failed somebody . . . I think there's also this idea that I really like to plan things, including, conversations and messages. And if I don't understand what my role is and what my purpose is, then I'm flying by the seat of my pants, and I hate that.</i>	contract and salary issue. However, the new professor explicitly stated that she did not want Christine to advocate on her behalf. Christine struggled to refrain from taking action to address this issue with administrative leadership. She did hint to the dean that there was an issue, but refrained from elaborating and providing details, even though she desired to directly address it.
Devin (1)	4(3)	High level leadership explicitly entrusted Devin and his supervisor, the school dean, to secure control of a smaller department and relieve the current leadership of their departmental leadership duties. The impetus behind this change was linked to the unsatisfactory performance of the current leadership.	<i>So, the bureaucratic stuff was challenging . . . But the real challenge was how do I keep these guys on board so that when this is all over, they're actually going to do some work. They're going to be productive faculty members. And how do I convince the rest of the organization that they haven't been fired? Because . . . if I were in that person's shoes, I would have felt like I'd been fired. Because we took his title away. I get it . . . So, I understood where he was coming from, so we had to kind of make that as gentle as possible for him.</i>	Devin when tasked with this directive intentionally sought to gain some perspective on the situation, talking to other stakeholders. Once developed an understanding of the root causes for this transition, he also actively considered the perspective of the department leaders, though did this without talking to them directly. He and the dean then communicated the restructure to the department leaders, stating that this change was at the behest of high-level leadership. The parties reacted negatively, and ultimately a mediator aided in the resolution process.
Devin (2)	4(3)	An external reviewer required the institution revisit its publication guidelines and process. This led to conflict with faculty pertaining to academic freedom and publication ownership.	<i>I think bringing it up, my instinct was that I wanted to have this conversation with them, however it occurred, because I wanted them to know—and I want them to feel—that their opinion was valued. And I promised them, and I have, to bring that forward.</i>	Devin communicated to the faculty that revisions to the publication process were going to occur. When they reached, he took their perspective, understanding their fears particularly related to the notion of censorship. He advocated for faculty involvement in the revision, and actively communicated with them and other

Name & scenario #	Dev. mind	Conflict scenario context	Self-talk & thinking behind approach	Demonstrated approach to conflict
				leadership to help find a solution that was suitable.
Devin (3)	4(3)	He faced the decision of retaining or letting go of the remaining staff member in the department that was moved under him.	<i>This was hard for me because I knew that she liked the job and she needed the money, and I didn't know how it was going to go.</i>	Devin attempted to take the perspective of the staff member, though made assumptions, as he did not communicate with her directly regarding her perspective. He also met with several other individuals to ensure he understood the protocol. Eventually the dean and him met with her to convey that she had been let go. He anticipated a strong negative reaction, but she conceded without contesting the decision.
James (1)	4	A student in his program demonstrated a lack of engagement in the program and made accusations of racial discrimination toward faculty in the program.	<i>So, the racial element is always going to be a piece for me, the gender element will always be a piece for me that I'm going to be very sensitive to. [But] I never got the sense that there was any realization or appreciation of any different power dynamic. And that makes it hard for me to approach because she's not seeing it at all. Like, I couldn't even manipulate the power that I held or make it go faster.</i>	James reached out to her several times attempting to connect and offer support prior to having her in his class. Eventually she took a class with him, during which he witnessed her counterproductive behaviors and lack of engagement. She was ultimately "fired" from her internship, made complaints of discrimination, and dropped out of the program. He attempted to resolve the situation before this, though at this point it was out of his hands.
James (2)	4	A new associate dean was hired to oversee the education division without support from faculty. After he was hired, the university combined several divisions into one division, and he was promoted to the dean. He consistently neglected obligations to support James'	<i>I really see my responsibility to empower my colleagues . . . I'm pointing out things that they should know. I want them to have input, but I also want to do the work for them where I know that I'm standing on solid ground and representing them capably and appropriately. I think that's part of my responsibility and part of the privilege that I have in not serving on all of these other committees, and because I sit at these power circles.</i>	James, as one of the tenured faculty in the education intentionally sought to empower his fellow faculty members by sharing important insights and advocating for them. He actively pointed out the dean's misrepresentations of information in university leadership meetings, and actively organized the faculty to make decisions which were in their best interest. Ultimately,

Name & scenario #	Dev. mind	Conflict scenario context	Self-talk & thinking behind approach	Demonstrated approach to conflict
		department and regularly distorted department needs and interests to leadership.		James expressed being disheartened by the circumstances, stating that the resolution would not likely occur until the dean retired.
James (3)	4	For several years he participated as an HLC accreditation reviewer. In his last assignment he was assigned the section of mission and values for the institution the committee would be reviewing. Less than a week prior to the review he saw that the institution was private Christian school with an anti-LGBTQ+ mission and values.	<i>And I really agonized because I felt like I should be able to rise above. I felt like this is my job. This is something I'm being paid to do. It's my service to the field. But at the same time, I just couldn't be a part of it. And I felt like if I said anything critical whatsoever . . . they could easily say anything critical, "Obviously, he came in with a bias." And so, it really was agony.</i>	As a gay man and advocate for LGBTQ+ equity, inclusion, and justice expressed how difficult it would be for him to take an objective perspective on an institution's mission and values when they directly opposed his. He actively consulted others as he sought to gain perspective before deciding to recuse himself from this assignment. Because he waited until "the last minute" to review the assignment, he recognized the negative impact this would have on the committee. Ultimately, he recused himself, knowing the ramification may mean a decline in future assignments.
James (4)	4	The university undertook the task of reviewing and updating the courses that qualified as general education "Diversity" courses. The process was underway and was progressing positively.	<i>[Some] of it, because of this work, it's been figuring out who these allies are. So, I have a good sense of who they are, and many of them are already on my committee. They're also younger, and I worry about that because I don't know that they're going to have the same effect as their colleagues, who are tenured.</i>	James anticipated conflict regarding the changes to diversity course qualifications. In the initial phase, he identified individuals who understood the need for more deliberate qualifications. Thorough the initial phases the committee made progress with minimal resistance, though he anticipated future from more established tenured faculty.
Nasir (1)	4	A program director in his division demonstrated significant drop in her ability to fulfill the duties of her position. After offering her feedback and advice, which she rejected outright, she reported him to HR, claiming he was	<i>I don't take confrontation lightly. I don't want people to confront me about things that I know are not true. Don't come to me with that nonsense and expect me to just roll over and smile. I won't do it.</i>	Incensed, that she reported him for discrimination, Nasir filed a counter complaint citing and providing evidence of her failing to meet the obligations of her role and putting the program in jeopardy. He did not accept the claim of discrimination. Still, he understood her perspective and the racial

Name & scenario #	Dev. mind	Conflict scenario context	Self-talk & thinking behind approach	Demonstrated approach to conflict
		discriminating against her as a Black woman. (Nasir is a white man working as a dean at an HBCU.)		dynamic at play. His action escalated the conflict, and he continued to assert his position. Prior to this incident he had accommodated her interests beyond what would normally be required of his position.
Nasir (2)	4	After submitting the paperwork for the upcoming faculty pay period, he was notified by the individual who processed the paychecks that there were a few minor mistakes in the paperwork, which he corrected. A few days later, he was notified that there were more mistakes, and that the faculty would not receive their full compensation as a result.	<i>[Don't] do for this college what you're not willing to do for us. I'm all about fair play. I know life isn't necessarily always fair, but when you're in an institution, there should be some sense of fair play, or it should be fairly level as best you can.</i>	Nasir swiftly addressed the mistakes after initially being notified. However, the staff member did not fully convey the extent of the mistakes until it was too late, at which point Nasir became irate, communicating this to the staff member in the other department, apologizing to his faculty, and promising to rectify the situation in the forthcoming pay period. Additionally, he consulted a colleague in another department for perspective, learning that the other department made mistakes in the paperwork often, and the same staff member fixed them without taking issue. This further irritated Nasir.
Nasir (3)	4	The faculty chair of one of his programs submitted his resignation from the chair position, forcing Nasir to quickly find a replacement, which he did. However, not even a year into her chair role, she communicated that she wanted to step down due to the demanding nature of the role.	<i>[You] have to build that kind of confidence in the people that work for you that you will advocate for them wherever you possibly can. You have to have them on your side. You have to have them working with you. They're not working for you; they have to be working with you.</i>	Nasir expressed immediately expressed empathy toward the chair and followed it by asking her to reconsider. Moreover, he stated that he would more forcefully assert to university leadership the need for a second chair position so that the responsibilities could be divided among them. He had advocated for this in the recent past but committed to be more audacious in his approach. She agreed to remain in the position for the time.

Name & scenario #	Dev. mind	Conflict scenario context	Self-talk & thinking behind approach	Demonstrated approach to conflict
Tamera (1)	4	When COVID emerged on the scene in the US in early 2020, the college had to adapt quickly. Tamera acted quickly, adopting new approaches and practices that she deemed would benefit her faculty, students, and support other deans in their efforts. One of her practices was “coopted” by leadership at the college without any discussion and her consent, leading to conflict between her and the leaders involved. Additionally, significant decisions were being made at the college, which she was not invited to be a part of, and this frustrated her.	<i>I deeply sigh and go, okay, what’s one part of this that we [the academic deans] can impact as we’re moving forward? But I think a lot of it is creating a lot of unnecessary work for us because we have not been consulted . . . From what I understand about the decision to cut the classes in half, that is a high-level administrative decision that happens above my pay grade, or at least at this point, even though I would like to be a part of those decisions because it affects how we operate.</i>	Tamera demonstrated the foresight at the advent of COVID that she and the college would have to adapt quickly to the crisis they were not prepared for. She took immediate and deliberate action, keeping in mind her interests as well as other stakeholders. One of her efforts was acknowledge as innovative during this period of time. It was coopted by leadership. Instead of confronting them on this, she accommodated this move, and understood it. Still, she expressed resentment toward leadership in this instance. Additionally, she desired to be a part of the college-wide decision-making regarding adaptations at the onset of COVID, but was not invited to these, which frustrated her. Yet, she attempted to reframe the situation, and focus on what she could influence.
Tamera (2)	4	The college hired a new provost who approached the role as a “friend to the faculty,” which emboldened the faculty and alienated the deans and administrative staff. In the wake of the new provost, faculty renegotiated a contract which provided them with exclusive power over the course scheduling process. Additionally, the provost coopted a communication process she had designed and	<i>It’s harder for me to have the impact that I think I was hired to have, to have that self-esteem where I feel that I’m doing my job and making an impact, where I’m proud of those particular efforts. I don’t like to push paper. I don’t like to rubberstamp things. If I’m asked for an opinion, I would hope that that opinion would be held in regard with the knowledge and the experience that I have.</i>	Tamera expressed her frustration at the entirety situation and shared that she felt disempowered as a result of the provost’s orientation favoring faculty. Moreover, when the communication process she developed was coopted by the new provost intensified her resentment and frustration. Yet, she chose to accommodate the provost, not to push the issue. Ultimately, she collaborated with her dean counterparts to strategize a collective action, scheduling a meeting head of HR to advocate for their collective interests and the interests of the college, in which they made their case for a

Name & scenario #	Dev. mind	Conflict scenario context	Self-talk & thinking behind approach	Demonstrated approach to conflict
		initiated at the onset of COVID without her permission.		clarification of their adjusted and diminished roles, especially pertaining to the scheduling process.
Tamera (3)	4	With the faculty newly responsible for the entire course scheduling process, the students' needs and interests were neglected. Instead of referring to past scheduling trends that considered the best times and modalities for the students, the majority of the faculty approached scheduling that was focused on their preferences, not the students'.	<i>But I bristle a little bit at the word "power," because I really [try] to be very collaborative in all of these decisions. I try to use the data in all of these decisions and present to the faculty different scenarios as we're moving through the process. The word power has a little bit of a negative denotation for me. So, I really strive for everything to be collaborative and for us to talk about things, always trying to keep the student at the forefront. That's not happening any longer. And so that decision-making power, it feels like it's been stripped from the academic deans.</i>	Due to the new contract, Tamera felt powerless to help resolve this situation. She desired to offer support and guidance in the process, but she was not consulted. She saw that this had a negative impact on the students' educational journey. She resigned herself to the notion that eventually the new system would fail, which would be the impetus to reassess and make changes during the forthcoming faculty contract negotiations. She also took the perspective of the faculty who had not wanted this change or did not understand its implications during the previous contract negotiation.
Tamera (4)	4	When COVID forced the shift to virtual learning, a significant number of faculty resisted the adoption of online learning platforms and effective practices. Additionally, this was underlined by the fact that faculty had resisted adopting consistent practices for assessing students learning which would aid in contributing data for assessing overall learning occurring at the institution.	<i>And I think many of [the faculty are assessing students' learning] well. They just don't have that back-end piece and they resist [it] . . . They just don't [want someone telling them] you have to do this. Because they feel they are an independent agency in that way. So yeah, it's accountability. It's providing that data that they are, in fact, moving forward or helping the students move forward. I think it has to do with collaboration. It flabbergasts me . . . They're just caught in these ruts . . . It's a matter of being proactive. Reactive, I can't. I don't like that. I'm not comfortable with being reactive to situations.</i>	Tamera shared many failed attempts to communicate and work with the faculty in her division from a collaborative orientation. In all the situations she highlighted, she ascribed this lack of desire to adapt and adopt consistent practices as acts of self-interest on the faculty's part. She actively sought to take their perspective and engage them in dialogue, but there was an unwillingness to do so on their end.

Name & scenario #	Dev. mind	Conflict scenario context	Self-talk & thinking behind approach	Demonstrated approach to conflict
Lisa (1)	4	In the years leading up to COVID, the campus had experienced a revolving door of leadership changes. Lisa, as one of the senior academic leaders at the campus was tasked for filling in for high-level vacancies in an interim capacity, while supporting campus and college-wide programs that were in volatile situations.	<i>[In] this whole situation, as bad as it was, I knew that I couldn't make any decisions immediately. That I had to kind of follow this out and see where it leads.</i>	Lisa described the overarching conflict scenario which stemmed from constant change in high-level leadership changes on her campus, and the adverse impact this had on the culture and programs at the institution. She demonstrated a deliberate and systems thinking approach to navigating these changes through several iterations. She demonstrated the capacity to consider a myriad of dynamics and relationships when making decisions and communicating. She tailored her conflict approach to each sub-conflict and did not demonstrate a particular dominant conflict mode.
Lisa (2)	4	For years leading up to COVID, Lisa's was the only consistent member of academic deans' counterparts regular meeting who identified as a Black woman. For the past year all the other members were White and half of them were men. Often, she experienced feeling unseen and unheard, which she linked to her intersecting social identities. She was also the most experienced member of this counterpart's group.	<i>But I [also think] our relationship, at least on my part, is getting more inclusive now, because now they have to be conscious of behaviors that might not be inclusive. For some of them, I'd like to think that they didn't do it on purpose, they just weren't conscious of that they were doing it.</i>	After accommodating her colleagues' detrimental behaviors (which she acknowledged they were likely unconscious of) for over a year, she finally made the decision to voice her concern and perspective, asserting herself by drawing attention to this inequitable behavior. She did this within the context of one of the counterparts' meetings, acknowledging that her colleagues felt uncomfortable. Yet, she was secure in knowing this was the right thing to do.

This table consolidates data from all three phases of interviews to provide a comprehensive look at the nature of the conflict situations the participant academic leaders faced. It does so while providing succinct insight into how each leader constructed meaning during conflict scenarios they were faced with. The table does not focus on whether a leader effectively or constructively resolved or managed conflict(s); instead, it aims to draw objective linkages to how they constructed meaning while in conflict and how their meaning-making system influenced their thinking and decisions, then influenced their behaviors and actions. Additionally, it is important to note that this table does not precisely incorporate all the leaders' thinking, decisions, behaviors, and actions. Instead, it intentionally draws from the data collected in the interviews—mainly the CCIs—to convey the essence of each leader's relationship to the conflict scenario and their prevailing interactions within the context of each conflict. (For a detailed description of each conflict scenario, see the corresponding case study in Chapter IV.)

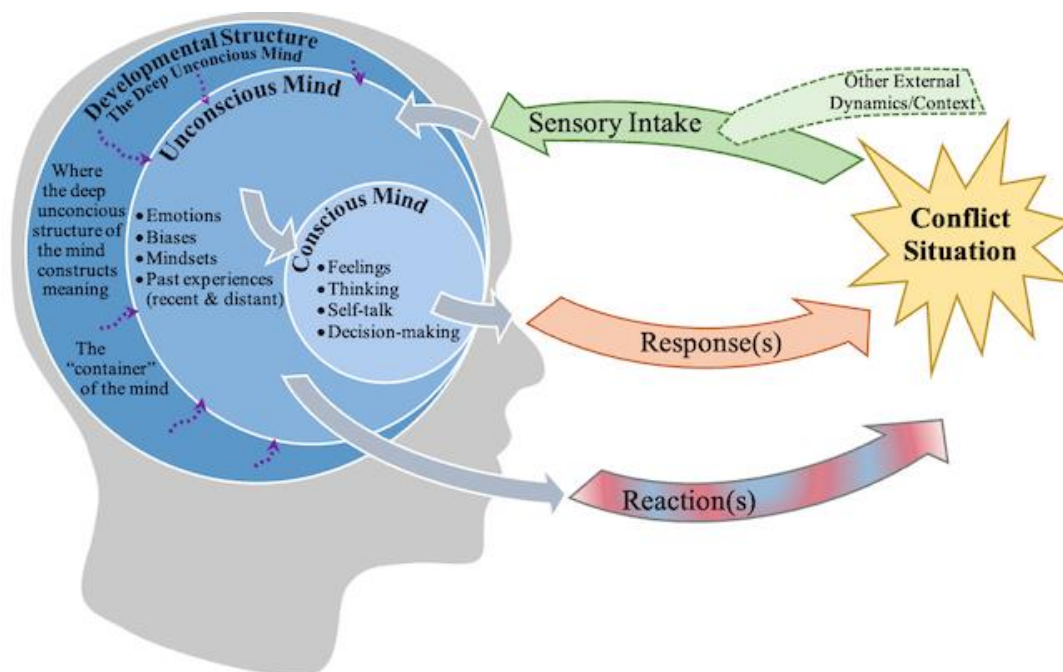
Additionally, many leaders demonstrated moments of *reaction* (vs. responding) wherein their actions were not mediated through their most complex system of consciousness. These are not emphasized in detail within the preceding table. However, the individual reactions expressed by participants—perceptively unaided by the highest evolutionary system of their conscious mind in the moment(s) of reaction—demonstrated a link to their attributed developmental mindset when they took time to reflect on these moments in a conflict scenario.

The primary research question in this study aimed to explore how the leaders' developmental mindsets affect their meaning-making in conflict situations. The following three sections will explore this question and the two secondary questions. First, however, over the early phases of analysis, I began to map out a working visual model that aims to capture the relationship between the developmental structure of the mind to an individual's thinking and

decision-making and then the relationship to behaviors and actions³. Figure 5.2 provides a *working* visual model of the process each individual appeared to undergo when engaging in their respective conflict situation (though the capacities of conscious and unconscious mind are dependent on an individual's developmental mindset). It also illuminates the developmental mindset's conceptual role in one's internal and external process when navigating conflict. As Berger (2011) discussed, the mind is the “container” in which one constructs meaning. As one's *container* evolves, the meaning-making process one engages in when in conflict shifts subtly with each sub-step, as the mind transitions to a more complex substage, which is the essence of the developmental evolution of the mind.

Figure 5.2

The Process of the Developmental Mind in Conflict



³ Notably, the external reactions that individuals demonstrated (e.g., making sudden, brash, or unbecoming remarks) in response to the situations encountered may not follow this same initial progression, for the reaction appears to be derived from the unconscious mind—as shown in Figure 5.2—and in the moment are unaided by the filter of the conscious mind (e.g., formal thinking). However, their reactions may still be influenced by the developmental mindset of the individual. Moreover, as the participants conveyed, they demonstrated a return to a conscious awareness following their reaction in conflict situation (also depicted in Figure 5.2).

When examining the participant's deep structures of meaning-making in this study, there are subtle differences between the individual who constructed meaning from the "3/4" mindset when carefully compared with the individuals who constructed meaning at the "4/3" mindset (with only one sub-stage of difference). In a careful analysis, the untrained eye may not see these subtle differentiations, but they emerged and persisted with each progression from one substage to the next. As a result, each stage of development holds a slightly more complex way of interpreting and making sense of the conflicts encountered, which contributes to a greater *potential* for the individual at a more advanced substage to respond in a slightly more nuanced way, as the individual now has incrementally more capacity to make sense of progressively more contributing factors in the conflict situations (i.e., their structure of consciousness is more complex which corresponds with ones capacity to recognize and make sense of complexity). The following section explores the delineations of the differences in meaning-making and its relationship to an individual's thinking and decision-making, which implicitly contributes to participants' behaviors and actions in each conflict scenario.

The Developmental Mindsets in Conflict

The method of analysis for this portion of the study utilized an adapted form of the critical incident technique (CIT), which customarily is accompanied by a structured critical incident analysis that informs the synthesis and findings. I deliberately chose to approach the written portion of the analysis in this section in an unconventional way (compared to the traditional practices when utilizing CIT). Given the nature of this study, which incorporates multiple methods, in this section, I provide a qualitative analytical summary of the findings that address the primary research question and the two secondary questions. Following this section, the chapter concludes with a concise summary.

I approach this section by moving through the progression of the developmental mindsets, following the same progression of Table 5.4, grouping together the individuals who demonstrated developmental mindsets at the same stage or substage. This section does not explicitly address every conflict scenario from each of the nine participants. Yet, the described findings presented carefully consider all relevant data from the participants and their respective conflicts.

A Caveat: The Relationship Between Leaders' Mindsets and Their Approach to Conflict

The participants in this study demonstrated various approaches to the conflict scenarios they navigated. The conventionally recognized approaches to conflict in the discipline of conflict studies are commonly referred to as “modes” or “styles” and focus primarily on the external and observable behaviors associated with how an individual engages conflict. The traditional primary modes include competing (assertive behavior), avoiding, accommodating, compromising (making agreements), and collaborating (problem-solving oriented). This way of looking at behavioral approaches to interpersonal conflict was popularized by Kilmann and Thomas (1975). The participants demonstrated each of these approaches to conflict throughout the interview process. These frames for categorizing conflict approaches are relevant to this research; however, looking beneath the behavior to understand the motivations behind the various approaches was one of the primary lines of inquiry for this section of the study. The question can be reframed for this analysis as: *how does the developmental structure of the mind relate to one's internal inclinations to approaching conflict?*

The aspect of one's conflict mode, style, or approach examined in this section focuses less on an individual's observable and external objective actions and behaviors. Instead, the “approach” explored here deals with how conflict is *related to* in the mind of the individual. For

example, even though an individual may demonstrate consistent behaviors that objectively qualify as ‘accommodating’ behaviors, it must not be assumed that the externally demonstrated behavior correlates with one’s approach to conflict within one’s mind. Observed behavior may be a product of the demands of the more extensive social system, an individual’s position or role within the system, the cultural and structural elements of the system, the patterns of relationships, how an individual’s social identities conform or are perceived as antithetical to the accepted biases of the social system, as well as other complex factors one may consciously consider or unconsciously experience in relations the context of the conflict situation.⁴ The conflict *approach* considered here looks at the internal *how* and *why*, which informs an individual’s external behavior in conflict. The approach to conflict in the context of this chapter considers the distinctive structure of the mind for each participant and their mind’s predisposition to engaging conflict from their current mindset.

The following sections explore each of the meaning-making structures demonstrated by the individual leaders in this study while elaborating on and integrating the concepts explored in this section and previous sections by applying qualitatively discussing the data collected in the interviews. These individual sections highlight and incorporate several primary and relevant themes that emerged during the critical incident analysis (while also considering the context and the case studies). The subsequent sections begin by examining the participant who demonstrated

⁴ Note: In a simplified sense, consider the notion of code switching, which requires a conscious override of one’s encultured linguistic and behavioral tendencies to adapt to the social context and/or system. Now consider developmental mindsets. An individual who is generating meaning from a socialized mindset might decide to engage in a situation utilizing a more objective *competitive* conflict engagement approach if an external party—an individual or group—whom the individual looks to for validation strongly encourages a more direct or assertive approach to dealing with the conflict. Or if the individual perceives this being “more competitive” is what the referenced individual or group would expect from them, want for them, or recommend to them.

a 3/4 developmental mind and progressively works through each of the subsequent substages, finishing with the individual who demonstrated a 4(5) mindset. However, before

An Additional Wrinkle: A Language Modification From “Mindset” to “Mindform”

Over the course of this study, one of the reoccurring obstacles I encountered when reading and writing within the context CD theory involved the inconsistency in the usage of language and terminology. When I proposed the initial aim, scope, and rationale for this study I intentionally chose to emphasize and utilize the language of “mindset” as the primary term I would use in reference to the structural meaning-making milestones (i.e., equilibrated stages) and the *in-between* steppingstones (i.e., substages) the participants demonstrated. However, the more time I spent steeped in the literature and the data analysis, the more uncertain I became with utilizing the term “mindset” in this way. Toward the end of the analysis and writing processes, I allocated time to review and consider the various terms and the rationales used by CD scholars (i.e., stage, order, level, mindset, etc.) as well as other inconsistent terminology. Eventually, I decided to examine the etymology of the term “mindset” and reviewed its use and connotations in other subfields of psychology. In the course of this ancillary investigation, I found myself drawn to the word and notion of “form” and the idea that one’s mind and its structure is a malleable and adaptable “form.” I contrasted the meaning and connotation of “form” with that of “set” (the latter part of the conjunction “mind-set”), and given the denotation of “set” being strongly associated with a lack of movement or rigidity, I considered this line of inquiry worthwhile.

During this process, I rediscovered Berger’s (2011) chosen language of “form of mind” as an alternative to the terms stage, order, level, or mindset. Influenced by Berger’s language and in an imaginative effort to ascertain vocabulary that more fully resonated with my deepening

understanding of this highly complex concept, I began to test the language of “mind-form,” eventually condensing it to “mindform” (without a hyphen). Furthermore, I conducted a moderately comprehensive search of scholarly literature to see where and how this novel term had been used—if at all. I found limited instances where the term “mindform” was used (less than twenty instances and predominately in the context of religion and theology).

Informed by a perhaps excessively iterative process, I make a deliberate decision to utilize the terminology of “mindform” in place of mindset in most instances throughout the remainder of Chapter V and in Chapter VI. This experiment with the language of “mindform” aims to exemplify the notion that one’s ways of knowing and constructing meaning are open to changing and evolving. Moreover, though one’s meaning-making structure evolves incrementally, remaining relatively secure, conceivably for long periods of time, ostensibly insignificant moments may contribute to constructive and notable shifts.

Finally, the language of “mindform,” I posit, more purposefully considers the *in-between*—the substages (or steppingstones) between the equilibrated stages (or milestones)—where two interdependent meaning-making systems are learning how to interact and relate to one another.

The “3/4” Mindform’s Relationship to Engaging and Navigating Conflict

Kevin was the sole individual assessed to construct meaning from the “3/4” developmental mindform, wherein the socialized mind was salient. As hypothesized, his external approaches to conflict fluctuated, for the governing meaning-making system does not directly dictate actions and behaviors. In his SOI, he demonstrated the concurrence of the socialized and self-authored minds, yet the sway of the socialized mind prevailed as the primary governing system.

The subsequent subsections explore Kevin's internal experience in conflict, his prevailing internal (and external to a lesser extent) modes of conflict engagement, his propensity toward empathy, his capacity for complex thinking, a brief analysis of his conflict approaches, concluding with a summary of the key findings discussed.

Internal Experience in Conflict. In the case of Kevin, he implied at multiple points throughout the interview process that he was not fond of conflict and that it made him feel uncomfortable. This discomfort also showed up throughout the interview process when he projected this discomfort onto others, unconsciously not taking responsibility for his unease in conflict situations. Kevin often experienced conflict as personal and struggled in his mind to separate himself from it, even in situations where he assumed a mediator-type role (i.e., he was not directly a party to the conflict). Kevin insinuated throughout his interviews that conflict presented a threat to who he was, as he saw himself as a chair that others "like," and conflict posed a threat to this. He shared he especially was uncomfortable with conflict that was unresolved or that he could not resolve through identifying "shared interests" that he identified as difficult. As he stated, "I don't like confronting people, particularly. [The] conflicts that I have been unable to resolve through . . . shared interest conversations [are difficult]. So, when it gets to the next level and we have to go beyond that, then I find [it] unpleasant."

At the beginning of the critical conflict interview (CCI), Kevin initially indicated that he did not experience much conflict as the department chair. The conflicts that he did elaborate on required a significant amount of probing through questioning from me (the interviewer). Many of his initial responses to open-ended questions were to the point—limited in the conveyance of complexity—as he appeared to struggle in providing detail and conveying nuance (specifically when compared to the other participants). It seemed that part of this hesitancy to expand with

detailed information was connected to his discomfort with the topic of conflict as well as making sense of the abstraction of conflict within his experience as a leader. This was unique among the participants in the study and may be attributed to his personality, communication style, and/or other factors influencing his responses in the CCI (characteristic of the socialized mind). Though during his other two interviews, his level of engagement appeared to be significantly higher, as he responded to questions more naturally, providing detail without the same intensity of probing.

Demonstrated Conflict Modes. Kevin demonstrated an internally driven tendency to seek to accommodate others when possible or avoid conflict altogether when deemed permissible. Of the three conflict scenarios he highlighted during the interview process, there were two conflicts in which he demonstrated assertive behavior and moved beyond his inclination toward accommodating and avoiding (characteristic of the self-authored mind). However, asserting himself was not his initial or preferred mode of engagement. In these cases, he did express some internal pull toward an assertive behavior that was shown to be motivated internally, however, he did not act until it was necessary. As highlighted in the first conflict, he described (in Chapter IV) his preferred and initially attempted accommodating approach did not serve the desired outcome for the situation. Nor did it serve the needs and interests of the students, which he acknowledged also played a role in his motivation to consider different handling of the situation with the instructor. Moreover, he emphasized that it was his responsibility as the department chair to address the situation. It would “reflect badly” on him if he did not deal with the problem right away (characteristic of the socialized mind). In reflecting on this moment, he stated:

In some ways, it felt like how the hell did this happen? I’m the chair, and we’re seven weeks in, and students haven’t—shouldn’t I know that sort of stuff? So, I felt a little guilty about that. But then, and this is going to reflect badly on me, but I also felt like I

needed to deal with it in the best way possible for the students and the university and get her out at least temporarily.

He shared that “I don’t want to have to tell somebody that they’re fired . . . that we can’t work with you anymore. I want it to work out.” Yet, he was motivated to act partly because “I’ve got the student advisor on me because she’s hearing complaints from the students,” and the advisor conveyed to Kevin, “You’ve got to do something about this.” In response to this, he conveyed his rationale for taking action to confront the instructor, stating:

So, it had to be my decision, and I had to take ownership of it along the way, every part of it. No matter who else was there, it was my responsibility. So even if somebody was whispering in my ear and telling me what to do, the fact that I accepted that advice, it was [my] decision.

His thought process illustrates the link between the governing socialized mind and his approach to the conflict situation in this context.

Kevin expressed that part of his frustration related to the fact that the students were paying for a class, and the instructor was not showing up. He demonstrated a commitment to the students’ best interests.

In the second conflict scenario he recounted, he took an indirect approach to asserting his desired interest. Rather than addressing the individual directly involved, he coordinated an effort to encourage others to run for the leadership position another faculty member he expressed frustration toward aimed to be selected for. This allowed him to avoid direct conflict with her—an encounter he unconsciously sought to avoid—while also working to maintain his version of *relational harmony* in the department. In fact, he stated that he never conveyed his concerns or thoughts directly to her. In part, his actions were motivated by what he described as his desire to prevent a more vocal and assertive leader from earning a more influential platform for voicing her ideas and interests. Kevin considered her communication style overly dominating, as he

stated, “There are two people who really dominate, and she’s one of them. But she’s also kind of abrupt and rude.” Kevin stated that his aim as the department chair was to “encourage others within the program to speak up and speak out at meetings and just talk about things they’re doing as well.” He perceived that she would threaten his efforts and desire to provide space for other department members to share openly if she were elected to represent the department.

He vaguely presented his perspective for the third and final conflict, which dealt with organizational change, and ultimately shared that it was “above his paygrade,” avoiding any direct involvement. Moreover, he conveyed that this was not really a conflict for him, though it was for others in his department. This could be attributed to the influence of the socialized mind, as it did not directly impact his identity as a “liked” chair or affect his good standing with higher leadership. Regarding the faculty in his department, he saw it as his role to listen to them but did not engage in the aspects of conflict that the faculty expressed tied to this organizational change.

Based on his recollection of the conflict scenarios, Kevin’s most dominant approach to conflict was that of accommodation, followed by avoidance, then indirect and passive action as a form of assertion (characteristic of the 3ish mind). Internally, he sought to approach conflict incidents in a manner that would not cause others involved to feel uncomfortable, as he wanted to maintain relational harmony among the faculty within the department. He shared at one point that he wanted to “make sure that everybody felt included.” This accommodating approach was influenced by his socialized mind’s desire to avoid an escalation of conflict. He perceived conflict as disruptive to the relationships and, to an extent, his identity as the “liked” department chair.

Orientation(s) Toward Empathy. In each of these conflict scenarios, Kevin expressed empathy toward the other individual stakeholders involved (i.e., the students and the other

department faculty). However, his ability to do so appeared to be limited to the emotional level (i.e., affective empathy) instead of a cognitive level—he could feel and sense what the other stakeholders were experiencing (Moore et al., 2014). Still, he demonstrated a limited capability to think from their perspective and intentionally consider others’ point-of-view. He could distinguish between perspectives but was limited in his capacity to take on the other’s perspective when in conflict. This restricted capacity limited his ability to comprehend and make sense of the various dynamics at play on the other individual’s end of the conflict. This, too, influenced his behavior in that he ascribed to the traditional sentiment of the golden rule, ‘treat others the way you want to be treated.’ In conflict situations, he tended to project his point of view onto others, making decisions based on what he *thought* other stakeholders wanted—grounded in what he wanted—without genuinely taking on their perspective and integrating it into his considerations.

Moreover, in the first conflict scenario with the instructor who ultimately was released from her teaching obligations, once he realized that he must take more decisive action, he demonstrated a lower aptitude for empathy as he prepared to distance himself from the faculty member, he intended to release from her course assignment. The clear demonstration of a transition from a genuine expression of emotional empathy—and to a more limited degree, cognitive empathy—to a near-sudden emotional shift toward disconnection was expressed in his dismissive language regarding the instructor’s situation.

The first time I really felt sympathetic and like we needed to get her help, and we were all on the same page, and it was getting done. The second time, I was just kind of angry, I guess, frustrated that we’re back here again . . . She used terms that implied that she should have special status in terms of either mental illness, or I’m not sure what she was implying, but she didn’t document that in any way that we could use that to help her out. So, she was saying, “I have a history of being othered. I’m not neurotypical,” or whatever.

The language employed here conveyed his internal process and demonstrated a diminished empathy toward the faculty member—both emotional and cognitive empathy.

Complex Thinking and Awareness. The limits of his awareness and conscious consideration of the various levels of complexity contributed to his straightforward conception of conflict (compared to other leaders in this study). Even his understanding of conflict as a concept was clear-cut and limited in its complexity. He selected conflict scenarios that were presented as tied to more external elements than internal, even though he experienced them internally (but was limited in his conscious awareness of this). This was unique among the participants of the study, except for his second conflict scenario, in which he demonstrated the self-authoring mind at play in a limited manner.

Kevin demonstrated moderate capacity for creative problem-solving and adaptivity, as was demonstrated in the first two conflict situations he detailed. He displayed some awareness and tolerance for ambiguity, especially if it did not directly impact him. When he did see conflict as impacting him directly, his tolerance for ambiguity decreased. Finally, he demonstrated limited abstract thinking and attention to paradoxes in his conflict scenarios, and he did not demonstrate dialectical thinking.

Brief Critical Analysis of Conflict Approach. From a conflict engagement perspective, the governing socialized mind, paired with his tendency toward accommodating and avoidant approaches, can be constructive and beneficial if relational harmony is deemed as the primary aim and is highly valued within the larger social system. However, the dominant emphasis on the maintenance of relational harmony can have a shadow side in that if there are critical elements that must be addressed within the department that are avoided for the sake of not disturbing the

harmony, necessary and honest dialogue may be deficient or quelled, impeding progress toward the department or institution's larger mission and objectives.

Summary of Leader at the Substage “3/4” Mindform. Kevin, constructing meaning from the “3/4” mindform, demonstrated his external approach and associated actions in the conflict scenarios as he sought first to accommodate or avoid conflict if possible. This was only overridden when it was necessitated that he engage the situation more directly, as required by his leadership responsibilities in the department and the expectations of others (3ish system). Moreover, behaviorally, he did not speak up or push back through direct channels with those he experienced conflict unless required. Specifically, in the second conflict scenario, he demonstrated this by using indirect means to reach his goal. In the case of Kevin, an individual constructing meaning from the “3/4” mindform constantly weighs how their behaviors and actions are perceived by others—especially those they respect and/or work under. Even when an individual demonstrates the existence of the self-authoring mind, the socialized mind appears to be the default governing mind in the context of a conflict situation because the socialized mind is stronger in “3/4” developmental structure.

The “4/3” Mindform’s Relationship to Engaging and Navigating Conflict

Emma, Brian, and Christine all demonstrated developmental minds at the “4/3” substage, wherein the self-authoring mind is slightly more determinative than the socialized mind (as detailed in each of their case studies). They were each still susceptible to the socialized mind ascending to a more influential role in certain contexts. Considering personality, interests, identities, education, background, and other factors, the three of them held uniquely different world views; however, how their meaning-making in conflict influenced their thinking was comparable, as will be explored in this section. Using a parallel outline to what was presented in

the previous segment, the following subsections will explore the linkages between the individuals' similar developmental structures and how their mindforms influence their engagement with complex conflict and its relationship to their thinking and, to an extent, their behaviors.

Internal Experience in Conflict. When faced with conflict, Emma and Brian each expressed in multiple moments and in distinctive ways their discomfort and negative feelings and perceptions regarding conflict. Emma stated, "I don't like conflict, and [yet] conflict is inevitable." She went on to share how she intentionally seeks collaborative approaches to problems so as to prevent conflict from escalating. Brian expressed, "I don't like being in conflict, at least with people—with individuals." He later shared how he does not always identify tensions or disagreements with others as conflict (he appeared to avoid identifying conflict as such because of his negative association with the concept). Christine conveyed that conflict, in general, was not something she felt uncomfortable with, unless it was interpersonal, and she was a party to the conflict.

All three of these academic leaders demonstrated their willingness to engage conflict when essential to their personal and professional objectives, values, and role requirements. This slightly nuanced association with conflict in the mind (compared to Kevin) can be associated with the shift from the strong influence of the socialized mind toward a more influential self-authored mind (the movement from the strong influence of the 3ish system to a more influential 4ish system). Christine, Brian, and Emma were each able to clearly and objectively state their own interests and positions in the context of conflicts they encountered (characteristic of the 4ish system, a sign of a more complex mind and the capacity to see aspects of self that were once subject now as object). Additionally, they could objectively identify the other parties'

points of view, emotions, and interests, differentiating them from their own. (Whereas Kevin, at the “3/4” mindform, could clearly describe his position and could identify his deeper interests to a limited extent. Yet, he unconsciously tended to lump his interests with others’ interests and demonstrated a more limited capacity to differentiate his values and perspective from others.)

Intriguingly, Brian, Emma, and Christine were the only three participants in the study who unprompted, spoke to the influence of their *earlier self* in relation to their making sense of a situation or conflict. Each of them expressed in different ways that this *earlier self* still had sway in their mind and that at times they had to consciously resist the earlier self’s influence in their mind, demonstrating the tension between the 3ish and 4ish systems when constructing meaning from the “4/3” mindform. (This recognition of multiple influences demonstrates their evolving capacity to take perspective on their earlier mindform, signaling a shift from a governing 3ish system to the 4ish system.) Emma and Brian used language implying the influence of their ‘child self’ while describing how they experience conflict internally. Emma shared at one point that when people are “unhappy” with her, “it hurts me like a little girl. It causes me anxiety. Like, I’m up at night.” Whereas Brian stated that occasionally he does not want to push back on leadership requests he doesn’t like because “my inner child is probably telling me, ‘Just give them what they want. Don’t fight. I’m not a fighter.’” These comments demonstrated the influence of the socialized mind.

Christine spoke about how she used to deeply internalize others’ conflicts, even in her work as a mediator as she stated, “I was over-involved in people’s stuff, in a way. It would be a really difficult mediation, and I would think about these people for like years on end afterward.” Later in the interview process, she shared that she still tends to over-internalize certain conflicts.

However, she could now exercise the ability to identify and take perspective on these occasions objectively.

In relation to their objective recognition of the influence and pull of their earlier mindforms in their thinking, they each described a self-awareness regarding the tension between their inclination to “please” or “help” the other, contrasted with their individual capacities to resist the pull of their socialized mind. This allowed them to approach conflict situations in a manner that was true to who they were as individuals and in line with their personal objectives (i.e., what they implied was their *adult* mind). This demonstrates the transitional phase of moving from the predominant governing socialized mind of the “3/4” mindform to the now more prominent self-authoring mind expressed as the “4/3” mindform. The once subjective socialized mind *was becoming* object as they began to take perspective on it and *see* what they were developmentally incapable of seeing in themselves before.

Furthermore, they each expressed feeling hurt by damaged relationships resulting from conflict situations. They were heavily influenced by the notion that “relationships mattered.” However, they could consciously separate others’ feelings from their own and could consciously mitigate overly internalizing the harmful actions and statements others made toward them in conflict. Each one of these three leaders still felt a significant emotional impact and expressed the experience of feeling distressed when relationships were damaged. In this regard, Brian and Emma each articulated wishes and intentions for some type of relational restoration when it came to the negative impact the conflict scenarios had on specific relationships. Christine implied this to some extent; however, she focused less on restoration and more on problem-solving so that she and the other individual(s) involved could move on with their professional relationship.

While Brian expressed that he was inclined to consider many coworkers as friends, Emma and Christine both shared that they understood friendships with coworkers were not the priority, though relationships grounded in respect were.

Christine, Brian, and Emma each framed and viewed relationships within their respective contexts differently—yet they each spoke to the value they perceived in deliberate relationship building as a means to resolve and manage conflict, as well as contributing to preventing conflict from escalating in adverse and detrimental ways within their professional contexts.

Demonstrated Conflict Modes. Brian and Emma each consciously articulated their customary tendencies to initially accommodate others. Yet, they showed the capacity to override this tendency for the purpose of working toward a more important objective. Christine did not frame a tendency to accommodate in the same way as Brian and Emma, though she demonstrated an equivalent approach to how she constructed meaning in her mind when in conflict.

This “override” or deliberate resistance, as they demonstrated in the depictions of their self-talk, required a conscious and deliberate effort. To speak up and assert their perspective, they had to internally contradict the subsistent and moderate pull toward their accommodating and avoiding tendencies within their mind. This demonstrated the still active influence of the socialized mind in each of their ways of constructing meaning.

Concerning their external behavioral tendencies in relation to engaging and navigating conflict, they differed significantly, though all three demonstrated orientations toward collaborating and compromising. Emma was much more outwardly assertive, yet this external action relied on significant self-talk and actively consulting others to gain support and validation for her proposed actions. Additionally, Emma demonstrated substantial internal conflict and

tension, even though she would be seen as assertive in her behavior and communication from an external perspective. This inner tension connected to what was presented in the previous paragraphs in that she felt the urge to transcend the familiar accommodating approach and assert herself because, as she stated, “I thought it was the right thing to do because keeping this adjunct in the class is the best thing to do for [the college],” even when her actions deliberately challenged established policies and practices.

Christine was outwardly direct in her approach to engaging conflict situations. In her mind, she felt significant tension and frustration as she could not successfully resolve the two complex conflict situations in ways that made sense to her. To an extent, she desired a concrete resolution to these situations. Yet, in each of her conflict situations, no matter how hard she tried, she could not obtain a satisfactory form of resolution in her mind. Regarding the first conflict scenario, she went as far as stating, “I’ve done everything within my positional power to do something about it, and like I said, it’s not resolving it for her, which means it’s not resolving it for me.” This recognition that her sense of resolution regarding this conflict was tied to the other individual’s sense of resolution was a moment where the socialized mind demonstrated noteworthy influence. Christine tied her determination of what is, or is not, a resolution to the other individual’s feelings in this specific conflict scenario. Here, her internal experience was linked to the other individual. However, she was also aware of this, as she stated, “maybe I don’t need to internalize it as much and feel like I need to try to figure out a way to make her happy. Maybe she just needs to decide she’s going to be happy.”

On the other hand, Brian demonstrated more subtle maneuvering in his approach to navigating conflict. He worked to generate buy-in from his constituents, the stakeholders in an organizational change process. He actively reached out to stakeholder groups, taking less of a

typified assertive approach and what might appear to the external observer as a collaborative approach. However, at several points, he highlighted the resistance he experienced from leaders of the stakeholder groups he was attempting to build relationships with and gain buy-in from. When the leaders he referenced would not comply with his requests, he circumvented them, arranging meetings without their communicated consent. These efforts were not approached in a subversive way or with ill intent. Instead, his actions were a deliberate response to the other's inaction—a form of resistance he frequently encountered. The presence of the self-authoring mind enabled the purpose behind his action. He took the initiative on his own and expressed no feelings of guilt or fear of personal backlash, as he was confident in his decisions and actions and their intended effect to support his own internal objectives. Still, he also expressed an inner tension to conform to the two sides' perspectives on how he should communicate and what he should be working for on their behalf. As Brian shared, “I feel like there's this huge weight on my shoulders in terms of I'm expected to bring the vision of [leadership] . . . into reality and figure out ways to overcome the resistance to change.” While at the same time, he shared that the mid-level leadership and faculty are “sort of angry at the university. It's not really so much at me. Honestly, they're not blaming me for anything. They're not saying, why are you doing this? They know that I'm being forced to do it.” Though he objectively recognizes this, it still takes a toll on him internally, as there was “a lot of discomfort” for him, as he wished everyone to get what they wanted.

Moreover, all three leaders expressed or demonstrated in different ways that they tend to follow protocols, rules, and the expectations of their role most of the time. Still, each of them demonstrated at least one moment where they bent the rules or deliberately went against what

was expected of them. Emma explicitly stated this as she explained how she deliberately breached a policy articulated in the faculty contract.

Usually, I'm a rule follower, and I stay within the bounds and respect the whole full-time faculty thing. Even when it doesn't make sense to me, it's like, it's fine. I'm not going to argue with their right to make decisions and their academic freedom, even when it impinges upon other people's academic freedom. Because that's the rank that they've earned, and that's fine, and I'm not going to change that myself.

The policy she intentionally breached created an obstacle to what she thought was in the best interest of the students and the institution. She understood the rationale for the policy, but given the nuances of the situation, her breach of this rule "was the right thing to do." She stated that she recognized that "politically it was dangerous, but I did anyway." This demonstrated the influence of her self-authored mind. For Christine and Brian, the situations in which they went against a policy or expectation were also identified as motivated by the influence of their self-authored mind.

When considering the differences in conflict approaches employed by Brian, Christine, and Emma, it is essential to consider that they were navigating conflicts that they deemed difficult and complex in distinctive contexts. They each held power differently in their institutions. Their roles and responsibilities differed. The objective complexity and root causes of the conflict scenarios they described were unique to their contexts. The conflict scenario that Brian described stemmed from organizational changes and involved many stakeholders. The conflict scenarios Emma articulated were predominately interpersonal with faculty, though tied to organizational structure and policies, and unique to her role as an associate dean. Christine's conflict scenarios were unique in that one was primarily an interpersonal conflict with a teaching colleague with a complex history and relationship with the department. In comparison, the second conflict situation dealt more with supporting a colleague who was navigating a conflict

rooted in cultural and structural institutional barriers and practices. Moreover, the various stakeholders' power dynamics and social identities that played into each of these situations differed significantly. Though their behaviors and self-perceptions of their approaches to conflict differed, how they internally constructed meaning while navigating their disparate conflicts exhibited analogous qualities.

Orientation(s) Toward Empathy. The ways in which these three leaders demonstrated empathy were comparable in that they each showed significant intuitive capacities of emotional empathy toward individual stakeholders involved in the situation. This affective empathy appeared to be naturally occurring at an unconscious level for each of them. Moreover, as differentiated from Kevin in the previous section, Emma, Christine, and Brian each demonstrated an additional, more deliberate, approach to empathy, cognitive empathy, as they consciously sought to take on the perspective of select stakeholders in the conflict, even with those with whom they were directly in conflict with (this differs slightly in a qualitative sense from what Kevin demonstrated, as he was more limited in his capacity for cognitive empathy when directly involved in conflict).

This concept of cognitive empathy did not appear to come as intuitively as emotional empathy did. All three of these leaders demonstrated a deliberate conscious effort to recognize the various elements at play for the other stakeholder(s) in the conflict situations. As Savard et al. (2022) state, cognitive empathy is an “effortful process focused on understanding what others are feeling and taking on their perspective” (p. 16). This form of empathy was clearly demonstrated in each of these participants. Some of the factors they considered in their perspective-taking included the intersecting factors of the social identities of the other individuals, the others' histories at the institution in comparison to their own tenure, the power dynamics, the role

responsibilities, and what was going on in people's personal lives. At one point, Brian described his approach to empathy (though he did not explicitly label this description as his approach to empathy):

I think I have good emotional intelligence, and I think I can sort of figure out where people are at that moment. And I try to keep tabs on it the best I can. I kind of try to have a sense of what's going on in people's lives and what's the pressures at that moment . . . I try to sort of calibrate how I'm going to interact over something that might be a source of conflict based on what I think their emotional state is at that moment or what they're going through, or how they're likely to respond.

Though Emma and Christine did not describe how they each approach empathy in a general sense, their demonstrated orientation to the active practice of cognitive empathy aligned closely with what Brian described.

Moreover, they each deliberately articulated what they perceived to be the other individuals' motivations and points of view, a component to their deliberate perspective-taking that, in comparison, Kevin did not demonstrate. Especially in the case of Emma and Christine, they acknowledged that perhaps they spent too much mental energy and time trying to understand the other parties' perspectives as they sought to tailor their communication and approach to the conflict situation in a way that would accommodate other's perspectives. Brian implied that he sometimes would be overly empathetic in a similar manner as described by Emma and Christine. However, a specific example did not emerge in his detailed complex scenario.

Complex Thinking and Awareness. The capacity to actively endeavor to consciously understand the individualized perspectives of others enabled Brian, Emma, and Christine to approach the conflict situations with more intention and consideration. They were capable of carefully and deliberately tailoring their approach to engaging the conflicts strategically and informedly. Moreover, constructing meaning from “4/3” mindform, they demonstrated an ability

to think more objectively and abstractly as they grappled with concepts such as power dynamics, the purpose behind institutional policies, and the intersecting social identities of individuals involved as they considered the roles these notions played in each of the conflict scenarios they described.

Moreover, Brian, Emma, and Christine's conception of 'complex and/or difficult conflict' was shown to be representative of where they were in terms of their current meaning-making structure, in that conflict framed as "complex" or "difficult" was at the edge of their present minds' highest propensity to navigate conflict in a way which they understood to be constructive—i.e., it required them to tap into and test their most evolved meaning-making system's capacities, which was that of the self-authored mind.

Brief Critical Analysis of Conflict Approach. Emma, Christine, and Brian demonstrated the power to deliberately tap into their still-evolving self-authoring mindform. Though they each articulated that they were concerned with others' perceptions of them and how the eventual outcomes of these conflict situations reflected on them as individuals, they demonstrated the capacity to suspend their fears and sit with their discomforts when navigating the conflict. This allowed them to bring a more objective perspective to their engagement and navigation of the conflict.

While the upside of deliberately taking a conscious and more objectively informed approach showed that they could incorporate multiple factors into understanding and addressing complex and difficult conflicts, the potential consequence for each of them appeared to be the internal toll this deliberate approach took on their emotions and mind. They each spoke to the reality that the conflict situations took up a significant amount of internal space for them, which inadvertently implied that energy needed elsewhere in their professional and personal lives was

likely depleted to varying extents. Moreover, especially in Christine and Emma's examples, they appeared to be overthinking the situational dynamics at times. However, in the scenarios Emma described, it was not to the detrimental extent of paralysis from over-analysis. Christine, on the other hand, in one of her conflicts, conveyed that her over-empathizing and analyzing contributed to her over-accommodation, which ultimately took an emotional toll on her. Brian acknowledged that his husband had made comments regarding the toll he noticed aspects of the complex situation and accompanying conflict took on him.

Additionally, this recognized excessive perspective-taking and analysis for the participants could potentially contribute to an over-complication of the conflicts, building them up as larger than they need to be at moments. (However, it is difficult to adequately assess this given the limited data in this study which was only collected from the participants' points of view.)

It is important to note that these findings do not suggest that individuals at the "4/3" substage can reliably resolve or manage the conflict *better* than someone at an earlier developmental level. However, it suggests that with access to comparable interpersonal and organizational conflict engagement social skills, tools, and strategies, they would likely be more accurate in constructing their assessment and making judgments, which would inform their decisions and behavioral approach to conflict. As demonstrated, Emma, Christine, and Brian could take in more information, synthesize it, and respond from a more deliberate and informed perspective on the conflict situation compared to Kevin.

Summary of Leaders at the Substage "4/3" Mindform. As academic leaders navigating conflict, these three individuals demonstrated how they constructed meaning in conflict and its influence on their thinking and behaviors. Constructing meaning from the "4/3"

mindform, they deliberately worked to prioritize what they understood to be their ‘adult’ mind—the self-authoring mind. At times, this enabled them to function independently of others’ expectations, projections, and validations (or lack thereof). Yet, they each demonstrated moments of deferring to the socialized mind. Individually, they demonstrated the conscious ability to resist or override their socialized mindsets’ influence in specific scenarios, allowing them to think and act in a manner they deemed best, given the dynamics and factors contributing to the complex conflict scenario(s). This *knowing* what is *best* in a given situation may come from their solidifying personally constructed ideologies. The staving off from allowing perceptions and expectations of others to overly influence their thinking and behavior was by no means foolproof. They still were impacted by their perception of what they believed others desired out of the situations. However, they were aware of this (which is a significant point of comparison when also looking at the “3/4” mindform of Kevin).

Christine, Emma, and Brian each demonstrated a mix of actively empathizing by attempting to take the perspective (i.e., cognitive empathy) of the various stakeholders involved in the conflict situations they experienced. Though emotional empathy (affective empathy) was fully present for them, it did not consistently take up as much space or hold as much weight in their minds compared to Kevin. This demonstrated a shift toward an increased capacity to take the perspective of another, intentionally seeking to understand the autonomous stakeholder’s interests, needs, values, identities, and world views, is also associated with a shift in their thinking complexity. Furthermore, they demonstrated a heightened capacity to construct a subtly more expansive understanding of complexity in their conflicts, as they identified how the social and structural systems, culture, and stakeholder groups related to the conflict scenarios they described during their interviews.

The “4(3)” Mindform’s Approach to Engaging and Navigating Conflict

Devin demonstrated that he constructed meaning from a governing self-authoring mindform, with indications of the socialized mind maintaining some influence. Individually, he articulated that he had become self-aware of an internal shift within the last few years, wherein he no longer expended significant amounts of mental energy prioritizing what other people thought of him. With this shift, he no longer internalized every conflict event or situation he was involved in, as he had in the past. He was consciously aware of this change in his thinking and his internal approach to conflict situations. The socialized mindform was now subject to him, as he could see its existence and influence on his meaning-making, and he was no longer governed by it.

The subsequent subsections will follow the same presentation flow as the two previous sections.

Internal Experience in Conflict. In the case of Devin, he conveyed that he was relatively comfortable engaging with conflict in most contexts, though deep down, he acknowledged that historically he tends to “flee from conflict.”

Devin demonstrated an additional layer of nuance regarding how he constructed meaning when engaging and navigating difficult and complex conflict situations compared to that of the previous individuals. He clearly articulated a distinction between other people’s interests and positions in conflict and his own. Moreover, he was internally less burdened by conflict in general—in that he could separate himself from the conflict and view it objectively. In his first conflict situation, which he acknowledged was very complex, while negotiating with a faculty member who was being demoted from one of his leadership positions, Devin shared, “I never

took any of it personally.” Yet, conversely, he did confess toward the end of the second interview that he still is occasionally concerned with the perceptions of others:

I have found in the times that I’ve taken on conflict head-on early, it’s never as bad as you think it’s going to be. It’s over very quickly. No one hates you. Because that’s probably my deep-down fear, is people won’t like me anymore, as if this is a popularity contest.

Devin held himself to a high standard, as the primary lingering tensions he experienced internally centered on his self-evaluation as he consciously identified gaps in his perspective in each of the three conflict situations he detailed. He reflected on how he could have approached certain aspects of the conflict situations differently, especially pertaining to the notion of more actively seeking to understand the other stakeholders’ points of view and interests through more direct communication and open-ended questioning and making fewer assumptions. At one point, he articulated a self-critique of how he had communicated with a group of faculty members during his articulated conflict scenario related to tension and conflict concerning academic freedom censorship, stating:

That’s their professional purview, and they’re right about that. I can understand it. I can hear the words coming out of your mouth. I understand the language, but it doesn’t mean I’ve lived it. I think I gave that vibe in the early days like, “Yeah, I get this, you guys.” [And they were] like, “No, you don’t. We want to talk to you about it.”

In this reflection, Devin shared that he could understand rationally where they were coming from, he was aware that the degree to which he understood their concerns regarding academic freedom was limited. Moreover, he was able to take perspective on this and ended up adapting his conscious approach to the situation while demonstrating humility without overly internalizing the conflict.

Demonstrated Conflict Modes. For Devin, though he did insinuate that he did not enjoy conflict and tended to avoid it, he showed, on the other hand, that he did not actively avoid

conflict externally or internally. Instead, he deliberately leaned into it to better understand others' perspectives, the causes of the underlying issue(s), and what others' motivations and interests were within the context of the specific conflict. As shown in the previous subsection, in hindsight, he struggled in specific moments by making assumptions and unintentionally projecting his own prejudgments onto other stakeholders. Still, he genuinely sought to take others' perspectives, utilizing cognitive empathy, and attempting to separate his perspective, values, interests, and identities from other individuals'.

Devin demonstrated an orientation toward seeking a clear resolution of conflict situations in the external relational sense and within his mind. He emphasized his desire not to cause others distress, and in his third conflict scenario, when preparing to let an employee go, he shared, "This was hard for me because I knew that she liked the job, and she needed the money." Yet, he articulated and demonstrated that he would not let others' distress restrict him from doing what was in the institution's best interest and its stakeholders. This notion of what was best for the institution and the stakeholders appeared to be at the heart of a self-generated ideology. He continuously kept circling back to this in both direct and indirect ways.

Devin's demonstrated approaches to conflict, compared to that of Emma, Brian, and Christine at the "4/3" substage, showed that he was incrementally more removed from taking the perceived conflict personally. As well, he proved to be direct and assertive in his communication, rarely second-guessing himself; instead, he reflected after the fact on how he could improve in approach in future instances.

Compared to the previous substage, Devin demonstrated a more expansive ability to consider the institution's larger systems and cultural influences on the conflict situations. He spoke at length on institutional culture and how he consciously needed to adapt his approach to

addressing the situation in a way that considered the cultural elements to be successful in his aims regarding resolution.

Orientations Toward Empathy. Pertaining to the notions of empathy and perspective-taking, Devin demonstrated an orientation toward cognitive empathy when seeking to understand the other individual stakeholders' or group's perspectives. He was able to separate emotional empathy from cognitive empathy (i.e., he attempted to put himself in the minds of others and understand the context from their point of view, as opposed to overly focusing on how the other parties to the conflict felt). In the first conflict scenario, when taking the perspective of the director who was in the process of being demoted, Devin shared, "His title was his whole life. He did really take a lot of meaning from that." Additionally, when describing the relational dynamics with this individual, Devin reflected on the perceived power dynamic tied to his more extensive military service and retiring at a higher rank than the director. "[So] there's that immediate tension there that he thinks that I looked down on him, and I get that. I absolutely get it. It's not the case for me, but I get it."

Devin demonstrated an internal approach to conflict which highlighted his genuine attentiveness to comprehending the motivations and perspectives of other stakeholders in each conflict situation. He exhibited a conscious practice of deliberately factoring in various elements of the other individuals' social identities, power dynamics, backgrounds, values, interests, and needs. Additionally, in this conscious effort, he demonstrated the capacity to view other individuals through an intersectional lens. He consciously sought to avoid generalizations, and when he did slip into projecting based on stereotypes, he acknowledged his lapses in judgment in hindsight.

As it pertains to conflict, this added capacity for understanding myriad layers of complexity, both from his point of view and the others' points of view, provided him the benefit of employing systems thinking approach when navigating the conflict scenarios to a greater extent than what was demonstrated by the individuals that constructed meaning from the "4/3" mindform.

Complex Thinking and Awareness. Devin objectively demonstrated a greater capacity for making sense of complexity than the leaders of the earlier mindforms. Also, his earnest acknowledgment of the limits to his understanding demonstrated a level of objectivity unobserved in the prior leaders. The three participants at the "4/3" mindform demonstrated the capacity to apply systems thinking to address the conflicts they were involved in; however, Devin displayed slightly more capacity to consider more dynamic factors when contextualizing the conflict within the systems he was dealing with. In the first conflict scenario he described, he highlighted that:

[The] real challenge was how do I keep these guys on board so that when this is all over, they're actually going to do some work. They're going to be productive faculty members. And how do I convince the rest of the organization that they haven't been fired?

Here he consciously grappled with future ramifications, ambiguity, and the paradoxical elements involved in the larger conflict scenario. He also showed some early signs of dialectical thinking as he was seeking to make sense of this conflict, though he unconsciously appeared to resist leaning into this way of thinking more, in that he continued to focus on finding a concrete resolution to the conflict as opposed to being comfortable with paradox. To this point, he lacked the capacity to be okay with unresolved conflict. Reflecting back, he still felt like he could have better understood and engaged in conflict situations in a manner that lead to clearer and cleaner

resolution. There was an internal sense he conveyed that he had missed certain important elements over the course of navigating the conflicts.

Brief Critical Analysis of Conflict Approach. From the “4(3)” mindform, Devin’s approach to conflict was predominantly informed by the self-authoring mind, which enabled him to recognize that the various stakeholders in any given conflict have uniquely different perspectives on the situation, informed by their individual and/or group values, interests, identities, and needs. He consciously and effortlessly separated his perspective and interests from those of others. Additionally, he put forth the effort to take others’ perspectives and understand the conflicts and tensions from their points of view. Yet, he was not bashful in asserting his own perspective when compelled to do so and was confident in this even if it was met with opposition.

From his perspective, thought-consuming analysis of the situation did not always contribute to an accurate understanding of others’ perspectives or a constructive outcome in his mind. Occasionally he demonstrated a propensity to fixate on specific elements and to generalize attributions to others’ points of view. Yet, in hindsight, he was aware of these vulnerabilities.

Because Devin was not fully equilibrated in the self-authoring mindform, he was also vulnerable to lapses toward a momentary socialized mind, which he reluctantly alluded to at moments throughout the interview. Additionally, he expressed a strong desire to find resolution in conflict, both in an external sense and in his mind, similar to those of the earlier mindform.

Summary of Leader at the Substage “4(3)” Mindform. When compared to all the other leaders in this study at the previous stages of constructive development, Devin actively and consciously made an effort to understand where the participants were coming from while factoring in the more significant dynamics of structure, culture, history, and personalities of the

stakeholders, as well as other factors. He also consciously made an effort to take the perspective of different stakeholders involved in the social system who would be (or were currently) directly and indirectly impacted by the conflict scenario and any associated changes.

He demonstrated a greater capacity to separate himself from the conflict and tended not to internalize it to the same degree as individuals of previous mindforms. Conflict was seen through his perspective as more objective when compared to the leaders of the earlier mindforms.

Additionally, Devin showed signs of a salient, yet perhaps not fully solidified, personal ideology of his own construction, which informed his meaning-making in the conflicts he encountered. When his self-generated ideology was subconsciously perceived to be threatened, the conflict escalated in his conscious mind.

For Devin, there were moments where the socialized mind reared its subtle influence. There was some conscious attention directed toward grappling with the socialized mind and resisting it, yet there was an intuitive awareness of it. In contrast, Christine, Brian, and Emma demonstrated a concerted effort not to let it govern their thinking in conflict—they had to resist its beckoning consciously. The socialized mind was not as strong as the self-authored mind for Devin, and therefore he required less effort to keep it at bay.

The “4” Mindform’s Approach to Engaging and Navigating Conflict

James, Nasir, Tamera, Lisa were all assessed to construct meaning from an equilibrated self-authoring mindform. The socialized mind no longer holds significant unconscious sway at this embedded stage. It is still present and shows up in each of these individuals; however, it is seen as an objective part of the self, which the individual is aware of, but no longer is subject to. As illustrated in the earlier segments, their self-authored mindform did not directly correlate with

a consistent external conflict style or approach to conflict; however, their minds' construction of meaning in conflict was similar. This is explored in the subsequent subsections of this segment, following the same outline presented in the previous segments.

Internal Experience in Conflict. For all four of these participants, conflict was generally experienced as a difference in perspective, interests, ideas, values, and/or beliefs. All three of them clearly, and without significant conscious effort were able to separate and identify their personal views on the situation from that of the other individuals and stakeholder groups. This apparent effortless to make these distinctions substantiated the notion that an individual constructing meaning from the self-authored mindform reinforces the notion that this mindform holds a greater capacity to make sense of complexity than earlier evolutionary mindforms.

Consistent with this stage of meaning-making, these individuals consistently demonstrated that central to their meaning-making process was a self-generated ideology that functioned as the predominant lens through which they constructed meaning in conflict. The personal ideology of each of these leaders was cogent, and they showed up and played an influential role in each of the conflict scenarios these three leaders described. Still, their personal ideology remained subject to the leader themselves, in that they could not look at it objectively and critique it. Moreover, each individual's demonstrated personal ideology was unique to the individual.

Though they all insinuated that they did not enjoy or seek out conflict, they each expressed the potential upside to certain forms of conflict, in that conflict could generate space for learning, growth, and change within others and themselves. Tamera specifically spoke to the notion of collaboration in conflict and the benefits of working with other individuals who held different perspectives than her own to find creative solutions. Additionally, she highlighted the

recognition that the academic deans—her counterparts—had “become much closer” when they worked together in the face of a complex conflict situation. She stated, “The conflict has caused us to unite . . . We had not taken the time to understand one another’s positions or workloads or frustrations before COVID had hit.” Nasir highlighted that he viewed “conflict of ideas” as potentially constructive “if it’s used in a sort of constructive way so that you can come to some sort of resolution over whatever the disagreement is.” He stated that “Everybody doesn’t have to agree with me. I don’t believe that. I can learn from someone else’s perspective as well.” Additionally, he stated that conflict is not helpful “when it gets personal.” James underscored the notion that conflict can be constructive when “When there’s a holding space, and there’s intentionality to it, and there’s some real processing . . . [but] it depends on the type of conflict.”

For each of them, there was little attention in their minds given to how others perceived them (especially when compared to the participants of the preceding mindforms), in that they did not need or actively seek out validation or edification from others. The moments that they did reach out to others asking for them to weigh in on a situation, they did so not for validation or approval, rather with the aim of gaining more clarity and perspective on dynamics involved in the conflict scenario so as to understand the complex dynamics more fully, which they then utilized in their thinking and decision-making pertaining to the conflict situations.

Additionally, each of the complex and/or conflict scenarios they described included elements that suggested their experiences of “complex” and “difficult” conflict strongly linked to their personal ideology. Complex and difficult conflict for each of them was experienced as a threat or a perceived threat to their self-generated ideology. For example, Nasir’s personal ideology was grounded in the idea that his purpose is to build and grow *things*, and he stated:

The other two institutions I was at, I worked directly with the president . . . I don’t have that here. I have to go through layers. And that makes it very difficult in my situation

because I'm the kind of person I can't be a status quo dean. That's not my nature. I have to be constantly building.

Tamera, whose personal ideology was attached to the notion of moving things forward, shared how in the weeks leading up to her second interview, she was being brought back into the scheduling process (which was taken from her with the new faculty contracts):

I'm spending numerous hours on all of that right now. But it's okay. That's kind of what I think my role should be, even though it was supposed to be faculty-driven. Nope, I'm snatching that back because it's not getting done. You're not asking the right questions, even though it was all provided for you. And we got to get it done. We just have to get it done. We got to move forward.

As a self-described relational leader, James's personal ideology was connected to advancing equity and justice for disadvantaged and marginalized social identity groups and individuals. In the conflict scenario where he realized that he was being tasked with evaluating another HEI's mission and values, which were directly antithetical to his values and purpose, it caused him significant agony, as he highlighted:

I really agonized because I felt like I should be able to rise above. I felt like this is my job. This is something I'm being paid to do. It's my service to the field . . . [But] I just couldn't be a part of it. And I felt like if I said anything critical whatsoever, I mean, if you Google me, your screen just goes rainbows. Your computer goes gay and so they could easily say anything critical, "Obviously, he came in with a bias." And so, it really was agony.

For Lisa, her personal ideology was informed by her desire to serve the greater good of her community, living authentically, and working for equity. In one of the sub-conflicts she cited, which was tied to a significant leadership change conflict (her first conflict scenario), she shared that what was important in the situation was not what others thought or how they might judge her. Instead, she stated, "[In] my mind, this was the integrity piece. I told [the stakeholders] the truth. And I tried to give [the stakeholders] some strategies to make sure that [they are] still relevant even with this change taking place." Referring to another stakeholder

group involved in this conflict-ridden change process, she stated, “They might not like everything that I say, they may not like my ideas or my decisions, but they trust me.”

The perceived threat to one’s self-generated ideology appeared to be the impetus for what each of these academic leaders identified as complex and/or difficult conflict. For each of them, the conflict became personal when it posed a threat to an aspect of their work that was intrinsically attached to their personal ideology.

Demonstrated Conflict Modes. Each leader at equilibrated the self-authored mindform was solution and resolution-oriented. All four of them were clear in expressing that they desired to address the conflicts or problems straight on. In the case of Nasir and James, they were actively assertive in doing this in that they showed no hesitation in vocalizing their perspective. They conveyed that in doing this, they sought first to understand and hear from the other individual stakeholders—or they believed that they already had a clear grasp of where the other(s) was coming from—to gain greater insight into their minds and motivations. This ostensibly intuitive practice informed their intentional approach to the conflict situations they navigated. However, if the conflict was tied to some aspect of their personal ideology, ultimately, they tended to be more assertive in advocating for their values, positions, and interests. James and Nasir demonstrated this in a vocal and objectively assertive manner.

In contrast, Tamera’s demonstrated approach to asserting herself in the context of the complex conflict situations was more subtle. Yet, it is essential to note that their external approaches to the conflict scenarios were dictated by the institutional structures, policies, culture, and the nature of their relationships with others at their respective institutions. For Tamera, she was navigating newly adopted policies and practices related to faculty contracts, with the additional layers of navigating new high-level leadership and simultaneously dealing with the

early phase of the COVID-19 crisis. Her decision not to be more vocally assertive was calculated based on her understanding of the myriad dynamics at play.

Lisa's demonstrated approach could be situated somewhere between James and Nasir's approaches and Tamera's. Though she was a bit of an outlier from this group in that she was the sole individual in this study who did not express an involuntary and salient summary of how she approached conflict. This unconscious refrain from simplifying conflict demonstrates a more complex and nuanced approach to engaging conflict in its various forms. For her, the statement "it depends" was consistent in her approach to how she engaged in conflict situations throughout the examples she provided. In fact, she even only referred to the notion of "resolving" the conflict situations once throughout all three interviews. The time that she did use this term was in reference to framing the ongoing conflict situation. It was not used in the context of a specific orientation toward conflict. Instead, she repeatedly used the term "address" while sharing how she approached conflict situations. This subtle unconscious refrain from utilizing the terminology that implied "resolution" provided evidence for the notion that she was not necessarily focused on concrete resolution, as *all* the other participants in this study prioritized. Instead, Lisa utilized a variety of conflict engagement strategies to address the situation in a way that she deemed appropriate for not only herself but for the stakeholders and the institution as a whole.

Nasir, like Tamera, navigated new leadership and the new dynamic of the pandemic. Still, the policies and practices had not been formally overhauled to the same extent, and his program was also spotlighted as exemplary and financially beneficial to the institution. He recognized the additional power and influence this platform provided him. In the case of James, the central institutional changes and challenges he faced dealt primarily with adaptations made in response to the onset of COVID-19. He also was a tenured faculty member who specialized in

higher education leadership, which he consciously acknowledged gave him more power to be assertive.

James shared his take on his approach to conflict as being “entirely situational” and stated:

It depends on the power, where I have power. In some of these senate situations, I tend to be more competitive. With the diversity committee, I’m definitely more collaborative. With my student I think I was a little bit more avoidant, and maybe with the HLC one, too. So, it’s very situational for me. It depends where the power is and what my positioning is.

Tamera, Nasir, and Lisa also demonstrated the flexibility and adaptability to consciously approach conflict based on the situation, context, and myriad other dynamics that they consciously and intuitively factored into their decision-making in conflict. All four of these leaders demonstrated this competency in a more natural manner than those of the individuals at the previous mindforms. For each of them, making sense of the complexities playing into the conflict was a mix of conscious and intuitive sense-making.

Orientation(s) Toward Empathy. James, Tamera, Lisa, and Nasir all predominately demonstrated cognitive empathy as they recalled how they navigated their respective conflict situations. Moreover, for each of them, their capacity to take the perspective of the other individuals in their conflict situations was not cognitively laborious (especially when compared to the three participants constructing meaning at the “4/3” mindform). They did not appear to put as much conscious mental effort into understanding the others’ perspectives (as the individuals of earlier meaning-making structures had). They did not struggle to identify and consider the interests, values, needs, and identities of others in their thinking and decision-making. Instead, they approached this practice of perspective-taking in an intuitive yet unassuming way. Additionally, they each demonstrated a sense of confidence or certainty regarding how they

presented their perspective-taking, compared to the individuals constructing meaning from earlier structures.

Complex Thinking and Awareness. When compared to the previous section which examined Devin (at the “4(3)” mindform), Lisa, Tamera, James, and Nasir demonstrated an even more robust capacity to consider myriad factors when making sense of a conflict situation in their minds.

One unique element that all four of these participants demonstrated was that they were able to not only make sense of the conflict from a broader perspective but also actively anticipated how the various conflict situations would/could play out into the future. They were able to clearly articulate their understanding of the organizational culture(s) and institutional structure(s) influence on the conflict situations, as well as their understanding of how the way the conflicts were engaged and addressed in the present might impact or influence the social systems—large and small—in the future, depending on how it was addressed in the present. This anticipation and vision into the future demonstrated a form of complex thinking that was not shown to nearly the same extent in the earlier individuals. This capacity appeared to inform their approach to the situation in the present.

All four of these individuals showed that they could adapt quickly, think creatively and abstractly, and hold a space for paradox in their minds (even when uncomfortable). Moreover, they each demonstrated a moderate to high tolerance for ambiguity. Though none of them consistently showed an inclination toward dialectical thinking, they each had moments where they engaged in an unrefined form of dialectical thinking while attempting to make sense of a complex conflict from multiple perspectives.

Brief Critical Analysis of Conflict Approach. The embeddedness of Nasir, Lisa, Tamera, and James' meaning-making structure allowed them to genuinely and artfully understand layers of nuance in each conflict situation. They were able to get creative and adapt when needed. They could hold others' perspectives in their mind and consider others' perspectives in their decision-making while navigating conflict. Moreover, they could also assert themselves as deemed necessary from their perspective, unconsciously informed by their self-constructed ideology.

However, the potential downside demonstrated by the self-authored mind dealt with this strong attachment to their personal ideology and their inability to objectively reflect, question, and critique their own theory. They knew for themselves what was "right" and/or the "best" way of doing things. Though they demonstrated the capacity to understand others' points of view, values, interests, and identities and how they played into the conflict scenarios, they critiqued others' ways of knowing by unconsciously comparing them to their own (preferencing their own perspective and thinking). They did not demonstrate the capacity to internally synthesize and integrate others' perspectives, interests, values, and identities into their own. In a sense, their personal ideology was their gold standard, even though they were not conscious of this internal reality. They each demonstrated a gap in their capacity to consider what the others' perspectives may offer to the situation that could contribute to an even more complex understanding of the situation. They lacked the capacity to integrate others' points of view naturally and genuinely into their own point of view (though cognitively they were likely capable of this activity). This is not to say that they did not learn from the other individuals, all four of them conveyed salient moments where they gained clarity based on their perspective-taking from another individual.

Instead, it was their inability to display an openness or awareness that their way of knowing, their system of constructing meaning, may still cause them to have gaps.⁵

The caveat to this is that when a conflict situation presented a layer of complexity they had not previously considered and struggled to make sense of, there was an expressed feeling that *there may be something I'm missing here*. This only occurred in a couple of scenarios, one for James and another for Tamera. James expressed a significant amount of internal conflict in his final conflict regarding a situation he had never found himself in, wherein he could not find a comfortable “resolution” and found himself questioning his own values, which appeared to be linked to his personal ideology. Tamera, too, shared that she felt powerless in a particular situation, which caused deep internal conflict, and she felt as if she did not have the power to resolve it.

Summary of Leaders at the Equilibrated Stage “4” Mindform. For each of the participants who constructed meaning from a self-authored mindform, their capacity to empathize and take the perspective of others was greater when compared to individuals who constructed meaning at earlier evolutionary stages. Lisa, Tamera, James, and Nasir demonstrated a greater ability to employ complex thinking, which allowed them to recognize and consider a myriad of factors when determining how to effectively engage each conflict incident as well as the overarching conflict scenarios they detailed. This capacity for advanced complex thinking provided them with more options in their minds regarding how to approach the conflict

⁵ Worth noting, this *may not* be the case in all conflict, especially in conflict that is less complex or difficult in their minds, in that there may not be the same deep sense of threat to their personal ideologies when the conflict not seen as complex or difficult.

situations—in terms of thinking about the larger systems, the culture of their institution, and the involved individual and stakeholder groups.

Though they demonstrated a genuine interest in considering and understanding others' perspectives, there appeared to be an unconscious bias in their meaning-making system toward their own perspective—informed by their personal ideology—whereby understanding others' perspectives equipped them to convey their perspective and in a more strategic way that would support a movement toward a resolution that was in line with their aims, as opposed to taking in and integrating the other perspective with their own. Their most objectively observable gap in their meaning-making was the unconscious influence of their personal ideology on their engagement and navigation of conflict.

Finally, as demonstrated in the earlier segments by participants in this study, the notions of complex and difficult conflict in their minds were conflicts that tested the higher edge of their system of constructing meaning, which for the equilibrated self-authored mindform linked directly to their self-generated ideology. Yet, it was still subject to them at this constructive-developmental stage, and they could not consciously see and observe its influence.

Summary of Findings Discussed

For each of the participants in this study, the notion of “complex” and/or “difficult” conflict was linked to one's ability to make sense of complexity in conflict that they experienced at the edge of their current mindform's capacity. At each substage of Kegan's constructive-developmental framework, the way individuals constructed meaning had a direct relationship to how they made sense of conflict. As explored in this chapter, the further along one was in their developmental journey, the more nuance and perspective a leader's conscious mind was able to bring to understanding and navigating conflict. Though a leader's construction

of meaning did not directly relate to how they behaved in conflict, the more evolved their meaning-making systems, the more conscious options they had to consider when deciding how to approach a given conflict incident or larger situation. Leaders participating in this study on the earlier end of the developmental journey were more limited in their understanding of complex conflict and thus limited in their options for approaching conflict when compared to those further along in their developmental journey. This suggests that the more developmentally evolved, or complex, one's construction of meaning, the more capacity they have to assess and respond to conflict in a way their meaning-making systems deem constructive.

The data suggests that as meaning-making systems evolve, they become more complex. With this increased complexity, the quality of their orientation toward empathy objectively changed. For example, the individuals who demonstrated the active influence of the socialized mind showed more affective empathy (i.e., emotional empathy). In contrast, those who demonstrated an equilibrated self-authoring mindform—or beyond—intuitively practiced cognitive empathy, enabling them to practice a more advanced form of perspective-taking. As opposed to only sensing and identifying feelings, with the adoption and integration of cognitive empathy, a leader was able to identify other factors that played into the situation from another's point of view (e.g., needs, interests, values, identities, and past experiences) while also considering the emotions of the individuals. This will be discussed at greater length in Chapter VI.

Additionally, with the advancement of one's capacity for complex thinking in relation to where an individual existed in their developmental journey, the more evolved one's meaning-making structure, the more capacity the leader demonstrated for consciously factoring power and relational dynamics and an institution and department's structural and cultural

dynamics. This enhanced their ability to adapt and problem-solve as they employed abstract and creative thinking. The more complex a leader's mind, the more they recognized and grappled with paradox, ambiguity, and volatility. Moreover, the leaders of the self-authored mindform and beyond showed initial signs of dialectical thinking while making sense of the complex conflicts they encountered.

As one evolves, their capacity to make sense of complexity increases. This enables leaders to be more mindful, deliberate, and grounded in their approach to engaging and navigating complex and difficult conflicts in their respective contexts.

CHAPTER VI: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Conflicts are the midwife of consciousness.

—Paulo Freire (as cited in Horton, 1990, p. 187)

Sometimes, maybe, it depends.

—Stanley “Stan” Sitnick (personal communication, n.d.)

This study aimed to explore the relationship between academic leaders’ developmental mindsets (i.e., mindform) and how they constructed meaning during complex and difficult conflicts within their roles at a higher education institution (HEI). Additionally, the study sought to gain insight into the influence of academic leaders’ meaning-making system on their thinking and behaviors when navigating conflict and change.

In this final chapter, I address the primary research question and the two secondary questions proposed at the onset of this study. As a reminder, this study aimed to address the following questions:

1. How do the leaders’ developmental mindsets (orders/stages of adult development) affect their meaning-making in conflict situations?
 - 1.1 What is the relationship between leaders’ developmental mindset and their approaches to conflict?
 - 1.2 How, if at all, do the leaders’ developmental mindsets influence their actions when engaging, responding to, and navigating conflict?

This chapter begins by providing an opening statement, followed by a summary of the research process, a discussion of the findings from Chapters IV and V, and endeavors to answer the research questions proposed at the onset of this study. Following these sections, I discuss the

implications for theory and suggest areas for future inquiry. The chapter concludes by discussing implications for practice, a researcher's critique of the study, and a closing statement.

A Reflective Opening Statement

Through this research, I had the privilege to interact with nine mid-level leaders in HEIs, during which I was gifted with the opportunity to explore the minds of these individuals—how they made sense of, engaged, and navigated conflict in their professional lives (and to a lesser extent their personal lives). I will be forever grateful to these individual leaders for their willingness to participate and commit to the entire process.

At the onset of my doctoral journey, I held limited firm convictions on the direction my dissertation research would ultimately take. However, I knew it would involve looking at the intersection of conflict, leadership, and psychological development. Additionally, I held a notion that the psychology of interpersonal and intra-organizational conflict had intriguing gaps worth exploring. When I first read the work of Kegan and Lahey (2009) early in my doctoral coursework, my creative mind lit up as I considered the myriad directions I could explore by utilizing constructive-developmental (CD) theory as one of the focal lenses for my doctoral research. The intersection between how one constructs meaning and its influence on how one thinks and makes decisions during a conflict and how these cognitive functions then inform behaviors and actions presented an intriguing research trajectory in my continually evolving mind.

When first exposed to Kegan's adult CD theory, I was drawn to the notion of how complex situations that strain one's current meaning-making capacities contribute to the development of consciousness. This notion was akin to my then-current thinking concerning the internal experience associated with conflict. My primary thinking about conflict at the time was

based on the notion that conflict occurs when an individual's needs, interests, values, and identity are threatened or perceived to be threatened. This experience of threat or perceived threat occurs in the mind of an individual and is influenced by one's meaning-making structures. This relationship between navigating conflict, the way conflict is made sense of in an individual's mind, and the notion that the developmental structure of one's consciousness is linked to overcoming obstacles that require meaning-making at the threshold of their current capacity fascinated me.

Additionally, around the same time, I began observing how different leaders in HEIs navigated complex conflicts in uniquely different ways. Initially, I could not identify consistent patterns in how academic leaders approached conflict. Specifically, I was comparing the communication and behaviors of those that I—through my own limited lens—deemed as effective or constructive conflict resolvers or managers compared with those that I considered ineffective or unconstructive in their approaches to navigating complex and difficult conflicts. I began exploring the literature and found scarce empirical research on the topic of constructive conflict engagement within the context of higher education. What I did find, however, was a number of different hypotheses based on academics and administrators' personal experiences and antidotes. This inquiry eventually led me back to the work of Kegan, as I began to realize that my focus on external behavior (e.g., interpersonal conflict skills and conflict modes) and other observable communication was limiting my inquiry. There was something else at play, something that transcended skill development or knowledge regarding conflict dynamics and processes. *That something else* I hypothesized may have a connection to CD theory and how an individual makes sense of a conflict situation they are working to navigate based on where they

are in their individual evolutionary journey pertaining to the development of their mind and consciousness.

Summary of Research Process

This research aimed to explore this connection between leaders' meaning-making structures and how they engaged and navigated conflict. I used the term “engage” because of its open-ended implications, as it can refer to the physical or material act of engaging, as much as it can refer to the mental and conscious process of thinking through—and making sense of—*something* (see Chapter I for a more detailed description). Additionally, I used the language “navigate” as an attempt to avoid the projection of value to the conflict situations' outcomes or processes (e.g., “resolved” or “managed” the conflict). Moreover, using the language of “navigate” allowed participants to detail conflict scenarios that were still in process (in contrast to asking a participant how they “resolved” a conflict, for using the term resolve may prime one for only thinking of conflict that they deemed as successfully resolved in their mind, limiting the possibilities of exploring conflicts that were still underway).

I began the dissertation research proposal process in earnest in the summer of 2019, just months before the entire world—and the United States of America with it—was hit with one of the most significant crises of the past century, the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic forced society and its institutions to make rapid changes to policy and practice. Businesses and organizations—higher education institutions included—around the globe were forced to adapt or die (i.e., risk folding, significant fiscal losses, and/or other unforeseen consequences). Conley and Massa (2022) aptly called this period in higher education “the great interruption.” It could also be seen as a *collective* “disorienting dilemma” to use the language of Mezirow (2000). Higher education as a whole was facing a predicament that institutional leadership did not have

the luxury to ignore. This collective *crisis-interruption-dilemma* coincided with a significant social demand to rethink diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice in the wake, yet again, of another run of violent deaths for people of color at the hands of law enforcement, giving a resurgence of breath to the Black Lives Matter moment and systemic reckoning concerning racism embedded in the systems, policies, and structures of society its institutions. Higher education as an institution was provided with an opportunity to review its past practices and policies and make decisions to revise historically inequitable and injustice practices and policies.

The focus of this study was timely as I actively worked to submit my research proposal in the fall of 2020, as a notably high amount of conflict and change was occurring in higher education institutions. Moreover, the proposed study addressed a gap in the literature.

In Chapter II, the literature looked at three areas of scholarship: academic leadership, constructive-developmental theory, and conflict studies. The literature provided support to the notion that there is a noteworthy relationship between CD theory and the way people make sense of conflict and how this then informs their thinking. Yet, the literature review shed light on the lack of research specifically focused on the intersection between CD theory and interpersonal and organizational conflict.

Chapter III provided a detailed description of the multimethod research process. Given the study's aims, which sought to explore the construction of meaning in multiple leaders' experiences navigating and engaging conflict, I incorporated three differently structured interviews as the primary approach to gathering data. The first in the series of interviews was the Subject-Object Interview (SOI), developed by Lahey et al. (1988) and provided the data for assessing Kegan's notion of the subject-object balance of each individual and their individual

constructive-developmental mindset (i.e., “developmental mindset” or what I call the “mindform” beginning in Chapter IV and I will continue to use throughout this chapter).

The first interview was followed by a modified version of the critical incident technique’s interview structure, developed and used by Flanagan (1954). This interview aimed to capture the details of three to five difficult or complex conflict scenarios the participant was asked to identify. I intentionally posed questions that illuminated the thinking and decision-making that went into the leaders’ actions as they engaged and navigated the conflict scenarios they identified. Due to the modified nature of the interview and the analysis process, I reframed the interview as the *critical conflict interview* (CCI) and the method of analysis as the *critical conflict analysis* (CCA), the terms that will be used throughout this chapter. Both interviews were semi-structured, administered in 70 to 90 minutes per individual, and were scheduled approximately two weeks apart.

The final interview, what I refer to as the closing interview, was semi-structured and served three distinct purposes: (a) to designate time and space for follow-up questions pertaining to the previous interviews; (b) to gather additional demographic and biographic information from the participants; and (c) to provide space for debriefing the interview process. This interview was administered approximately two weeks after the second interview and took 40 to 60 minutes.

Following the entire interview process, once the interviews were transcribed, the assessment and scoring of the participants were conducted with another trained and certified assessor following the interrater process recommended by Lahey et al. (2011). Once the leaders’ subject-object balance was assessed and each individual’s developmental mindform identified, I used these data, the narrative data provided by the CCI, relevant data from the debrief interview, and information from the intake survey and each participant’s CV to construct individual

mini-case studies which examined how each leader's meaning-making structure (i.e., mindform) influenced their thinking and behaviors.

Overlapping with the process of constructing the individual mini-case studies, I worked with a colleague who assisted in the coding and categorizing of the CCI as a separate data set (following more of a traditional critical incident approach to the initial analysis). This was conducted with the support of another colleague with coding experience. I then utilized these data to inform an integrated approach to presenting the findings in Chapter V.

Discussion of Findings

In this section, I revisit the research questions which guided the study. The section begins with a summary of the findings relevant to the primary research question and the two secondary research questions. This is followed by a review and discussion of the results reported in Chapters IV and V. This section is followed by proposed advancements pertaining to relevant theory.

Summary of Findings Pertaining to the Primary Research Question

As an exploratory study, the primary focus of the research aimed to respond to the primary research question: *How do the leaders' developmental mindsets (i.e., mindforms) affect their meaning-making in conflict situations?*

This primary research question relied on the premise that all participants in the study were leaders whose developmental mindforms could be identified, characterized, and studied in relation to the conflict situations described by the leaders. It also assumed that the developmental mindform influences a leader's meaning-making in conflict. The multimethod design of this research ensured that the first premise was addressed accordingly. The second premise was addressed in the literature review prior to the start of the research process. The literature

supported the notion that the individual self-constructs meaning in a way that correlates with where an individual is situated in relation to others in their constructive-developmental journey (Kegan, 1982, 1994; Lahey et al., 2011; McCauley et al., 2006; Torbert, 2004).

With the intention of clarification and precision, I introduced the term “mindform” in place of “mindset” or other terms used to reference Kegan’s notion of the subject-object balance (1982). This term was introduced in Chapter V and will be used throughout this chapter. Similar language and the notion of the “form of mind” has precedent (Berger, 2011; Berger & Atkins, 2009; Kegan, 2000). Kegan’s own terminology for the subject-object balance has shifted over time, as he initially used “stages of development” (1982), followed by orders of “consciousness” (1994), then experimented with “forms of mind” (2000) and “mindsets” (Kegan & Lahey, 2009) in reference to the subject-object balance in the mind.

For this final chapter, mindform signifies the subject-object balance of the mind (e.g., Avery constructs meaning from an equilibrated self-authoring mind. Avery constructs meaning from the 4 mindform, equivalent to Kegan’s subject-object balance of stage 4). I deliberately made the shift from mindset to mindform (described in more detailed in Chapter IV). The concept of mindset emerged in popularity within the field of psychology beginning in the 1980s and 1990s. Myriad definitions are attributed to the concept of mindset. The common definitions focus on the attitude or state of mind. Dweck refers to the mindset as a “self-theory” people hold about themselves. However, even this is problematic when applied to CD theory, in that it assumes one is conscious or aware of their own “self-theory.” Moreover, it may prevent exploration of the in-between or multiple systems of the mind which influence one’s construction of meaning. This is particularly worth noting when concerned with individuals whose minds may be governed by two systems (i.e., minds), which is the case with more than

half of the participants in this study (only three of the nine participants construct meaning at an equilibrated mind). In part, this discontinuity was the impetus that influenced my reassessment of the terminology and influenced the adoption of mindform.

Mindform refers to *any* developmental or evolutionary *form* in which an individual's mind is structured, including Kegan's substages (e.g., Taylor constructs meaning predominately from a socialized mind while also demonstrating meaning-making from the self-authored mind. Taylor constructs meaning from the "3/4" mindform, equivalent to Kegan's subject-object balance of the "3/4" substage). Thus, the use of mindform incorporates more than the equilibrated states, or 'set' states, functioning as a more inclusive and representative descriptor, particularly relevant to this study which explored the nuances of Kegan's substages along with the equilibrated stages. Mindform, in straightforward terms, is the demonstrated current structure that informs the way one constructs meaning (i.e., one's current meaning-making structure).

As discussed throughout Chapters IV and V, an individual's developmental mindform influenced the construction of meaning in identifiable and significant ways. The key findings concerning the primary question are summarized as follows. Leaders' construction of meaning in conflict is affected by the current evolutionary form of an individual leader's developmental mind, in that:

- The mindform fundamentally informs how one makes sense of the elements and dynamics that contribute to the conflict, in that there are incrementally and uniquely different capabilities and characteristics demonstrated in each mindform that directly influence an individual's capacities for adaptability, empathy, and thinking complexity.

- The further evolved an individual's mindform, the greater capacity they hold to take on more perspective on themselves and others—the more one can objectively “see” when making sense of a conflict situation. (This does not equate to consistent careful considering what they see, but rather that their capacity for seeing nuance and a myriad of dynamics is greater than those constructing meaning at earlier mindforms.)
- The more evolved (the more complex) the developmental mindform, the greater capacity for objectively seeing the various dynamics at play in any given conflict scenario. (This includes structural influences, cultural norms, individual perspectives, social identities, and other elements and dynamics.)
- In the conflicts explored, the participants demonstrated a significant tendency to unconsciously rely on their predominate system of meaning-making (the more complex system of the mind).
 - For Kevin at the “3/4” mindform and James et al. at the “4” mindform, this meant reliance on the stronger system, as Kevin demonstrated a strong propensity to construct meaning from his 3ish system (i.e., socialized mind) and James et al. relied on her 4ish system (i.e., self-authored mind).
 - For Christine, Brian, and Emma at the “4/3” mindform and Devin at the “4(3)” mindform, they all leaned into their more complex system of meaning-making, the 4ish system. In the case of Christine, Brian, and Emma this required some conscious effort, motivated by the desire not to revert to their “child mind” (associated with the socialized mind). For Devin, this required less conscious effort, though he was consciously aware of the

presence of another system's influence in his meaning-making during conflict situations.

- Tamera, James, and Nasir, those constructing meaning from the equilibrated 4 mindform (i.e., the self-authored mind) effortlessly constructed meaning from this mind when navigating the conflict situation.
- An individual's developmental mindform influences the quality and characteristics of empathy an individual's aptitude for cognitive empathy (i.e., perspective-taking) as compared to affective empathy (i.e., emotional empathy). One's capability incrementally increases as one's meaning-making structure evolves and becomes more complex.
 - The more prevalent the influence of the socialized mind, the more prevalent the use of *affective* empathy (conscious or unconscious). As one's mind evolves toward a predominate self-authored mind, the empathy demonstrated transitions from predominantly affective empathy to cognitive empathy.
 - The emergence and development of an individual's aptitude for cognitive empathy appeared to correspond with the quality of perspective-taking in the individuals studied. The stronger the influence of the self-authored mind, the more one demonstrated the prevalence of active perspective-taking. (This does not assume that the perspective-taking demonstrated by each leader in this study was always accurate as it pertains to the individual or group to whose perspective the leader was taking.)
 - The individuals who constructed meaning-making from the "4/3" mindform, wherein the 4ish system now held more influence than the 3ish system,

demonstrated that they required a significant amount of conscious effort when attempting to take others' perspectives (i.e., employ cognitive empathy).

- At the “4(3)” mindform, the effort demonstrated appeared moderately more natural and less mentally strenuous. At the fully equilibrated 4 mindform the leaders exerted minimal mental effort when perspective-taking while demonstrating the ability to articulate in a succinct yet nuanced way the perspective(s) of the others (i.e., practicing cognitive empathy appeared intuitive).
- How each leader makes sense of complex conflict is influenced by the leader's developmental mindform. The developmental mindform determines the levels of complexity one can consciously consider in each conflict situation, and it affects the complex thinking capabilities of an individual in that certain aptitudes for complex thinking require evolutionary advances in one's mindform. (The elements of complex thinking recognized in this study will be discussed in greater length in the forthcoming section, including: adaptive, paradoxical, dialectical, and projecting consequences and impact; and one's comfort level with comfort with ambiguity and volatility.)
 - How the participants described understanding their respective conflict situations aligned with the characteristics of their demonstrated developmental mindform.
 - In each individual's mind, the abstractions of complexity and conflict and the relative term “difficult” appeared to be understood at the highest degree of

complexity that the mind was capable of in each individual's current mindform.

- The developmental mindform influences how an individual frames their objective(s) regarding what a constructive or positive outcome in a conflict situation looks like.

Thus, it is clear, though based on a limited data sample from this exploratory study, that the mindform one constructs meaning from bears a strong relationship to a leader's construction of meaning when navigating complex or difficult conflict. The more advanced one's mindform, the more capacity one holds to make sense of the complex dynamics influencing a given conflict situation; the greater capacity one acquires to take others' perspectives; and, ultimately the more options one can consciously consider when deliberately engaging and navigating complex conflict.

Summary of Findings Pertaining to Secondary Research Questions

The two secondary research questions were each considered in Chapters IV and V, though they are directly addressed in Chapter V. In this summary, the two secondary research questions will be considered together: (a) *What is the relationship between leaders' developmental mindset (i.e., mindform) and their approaches to conflict;* and (b) *How, if at all, do the leaders' developmental mindsets (i.e., mindform) influence their actions when engaging, responding to, and navigating conflict?*

Before summarizing the findings, it is important to distinguish between the way one approaches conflict in their mind (internally) and the way one approaches conflict behaviorally (externally). For this study, I distinguish between the "internal" and the "external" approaches to conflict. The internal approach to conflict I define as: how one perceives, feels, and thinks about conflict, and how both the conscious and unconscious mind make sense of conflict. The external

approach to conflict I define as: the observable behavior—action and communication—which may or may not be informed by the conscious mind. Building off these notions, the findings from this study suggest:

- The way one *internally* approaches conflict is strongly related to the individual's demonstrated developmental mindform.
- The way one *externally* approaches conflict is indirectly related to the individual's demonstrated developmental mindform. (The external approach in the context of this discussion is synonymous with conflict modes or styles.)
 - The mindform at earlier stages of development (i.e., less complex) tentatively bears a stronger and more direct influence on the individual's external approach to conflict, compared to individuals at later stages of development.
 - Initial findings suggest that the further one is along on their evolutionary journey, the weaker the direct relationship between one's internal approach to conflict and their external in conflict. This can be credited to the increasing capacity to view aspects of oneself objectively.
 - The instrumental and impulsive minds presumably support a strong and more direct relationship between internal approaches to conflict and one's external behavior in conflict.
 - The socialized mind exhibits a moderate and less direct relationship between the internal approach and one's external behavior in conflict.
 - The self-authored mind exhibits a minimal and indirect relationship between the internal approach and one's external behavior in conflict.

- The further one is along in their development, the greater the role the conscious mind plays in deciphering constructive behaviors for the context.
- The further one is along in their development, the more capacity they have to view the conflict situation objectively and respond with more options for external approaches and the more objective perspective one can take on their own thinking when in conflict (i.e., metacognition).
- An individual's external approaches to conflict are strongly influenced by one's developmental mindform, as it directly informs one's meaning-making, which informs one's thinking, which informs one's approach when engaging and navigating a conflict situation.

Discussion of Select Findings

Building off the findings outlined above, the following subsections will address the primary areas of constructing meaning at each mindform represented in this study. Specifically, it explores the notions of empathy and complex thinking.

Qualities of Empathy

Empathy is commonly defined and understood as the emotional experience of feeling what another person is feeling *or* as the ability to put yourself in someone else's shoes. Each of these definitions are accurate, yet how they are framed implies two very different experiences in the mind. Internalizing and feeling the emotions of someone else presumes an emotional experience, whereas putting yourself in someone else's shoes assumes some form of cognitive action, as it implies that one is attempting to see and understand a situation or experience through another's point of view (Moore et al., 2015; Savard et al., 2022). The language of empathy is often used in the spoken and written word with little to no qualification regarding the specific

quality or type of empathy being referenced (especially evident in much of the literature on interpersonal conflict).

Empathy is a multifaceted construct associated with both affective and cognitive processes (Leiberg & Anders, 2006). Yet, there has been little agreement among researchers and scholars on a consistent definition of empathy and if the different forms and qualities of empathy should be differentiated (Leiberg & Anders, 2006; Martingano & Konrath, 2022; Moore et al., 2015; Myszkowski et al., 2017; Savard et al., 2022). The APA Dictionary of Psychology (n.d.) defines empathy as “understanding a person from his *or* her frame of reference rather than one’s own, or vicariously experiencing that person’s feelings, perceptions, and thoughts” (emphasis added); furthermore, it states, “Empathy does not, of itself, entail motivation [of the individual empathizing] to be of assistance, although it may turn into sympathy or personal distress, which may result in action.”

During the process of coding and analyzing the data for Chapter V, the data revealed at least two distinct forms of empathy demonstrated by the participants. As referenced in the previous section, these were determined to fall under the general categories of affective empathy (a.k.a., emotional empathy) and cognitive empathy. Martingano and Konrath (2022) stated that “Generally, *cognitive empathy* involves understanding others’ thoughts and feelings without necessarily reacting emotionally, whereas *emotional empathy* involves experiencing emotions in response to others’ emotional experiences or expressions” (p. 114). Some scholars have acknowledged that there may be additional subcategories within affective and cognitive empathy or other forms of empathy beyond these two commonly accepted delineations (Decety & Meyer, 2008; Goleman, 2005; Leiberg & Anders, 2006; Myszkowski et al., 2017).

The experience of affective empathy deals with the ability to take on the feelings of another, to take part in their emotional experience by sharing their feelings. It may be connected to cognitive activity, yet it deals more with the sensory experience. When navigating conflict, it can be helpful in that affective empathy supports the formation and growth of emotional connections with others involved (Goleman, 2005). In the findings from this study, the leaders all demonstrated affective empathy. Yet, it was more prominent in the participants who demonstrated the socialized mind playing an influential role in their construction of meaning (i.e., mindforms “3/4” through “4(3)”).

Cognitive empathy, as stated earlier, involves the mental process of recognizing and understanding the emotional states and other internal processing of others, such as what they are thinking or perceiving. Cognitive empathy is also strongly related to perspective-taking, which is the cognitive exercise of intentionally making sense of multiple factors in a given context to effectively understand another’s perspective on the situation (Moore et al., 2015; Savard et al., 2022). Perspective-taking has been linked to cognitive empathy. Perspective-taking can be problematic unless one is self-aware enough to suspend their biases and heuristics. Perspective-taking is also vulnerable to attribution error and self-projection (Savard et al., 2022).

Based on the data from the nine participants in this study, the deliberate and conscious effort to engage in cognitive empathy and perspective-taking increased the more evolved their mindform between the socialized mind and the self-authored mind (up until the “4(3)” mindform). However, with the equilibrated self-authored mindform, there was a significant decrease in the conscious effort participants demonstrated when practicing cognitive empathy. The data supported the idea that the practice did not decrease; instead, the practice of cognitive empathy became ingrained and no longer required conscious attention and effort on the part of

the individual constructing meaning at the 4 mindform. Table 6.1 details the qualities of empathy demonstrated within each of the mindforms represented by participants in the study along with a brief description of their demonstrated perspective-taking (i.e., cognitive empathy). Additionally, Figure 6.1 illustrates the level of conscious attention focused on affective and cognitive empathy relative to the mindforms of the participants.

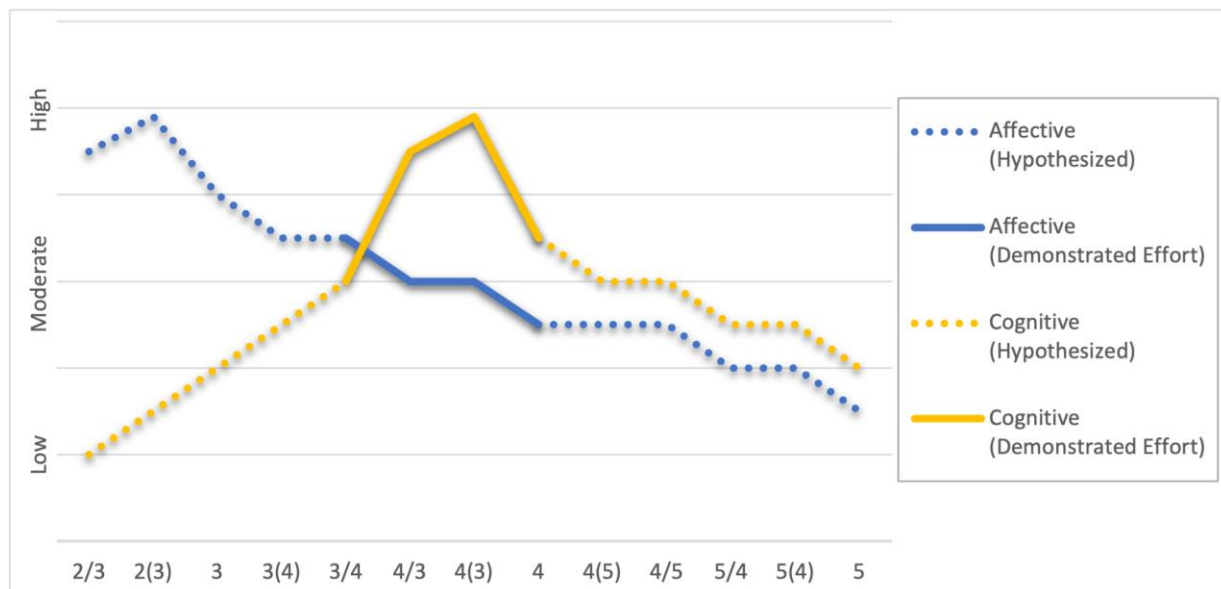
Table 6.1

Demonstrated Orientations to Empathy in Relation to Demonstrated Mindforms

Mindform	Orientations to Empathy	Demonstrated Perspective-Taking
3/4	Primary = Affective (Significant) Secondary = Cognitive (Moderate)	Forced and requires a deliberate and conscious effort (focused almost exclusively on other's feelings/emotions)
4/3	Primary = Affective (Significant) Secondary = Cognitive (Significant)	Requires a deliberate and conscious effort, yet less strenuous (primarily focused on other's feelings/emotions, though considers other's thinking as well)
4(3)	Primary = Cognitive (Significant) Secondary = Affective (Moderate)	Requires a deliberate and conscious effort, yet more natural (considers other's feelings/emotions as well as other's thinking)
4	Primary = Cognitive (Moderate) Secondary = Affective (Minimal to Moderate)	Utilizes minimal deliberate and conscious effort, yet appears more natural than previous mindforms (focused on other's thinking, though considers other's feelings/emotions)

Figure 6.1

Mindforms Demonstrated Conscious Attention to Affective and Cognitive Empathy



Note. This figure is based on limited observational data and is a *working* conceptual and theoretical depiction of the relationship between mindforms and types of empathy.

Given the limited data collected in this study, it is difficult to predict the quality of empathy beyond the self-authored equilibrated mind with these data alone. However, CD researchers and theorists' descriptions of the characteristics of the mind at more advanced mindforms suggest that there may exist other qualities of empathy that emerge as an individual progresses toward the self-transforming mind (i.e., the "5" mindform). Hypothetically, as an individual's meaning-making structure evolves beyond the self-authored mind and toward the self-transforming mind the quality of empathy one is capable of experiencing broadens and extends allowing one to emotionally (i.e., affective) empathize and take the perspective (i.e., cognitive empathy) of *multiple* others simultaneously.

Conclusion on Empathy. Empathy as a construct is often considered a critical element in constructive conflict engagement. Based on the findings of this exploratory study, the quality

of empathy an individual is capable of applying is moderated (at least in part) by the current way one constructs, as cognitive empathy or perspective-taking capabilities appear to require a complex mindform, whereas affective or emotional empathy is accessible at earlier developmental mindforms. (*Note.* Lahey et al., 2011, indirectly address the transformation of empathy and its relationship to the evolution of one's meaning making structure.)

Empathy is not a cure-all, yet it can be a constructive component in the meaning-making process when one seeks to engage conflict constructively and intentionally consider the perspectives of others in one's sense-making process, thinking, decision-making, and corresponding actions.

Complex Thinking

The concept of complex thinking within this study refers to the capacities of cognitive thinking processes that enable one to recognize, engage with, and make sense of complexity, wherein a myriad of enigmatic and dynamic elements contribute to the unqualifiable whole of the social system. Pacheco and Herrera (2021) suggest an emergent framework for what they refer to as "complex thinking," which incorporates three distinct cognitive processes, metacognition, creative thinking, and critical thinking, each encompassing their respective subprocesses. Though this discussion does not detail all the categories and subcategories that Pacheco and Herrera described, it touches on key demonstrations of complex thinking observed in the leaders who participated in this study.

Coleman (2018) defined conflict intelligence as "the set of competencies and skills used to manage different types of normative conflicts in diverse or changing situations effectively and constructively" (p. 14). He posited that having the capacities to distinguish between different conflict types, approach conflict objectively, recognize conflict as "short-term but dynamic," and

engage conflict in a “direct, incremental, and linear” manner were core to capacities relating to conflict intelligence. Moreover, Coleman (2018, p. 14) identifies the core competencies for conflict intelligence as:

- **Self-knowledge and regulation:** Knowing and managing yourself in conflict, including implicit theories of conflict, social value motives, conflict anxiety management, and moral exclusion.
- **Constructive conflict resolution:** Understanding the constructive and destructive potential of conflict and developing the knowledge, attitudes, and skills for constructive resolution.
- **Conflict optimality:** The capacity to navigate between different or competing motives and emotions, and combine different approaches to conflict to achieve desired outcomes.
- **Conflict adaptivity:** The capacity to employ distinct strategies in different types of conflict situations in a manner that achieves goals and is fitting with the demands of the situation.

Coleman (2018) posited that beyond conflict intelligence, there is another capacity, which he referred to as “systemic wisdom,” that influences one’s ability to deal with the more complex and intractable conflicts. He defined systemic wisdom as “the capacity to understand the inherent propensities of the complex, dynamic context that gives rise to an intractable conflict and to work with the dynamics of the system to support the emergence of more constructive patterns” (p. 22). This differentiation between “intelligence” and “wisdom” is seen in the participants of this study. Intelligence can be considered an expression of *thinking*, whereas wisdom is an expression of *knowing*. Though Coleman does not approach his research and scholarship from a constructive-developmental lens, his framing and theorizing around the

concept of systemic wisdom support the notion that the development of a complex consciousness (i.e., self-authoring mindform and beyond) is a necessary prerequisite for constructively navigating complex conflict. He explained how systemic wisdom enables one to engage “highly complex, destructive, and enduring conflict” while employing thinking that can support constructive engagement (i.e., the possibility for conflict transformation). He suggested that when an individual is capable of systemic wisdom, the individual frames their objective as making “the conflict landscape constructive” versus simply seeking some form of resolution (p. 22). Moreover, with systemic wisdom, one can view the conflict from a more long-term perspective and consider aspects of sustainability of the dynamic while also staying focused on the specific context of the conflict, viewing it more qualitatively and understanding it in a non-linear way. Coleman (p. 22) identifies the core competencies for systemic wisdom:

- Systems Aptitudes: Tolerance for ambiguity, cognitive, emotional, behavioral complexity, and future orientation
- Complexity Visualization: Capacity to map complex systems and identify core dynamics
- Systemic Agency: Skills in reading and marshaling resonance or shared energy; capacity to work upstream to alter the dynamics of systems over time to support more constructive patterns
- Sustainability and Adaptive Decision Making: Capacity to employ adaptive decision making and action to sustain constructive dynamics

Coleman affirmed that one’s capacity for constructive engagement of conflict is tied to elements he framed as “conflict intelligence.” The thinking capacities, perspective, and mindsets which inform conflict intelligence were at different levels among the leaders in this study. As the findings of this study suggest, the more evolved one’s consciousness (i.e., one’s mindform) the

more capacity they have for sophisticated forms of conflict intelligence. Additionally, the findings suggest that his notion of “systemic wisdom” require, at minimum, the existence of the self-authored system. In this way, Coleman’s work provides an interesting link to my research, in that conflict intelligence, as he described it implies that it is an intelligence demonstrated in individuals who construct meaning from the self-authored mind (or beyond). This supports the argument that leaders in higher education and other sectors who are confronted with complex conflict require a complex consciousness in order to engage and navigate conflict constructively. Moreover, in order to more effectively *understand*, *engage*, and *navigate* highly complex conflict—or to engage complex conflict in transformative ways—and enable systemic wisdom, it is essential that one develop an *even more* complex mindform that moves beyond the socialized mindform toward the self-transforming mind (and beyond).

One of the main themes that emerged from the data concerned complex *thinking* and complex *knowing*. Table 6.2 details the capacities regarding complex thinking and systemic wisdom demonstrated in each mindform represented in this study. All the individuals in this study exhibited—to varying degrees—all the competencies for conflict intelligence, yet it was only those who demonstrated constructing meaning from the equilibrated self-authored mindform and beyond that demonstrated the premature elements of systemic wisdom.

Table 6.2*Demonstrated Capacities for Complex Thinking and Systemic Wisdom*

Mindform	Demonstrated complex thinking and systemic wisdom capacities	Levels (relative to other mindforms explored in study)
3/4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderate capacity for adaptability • Disassociated with potential volatility • Low to moderate awareness in considering competing forces • Lacked examples of considering paradox • Limited tolerance for ambiguity • Limited to no dialectical thinking • Minimal consideration of future consequences and impacts • Limited integrative thinking 	Low
4/3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderate to high capacity for adaptability • Consciously considered potential volatility, though limited • Moderate awareness in considering competing forces • Consciously considered and acknowledged paradox, though limited • Ephemeral tolerance for ambiguity • Minimal dialectical thinking • Limited consideration of future consequences and impacts • Minimal to moderate integrative thinking 	Low to Moderate
4(3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderate to high capacity for adaptability • Consciously considered potential volatility • High awareness in considering competing forces • Consciously engaged with paradox • Moderate tolerance for ambiguity • Limited dialectical thinking • Moderate consideration of future consequences and impacts • Minimal to moderate integrative thinking 	Moderate
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderate to high capacity for adaptability • Consciously considered and identified areas for potential volatility • High awareness in considering competing forces • Consciously engaged with paradox, though tied to discomfort or negative in orientation • Moderate to high tolerance for ambiguity • Specific moments dialectical thinking • Moderate to high consideration of future consequences and impacts • Moderate integrative thinking 	Moderate to High

The more evolved one's mindform, the greater capacity for complex thinking and systemic wisdom the leaders demonstrated. This connects to the primary hypothesis I held when designing this study. The mindform one demonstrates—the developmental structure that one

relies on to construct meaning—influences their capacity to constructively engage and navigate incrementally more and more complex conflict.

Coleman (2018), citing Dörner’s (1996) research on decision-making in complex environments, highlighted the notion that those who exhibit systemic wisdom “understood that the problems they were addressing were closely linked with other problems, and so their actions could have multiple effects. Therefore, they took a wider variety of actions when attempting to achieve one goal” (p. 26). This capacity to incorporate various actions and behaviors when addressing conflict corresponded with that which the leaders in this study demonstrated. The more advanced their demonstrated mindform, the more options for action were consciously available to the individual leaders when assessing the best course of action.

Advancing Theory: Connecting *Some* of the Dots

This section builds off some of the findings from this study to provide suggestions for advancing theory in interpersonal and organizational conflict and CD theory.

On Faculty-Administrator Conflict

Of the 24 conflict scenarios the participants in this study detailed, 19 involved substantial faculty-administration conflict. The other five primarily dealt with conflict with another member of one’s group (i.e., faculty-faculty and administrator-administrator). Bess and Dee (2014) posited, “Unless administrators and faculty members can come to understand and appreciate the meanings and interpretations of the other party, effective communication between the two is unlikely” (p. xvii). They framed the difference in meaning and interpretation using the language of different “paradigms” that faculty and administrators bring to their role and inform their communication approach. Moreover, their central thesis proposed that *more* communication alone “will not effectively address the persistent conflicts that emerge between [faculty and

administrators]” (p. 147). Instead, they asserted that “administrators and faculty will need to use specific forms of communication that direct their attention to the underlying paradigmatic differences between them,” explicitly highlighting modes of communication that “focus on values and beliefs, so that each party can become aware of its own paradigm and those of others” (pp. 147–148).

Bess and Dee’s language to explain their notion of a “paradigm,” which they described as the often-unconscious lens that influences one’s positions, interests, and understanding in a conflict situation, is analogous to Kegan’s constructive-developmental mindsets. Their notion of becoming aware of one’s own and others’ paradigms is not as easy as it may appear, in that what they are describing is a capacity of the transforming mindform (the 5ish system). Using language and concepts primarily from communication studies, what they propose as the primary source of conflict between faculty and administration stems from a lack of genuine understanding and considering the perspectives of the *other* stakeholder group.

In response to Bess and Dee, the need for enhanced communication approaches is essential. Yet, beyond improving communication, I posit that there is a critical need to emphasize and deliberately provide opportunities aimed at developing individuals’ complexity of their mindform, which may increase the likelihood that academic leaders would develop the capacity to view others’ “paradigms” and their own as “object.” By providing deliberate opportunities, this may lead to more and more faculty and administrators developing the capacities (e.g., complexity of mind) to authentically and deliberately grapple with the complexities that exist currently in institutes of higher education in a way that employs constructive and transformative approaches of conflict engagement.

Bess and Dee implied, perhaps unintentionally, that the developmental minds of faculty and administrators often had not evolved far enough along the CD trajectory. As they asserted, in order to communicate effectively across these stakeholder lines, individuals in each group must be able to objectively recognize and consider the “values and beliefs” of others (a capacity of the self-authored mind) as well as those of oneself and the “paradigms” of others (a capacity of the self-transforming mind). Essentially, they unknowingly advocated for developing faculty and administrators beyond the socialized mindform, beyond the self-authored mindform, toward developing individual minds to construct meaning with, at the very least, some demonstration of the self-transforming mindform (equivalent to the “4/5” mindform and beyond).

Bess and Dee’s recommendation for improving communication between administrators and faculty focused on integrating dialogue, specifically “appreciative inquiry,” as an approach that could lead to a more constructive conflict engagement. Promoting dialogue is laudable, especially in HEIs that may idealize collaboration and dialogue, yet often fall short in authentic and intentional practice. As Mezirow (2000) reasoned, group dialogue creates a container for individuals to experience disorienting dilemmas that can create space for the re-construction of meaning, which aids in the evolution of the individual mind’s meaning-making structure.

The practice of appreciative inquiry may be one model for simultaneously engaging conflict in more constructive ways while also contributing to the evolution of one’s mind toward a more complex meaning-making system. However, perhaps it is not the model of dialogue that matters as much as it is the actual practice of dialogue on the part of the parties involved.

Saunders (1999), discussing dialogue within the context of racial and identity-based conflict, stated:

Dialogue is a process of genuine interaction through which human beings listen to each other deeply enough to be changed by what they learn. Each makes a serious effort to take others' concerns into her or his own picture even when disagreement persists. No participant gives up her or his identity, but each recognizes enough of the other's valid human claims that he or she will act differently toward the other. (p. 82)

Though Saunders' quote was originally aimed at a different audience—that of international diplomats, foreign service officers, military, and state leaders—the notion of genuine interaction wherein individuals and groups retain their whole identity while still listening deeply to the others' perspectives is at the heart of what dialogue intends. Yet, the potential limitation here is that participating in dialogue in the way that Saunders outlines may not be fully attainable unless one has evolved beyond the self-authored mind. This requires an approach to dialogue that asks the individuals engaged to have the capacity to take another's perspective and implies that people have this capacity. Perhaps this is part of the reason dialogue is not embraced more, both in academia and in greater society, because there is a lack of understanding pertaining to the value genuine dialogical approaches to communication provide—for the individual and the collective.

Constructive Conflict: A Pathway to the Evolution of Consciousness

Freire stated that “Conflicts are the midwife of consciousness” (as cited in Horton, 1990, p. 187). Freire suggested how conflict, when modeled healthily and constructively, provides an opportunity for the growth of the conscious mind. The caveat that I must add to Freire's statement is that the development of consciousness through conflict does not occur via osmosis. In fact, being in conflict consistently may have an adverse effect, depending on the content and quality of the conflict(s) and the developmental mindform of an individual. Instead, consciousness grows out of the deliberate engagement of conflict at the growing edge of one's meaning-making capacity (Kegan, 1994). Framing this metaphorically, the growth consciousness

occurs through conflict at the threshold of what one might consider their “pay grade.” The task is at the tip top, or maybe just barely beyond their paygrade, yet not so far as it causes them to feel “in over their head.” Instead, it is a sweet spot, where one is in the metaphorical water just deep enough that it takes a deliberate and conscious effort to stay above the water’s surface. In this space, one can still take full inhalations of air to keep the blood flowing steadily through the brain. This is the sweet spot where developmentally constructive conflict engagement can occur, what Wergin (2019) calls “constructive disorientation.”

Freire would likely support this notion, for he advocated for and practiced what he called “praxis,” the blending of action and practice. Guzman Foster and Fleenor (2019), citing Freire (1985), stated, “Praxis is an iterative, reflective approach to taking action. It is an ongoing process of moving between practice and theory. Praxis is a synthesis of theory and practice in which each informs the other” (p. 98). In a real sense, engaging in conflict at one’s growing edge, in that “sweet spot,” provides an opportunity for praxis to expand one’s consciousness incrementally over time, through continued earnest praxis.

In this way, the notion of “constructive conflict” holds a double meaning. It is conceivably constructive in both the material and psychic senses. Constructive conflict contributes to incrementally beneficial outcomes within an organization or social system while simultaneously contributing to the evolution of one’s developmental mindform. In this way, this form of constructive conflict is inherently transformative, as it contributes to the change of systems, relationships, and one’s consciousness. In line with Freire’s point, this form of constructive conflict serves dual purposes, as the potential catalyst for positive change within one’s physical context and as the catalyst for the development of consciousness.

Mayer (2015) briefly addressed the implications and value of developmental theories on understanding conflict. Citing the influence of Kegan on his thinking, Mayer posited:

Conflict provides us with both an opportunity to grow and a vehicle to regress. As disputes escalate, we are more likely to resort to ways of thinking and behaving that are characteristic of earlier stages of development. Our challenge in working on conflict is therefore to help promote more complex thinking that accepts ambiguity, the truth in seemingly contradictory realities, and the truth in the contradiction or paradoxes themselves. (2015, p. 13)

When one reframes conflict as a constructive tool in one's individual development, the development of others, and the transformation of structures and systems, conflict can be empowering in a transformational way. Constructive conflict pushes the limits of one's current mindform, which was demonstrated to varying extents with the participants in this study as they explained and reflected on conflicts that were difficult and/or complex for them to navigate.

Sometimes, Maybe, It Depends

The concepts of *conflict resolution* and *conflict management* are grounded in the modernist perspective. Though they may be archaic approaches for engaging conflict in the postmodern world, which abounds with ever-growing complexity, they may still hold significant relevance considering that most adults construct meaning from a self-authored mind or modernist perspective as Torbert (2004) suggested. In a way, utilizing conflict resolution and management approaches versus conflict transformation is meeting people where they are at, from a leader and practitioner's perspective.

Conflict itself is an abstraction, which is ultimately defined in the mind of the individual self and is related to by the individual in a way representative of an individual's mindform. To engage in conflict constructively—constructive not only for oneself and for others—a leader needs to meet others where they are at. This requires a level of cognitive empathy and the ability to unerringly take the perspective of others in an effort to understand their interests, values,

needs, and identities. I also suggest that an even more complex form of empathy and perspective taking might incorporate the capability of perspective taking with another's mindform in mind. Understanding another's perspective objectively and with relative accuracy may be aided significantly when one considers another's meaning-making structure (i.e., mindform) as a part of the deliberate and conscious practice of perspective-taking.

For academic leaders—and leaders in any sector, for that matter—to meet the demands of the postmodern world, leaders must transcend the modern ways of knowing (i.e., the socialized and self-authoring minds) and evolve toward the ways of knowing exemplified by the self-transforming form of constructing meaning (Kegan, 1994; Kegan & Lahey, 2009).

Individuals capable of this require an advanced meaning-making structure, which enables and empowers one to assess not only where the other(s) is/are coming from, in terms of their positions and interests, but also to consider the larger context, including but not limited to consideration of the various dynamics of the social system, norms and culture, rules and policies, as well as institutional structures and power dynamics. When one *can* consider these aspects, the options for how to engage and navigate a given complex conflict expand exponentially. Because, in conflict, there is no *right* way to engage conflict constructively (though one can argue that there are many wrong ways). The more advanced one is in their mindform, the greater capacity they hold to decide among several different possible approaches to navigating the multiple dynamics of the conflict situation (McGuigan & Popp, 2016), and to genuinely invoke the mantra of Stanley “Stan” Sitnick (personal communication, n.d.; a former professor and mentor of mine) when considering their approach to conflict: “Sometimes, maybe, it depends.”

Suggestions and Questions for Further Inquiry

This study, by design, was exploratory. I explored the relationship between academic leaders' meaning-making systems (i.e., mindforms) and how they made sense of complex and/or difficult conflict situations within their work at HEIs. Additionally, though to a lesser extent, I explored the relationship between their mindforms and their thinking, decision-making, and internal and external approaches to navigating conflict. As an exploratory study, it is no surprise that I have more questions than answers. In this section, I convey suggestions for further inquiry based on the most compelling questions that emerged during the process of this research. The proposed areas for further inquiry are summarized as follows:

- What is the nature of the relationship between the quality of empathy (affective and cognitive forms) that an individual demonstrates and their developmental mindform? Is there a consistent positive correlation? If so, how strong is this correlation, and what might it suggest regarding the deliberate development of one's mindform? Could concentrated or deliberate developmentally focused training in perspective-taking (i.e., cognitive empathy) contribute to the evolution of one's mindform?
- As queried earlier in this chapter, are there other forms of empathy that emerge between the developmental journey from the self-authored mind toward the self-transforming mind? (And possibly beyond?)
- Assuming the findings from this study are transferable to other individuals and/or leaders engaging and navigating conflict, how might the results look different in other sectors? Specifically, I am curious if there would be significant differences within organizations that are more tightly coupled.

- Is dialogue a tool that can engage all developmental levels? Moreover, what are the core tenants or elements of dialogue that support the development of the mind? Are there current models that incorporate these core elements? How might these play different roles in the developmental process based on an individual's current mindform?
- Is there potential for developing a model for understanding how the intentional engagement of conflict influences the development of an individual's mindform? (Here I come back to Kegan's concept of "optimal conflict" or Wergin's "constructive disorientation.")
- Since the role of intentionally engaging in complex conflict *may* aid in the development of consciousness (depending on many factors), how might one design a longitudinal study and a deliberate intervention (e.g., a development program) that could provide more conclusive and objective data for testing and gaining a greater understanding of this phenomenon?
- Regarding the methodology design, how might one redesign this study to be more streamlined (less complex) while still focusing on the influence of meaning-making structures in individuals navigating complex conflict?
- How might one design a study that directly examines the relationship between ones' *internal* and *external* approaches to conflict?
- Research pertaining to conflict styles/modes may benefit with the incorporation of CD theory. Examining the different conflict styles/modes (e.g., competitive and accommodating) from different locations along the CD developmental trajectory could provide valuable insight which may enhance theory concerning conflict styles/modes.

Additionally, this proposed work may contribute to more impactful education and coaching where these models are utilized.

- What are the quality and characteristics of empathy demonstrated in individuals constructing meaning from the self-transforming mind? What could this tell us about the human potential for constructive and transformative engagement of complex conflict?

Implications for Practice

This study was conducted within the context of academic leadership in higher education institutions; however, the implications of this research extend beyond this context. In this section, I propose implications and suggestions for practice in the context of academic leadership in higher education, followed by implications that extend beyond this context.

Implications for Leadership Practice in Higher Education

Leaders in higher education are required to navigate conflict and change consistently within the often-convoluted context of organizations that are loosely coupled. From the findings of this study, I outline the following implications for practice:

- Conflict is by its very nature complex, and the higher an individual is within the leadership structure of an organization the higher chance an individual will be faced with more and more complex conflict. Therefore, it is important not only to provide training on conflict resolution and management skills but also to provide leaders with developmental-focused support and coaching to support the evolution of leaders' minds toward more complex meaning-making structures.
- Given the reality that leaders and their stakeholders (e.g. other leaders, faculty, staff, and students) will construct meaning at different developmental mindforms, it may prove beneficial to educate leaders on the CD theory, specifically pertaining to how individuals

at different places in their evolutionary journey construct meaning when in conflict, so as to provide insight to leaders which they can take into account when actively taking the perspective of others during a given conflict situation, and then adapting their communication and behaviors accordingly.

- Specifically, it may be valuable for leaders to understand how individuals construct meaning when in conflict, and how an individual's mindform influences and individuals comfort with conflict and capacity for constructively navigating the complexities within conflicts.
- Also, it would be of value to leaders to know where they themselves are in their developmental journey, so as to provide themselves with more insight into their orientation(s) to conflict. Then, with this conscious awareness, they may be able to more objectively look at their own thinking and behavior in conflict, and deliberately adjust accordingly.

Implications for Practice Beyond the Scope of Higher Education

Beyond the scope of leadership in higher education, conflict is an aspect of everyday personal and professional life. From the findings of this study, I outline a few select implications for practice more broadly:

- Education and training, particularly pertaining to conflict resolution and management should move toward incorporating developmental mindforms into the educational material.
- Education and training should account not only for a variety of learning styles but developmental levels as well and adapt the curriculum to address this.

- Human resource managers, mediators, ombuds, and the general council could enhance their practices by considering the different developmental levels of the individuals they are working with.

A Reflective Closing Statement

As a budding scholar, experienced educator, a midlevel leader in an HEI, and practitioner of strategic conflict engagement in my community, I acknowledge my perspective on leadership and conflict is informed by theory and practice. Moreover, as a burgeoning constructive-developmental, I recognize that my perspective on the practice of conflict engagement and my interpretations and understanding of the literature and research was incrementally evolving throughout this process. I can recognize and take perspective on these changes in my mind from a more objective point of view. I intentionally sought to engage this research process in such a way that incorporated the practitioner-researcher perspective in the process, knowing that the result of this study would only bring about more open-ended questions than concrete answers.

Though I mentioned earlier in this chapter the enthusiasm I felt when I was first exposed to Kegan and Lahey's work, I left out the fact that I struggled with some of the hierarchical language used. This grappling with hierarchy is still present within me, even as I conclude this study, but the way in which I now grapple with this notion has shifted in its form significantly. Initially, I experienced significant resistance in my mind regarding the whole notion of hierarchy and the language of "stages" and "orders" and "levels," which is littered throughout the literature on CD theory. Looking back on this from a newly explored vantage point, my ever-evolving perspective at this point sees this resistance to the language of hierarchy as tied to the lingering influence of the socialized mind. I now recognize that when I set out on this exploratory journey

over two years ago, I was constructing meaning from an earlier mindform, or stage, than I am now.

I recall my then research mentor, Richard, who eventually—though perhaps reluctantly—agreed to be a member of my dissertation committee, shared with me something to the effect of “Some folks in CD theory disciplines ascribe to the notion that one cannot fully make sense of *this stuff* unless they are of a similar developmental level or higher than those of whom they are studying.”

As I reflect on my journey, now having had the time to think on this, long and hard, while learning from my own experience—*in praxis*—I believe there is some truth to this notion. Part of my barrier early on in this process was that I struggled to relate fully to the self-authored mindform. I understood it objectively, but the influence of my socialized mind was impacting my capacity to make sense of it in a deep and internalized way. In the past year and change, this has shifted.

In a sense, I was building the bridge as I crossed it. For this I am grateful. Moreover, in a sense, this is the work of deliberate and active individual development. When one comes to a chasm (i.e., a problem) wider than their current meaning-making capacities, this presents a prime opportunity to deliberately work on evolving one’s mind to grow the capacities required to navigate the gap. This is the incremental work of bridge building in the mind. This is the constructive-developmental work of growing a more complex consciousness.

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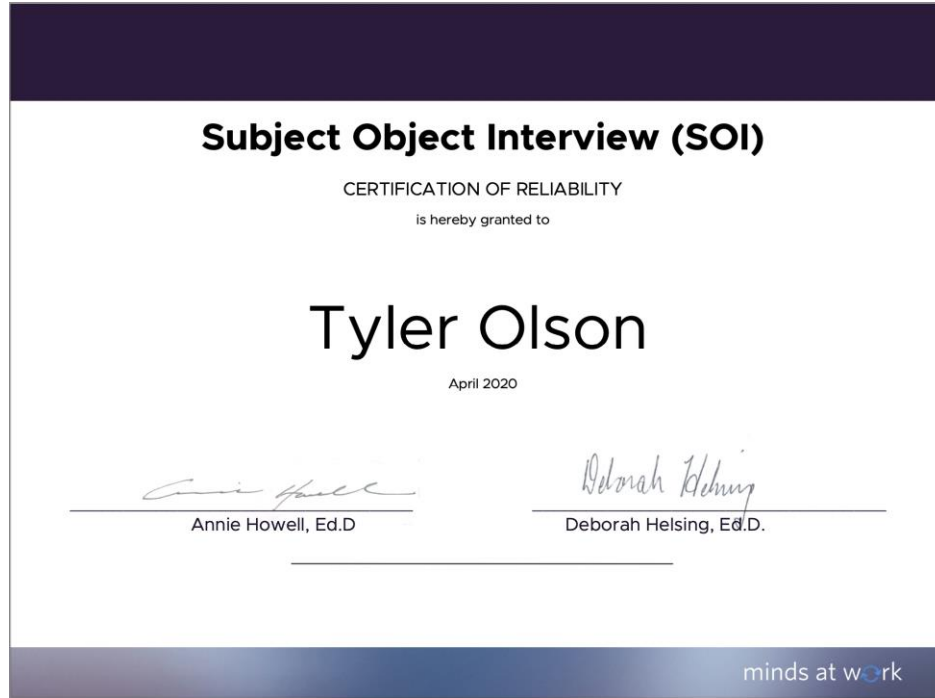
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Appendix

APPENDIX A: SUBJECT-OBJECT INTERVIEW CERTIFICATION



“The Subject-Object Interview (SOI) . . . is our adult development assessment tool that has been used all over the world, across all sectors, over the last forty years. A trained interviewer/analyst can use this instrument to identify, with high degrees of interrater reliability, where someone is in their evolutionary journey.”

“Successful completion of the online workshop will allow you to use the interview tool to fit your professional or research purposes, and there is an added benefit to participants as they join a community of professionals who share a common goal in understanding and supporting adult development.”

“The optional, additional certification as a Reliable SOI Scorer includes additional practice with the tool, analyzing and scoring 5 new SOI transcripts, and feedback on your work.”

<https://mindsatwork.com/programs-services/coach-development/subject-object-interview-training/>

APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT LANGUAGE AND INSTRUCTIONS

Recruitment Email

Hello [FILL IN WITH INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP]:

My name is Tyler (Ty) Olson, and I am a doctoral student in Antioch University's Graduate School of Leadership and Change. I am reaching out to request your help in identifying participants for my dissertation research.

(*Note.* I revised this initial paragraph based on the group or individual I reached out to.)

I am conducting research on how academic leaders' (i.e., department deans, associate deans, department directors, and department chairs) deep structures of consciousness influence their capacity to navigate conflict during periods of organizational change. I am looking for 6 to 10 leaders who are willing to participate in a series of 3 separate interviews. The interviews will inform the generation of small case studies and will be used to inform the field of leadership and conflict in institutions of higher education.

These interviews are semi-structured and reflective in nature and have been experienced as enjoyable and insight-building during the pilot phase.

In order to participate in this study, there are specific criteria participants must meet:

- You must be in the role of an academic leader at an institution of higher education, specifically in the role of an academic dean, associate dean, or department director (also department chair may qualify when responsible for significant administrative tasks).
- You have held this position or a similar position of leadership for at least one year.
- You directly oversee department faculty or other administrators who have direct reporting faculty and direct reporting staff.
- You hold a doctoral degree (e.g., PhD, EdD, JD, DBA) or are currently working to complete a doctoral degree.
- You acknowledge that conflict engagement (management or resolution) is a significant aspect of your role as leader in your institution.
- You acknowledge that conflict naturally arises during periods of organizational change in your institution.
- You indicate commitment to fully participating in all three interviews over a period of month to a month and a half (approximately 4 hours in total).

If these apply to you, and you are interested in participating please complete this pre-screening survey: [LINK REMOVED AND DISABLED](#)

I would also appreciate it if you were able to share this opportunity with others in your networks (via forwarding this email or copying and pasting the abbreviated version included below). This would aid in increasing the number of responses to support a diverse pool of potential participants.

Also, I have crafted a short description of the study for sharing on social media (LinkedIn and Facebook).

Thank you for your consideration and support! Please feel free to contact me with any questions.

With much gratitude,

Ty Olson

How to Share:

On Facebook and LinkedIn (or other relevant social media platforms)

My colleague, Ty Olson, is conducting research on how academic leaders' deep structures of consciousness influence their capacity to navigate conflict during periods of organizational change. He is looking for individuals with a minimum of one full year of experience as an academic department leader (e.g., academic deans, associate deans, department directors, and department chairs). Selected participants will be asked to participate in three separate interviews via Zoom over the course of a month to a month and a half. The interviews will inform the generation of small case studies and will be used to inform the field of leadership and conflict in institutions of higher education. These interviews are semi-structured and reflective in nature and have been experienced as enjoyable and insight-building.

If you qualify and are interested in participating, please complete this pre-screening survey:
LINK REMOVED AND DISABLED

Please consider sharing this with your networks.

Via Email

Dear colleagues and friends:

My colleague, Ty Olson, is conducting research on how academic leaders' deep structures of consciousness influence their capacity to navigate conflict during periods of organizational change.

He is looking for individuals with a minimum of one full year of experience as an academic department leader (e.g., academic deans, associate deans, department directors, and department chairs). Selected participants will be asked to participate in three separate interviews via Zoom over the course of a month to a month and a half. The interviews will inform the generation of small case studies and will be used to inform the field of leadership and conflict in institutions of higher education.

These interviews are semi-structured and reflective in nature and have been experienced as enjoyable and insight-building.

If you qualify and are interested in participating, please complete this pre-screening survey:
LINK REMOVED AND DISABLED

Thank you for your consideration and support of this study!

Sincerely,
[insert your name]

P.S. Please consider sharing this with your networks.

APPENDIX C: ONLINE PARTICIPATION QUESTIONNAIRE

This study will look how academic leaders' (i.e., department deans, associate deans, department directors, and department chairs) deep structures of consciousness influence their capacity to navigate conflict during periods of organizational change.

This study will involve 6 to 10 leaders from universities and colleges located in the United States. Participants will be asked to participate in a series of 3 separate interviews. The interviews will inform the generation of individual small case studies, which will culminate in a multiple comparative case study. The results are intended to inform the field of leadership and conflict in institutions of higher education.

All responses to questions (Q) are completely confidential.

For any questions, please contact the principal researcher Tyler (Ty) Olson.

Q1 - Which category includes your age? **dropdown options, see below**

- 20 or younger
- 21-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60-69
- 70 or older

Q2 - How do you identify in terms of gender? **short, open-ended**

Q3 - How do you identify in terms of race and/or ethnicity? **short, open-ended**

Q4 - What is your highest level of education? (Examples: PhD, EdD, JD, and MBA) **short, open-ended**

Q5 - Of the options, which one best describes the college or university where you work?
multiple choice, see below

- Public University
- Private University
- Liberal Arts College/University
- Community or Junior College
- For-profit College/University
- Other (*with option to fill in*)

Q6 - Is your college or university located in the United States? **multiple choice, see below**

- Yes
- No
- Other (*with option to fill in*)

Q7 - What is the name of the department that you lead? (examples: Sociology, Geography, and Electrical Engineering) **short, open-ended**

Q8 - How many years of experience do you have as an academic department leader? **dropdown options, see below**

- Less than 1 year
- 1 to 3 years
- 3 to 5 years
- 5 to 10 years
- 10 years or more

Q9 - Do you currently oversee department faculty? **dropdown options, see below**

- Yes, faculty report directly to my position
- Yes, faculty report indirectly to my position (I oversee the position(s) to whom faculty report)
- No, I do not oversee faculty
- Other (*with option to fill in*)

Q10 - Do department staff report directly to you? **dropdown options, see below**

- Yes, staff positions report directly to my position
- No, I do not oversee staff positions
- Other (*with option to fill in*)

Q11 - What is your official title at the college or university? **short, open ended**

Q12 - In my leadership position at the college or university, I acknowledge that I am often responsible for managing and/or resolving interpersonal conflicts. **multiple choice, see below**

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Unsure

Q13 - The climate of higher education over the past ten months, due to the global pandemic, economic constraints, and/or calls for racial justice and equity may have contributed to an increase in interpersonal tensions and conflict at my institution. **multiple choice, see below**

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Unsure

Q14 - I am willing to participate in a study which looks at how academic department leaders navigate conflict. **multiple choice, see below**

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Q15 - Please provide your full name. **short, open-ended**

Q16 - Please provide your preferred email. **short, open-ended**

Q17 - Please provide your phone number. (Optional) **short, open-ended**

Q18 - Is there anything else you would like to share as it relates to your possible participation in this study? **open-ended**

Thank you for your interest in this study and participation in this questionnaire. You will be contacted directly within two weeks by Ty Olson regarding next steps.

Note. This questionnaire was conducted through Google Forms.

APPENDIX D: REQUESTING YOUR PARTICIPATION EMAIL TEMPLATE

Subject Line: Requesting Your Participation in Study - Conflict, Change, & Leadership in HE

Dear [full name with title]:

I hope this email finds you well. As you know, I am a doctoral candidate at Antioch University in the Graduate School of Leadership and Change's PhD program. In January, you completed a pre-screening questionnaire for my study. Thank you for taking the time to do this and for your interest in participating in this study. After reviewing your entry, I would like to invite you to participate.

I am sure you have questions before we begin. This email may help in answering some of your questions. If questions remain unanswered, please do not hesitate to contact me at this email address.

The purpose of this exploratory study is to build upon the connections between constructive-developmental theory (based in adult developmental psychology) and theories of interpersonal conflict. The study explores this within the context of leadership in higher education. At the most basic level, this study looks at how deep structures of consciousness influence academic leaders' capacity to navigate conflict during periods of organizational change.

The study is designed as a multi-method qualitative study, which will utilize a series of three semi-structured interviews (which I will conduct) to collect data, which will inform the construction of a small case study on each of the participants. Two of the interviews are adapted from established interview protocols, the *Subject-Object Interview* and the *Critical Incident Interview*. The third interview is loosely structured and aims to gather additional relevant information for the individual case study and provide space for debriefing the process. Once all the individual case studies are completed, they will be used to inform a comprehensive comparative multi-case study.

In total, the time commitment from you will be approximately four hours, spread out over three interviews, and over the course of a month to a month and a half (ideally, the interviews will be scheduled two weeks apart). Prior to each of the interviews, I will provide information specific to that interview to ensure that you are fully prepared for each session.

Each interview will be recorded and kept secure. After each session, you will receive a copy of the transcript to review, if you wish, to ensure I correctly captured what you sought to convey.

Your participation in this study is confidential. The case studies themselves will be carefully anonymized. A consent form will be provided to you prior to our first interview.

Moreover, I think it is worth noting that during the pilot phase of this study, participants found these interviews as an opportunity to reflect deeply on conflicts that they have encountered in their professional context. This process proved to be gratifying and insightful for all pilot study

participants.

If you are willing to move forward with this process, please let me know at your earliest convenience. I am planning to begin interviewing participants the week of February 15th.

I look forward to working with you and learning about your experiences with conflict and change at your higher education institution, especially from this past year. Your participation in this study will contribute to an emerging area of research and may help uncover new insights into how consciousness influences a leader's capacity to navigate conflict and change.

Again, thank you for your time and consideration.

With much gratitude,

Ty

“To be truly visionary we have to root our imagination in our concrete reality while simultaneously imagining possibilities beyond that reality.” ~ bell hooks

Tyler G. Olson

PhD Candidate, Graduate School of Leadership and Change, Antioch University

APPENDIX E: PREPARING FOR FIRST INTERVIEW EMAIL TEMPLATE

Subject Line: Preparing for [day of week] Interview - Conflict, Change, & Leadership in HE

Dear [full name with title]:

I hope your week is off to a decent start.

We're scheduled to meet for the first interview this [day of week], [month and day], from [time] to [time and participant's time zone]. The Zoom meeting information is in the calendar invite you accepted.

For this first interview, the Subject-Object Interview (SOI), there are 10 prompts that will help to guide our conversation. I've attached a PDF to this email with the prompts. Please take around 10-15 minutes prior to our interview to consider these prompts and take a few notes. (I recommend doing this the same day as the interview, so your reflections are fresh in your mind.) We will review the prompts at the beginning of the interview if you have questions or are unable to review them beforehand.

Also, I include the consent form as an attachment to this email. There are a couple of ways you can provide consent. The first option would be to print it out, sign it, and then send a scanned version back to me. The second option would be to sign it by typing your name, signature, and date in the document (this does not work on all computers). Please note that there are two sections to sign in the consent form if you choose one of these first two options. Both sections are found on page three of the form. The third option is to consent via email, by emailing me directly and indicating that you have read the consent form and by stating, "I consent to participate in this study, and I consent to be recorded."

Before we begin the interview, I will check to make sure I have received your consent form, and I will ask for verbal consent once we begin recording.

I look forward to our interview, [name and title]. If you have any questions in the meantime, please feel free to contact me.

Be well,
Ty

APPENDIX F: CONSENT FORM

This informed consent form is for academic department leaders whom we are inviting to participate in a research project titled “Navigating Conflict and Change in Higher Education: A Multiple Case Study with Academic Division Leaders”.

Name of Principal Investigator: Tyler G. Olson

Name of Organization: Antioch University, PhD in Leadership and Change Program

Name of Project: Navigating Conflict and Change in Higher Education: A Multiple Case Study with Academic Division Leaders

You are encouraged to save a copy of this Consent Form for your records.

Introduction

I am Tyler Olson, a PhD candidate in the Graduate School of Leadership and Change at Antioch University. As part of this degree, I am completing a project that explores how academic department leaders construct meaning when navigating interpersonal conflicts in their higher education institutions. I will give you information about the study and invite you to be part of this research. You may talk to anyone you feel comfortable talking with about the research and take time to reflect on whether you want to participate or not. You may ask questions at any time.

Purpose of the research

The purpose of this project is to explore how academic leaders construct meaning when they are navigating interpersonal conflict, specifically during periods of change within their institution of higher education. This information may allow us to understand better the role meaning-making plays in navigating conflict constructively.

Type of Research Intervention

This research will involve your participation in three separate interviews (approximately four hours of interviewing in total). Each interview will aid in gathering unique information on your unique experiences and perspective and will be utilized to construct a small-scale case study focused on you. Your case study will be compared and contrasted with other participants’ in the study. Each of these interviews will be audio recorded solely for research purposes, but all of the participants’ contributions will be de-identified prior to publication or the sharing of the research results. These recordings, and any other information that may connect you to the study, will be kept in a secure, password-protected location.

Participant Selection

You are being invited to take part in this research because you have identified yourself as an academic department leader who acknowledges that dealing with and navigating conflict is an

aspect of your role in your department and at your institution of higher education. Additionally, you have expressed a willingness to participate in this study. You should not consider participation in this research if you are not an academic department leader, are unwilling to participate in all three interviews, or are a minor.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to participate. You will not be penalized for your decision not to participate or for anything of your contributions during the study. You may withdraw from this study at any time. If an interview has already taken place, the information you provided will not be used in the research study.

Risks

No study is completely risk-free. However, I do not anticipate that you will be harmed or distressed during this study. You may stop being in the study at any time if you become uncomfortable. If you experience any discomfort resulting from your participation, employee assistance counselors will be available to you as a resource.

Benefits

There will be no direct benefit to you except for the opportunity to reflect on your experiences with conflict intentionally. However, your participation in this research may help others in the future.

Reimbursements

You will not be provided any monetary incentive to take part in this research project.

Confidentiality

All information will be de-identified so that it cannot be connected back to you. Your real name will be replaced with a pseudonym in the write-up of this project, and only the primary researcher will have access to the list connecting your name to the pseudonym. This list, along with audio recordings of the interview sessions, will be kept in a secure, password-protected location.

Limits of Privacy Confidentiality

Generally speaking, I can assure you that I will keep everything you tell me or do for the study private. Yet, there are times where I cannot keep things private (confidential).

The researcher cannot keep things private (confidential) when:

- The researcher finds out that a child or vulnerable adult has been abused,

- The researcher finds out that a person plans to hurt him or herself, such as commit suicide,
- The researcher finds out that a person plans to hurt someone else.

There are laws that require many professionals to take action if they think a person is at risk for self-harm or are self-harming, harming another, or if a child or adult is being abused. In addition, there are guidelines that researchers must follow to make sure all people are treated with respect and kept safe. In most states, there is a government agency that must be told if someone is being abused or plans to self-harm or harm another person. Please ask any questions you may have about this issue before agreeing to be in the study. It is important that you do not feel betrayed if it turns out that the researcher cannot keep some things private.

Future Publication

The primary researcher, Tyler Olson, reserves the right to include any results of this study in future scholarly presentations and/or publications. All information will be de-identified prior to publication.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw

You do not have to take part in this research if you do not wish to do so, and you may withdraw from the study at any time without your job being affected.

Who to Contact

If you have any questions, you may ask them now or later. If you have questions later, you may contact Tyler Olson via Email .

If you have any ethical concerns about this study, contact Dr. Lisa Kreeger, Chair, Institutional Review Board, Antioch University PhD in Leadership and Change, Email.

This proposal has been reviewed and approved by the Antioch Institutional Review Board (IRB), which is a committee whose task it is to make sure that research participants are protected. If you wish to find out more about the IRB, contact Dr. Lisa Kreeger.

DO YOU WISH TO BE IN THIS STUDY?

I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it, and any questions I have been asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

Print Name of Participant _____

Signature of Participant _____

Date _____ **Day/month/year**

DO YOU AGREE TO BE RECORDED IN THIS STUDY?

I voluntarily agree to let the researcher audio record me for this study. I agree to allow the use of my recordings as described in this form.

Print Name of Participant _____

Signature of Participant _____

Date _____ **Day/month/year**

To be filled out by the researcher or the person taking consent:

I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

A copy of this Informed Consent Form has been provided to the participant.

Print Name of Researcher/person taking the consent _____

Signature of Researcher /person taking the consent _____

Date _____ **Day/month/year**

APPENDIX G: SUBJECT-OBJECT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Hello, (name). Again, thank you for agreeing to participate in my doctoral research.

The purpose of the Subject-Object Interview is to explore your most expansive self—the different ways you make sense of your work as a leader, specifically in the context of interpersonal conflict (when relevant).

This will likely feel different than other interviews you've experienced.

- (1) As a brief refresher, the aim of my research is to understand how a leader's developmental mindset influences their meaning-making in conflict. I'm particularly interested in how one's developmental mindset influences the way they understand and navigate conflict situations/dynamics, particularly during times of organizational change in institutions of higher education. As an individual who works in higher education, I regularly interact with academic leaders, and I've observed many different responses from leaders to conflict and tension (specifically, during times of organizational change). Additionally, as a mid-level leader, myself, I have at times struggled to navigate conflict during times of change and uncertainty.
- (2) This is a voluntary interview, and we can stop at any time. Also, this will be kept confidential, your real name and the name of your institution will be held in confidence and not be shared.
- (3) Confirm signing of letter of confidentiality.
- (4) Review prompts (these will be shared via email 48 hours prior to the interview):
 - SUCCESS – (Let's talk through this one first.) Think back over the last several months to a year. When were some moments where you felt like you were proud of something you had accomplished or achieved? Maybe something turned out well, when you thought it could have gone a different way. Perhaps you navigated an interpersonal conflict particularly well . . .
 - *Now take a few minutes to jot down a few words or sentences to remind you of what came up.*
 - MOVED, TOUCHED – Bring to mind a time where you felt touched or moved, where something you experienced, witnessed, heard, saw or sensed caused you to feel warmed.
 - ANGRY – Think of a time where you felt a strong sense of anger, outrage, or violation. Maybe, it was tied to a conflict or situation that went awry.
 - STRONG STAND, CONVICTION – Think about a recent moment where you felt like you must take a strong stand, or you experienced a sense of conviction that something must be done. What shows up for you?
 - CHANGE – This prompt can be about your experience during a time of change (external change), or personal experience of internal change. How did you make sense of this change?

- ANXIOUS, NERVOUS – Think about some times that you experienced some nervousness or anxiety. Perhaps an experience with conflict or tension while in your role as a leader at the institution?
 - SAD – Bring to mind moments when you felt sad or a real sense of sorrow about something you encountered. What shows up here?
 - TORN – Think about an experience where you felt torn, tension, or conflict regarding something that came up while in your leadership role. Perhaps, where you were unsure of the direction to go. You were being pulled or urged different ways than where you were inclined toward going.
 - LOST SOMETHING – This prompt relates to being worried that you may lose something (e.g., a relationship, connection, role, responsibility, etc.) or that you had to let something go. What comes up for you here?
 - IMPORTANT TO ME – What is really important to you as an individual or a leader? What do you care deeply for, or are passionate about, or matters most to you as an individual and/or a leader?
- (5) The purpose of these prompts is to spark memories of recent experiences, which may or may not directly connect to conflicts you’ve experienced.
- (6) Before we begin, I want to challenge/encourage you to be deliberate in how you frame and talk about your experiences in this interview. This is meant to be a time for you to be intentional and *reflect deeply*. There is no need to rush through the different prompts.
- (7) Are you ready to begin? Great! Now I’ll start the recording if that’s okay with you.
(AND BACKUP)
- (8) Let’s get started! We have 75 to 90 minutes to talk about some of the prompts that resonate with you. (We won’t get through all of the prompts. Typically, people will get through 3-5 of them.)
- I’ll be jotting down some notes during the interview . . .
 - It is up to you where you’d like to start . . .
 - I’ll be asking follow-up questions throughout our interview . . .
 - Is there a particular prompt that you would like to start with? Perhaps one that stands out among the rest and evokes some strong feelings and memories?
 - . . . tell me about the memories associated with this prompt and how you make sense of them.
 - What have you encountered recently in your leadership role and practice at the [college or university], how do make sense of these, and how does this inform the way you think and act in these situations?
- (9) We’re nearing the end of our time. Is there anything else that you would like to bring up in these closing minutes? (OR “How do you feel about ending here?”)
- (10) _____, thank you again for taking this time today!

(11) Next steps:

- Our second interview (CII) - Slightly different format. More specific and slightly more structured. I may refer back to things that you brought up in the first interview (SOI) if relevant in the second interview. The second interview will take approximately the same amount of time, 75 to 90 minutes.
- Can we schedule this interview to take place in two weeks?
- Following the second interview, we will have a final loosely-structured interview, where I will refer back to some of the things that came up in these first two interviews, in order to gain more clarity and insight for my research. It will provide some time for you to share additional thoughts or clarifications, and it will also provide us with an opportunity to gather any additional biographical information and debrief the process. This third interview should take approximately 60 minutes.

APPENDIX H: CRITICAL CONFLICT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Hello, (name). Again, thank you again for your participation in the first interview. I appreciate you taking the time to meet with me again today to talk about your personal experience with conflict in the context of being a leader at your university or college.

- (1) As a refresher, the aim of my research is to understand how a leader's developmental mindset influences their meaning-making in conflict. In the second layer of my research, I am looking at how one's developmental mindset influences the way they understand and navigate "difficult conflict" situations/dynamics, particularly during times of organizational change.
- (2) This interview is designed to explore a few difficult conflicts that you've experienced recently (within the last 6 months to a year). This is a semi-structured interview, so I have a series of questions prepared that we will work our way through.
- (3) I recognize that this may be an uncomfortable subject to reflect on for some. I want to assure you that this will be kept confidential, your name and the name of your institution will be held in confidence and not be shared.
- (4) Before we begin, I want to again challenge/encourage you to be deliberate in how you frame and talk about your experiences with conflict during this interview. This is meant to be a time for you to *reflect deeply* on your experience, so there is no need to rush to answers if you need time to think back on your experience(s).
- (5) Are you ready to begin? Great! Now I'll start the recording. **(AND BACKUP)**
- (6) Now let's get into the substance of the interview.
- (7) Please share and describe a recent incident or a situation in your professional context where you experienced a *difficult* conflict at work (e.g., with a faculty member, member of the administration, or small contingent). (NOTE: The notion of "difficult conflict" with initial prompts will be shared via email 48 hours prior to the interview.)
 - By *difficult*, I mean where the conflict was more complex than just having a quick conversation to resolve or deal with it.
 - **Reminder to interviewee:** *Refrain for now from explaining how you resolved or managed it for now, instead focus on your experience, thinking, and understanding of the situation that occurred.*
 - Try to recall what you were feeling when this situation came to your attention and escalated to the point where you engaged. What emotions were you experiencing? (Also, highlight how the conflict escalated during the subsequent encounters with this person or contingent, if relevant.)
 - Utilize timeline visualization/prompt, if perceived as helpful, beginning with the COVID-19's initial impact in February and March 2020.
 - Did this evoke any fears or anxieties? . . . If so, share specifics.

- Try to recall what you were thinking when this situation escalated to the point where you engaged and began to take preliminary action. What was going on in your mind?
 - **Reminder to self (interviewer):** *Ask open-ended follow-up questions to tease out the details and help them paint a full picture.*
 - Tell me about your perception of where the other party/parties were coming from?
 - **Reminder to self:** Tease this out. (This matters as it relates to developmental mindset/stage.)
 - Explain the nature of the conflict from their perspective(s) to the best of your ability. *What was going on for the other party/parties?*
- (8) Now take some time to describe how you *engaged* and *navigated* this conflict, *if you did*. (If you didn't, and you chose to avoid it, tell me about that.)
- Did you avoid it *initially*? (Or *want* to?)
 - Did you feel as if you could handle it yourself? . . . If so, tell me more about that.
 - Was there anything in this conflict that you *did, said, thought, or felt* that surprised you?
 - **Reminder to self:** I'm less interested in the specifics of their *behaviors* in conflict, because I am more interested in their internal process and meaning-making in this conflict. (Also, their recall *does not* have to be perfect here.)
 - Tell me more how you felt about your handling of the process?
 - Did you surprise yourself with how you handled this? If so, tell me about this. Why?
- (9) How do you perceive the outcome of this situation?
- Was your engagement “constructive” or “effective” in the long run? (Which *word*, “constructive” or “effective” do you [the participant] prefer here?)
 - **If relevant:** Is there a difference between “constructive” and “effective” for you?
- (10) From your perspective, how did power dynamics play into this situation?
- How about the role of *social identity*?
 - Your identity?
 - The other party/parties' identities?
 - **Reminder to self:** ask follow-up and clarifying questions here to dig in a bit.
- (11) After the fact, have you spent much time reflecting on this experience? (If so, tell me about that.)
- Why did you think you selected this particular situation(s)? *Why was this a “difficult” conflict for you?*
 - Typically, how do you usually feel about interpersonal conflict?
- (12) Take a moment to reflect back on this conflict situation. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about this experience?

- (13) **Note to self:** Now circle back and ask the participant to highlight another conflict situation.
- (14) *If time permits*, do you have another conflict situation at work that you can speak to?
- (15) We're nearing the end of our time. Is there anything else that you would like to bring up in these closing minutes? (OR "How do you feel about ending here?")
- (16) _____, thank you again for taking this time today to share about your experiences.
- (17) Next steps:
- Once this interview is transcribed (approximately 5-7 days) I will share it with you to provide you with an opportunity to review it. I will also share the transcript of the first interview, giving you a chance to review it.
 - In our final interview you will have an opportunity to add to or clarify any statements you made, and we can spend a little more time exploring some of the situations you highlighted.
 - I will also come to the interview with some additional questions to explore and may have some biographical questions to ask to fill in any gaps for the individual case study.
 - Additionally, this time will provide us with an opportunity to debrief the process.
 - This third interview should take approximately 45 to 60 minutes.
 - Can we schedule this interview to take place in two weeks?

APPENDIX I: PREPARING FOR SECOND INTERVIEW EMAIL TEMPLATE

Subject Line: Preparing for [day of week] Interview - Conflict, Change, & Leadership in HE

Hi [name],

I am looking forward to our second interview on [day of week].

We are scheduled to meet for 90 minutes beginning at [time and participant's time zone], [month and day]. Just like for our first interview, the link to the Zoom meeting is located in the calendar invite I sent.

This second interview is semi-structured and designed to look at a few specific “difficult” and/or “critical” conflicts that you have had to navigate at your institution during the last year.

In preparation for our interview, below are a few prompts to consider. I encourage you to take some time to think about this ahead of our interview. Also, I suggest jotting down a few notes in response to these prompts. (This is only for your reference, as I will not be asking for you to share your notes.)

Primary prompt: Identify 3 to 5 specific *difficult* and/or *critical* conflict situations you found yourself having to navigate at your institution over this past year.

Additional questions to consider: What led up to these situations? When did you recognize them as conflict situations? What were you thinking and feeling in these situations? How did you respond/react? How did others respond/react?

Additional framing for the notions of “difficult” and “critical” conflicts:

- By “difficult” conflict I am referring to conflict situations that are more complex than having a quick conversation to resolve or deal with it.
 - Difficult conflicts may extend over a period of time (a few hours, to several days, to a number of weeks or months).
 - They might initially feel or appear like they are just beyond your mental or skill capacity (or feel like they are “*beyond your pay grade*”).
 - They could be connected to change or resistance to change at the institution (from you and/or other stakeholders).
 - They might look like situations that you’ve never encountered before, or you haven’t had to navigate in the past (or that you’ve intentionally avoided).
 - Difficult conflicts could mean that there is something significant at stake.
- By “critical” conflict I am referring to conflict situations where the stakes are high. Where there is *something* deemed as significant at stake. Moreover, how the conflict is navigated (or “dealt with”) may influence a constructive or destructive outcome (short-term or long-term).

- Preferably, each of these conflicts involves other people or groups employed by the institution (other stakeholders who hold a different perspective or have different interests than you).
- Ideally, each of these conflicts occurred within the past year. (If there is a particular conflict that comes to mind that originated over a year ago, which stands out to you as relevant to this study, jot it down and we will evaluate its relevance during the interview process.)

Optional: As an additional aid in identifying difficult and critical conflicts, I have included an attachment called the “Conflict Timeline.” It serves as an optional visually aided activity to support your identification of—and reflection on—difficult and critical conflicts.

Finally, it is appropriate to consider conflict situations where you are not *a party to the conflict*, and instead where you are supporting other parties in dealing with a conflict situation.

In our interview, we will likely only have time to explore 2 to 3 of these conflicts in detail.

I look forward to our interview, [name]. Please let me know if you have any questions in the meantime.

Be well,
Ty

APPENDIX J: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR CLOSING INTERVIEW

Outline for final interview:

- This third interview should take approximately 45 to 60 minutes.
- Ask follow-up questions to gain clarity from conflict scenarios in the second interview.
- Provide space for participants to clarify any aspects of the conflict situations or statements made in the previous interview.
- Ask biographical questions to fill in any gaps for the individual case study.
- Spend approximately 10 minutes at end of the interview to debrief the interview process and thank participants for their time, willingness to participate, and contributions to the study.

Specific questions for each participant (some of these were already answered in previous interviews so do not need to ask again):

- What type of conflict do you struggle most with at the university/college? Why might that be?
- What do you see as the “constructive” elements of conflict?
- From your perspective what constitutes a constructive conflict versus a destructive conflict?
- What do you see as your “role” when conflict arises in your department during periods of organizational change?
 - How much of that is because of your role compared to how much is connected to your own interests, inclinations, values, etc.?
- How would you define conflict from your own perspective?
 - From your own perspective, what is the relationship between “conflict” and “change”?
- What do you see as the importance of relationships in navigating conflict during periods of conflict and change?
- ASK EVERYONE: What question(s) am I not asking that I should?

Biographical (fill in gaps):

- Titles and credentials (confirm)
- Would you be willing to share your CV or resume with me?
- Why did you get into this work? Where do you find meaning and purpose in this work?
 - Are there any specific moments or experiences that contributed to this trajectory that you’ve been on? And can you please highlight any of them briefly?
 - Did you have any significant or noteworthy career changes?
- Family educational background (Were you first generation college student?)
- Is there anything else that you would like to share?

Debrief:

- How was this process for you? (Or series of interviews been for you?)
- What if anything came out of this experience that was beneficial for you?
- Is there anything else you’d like to reflect on?

APPENDIX K: THANK YOU EMAIL TEMPLATE

Subject Line: Thank you for your participation!

Hello [name],

Again, thank you for your participation in this study. I am grateful to you for taking the time to engage in all three of the interviews over the past month and a half (I know it was a significant time commitment). Your perspective and contribution have been invaluable, and I enjoyed doing these interviews with you.

I've attached the transcripts for the first two interviews for your records. If you do have any comments or corrections, please share them with me within the next two weeks if possible. It is not required that you review and respond, but I wanted to make sure that I reiterated this with you.

I'll send the transcript from the third interview to you in the next week or so, for your records and review.

Again, thank you, and perhaps sometime in the future, our paths will cross again! Until then, be well.

With much gratitude,
Ty

APPENDIX L: SUBJECT-OBJECT ANALYSIS FORMULATION SHEETS

Part A: Subject-Object Formulation Process Sheet

Name or code of Interviewee:

Analysis Page #

Bit #/Interview page #	Range of Hypotheses					Questions
	1	1(2)	1/2	2/1	2(1)	
	2	2(3)	2/3	3/2	3(2)	
	3	3(4)	3/4	4/3	4(3)	
	4	4(5)	4/5	5/4	5(4)	
	5					

Part B: Subject-Object Overall Formulation Sheet

Name or code of Interviewee:

Analysis Page #:

A. Tentative Overall Hypotheses—minimum of 3 bits reflective of each hypothesis:

B. Rejected Tentative Hypothesis/Hypotheses and Reason(s) for Rejection

1. Hypothesis: _____ Why rejected:

2. Hypothesis: _____ Why rejected:

C. SINGLE OVERALL SCORE – minimum of 3 bits reflective solely of this score: _____

D. Testing S.O.S. if you have not already justified your rejection of scores on either “side” of the S.O.S., do so here:

From: Lahey et. al (1988). *A Guide to the Subject-Object Interview: Its Administration and Interpretation*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Graduate School of Education.

APPENDIX M: CODING REFERENCE GUIDE (ABBREVIATED VERSION)

Categorizing “Cheat Sheet”

(Revised 11.1.2022)

Note. This section includes notes shared with other coder after the first phase of coding.

Clarification of language in the codes and categories:

- Conflict, Tension, Problem, Issue, etc. → Are all essentially synonyms, and I haven’t clearly differentiated them in the notes or descriptions. Though I’ll be consistent in my writing/analysis! (I just didn’t want you to overthink these uses of language!)
- Interviewee (I) → I think I already mentioned this, but it is the person telling the story (aka, the participant). I choose to use “Interviewee” so that it is more specific and wouldn’t get confused with *other participants* or “stakeholder” in the scenarios.
- Other Party (OP) → Is another “party to/in the conflict” (an archaic term used frequently in the conflict studies and legal fields). The “Other Party” is most often an individual with whom the “Interviewee” is in conflict with. It also could be more than one (a triangle dynamic, which will come up in Gwen’s transcripts). It potentially could also be another group, if the conflict is between an individual and a group, or two different groups.
- Stakeholders → For the most part, I use “Stakeholder” in the category labels intentionally, referring to anyone who may be impacted by a situation or is involved in the situation, but isn’t the “Interviewee” or the “Other Party” in/to the Conflict. Stakeholders can include, but are not limited to: other staff, faculty, administrators, students, community members, etc. (Occasionally, the “Interviewee” and/or the “Other Party” could fit as a “Stakeholder” as well, but it is all contextual.)

One of the pieces, which I think you picked up on, but I wanted to articulate, is that material related to the different CIT stages can be found all throughout the transcripts. For example, an “Antecedent” might be expressed at the very end of the interview, and a “Reflection on the Process” (RoP) could come toward the beginning. All that to say, it is *not linear*, in the sense that all the Antecedents are first, then Critical Events/Incidents, then the Impacts, followed by the Reflections. Any of these stages may be found anywhere in the text.

Notes On Double Coding & Categorizing:

- Based on what I’ve done so far, approximately 5% of all the codes I put into categories I “double categorized,” meaning I linked two categories to a code instead of only one. Here are a few things I found myself consistently doubling up with other categories when linking to codes:
 - The “Motivating Incident/Event” categories, in which there are two (one causing the conflict and another prompting the Interviewee to get involved)... My rationale is that a motivating event can be a lot of different types of actions/behaviors, so I try to recognize other categories that might fit, when the impetus for the conflict/tension is identified by the Interviewee. (Does that make sense?)
 - The other main one is “Demonstrating Perspective Taking,” for when they are explaining how another person is understanding a the conflict situation or specific

elements to it, if they are demonstrating an conscious ability to genuinely grasp where the other is coming from, this is a form of “Perspective Taking.” Though, I would refrain from double categorizing Perspective Taking with “Empathy” or “Compassion” (but these are two categories that can be double categorized as well!).

- The third one deals with the category “Made Sense of Complexity” (while they were navigating the situation). When I use the term “Complexity” I’m thinking about all the interconnected elements and nuances someone is seeing/recognizing and keeping in mind as they are thoughtfully and intentionally navigating a conflict (not all of the participants truly demonstrate this). That to say, I saw a few cases where this fit with other categories as well.

Additional final notes on coding:

The FINAL piece, before I transition briefly into looking at a couple of examples from your “Emma CI 1” categories, is that *nearly every single code could be double categorized!*

What I mean by this, because of the way I’ve set this study up (partly intentionally and partly unintentionally) is that we’re essentially looking at—coding and categorizing for—both *behaviors/actions* (a.k.a., what individuals physically do) and *thinking/perception* (a.k.a., the “sense making” that a person does). For every *action* there is a *thought* involved (somewhere!). For nearly every *behavior*, there is a *perception* involved (from somewhere, for the most part.)

So, depending on what the individual coder is paying attention to in the moment that they read a code, they might choose to categorize the code under a behavior/action category or a thinking/perception category. (Is this making sense?)

One difficulty with my study, and is that I wanted to include both, but I should have been more intentional in consciously separating these. That to say, there is a connection in the categories between behaviors/actions and thinking/perceptions, but it is muddled

Anyway, I say all this to help create more clarity. My focus is first on the “sense making” of the participants, and then secondarily the behaviors/actions of the participants and the other people/stakeholders involved.

This to say, you may have found yourself constantly struggling between two category choices (or maybe three). Don’t over think it. And here’s a little flow/process protocol that may help when trying to identify the “best” category (*because multiple may apply*) to attach to a code if you are struggling:

1. First ask yourself if the participant is conveying in the coded material something that sheds light on “how they are making sense” of the situation (i.e., *what’s going on in their mind*).
 - a. If it is shining light on “sense making” material, there’s a good chance the code relates to “feelings” or “perceptions” or “thinking” related categories.

2. If it is not strongly related to what's going on in their mind, and it is more of an ***observation of fact***, something that was actually done by themselves or others, then it is likely tied to *behavior* or *action* related category. (And they might be describing their behavior in the moment, or another individual's or group's behavior/action.)
3. OR, it might be related to a category that is not specific to what is going on in their mind or a specific action/behavior (as in, related to the structure, culture, or outside elements).
4. Finally, try not to overthink it. We'll come back to all the coded material and reevaluate. (As I shared, the first two category sets were closely in line with my understanding and intention for the material, so we're moving in a constructive direction!)

APPENDIX N: INITIAL CATEGORY REFERENCE DOCUMENT

Note. These are informal notes that provided initial support during the early phase of coding.
(Edited 11.1.2022)

CIT Stages

1. **Antecedent:** What comes before—what precedes—mainly relational conditions (e.g., prior relationships, preconceptions, past experiences)
2. **Incident:** What actually is happening?
3. **Impact/Consequence:** How did the incident impact the situation/relationships
4. **Perspective and Context** (because they reported from different perspectives and in different contexts) → can connect to antecedent

Perspective, Stakeholders, Context (Don't need to code for, will address in phase 2)	Antecedent(s): What comes before. <i>CODE</i>	Conflict incident events: Typically, concrete elements. <i>CODE</i>	Impact/consequence(s) <i>CODE</i>	*Possible fourth category: "Done Differently" <i>CODE</i>
Perspective <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dean • Associate Dean • Director • Chair • Faculty v. nonfaculty Context <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • W/ Students • W/ Faculty • W/ Admin. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>General</i> Relational Conditions/Dynamics - "RC: . . ." • Power Dynamics - "PD: . . ." • Individual perception of situation/dynamics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ "Perceiving/ Perception: . . ." ○ "Anticipating: . . ." ○ "Tension: . . ." ○ "Fearing: . . ." ○ "Feeling: . . ." ○ "Threat(s): . . ." ○ "Need(s): . . ." ○ "Perspective Taking: . . ." ○ "Contemplating: . . ." ○ "Understanding: . . ." • Conscious strategizing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ "Strategizing: . . ." ○ "Planning: . . ." • Organizational/ structural conditions or change(s) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ "SC (structural conditions): . . ." ○ "Restructuring: . . ." ○ "Change: . . ." ○ "External demands: . . ." ○ "Problem/Issue: . . ." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflict interactions • Stakeholder behaviors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ "Action(s): . . ." ○ "Conduct: . . ." ○ "Demeanor: . . ." ○ "Verbal: . . ." ○ "Nonverbal (cues): . . ." ○ "Articulated: . . ." ○ "Reacted: . . ." ○ "Communicated: . . ." • Perceptions (during incident) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ "Tension(s): . . ." ○ "Threat(s): . . ." <p><i>Note.</i> Antecedent categories may also apply in Conflict Incident events category.</p>	Negative/positive/neutral (destructive/constructive/no notable impact) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relational • Structural/Political • Behaviors • Feelings • <i>Other?</i> <p>Example: "Impact: . . ."</p>	Reflecting back, what would have the individual done differently? Example: "Done differently: . . ."

APPENDIX O: MINDSET (MINDFORM) DESCRIPTIONS

Kegan (1982) described and outlined the five orders of consciousness (or equilibrated mindsets) of CD theory, what I refer to as developmental mindsets. Below is a summary of each mindset:

- ***The Impulsive Mind (Mindset 1):*** This mindset exists in early childhood, where the individual does not hold a level of consciousness that enables them to separate between themselves and others and where there is no genuine sense of permanence.
- ***The Instrumental Mind (Mindset 2):*** This mindset is prominent throughout childhood and into early adolescence, where an individual can differentiate the self from others. In this mindset, the individual will primarily pursue outcomes they perceive to be beneficial to themselves. In this mind, the individual is motivated primarily by their own needs and interests and cannot consciously take the perspective of other individuals. Moreover, they view conflict in black and white, good or bad, right or wrong, with little space for gray areas and situational nuance.
- ***The Socializing Mind (Mindset 3):*** This mindset typically emerges in late adolescence or early adulthood and shifts from viewing others as objects to relying on others for one's own meaning-making. In this mindset, the individual looks at others to derive meaning, specifically regarding values and constructing meaning around self-significance. In this mindset, individuals develop the capacity for genuine empathy toward others and recognize differences in worldviews. Additionally, in this mindset, there is a tendency to avoid conflict or overly accommodate others' perspectives to preserve the relationship that is the primary source of meaning-making.
- ***The Self-Authoring Mind (Mindset 4):*** This mindset typically emerges in middle or later life, though not all adults evolve to this stage. It is a shift from relying on others for

meaning-making to self-authoring one's own meaning. Individuals who demonstrate this mindset create meaning based on their deeply held personal values and beliefs. They are no longer dependent on others to affirm their self-worth. They can understand themselves in connection with others and as an individual entity, separate from the collective. They exhibit the capacity to take others' perspectives beyond basic empathy and hold their perspectives distinct from others'. This mindset exemplifies a modernist philosophical approach, where the individual can see systems as objects and how they fit into the system.

- ***The Self-Transforming Mind (Mindset 5):*** This mindset is the most complex in Kegan's framework and the mindset most equipped to meet the demands of the modern world. However, most adults never fully embody this mindset, even though a growing number of adults are evolving to this stage (compared to decades past). At this stage, the individual moves from being motivated by their self-authored values and truths to genuinely valuing plurality, complexity, and nuance in social systems. They are open to conflict, notably emotional conflict, which enables internal dialogue. Conflict is also approached dialectically in the mind and is seen as an opportunity for learning and growth. This mindset exemplifies the postmodern philosophical approach.