AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF


Title: Voices of Experience: Understanding and Enhancing Successful Conflict Management by Community College Presidents

Abstract approved: ____________________________________________________

Darlene F. Russ-Eft

The purpose of this research study was to enhance understanding of successful conflict management by community college Presidents through highlighting and describing conflict experiences with the faculty union or the board of trustees in a community college context. The following questions guided the research: (a) How do community college Presidents describe the experience of conflict management in the community college context? (b) How does conflict management competence manifest itself in conflict situations? and (c) How do community college Presidents develop the competencies to manage conflict? The research design included an interpretive social science philosophical approach and phenomenological method.

Seven community college Presidents representing a variety of geographical areas participated in two different semi–structured interviews. Three pervasive themes describing the experience of successful conflict management emerged from the data in response to research question one. These themes were (a) diversity, (b) inevitability, and (c) perplexing. In response to research question number two, three pervasive themes emerged from the data which were (a) avoid personalizing the conflict, (b) stay focused on college mission and students, and (c) inform and engage the board of trustees. Enhance content knowledge was the one pervasive theme that emerged for research question number three. Findings from this study highlight key themes to assist current and aspiring Presidents that seek to gain understanding of successful conflict management in the community college context.

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Mellissia M. Zanjani, Author
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply grateful to the seven community college Presidents who generously shared their time, and personal and professional reflections of their experiences with successfully managing conflict in the community college context. Each individual enriched my understanding of how Presidents successfully manage conflict in a community college context, and I worked to ensure that this research study captures their experiences in their own voices through the written text. I owe heartfelt thanks to many who made this project and its completion possible:

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DEDICATION

To Fardad V. Zanjani, my amazingly involved and dedicated husband,
Also known as “the wind beneath my wings” and the man who ensures
our family’s success by any means necessary

AND

To Shereen M. Zanjani and Sheena A. Zanjani
Two amazing daughters who perpetually astound me with their gifts of
kindheartedness, insightfulness, and thoughtfulness about the journey of life—and
who genuinely believe that all is achievable.

Thank You for reinforcing in me an attitude of gratitude!
CHAPTER ONE: PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE

All leaders will face difficult circumstances. These will frequently have little or nothing to do with anything the leader created or can influence. Administrators of community colleges, particularly Presidents, are commonly neither prepared nor trained to face a tougher, and perhaps meaner, job than in earlier years; those who would lead should understand and be prepared. (March & Weiner, 2003, p. 5)

The opening quote highlights the importance for community college Presidents to demonstrate conflict competence in the community college setting and to hear the message from those who have successfully managed conflict experiences with the faculty union or board of trustees. The purpose of this dissertation was to describe and give voice to how Presidents understand the experience of successful conflict management in the community college context. Leaders, including community college Presidents, lead despite conflict as it is inherent in business, education, government and all forms of interactions (Brown, 2004; De Dreu, van Dierendonck, & Dijkstra, 2004; Gerzon, 2006; Obama, 2009). It is therefore inevitable and inescapable (Brim, 2005; DeVoe, 1999; Ready, 2004; Swain, 2006). Since conflict exists in all organizations and agencies, then a model of leadership is needed to understand successful conflict management. Further, Gerzon (2006) shared “Here’s the catch—although conflict is built into our commercial and civic institutions, the skills for dealing with it are rarely taught” (p. 7). Traditionally, leaders did not need to concern themselves to great depths with the need to manage conflict due to the hierarchical structure which allowed a systemic sense of confidence originating from higher authority, power play, avoidance, and weak or partial use of collaborative options (Slaikeu & Hasson, 1998).

This dissertation was based on the premise that understanding the relationship between conflict, community college leadership, and competence will assist aspiring leaders in their decision to fill the leadership gap and possibly pursue a Presidential post in the American community college despite the inherent, inevitable, and unavoidable nature of conflict. Further, this study should illuminate the participating
Presidents’ understanding of how to lead through conflict and inform other interested readers.

**Research Purpose**

Conflict management is a necessary part of academic leadership (American Association of Community Colleges, 2005, 2011; Brown, Martinez, & Daniel, 2002; Carmichael & Malague, 1996; Findlen, 2000; Holden, 1984; March & Weiner, 2003). Runde and Flanagan (2007) indicated that how leaders manage conflict tends to influence the way the institution manages conflict and they need to be prepared with demonstrated conflict competencies. My intent in conducting research with selected community college Presidents was to share in their journeys of exploration, provide them an opportunity to reflect on the meaning of conflict and its description, examine their belief of how they developed their own sense of conflict competence, and share their stories so that others may learn how to develop conflict competence.

**Research Questions**

Three research questions formed the basis of this study:

1. How do community college Presidents describe the experience of conflict management in the community college context? This question encouraged the participants to reflect on the expression of their leadership in the community college context and the actual conflict experience(s).

2. How does conflict management competence manifest itself in conflict situations? This question provided an opportunity for conversation about what conflict management competence looks like in practice and how it has been used to guide the participants’ actions and decisions as Presidents.

3. How do community college Presidents develop the competencies to manage conflict? This question created the opportunity for the Presidents to reflect on their own experiences with how they developed the knowledge, skills, and abilities to manage conflict successfully.
Significance of Study

Understanding and enhancing successful conflict management by community college Presidents in the community college context has both practical and scholarly significance. Three reasons for the significance of this research study include (a) the need to understand the meaning of conflict and the lived experience of successful conflict management, (b) the need to address the community college leadership crisis, and (c) the need to fill a research gap on the Presidents experience. Each reason is described in more detail in the next section.

Need to Understand the Meaning of Conflict and the Lived Experience

Contradictory expressions prevail regarding the multiple perspectives used to describe conflict in the workplace. For example, some employees may describe a positive perspective towards conflict (Caudron, 1999; L. K. Johnson, 2004; Jourdain, 2004; Schmidt, 1994; Wilson, 1984) while other employees may describe a negative perspective (G. Johnson, 2004; Shechtman, 2008). Hocker and Wilmot (1985) described conflict through a communication perspective as an expressed struggle between two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce rewards, and interference from the other party in achieving their goals. (p. 23)

Vecchio (1981) described conflict through a situational perspective where the conditions, practices, or goals for each participant are naturally incompatible.

The multiple perspectives used to describe conflict in the workplace call for a better understanding of how community college Presidents manage the conflict experience. Runde and Flanagan (2007) indicated that “competency in dealing with organizational conflict is a hallmark of effective leaders and crucial to organizational success” (p. 11). Further, Runde and Flanagan (2008) stated conflict is at the root of many leaders best ideas, as well as at the core of their worst failures. When it is handled poorly it can cost organizations heavily in terms of wasted management time, turnover, lawsuits, and in extreme cases – violence and sabotage. When it is addressed effectively, it can stimulate creativity and lead to better decision making. With all this at stake, it would seem natural that leaders would seek to hone their conflict management skills. (p. 46)
This section described the need to understand the meaning of conflict and exploring the lived experience so that leaders can manage conflict competently. In so doing, the hope is that community college current and aspiring leadership will be better informed and enlightened about the lived experience of managing conflict successfully and will be better prepared to address the community college leadership crisis.

**Need to Address the Community College Leadership Crisis**

Community colleges have become a vital and perhaps permanent aspect of the United States higher education system, and it must maintain competent leadership in order to maintain its integrity. (Piland & Wolf, 2003, p. 1)

Leadership will guide community colleges through increasingly diverse and complex issues which include (a) major retirements in the ranks of senior faculty and community college Presidents (Campbell, 2006b; Dolan, 2005; Evelyn, 2001; Fulton-Calkins & Milling, 2005; McNair, Duree, & Ebbers, 2011; Perrakis, Galloway, Hayes, & Robinson-Galdo, 2011; Shults, 2001; Stephenson, 2001), (b) changing role of the Presidents in response to internal and external pressures (Beehler, 1993; Bornstein, 2003; Floyd, Maslin-Ostrowski, & Hrabak, 2010; Malm, 2008; Maslin-Ostrowski, Floyd, & Hrabak, 2011; Perrakis et al., 2011; Rushing, 1976), (c) reductions in funding (Beehler, 1993; Eddy, 2010; Evelyn, 2001), (d) an underprepared and increasingly diverse student body (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Eaton, 1989; Evelyn, 2001), and (e) mission complexity (Boggs, 2011a; Floyd et al., 2010; Frankland, 2010; March & Weiner, 2003; Reitano, 1998; Romero, 2004).

In fact, some experts worry that the community college sector faces a crisis in leadership with many expected retirements and significant turnover in the ranks (Dolan, 2005; Evelyn, 2001; McClenny, 2001; Moser, 2008; Perrakis et al., 2011; Romero, 2004; Shults, 2001; Vaughan, 2001). The turnover is creating a void in the leadership for community colleges which raises the question, Who will lead community colleges (Campbell, 2006a; Evelyn, 2001) through the challenging times of decreasing resources with increasing demands? Acknowledging the need for specific types of competencies among community college leaders, the American
Association for Community Colleges (AACC) voted unanimously to endorse six competencies for community college leaders which included (a) organizational strategy, (b) resource management, (c) communication, (d) collaboration, (e) community college advocacy, and (f) professionalism. Within resource management was the need for leaders to be able to “manage conflict and change in ways that contribute to the long-term viability of the organization” (American Association of Community College, 2005). The competencies were strongly advocated as necessary skillsets for current and future community college leaders.

Finally, Birnbaum (1993) presented three paths that a President can travel: (a) failed President, (b) modal or average President, or (c) exemplary President. For those Presidents seeking to avoid the failed or modal paths, this dissertation study could shed light on genuinely following the path of an exemplary President. Yet, the question remains, How will the leaders who choose to lead the community colleges successfully manage the conflicts within them? This study may contribute to the scholarly and practical body of knowledge by informing aspiring Presidents, current Presidents, and other interested readers about conflict competent leaders and hopefully address the community college leadership crisis. The next section will focus on the lack of research highlighting the experience of community college Presidents who have successfully managed conflict.

**Need to Fill in Research Gap on the Presidents’ Experience**

A number of research studies quantified the ways to manage a challenge or conflict to prevent it from becoming a crisis (e.g., Murray & Kishur, 2008). Malm (2008) examined six Maryland community college presidents to understand the “organizational challenges and uncertainties that forced changes in their college” (p. 614) while the styles of conflict management have been quantified (Baxter & Shepherd, 1978; Jones, 1976; Korabik, Baril, & Watson, 1993; Rosenthal & Hautaluoma, 1988) and prior quantitative dissertations (Adams, 2006; Espinosa, 1987; Guill, 1990; Pritchard, 1985; Revilla, 1984) based on a variety of factors which included age, gender, education, size of institution, location, and tenure. Relatively
little has been researched and written about the community college Presidents’ lived experience with conflict management with the board of trustees or employee, specifically faculty unions. The rationale for focusing on an employee union or a board of trustee conflict is best demonstrated in the words of March and Weiner (2003) who noted the

> loss of employee morale or trustee confidence is likely a ticket out of town for an administrator whereas instructional ineffectiveness, stale curricula, or anemic graduation or student transfer rates can often be lost in the noise of campus politics. (p. 8)

Additionally, March and Weiner wrote about Presidents who expressed concerns of “singing the blues” when they shared their feelings about leadership difficulties. Some of the Presidents expressed concern that exposing some of the difficulties would reveal a feeling of sour grapes on the part of those who have been left behind by a competitive world. Such an impression would, however, be misleading. One usually does not hear the blues from the losers in administrative life. It is the survivors who live to sing the blues. In some cases they have survived by dogged persistence, in some cases because their opponents lost interest in the attack, and in other cases by leaving one field of battle for a fresh one on another campus. But they have survived. Their pains are not the excuses of losers but the laments of survivors: laments for a lost dream of an idyllic academic institution, at least as seen by a President. (p. 8)

Maslin-Ostrowski et al. (2011) indicated that community college presidential leadership is more demanding than ever since leaders face “unprecedented economic declines, increased expectations, and the immediacy of media reporting” (p. 1). Clearly, the media can turn small rumors into campaigns against or for the President through the internet and social media so now Presidents need to worry about the paradox of the media. The paper describes the daunting realities of how leading can be complicated in the digital age.

Despite the contributions made, prior research and articles have made to conflict management, there remains limited research available to the academic community which gives voice to and describes the lived experience of successful
conflict management with an employee union or the board of trustees within the community college context by community college Presidents. Enhancing understanding of the conflict experiences with the faculty union or board of trustees may inform other readers interested in learning more about the experience. Figure 1 presents a graphical illustration for the focus and significance of understanding the intersecting union between the community college leadership crisis, meaning of conflict, lived conflict experience, and the research gap on the Presidents lived experience in the community college context.

![Figure 1](image)

Figure 1. Interrelationship between the focus and significance.

**Summary of Purpose and Significance**

The purpose of this research study was to enhance understanding of successful conflict management by community college Presidents with the faculty union or board of trustees in the community college context. Three important reasons to study the experience of successful conflict management by community college Presidents described in this dissertation were (a) the need to understand the meaning and lived experience, (b) the need to address the community college leadership crisis, and (c) the need to fill in a research gap for understanding the Presidents experience. Chapter Two is the next section that will describe the review of literature.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this review of literature was to gather and evaluate the most current academic research relevant to the topic of enhancing the understanding of successful conflict management with the faculty union or board of trustees by Presidents in the community college context. The research questions guiding the literature review were (a) how do community college Presidents describe the experience of conflict management in the community college context? (b) how does conflict management competence manifest itself in conflict situations? and (c) how do community college Presidents develop the competencies to manage conflict? Implications were drawn for the design of study from the literature review.

Approach to Review of Literature

The initial literature review was accomplished by extensively utilizing the Oregon State University (OSU) online library to search for literature pertaining to conflict in higher education. The primary source of data was the OSU Libraries Research Database and the Summit Catalog. PsychInfo, EBSCOhost, Electronic Journals Service (EJS) and Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), Cambridge version, and Dissertation Abstracts were use as search tools. The primary search strategy included dissertation abstracts, peer reviewed journals, reports, articles, websites and books for the literature review. I also reviewed the references from the literature I gathered in order to obtain additional pertinent literature.

I did not limit the search for era, location, or country since conflict is a universal and perpetual phenomenon (Hornung, 2008; Longaretti & Wilson, 2006; Valentine, 1995) that crosses cultures (Fraser, Hipel, Jaworsky, & Zuljan, 1990), business and industry (Hope, 2000; Ma, 2007), educational settings (Beatty & Brew, 2004; Townley, 1995), and organizations (Bernardin & Alvares, 1975; Rahim, 2002). Keyword search techniques used singly and in combination were conflict, issues, challenges, strife, discord, problems, community colleges, leadership, leadership qualities, leadership styles, two-year colleges, junior colleges, technical colleges, conflict management style, conflict management strategies, educational
administration, competence and competency models. The term technical college was not included as a search item, because it was understood to be included within the two-year search term. Educational leadership position terms used included college Presidents, College Chancellors, or Chief Executive Officer. In some cases, persons with the title President reported to a chancellor or a district President, or sometimes persons with the titles of vice chancellor reported to the chancellor. For this study, there was no differentiation created for the search between chancellor and President as the primary focus was on the leadership position that reported to an elected or appointed board of trustees as outlined in the participant criteria.

The following criteria were used to narrow the selection of literature reviewed: (a) They aided in enhancing the understanding of the Presidents lived conflict experience with the faculty union or the board of trustees; (b) They aided in understanding the Presidents’ manifestation of conflict competence during conflict situations in the community college context; and (c) They aided in understanding how Presidents, other leaders, and other interested readers could become conflict competent.

**Organization of Review of Literature**

The review of literature is divided according to three primary sections as indicated within the three research questions: (a) How do community college Presidents describe the experience of conflict management in the community college context? (b) How does conflict management competence manifest itself in conflict situations? and (c) How do community college Presidents develop the competencies to manage conflict? The three major sections are (a) context, (b) conflict, and (c) competence. Figure 2 presents a visual diagram for the organization of the review of literature by the three major sections.

**Context**

This section will describe the context for this dissertation. The context provides the background for this study. The section begins with higher education to provide a brief historical context and the current status of higher education, then the
community college context is discussed and finally, the context of the Presidential position is reviewed.

**Higher education context.** The higher education system, specifically the colleges in the American colonies, was based on a diverse set of ideas originating from the European system, although the American higher education system had its own uniqueness (Cohen, 1998). Boorstin (1991) commented that the colonists settled the land before they had a system for dealing with higher education so they reinvented governmental and educational forms as they progressed in laying the foundation for the American educational system (Cohen, 1998, p. 16). During the early years, the colleges focused on the advancement of learning, and they saw no contradiction in preparing young people to take their place as public officials or civic leaders and as ministers or clergy in a community where church and state were closely aligned (Cohen, 1998; Lucas, 1994). As a result, higher education developed around the notions of acculturating the young, passing on the wisdom of the classics, and preparing people not only for service as clergymen but as public servants. (Lucas, 1994, p. 221)

From the beginning, education has been used as the primary method to solve societal problems. Despite periodic disillusionment with the schools, the pervasive belief has been that education, defined as more years of schooling, is beneficial (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). It was expected that the secondary high schools would steadily improve to the point of feeding students directly into university level professional preparative programs. With secondary schools pushing up from below

![Figure 2. Organization of the review of literature.](image_url)
and university professional schools pushing down from above by demanding earlier specialized training, the colleges felt squeezed between the two (Cohen, 1998; Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Lucas, 1994). The compromise between the voices for more education for the masses through preparatory courses, specialized training, and university level professional programs evolved through the emergence of the junior college (Lucas, 1994).

**Community college context.** Joliet Junior College in Illinois was established in 1901 as the first junior college. As previously described in the higher education context, initially, many two-year schools saw themselves primarily as “feeders” to the more academically demanding and more prestigious four-year colleges and universities (Cohen, 1998; Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Dougherty, 2001; Frankland, 2010). Lucas (1994) described the evolution for community colleges “as a preparatory step to university life and a professional career” (p. 221).

The American community college began developing into a vocational institution and the idea proved in time to be very popular with the state universities and state and federal policymakers, who also played a major role in the rapid growth of community colleges (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Lucas, 1994). In addition, the industrial revolution in America brought the need for a skilled workforce and created yet another opportunity for the expansion of community colleges (Cohen, 1998; Dougherty, 2001; Frankland, 2010; Lucas, 1994). Another opportunity for the expansion of community colleges occurred because of the need for the influx of immigrants to learn how to become American citizens, which was a critical need during the early part of the century (Cohen, 1998; Cohen & Brawer, 2003). The opportunity for easier access to higher education by the masses through the advent of the community college as a neighborhood institution provided for increased members of the society to access higher education more than any other policy or action (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Finally, global forces, particularly economic ones, accompanied and contributed to organizational change in the 1990s, and community colleges were forced to alter their missions and structures once more to accommodate society’s
needs. These alterations, in effect, moved colleges away from a focus on local community social needs and local market needs to a focus on national and international agendas of dominant influencers such as governments and businesses, suggesting a more pronounced economic role of the community colleges with a significant impact (Frankland, 2010; Levin, 2000, 2001).

More than 1,300 community colleges in the United States enroll more than five million credit seeking students, which represent more than half of all undergraduates in higher education (American Association of Community Colleges, n.d.). As a consequence of the expansions to the community college mission throughout the years, community colleges have a proud history of an equal access agenda, a curriculum focused on serving community needs, a commitment to lifelong learning, and a strong emphasis on developmental education (Boggs, 2011a; Brint & Karabel, 1989; Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Deutsch & Coleman, 2000; Frankland, 2010; Levin, 2001; McClenny, 2004; Vaughan, 2006). The expansive mandate and inclusive mission of American community colleges make them unique among institutions of higher education. Community colleges serve an increasingly diverse population of learners by offering vital skills and development opportunities that nurture and support the economic health of their immediate area as well as the world. With the wisdom of historical hindsight, it is easy to see the somewhat ambiguous and paradoxical role two year institutions came to play in higher education.

As discussed in the prior section on the American community college context, the community and worldwide impact of community colleges is extensive which speaks to the critical role of the person in the leadership role—the community college President. The men and women who serve as Presidents of the nation’s public community colleges lead institutions that educate and train millions of students and clients, manage millions of dollars, and employ a substantial workforce. Understanding how community college Presidents gives meaning to conflict and demonstrate conflict competence in the face of challenging, competing, and often
conflicting demands is the focus for this dissertation. The next section will focus on the community college Presidential position context.

**Community college presidential position context.** This section reviews related literature concerning the context of the community college presidency. There is a need to more fully understand the community college presidency and gain an enhanced appreciation for the potential and limitations influenced on the institution by this critical position (Goff, 2002; Vaughan, 1986, 1989a). Community college Presidents serve in a very different capacity than their four-year counterparts due to the mission of the community college which is to serve open access, comprehensiveness in course and program offerings, and community building (Community College Stats, n.d.). These commitments shape the role and scope of community colleges. (Vaughan, 2006, p. 1)

Several publications and research studies focused on the expectations, needs, and requirements for how a community college President leads the institution (Boggs, 2003; Elsner, 1969; Floyd et al., 2010; Fuerst, 2007; Lewis, 1989; Maslin-Ostrowski et al., 2011; Morgan, 1970; Muñoz, 2010; Murton, 1975; Myran, Baker, Simone, & Zeiss, 2003; Perrakis et al., 2011; Vaughan, 1989c; Vaughan, Mellander, & Blois, 1994; Vineyard, 1993; Wygal, 1978). Review of each of these publications and research studies do not reveal a study of enhancing and understanding the community college Presidents experience with managing conflict with the board of trustees or an employee union which was the focus of this dissertation.

The demands on the community college President are far different today than they were 10-20 years ago, as today’s Presidents are often also assumed to be the chief advancement and financial officer (Boggs, 2003). Whereas once a President was expected to focus solely on his or her campus and the local community, now he or she must fundraise, court donors, build financially advantageous partnerships, lobby legislators, and develop a fiscal vision for the institution (Boggs, 2003). Community college Presidents are now called upon to source external funding and solicit gifts in order to expand campus resources and develop new programs. A new reality is
changing the Presidential landscape. Aspiring Presidents who lack development and fundraising (Wenrich & Reid, 2003) experience will need to hone these skills as they proceed through the pipeline unless they come to the presidency or chancellorship with these abilities already in place. Finally, community college Presidents “have a greater obligation to see that the college responds to local educational needs than their four-year counterparts” (Vaughan, 1989c, p. 18).

Myran et al. (2003) argued the early image of the community college President as an omniscient leader is being replaced by the image of the President as one who envisions and designs a college that is flexible and accommodating to the variety of constituents served by the institution.

The President and the other executive team members must combine the artistic and scientific skills of the architect to continuously design the college so that it can achieve its best possible future. (p. 4)

Increasingly, the community college President must integrate strategy and execution to effectively lead the institution through competing and conflicting demands. Examples of the strategic elements at the college include the mission statement and vision statement, while examples of operational elements include coordinating the various departments and divisions, systems, and structures of the institution. It is the usage of strategy and execution that will allow the President to envision growth and expansion for the institution. Although the usage of strategy and execution is critical for the President and the executive team, there is a need to understand the President’s experience with successful conflict management in the community college context.

Vaughan (1989c) expressed great concern that there was need to more fully understand the community college presidency and gain an enhanced appreciation for the potential and limitations influenced on the institution by this critical position. He revealed the notion that the pioneering Presidents were better able to communicate and practice the expectations of their responsibilities because the role was significantly more defined. Vaughan argued that the three most important functions required of the presidency were (a) managing the institution, (b) creating the campus climate, and (c) interpreting and communicating the mission of the college. All three functions reveal a
direct tie to the need for successful conflict management due to the inherent, inevitable, and unavoidable aspect associated with each of the functions. Increasingly understanding and enhancing conflict management is critical in this position due to the increased level of complexity.

Vaughan and Weisman (1998) indicated that a significant change in the role of the presidency in recent years is the increasing level of complexity required by the position which can contribute to different conflict sources. Examples of the types of complexity related to the community college Presidential position include more intrusive and better educated governing board members (Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, 1984; Basinger, 1999; Boggs & Smith, 1997; Bornstein, 2003; Cote, 1986; Floyd et al., 2010; Ikenberry, 2010; McLaughlin, 2006), declining funding streams (Eddy, 2010; Fuller, 2009; Kelderman, 2011; Roueche, Roueche, & Johnson, 2002), increasing multicultural perspectives and issues (Stewart, 2011) increasing and expanding role of faculty and staff unions (Ashburn, 2006; Basinger, 2001; Blum, 1991; Evelyn, 1998, 2000; Gravois, 2007; Heller, 1991; Hernandez, 2000; MacNeil, 1999; March & Weiner, 2003; McCormack, 2005; Piland & Wolf, 2003; Pluviose, 2006; Stephens, 1999; Wasley, 2006), and the pressure to prepare students who can compete in a global marketplace (Blakely & Bradshaw, 2002; Friedman, 2005; Levin, 2001; Mendoza et al., 2009; Ryland, n.d.; Vaughan, 1989c).

In fact, other authors have noted that the ambiguity related to the Presidential position as serving in this role has become less attractive as Presidents spend more time focused on politics (Floyd et al., 2010; Holden, 1984; Karlin, 1986; March & Weiner, 2003) and unprecedented economic and financial issues (Floyd et al., 2010; Holden, 1984; Maslin-Ostrowski et al., 2011). The study, “Presidents Make A Difference,” was sponsored by the Association of Governing Board of Universities and Colleges. The study researchers interviewed close to 900 people who included primarily current and former Presidents and spouses. The study reported generally the happiest with their jobs were the Presidents of 4-year (as opposed to 2 year) institutions; private ones, religiously oriented ones,
and ones that were academically elite. (Association of Governing Board of Universities and Colleges, 1984, p. 12)

In addition, search boards are reporting discouraging numbers of refusals of Presidencies by competent people who are electing to use their skills in private industry. In the report, the commission reported that the trend can be reversed by implementing organizational and procedural changes designed to “make the job more attractive and effective” (Holden, 1984, p. 421). The report further recommended that Presidents should serve as members of the trustee board and should serve as chief academic officer in fact as well as name. Finally, the report recommended the President should not have primary responsibility for functions outside his or her expertise, such as negotiating with the faculty union. Further, the report highlighted that the “treatment of Presidents has gotten increasingly uncivilized” (Holden, 1984, p. 421). Additional authors cited the concern about the increasing lack of civility (Jones & Johnson, 2008b; March & Weiner, 2003). It is recommended that the colleges and universities seeking to fill the Presidential position should do everything that they can to demonstrate that they can treat their leaders humanely and respectfully (Association of Governing Board of Universities and Colleges, 1984; Boggs, 2011b).

March and Weiner (2003) discussed in an article about leadership blues that Presidents need to be ready for difficulties posed by the irreverence and indifference of students, the resistance of faculty members who prize their individual and collective autonomy, and the challenges of board members trying to establish their own authority. (p. 8)

Further, March and Weiner described four issues with suggested recommendations as expressed through the Presidents’ experiences.

First, the issues that the Presidents confronted were met with great resistance from the faculty, staff, and trustees even though these issues were not typically about educational concerns. Instead, the most common feature of the conflicts revealed by the Presidents appeared to “be jostling for primacy among small groups or individuals or the bumping of one set of career expectations against that of others” (March & Weiner, 2003, p. 8).
Second, the levels of anger and emotion involved in the confrontations have expanded out of proportion to the more substantive issues at the college. The criticisms could be explicitly stated or implicitly carried out in rumors, whispered comments, and innuendos. Nevertheless, Presidents are in positions of formal authority and the opposition, who may fear the power of leaders, will most likely be using “hit-and-run guerrilla raids, using gossip and scorn as weapons” (March & Weiner, 2003, p. 8), than they are to actually engage in explicit public confrontations. As a result, the leaders are usually less well equipped than their opponents and often feel a “sense of ambush—bitterness; personal hatred; tactics of slash and burn; and in the parlance of the current era—the politics of personal destruction” (March & Weiner, 2003, p. 8).

Third, there are exceedingly low levels of trust among and between the participants involved in the conflicts. Paranoia is commonplace and the Presidents experiencing the conflict feel exposed and begin to question whom they can rely upon within their own executive teams or among the connections built throughout the campus. The Presidents feel a sense of loneliness and vulnerability and restate the need for the importance of connections outside of the institution including family and friends.

Fourth, the struggles that occur tend to repeat themselves which are similar to a blood feud, where the original insult, perhaps unintended, is lost from the initial discussion and all that seems to matter is the next maneuver in a never-ending campaign to gain advantage and outwit the other side or the other person. The lines of attack and the rhetoric of the opposition can often be traced to old enmities and skirmishes that were assumed to be long forgotten. (March & Weiner, 2003, p. 9)

Thus, the President is confronted by grudges from the past that obscure the current issues.

Kubala (1999) conducted a research study with 82 CEOs where 52 responses were received, yielding a return rate of 63.4%. The study’s purpose was to gain an increased understanding of learning-focused transformation in community colleges and to “provide insights into several facets associated with this very critical position in
higher education—the community college presidency” (1999, p. 184). The study included many different variables about the pathway to the presidency, motivation to serve, the search process, first impressions, governance, and transformation, which speaks to the complexity of this position. Of particular interest to this dissertation was the “first impressions” section of the study. Kubala asked the Presidents about their first impressions upon assuming the position. The results were grouped into “two general categories: “pleasant surprises and disappointments” (1999, p. 187). The responses from the group of pleasant surprises included “no tenure for faculty, everything was pleasant, the faculty and staff were described as talented, dedicated, supportive, friendly, and ready for change” (1999, p. 187). Meanwhile, the number of disappointments cited by Presidents outnumbered the pleasant surprises with responses ranging from insufficient funding, outdated technology, lack of financial information, increased debt volume, reluctance to change, and board related issues including board ethics, micromanagement of day-to-day matters, and inexperienced board members (Kubala, 1999). Complexity, ambiguity, paradoxes, and the increasing lack of civility are significant contributors to the increasing quantity and quality of conflict sources being managed by community college Presidents. The next section will explore conflict.

Conflict

Since conflict and its management can be difficult to describe and is a highly personal and individual experience (Guill, 1990; Holton, 1995b; Pritchard, 1985), some time is taken in this section to explore various meanings that exist in the literature. First, the meaning of conflict is explored. Then conflict sources are discussed and finally conflict management strategies, also known as conflict management styles, are explored.

Conflict meaning. “If you wish to converse with me, first define your terms” (Voltaire, n.d.). The previously mentioned quotation begins this section as conflict can be difficult to define due to the highly personal and subjective nature. (“Conflict,”
dates the term conflict to 1375–1425 and is late Middle English. The Latin derivative is *conflictus*, a striking together (“Conflict,” 2011).

The meaning of conflict has been addressed from different perspectives, contexts, situations, and eras. For example, Rapoport (1970) indicated students of conflict and those concerned with conflict resolution look to diverse sources for information or inspiration: to ethology for the light it may shed on the biological underpinnings of aggression, to psychology for the roots of conflict in personality and for its motivational aspects, to sociology for the institutional settings, and to history for evidence of evolutionary trends. (p. 1)

Deutsch (1973) approached the meaning of conflict as control over resources, or different preferences on nuances, values, and beliefs. The meanings discovered in the literature review will help with the framework for responding to the answers indicated in the first research question regarding the meaning of conflict and managing the conflict experience. Table 1 may provide a useful framework for conflict meaning discovered in the literature. As demonstrated in the varied sets of meanings, there was broad basis for meaning in the term conflict, which can be confusing and difficult to understand (Guill, 1990).

Conflict as a term has particular meanings that are imposed by those who are involved in the experience with the conflict (Runde & Flanagan, 2007). One person’s definition and experience with conflict can be substantially different from another person’s definition and experience. The difficulty with obtaining meaning for the term is closely linked to one’s own personal perception of the word (Guill, 1990). The lack of one clear definition provides an opportunity for confusion, misunderstanding, and mistrust.

As I spoke with the community college Presidents, I conveyed that it is their lived experience of giving meaning to conflict and its successful management that guided the study. The term “conflict” elicited varying competing thoughts and perceptions, and the current review of the literature promotes an enhanced balanced view of the meaning of conflict. Interpretive research emphasizes acknowledgement and acceptance for multiple realities and multiple truths (Bredo & Feinberg, 1982c).
Table 1

*Conflict Meaning*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflict meaning</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Latin derivative is <em>conflictus</em>, a striking together</td>
<td>“Conflict,” 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict is a “struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power, and resources in which the aim of the opponents are to neutralize . . . or eliminate their rivals” (p. 8).</td>
<td>Coser, 1956</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control over resources, preferences on nuances, values, beliefs, or the nature of the relationship between the parties.</td>
<td>Deutsch, 1973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A process of cooperative confrontation.</td>
<td>Thomas &amp; Kilmann, 1974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any kind of opposition or antagonistic interaction between two or more parties.</td>
<td>Robbins, 1978</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An “expressed struggle between two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce rewards, and interference from the other party in achieving their goals” (p. 23).</td>
<td>Hocker &amp; Wilmot, 1985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A process in which one party perceives that its interests are being opposed or negatively affected by another party.</td>
<td>Rahim et al., 1991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frustrations and debates based on misunderstandings, mistrust, disrespect, and even arrogance.</td>
<td>Tjosvold &amp; Tjosvold, 1995</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is the reason that I chose not to select a definition, but instead keep the conversation open and evolving so that the Presidents may make known their own reality and truth for the meaning of the term conflict. The next section will focus on the sources of conflict that can be experienced by the community college Presidents.

**Conflict sources.** There are a variety of conflict sources that can be experienced by community college Presidents. The sources can range from (a) mission complexity, (b) changing role of the Presidents in response to internal and external pressures (Beehler, 1993; Bornstein, 2003; Malm, 2008; Rushing, 1976), (c)
reductions in funding (Beehler, 1993; Eddy, 2010; Evelyn, 2001), (d) an underprepared and increasingly diverse student body (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Eaton, 1989; Evelyn, 2001), (e) business and industry (Vaughan, 1989c), (f) institutionally related foundations (Evelyn, 1999), (g) employee unions (Hernandez, 2000; MacNeil, 1999), and the board of trustees (Fisher, 1991; O’Banion, 2009a; Vaughan, 1986, 2008).

Since the emphasis of this dissertation focused on community college Presidents who successfully managed conflicts with the board of trustees or the faculty or staff union, I spend additional time in this writing to provide a little more detail regarding these two sources of conflicts that can be experienced by community college Presidents.

**Governance and union descriptions.** Governance comprises structures, procedures, standards, and time limits arranged to make decisions and policy in an orderly and effective manner. Good governance necessitates the delegation of authority to each party to make decisions appropriate to its responsibility and to accept the consequences of those decisions. Governing boards of colleges and universities, whether public or private, have power through charters and enabling legislation (Schmidt, 2009). The legal power that is entrusted in these agencies involves the nearly unrestricted ability to hire and fire, to set salaries, determine priorities, establish new educational ventures, and abolish old ones. Increasingly, the pressure of unions and collective bargaining in two-year colleges is affecting the governance and decision making of the institution (Cohen, 1998; Garfield, 2008; Hernandez, 2000; MacNeil, 1999).

The expanded view of collective bargaining brought a major shift in the way community college managerial and administrative roles interacted and created an era of political accommodation among traditionally contending forces, including the faculty, staff, college President and other administrators (Cohen, 1998). The changes were difficult for many administrators whose experiences had not prepared them for this different and new role. The realities of management within the boundaries of a
negotiated contract confronted them where they had to either learn to live with the restrictions or leave the higher education system. In many cases, the negotiated contracts seemed to move nearly all decisions to the level of the negotiators, including the board and the faculty unit representatives.

Finally, the collective bargaining process can be both positive and negative which is contingent upon the group of players, situations, and circumstances. For example, increasing votes of no confidence, also called “the nuclear option” are used by faculty unions to disagree with the President (Blum, 1990; Fogg, 2005; Mangan, 1995; Maslin-Ostrowski et al., 2011). Few American campuses have experienced a vote of no confidence in the President, provost, or board, and will probably never have the experience. Yet, the stakes are high when a campus erupts due to a vote of no confidence. Where a vote of no confidence occurs, everyone invariably wishes it had not (Tierney, 2007). Further, Tierney indicates that it is worth understanding how to avoid these high impact confrontations. In addition, the author indicates that a vote of no confidence may cause irreparable damage to the President’s ability to act and conduct business on behalf of the institution. As a result, the President needs to prepare an exit strategy and “the campus lurches forward with a Presidential search” (Tierney, 2007, p. 1).

**Board of trustees’ description.** The community college is a unique American social invention (Boggs, 2011a; Cohen, 1984; Cohen & Brawer, 2003) which makes the lay board a unique American social invention which describes democracy in action (Tierney, 2007). Community colleges symbolize access, affordability, and opportunity (Boggs, 2011a), while the lay board symbolizes citizen responsibility for supervision and representation of the American community college (Vaughan & Weisman, 1997). They are symbiotic concepts in which the lay board is charged with assuring that the community college carries out its mission and goals. Each depends on the other for its success (Richardson, 1978; Tierney, 2007). In the United States, community colleges are governed by boards of trustees who are either elected or appointed. Community college trustees are extraordinary civil servants working for the common good. It is
the responsibility of the board of trustees to decide whom they wish to hire or fire as
the college President (Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges,
1984; Boggs, 2011b; Illinois Community College Trustees Association, 1989;
board of trustees and the President agree that the President needs to remain at the
institution in spite of a vote of no confidence, and then there may be a need for an
external consultant. Tierney (2007) stated

Nor is it appropriate for trustees to get directly involved. The board is
likely to be the ultimate arbiter, so it should not assume an investigative
role as well. Rather, many campuses have a handful of respected
individuals, usually senior faculty members, who are well known for
their integrity. Such individuals are capable of assessing the situation,
calming the waters, and presenting judicious alternatives about how to
proceed—but only if they have not played a role in a no-confidence vote.
Just as a board should not investigate a problem while also serving as
arbiter, neither should a faculty member take on such a role if he or she
already has come down on the side of no confidence in the President.
(p. 49)

Vaughan (1986), Chait (2005), and Trombley (2007) suggested regular
conversations with the board to keep them well informed and educated about the
college’s mission and the policy-making role of the board as keys to preventing
possible conflict with this group. When members of the board of trustees change, then
the dynamics of the situation can create conflict and may be viewed as a threat to the
organizational culture. Vaughan (1986) quoted one participating President in the
study:

even though the trustees were aware that the role of the board was to
make policy and that the Presidents was to administer the college.
Moreover, all Presidents and trustees realized that it was the boards
who hired and fired Presidents . . . . This knowledge did not prevent an
occasional showdown between the board and the Presidents. (pp. 80-
81)

Despite occasional showdowns between the board and the President, there must be a
synergistic relationship which allows the board of trustees and the college President to
work together in their respective roles for effective and shared governance so that
ultimately the institution benefits (Brown, 2006; Kenney, 1997; O’Banion, 2009a; Pappas & Ritter, 1983; Trombley, 2007). The Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (1984) called for a brand of leadership linking the two “in an environment of support, candor, and accountability” (p. vii). Nevertheless, the ultimate decision for a President who chooses to leave an institution is decided between the President and the board of trustees based on what is ultimately in the best interest of the institution. The prior section presented a description for the community college board of trustees and the necessary synergistic relationship with the community college President. The next section will describe the strategies or styles used to assist people when managing conflict.

**Conflict management strategies.** People tend to manage conflict in different, yet habitual ways and have a tendency to regress into routine styles of leadership, communication, and conflict management. People do this because habits and repetition are comfortable and familiar (Jourdain, 2004). A conflict management strategy or style is defined as the self-reported tendency toward particular behavioral modes in conflict situations (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974). The conflict management strategies or styles that “people bring to work are important components in the workplace” (Friedman, Tidd, Currall, & Tsai, 2000, p. 33).

Lipsky, Seeber, and Fincher (2003) demonstrated a relationship between the way leaders view conflict and the strategies the organization use to address it. When leaders have a zero-sum perspective on conflict, their organizations are more likely to adopt an adversarial approach to its resolution. If leaders see conflict as an opportunity for both sides to gain, then their organizations are more likely to adopt approaches that favor collaborative effort at resolving conflict. Most leaders incorporate some of each perspective and adjust their approaches based on the specific conflict and situation which becomes their conflict strategy or style.

Thomas and Kilmann (1974) introduced the concept of conflict management style with the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI). The TKI measures an individual’s behavior in conflict situations where the concerns of two people appear
to be incompatible. During conflict situations, an individual behavior can be measured along two basic dimensions: (1) **assertiveness**, the extent to which the individual attempts to satisfy his or her own concerns, and (2) **cooperativeness**, the extent to which the individual attempts to satisfy the other person’s concerns. Figure 3 presents a graphical illustration for the five modes of managing conflict by using the Thomas-Kilmann conflict mode instrument.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cooperativeness (Desire to satisfy other concerns)</th>
<th>From Low to High</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assertiveness</td>
<td>Accommodation</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Desire to satisfy own concerns)</td>
<td>Compromise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From Low to High</td>
<td>Avoidance</td>
<td>Competition</td>
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</table>

**Figure 3.** Conflict management mode.

The first style focuses on yielding to, or accommodating, the other person and involves low assertiveness and high cooperativeness. The goal of the accommodating conflict style is to yield to another person. The style is best used when issues are more important to others than to oneself. A good example is when the President chooses to encourage other administrators to finalize a decision like committee service. Individuals who witness actions of this nature from the President may view the President as being supportive. It is important to note that there is no single best conflict management style as each style has strengths and limitations depending on the situation (Rahim, 2002; Rosenthal & Hautaluoma, 1988; Thomas & Kilmann, 1974). The second style focuses on collaborating where the goal is to find a win-win solution. The collaborative conflict management style involves high assertiveness and high cooperativeness. The best use of the collaborative style is when the objective is to learn and synthesize diverse perspectives from different people. The collaborative
style encourages creativity in problem solving and both sides win. The risk of this style is that all people involved in the collaborative effort could become alienated. An example for a community college President is when a decision is needed to present a program in honor of an emeritus faculty member. The third style emphasizes a middle ground approach, or compromising, where there is moderate assertiveness and moderate cooperativeness. The compromising conflict style allows for temporary settlements for complex issues as in the case of settling a difficult contract for a temporary time period. This style allows parties involved in the conflict to have a win, but may not necessarily encourage creativity, and only delays conflicts as neither side may be totally satisfied. The fourth style indicates a need for avoiding or delaying the conflict and reveals low assertiveness and low cooperativeness. The goal is to delay the conflict, and the style can be beneficial when information gathering is more important than an immediate decision or when others may be able to resolve the conflict more effectively. An example is when the President or the Board of Trustees decides to hire a consultant to assist with managing the conflict. The fifth style focuses competition; the goal is to win by using high assertiveness and low cooperativeness. A competitive mode is best used when quick, decisive action is critical. An example is when the President needs to make decisions during campus emergencies. Another example is when the President needs to implement important issues for the organizational health of the institution. However, decisions based made from a conflict management style of competing can be unpopular and may alienate or discourage others from working with the President.

As with many other measures it is helpful not only to discover one’s own style but to examine its pros and cons, which often relate to a particular situation. While people advocate the benefits of a collaborative style, it might not be appropriate in situations with an untrustworthy opponent. Likewise, an avoiding style tends not to help resolve conflicts, but sometimes it may be the best approach, at least temporarily, when safety is an issue. No one style is always good or always bad. Each must be viewed in context and in situation (Runde & Flanagan, 2008).
Four dissertations were discovered through the search for prior literature that focused on the conflict management styles of administrators in community colleges. Adams (2006) studied the conflict management preference for cabinet level community college administrators in North Carolina and determined that there was no statistically significant difference between conflict management styles and 11 variables, including gender, tenure, and age. Espinosa (1987) focused on studying the conflict management styles based on ethnic composition by focusing on the ways Latinos and Anglos displayed their individually preferred conflict management style. Pritchard (1985) investigated the relationship between conflict management styles for both men and women in educational administration and assessed the effects of minority status of women in management of their conflict management styles. She used the Thomas-Kilmann conflict mode instrument for 114 female and 114 male community college administrators and found no significant difference in how men and women managed conflict. She also did not find a significant difference based on gender regarding the number of supervisory years regarding conflict management styles.

Alternatively, Guill (1990) used the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument and found that more experienced administrators compromised less and were more competing and assertive than less experienced administrators. Guill (1990) conducted her study to identify the conflict management preferences of Presidents based on gender, college locale, age of President, years of managerial experience, and number of students enrolled at the institutions. Her conclusions were that the conflict management styles of higher education administrators were more affected by their years of administrative experience than by any other variable. In all of the research dissertations, a quantitative approach was used. The instruments used have limitations due to the inability to differentiate between self reported conflict management styles and actual behavior. The focus of this dissertation is to study the experience of successful conflict management by hearing the direct voices of the Presidents themselves.
Pettit and Ayers (2002) studied 180 full-time community college employees and analyzed how various job groups used different styles of conflict communication behaviors and how those behaviors related to the organizational climate. Pettit and Ayers also indicated community college Presidents and their administrative teams, as leaders of institutions of higher education, have responsibilities for shaping the climate of their organizations in ways that promote healthy tensions. (2002, p. 105)

In order for conflict to be used as an avenue for constructive change, creativity, and action, then leaders must understand the nature and influence of organizational climate and conflict communication. Pettit and Ayers (2002) study included a variety of community college employees and focused on quantifying conflict management styles by job groups, while the research study focused exclusively on understanding and enhancing conflict competence by community college Presidents. The previous section described conflict management strategies or styles. The next section will describe competence.

**Competence**

This section will describe the meaning of competence. Conflict competent leaders understand that conflict can be overt and demonstrated through raised voices, anger, and high levels of frustration or most often conflict can be covert and manifests itself through cliques, side conversations, and apathy. Often, conflict is a combination of overt and covert actions and behaviors. Since conflict presents itself in a variety of shapes and forms, then gaining an insight into the experience of successfully managing conflict by leaders can be a competence worth learning. Some time is taken in this section to address the meaning of competence, conflict competence manifestation, and the conflict competence development.

**Competence meaning.** “Competence” is defined as “the quality of being competent; adequacy; possession of required skill, knowledge, qualification, or capacity, sufficiency; a sufficient quantity, and an income sufficient to furnish the necessities and modest comforts of life” (“Competence,” 2011). The current
The concept of competencies dates back to the work of psychologist David McClelland. McClelland (1973) was concerned about the pervasive use of intelligence and aptitude tests which he believed failed to provide practical outcomes. McClelland proposed that knowledge, skills, ability, traits, and motives could be measured and the measurement of these traits could be a better approach to measuring aptitude as it was outcome based. As a result, McClelland’s competencies have been used since the 1970s and have increasingly gained momentum and popularity through the early 1990s in response to the significantly increased pace of change that was experienced by many organizations.

A competence is an underlying characteristic of an individual that is causally related to criterion-referenced effective and/or superior performance in a job or situation. (Spencer & Spencer, 1993, p. 9)

In other words, a previously determined set of persona like motives, traits, self-concepts, knowledge, skills, or abilities can be assessed with varying levels and can be compared to the actual performance of an employee in a job or situation. The researchers further detailed the meaning for competence by describing each term as follows:

- Underlying characteristic – the competence is a deep and enduring part of a person’s personality and can predict behavior in a wide variety of situations and job tasks.
- Causally related – the competence is associated with a behavior that can be predicted.
- Criterion referenced – a standard of measure exists that is the decisive factor which could predict who can demonstrate a competency.

Further, Spencer and Spencer (1993) described five types of competence characteristics. Each of the characteristics is described with an example that relates to this dissertation study. Motives is the first type of competence characteristic that focuses on incentives as to why people perform specific actions or think certain thoughts. An example as it relates to this dissertation is when a President as the leader
of the institution believes that all people should have fair and equal treatment which may be based in the leaders belief that all people should be treated fairly and equitably. *Trait* is the second type of competence characteristic which is a unique and identifiable behavior that presents itself through regular and consistent responses to situations or information. For example, during a conflict, a President routinely shows emotional self-control in the face of great adversity and does not become angry. *Self-concept* is the third type which is focused on a person’s own self–image. For example, the President can possess the belief that he or she will be successful in practically every situation, in spite of conflict. *Knowledge* is the fourth characteristic which means the accumulated base of content specific information that a person builds. In the case of this dissertation, a specific example includes the knowledge for managing collective bargaining conflicts or knowledge of negotiations. Finally, the fifth type is *skill* or the ability to perform a certain physical or mental task. This includes, for example, the ability to operate a personal vehicle without causing harm to others. There are also mental or cognitive skills that include analytic thinking (processing knowledge and data, determining cause and effect, organizing data and plans) and conceptual thinking (recognizing patterns in complex data). This includes, for example, recognizing when the lead negotiator for the faculty has a pattern of making presentations by using innuendos to attack the President.

Boyatzis (1982) defined a competence as an underlying characteristic of a person that may be a motive, trait, skill, aspect of one’s self image, social role, or a body of knowledge. Brown (2006) described a competence as “something an individual must demonstrate to be effective in a job, role, function, task, or duty” (p. 20). As an application to healthcare leadership, Garman and Johnson (2006) defined competencies as “characteristics of employees with behavioral implications that are thought to be associated with successful performance on their job” (p. 14). The authors also gave meaning to core competencies as those “associated with the success of an organization” (p. 14). Finally, Voorhees (2001) relied on the U. S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2001) definition of a
“combination of skills, abilities, and knowledge needed to perform a specific task” (p. 1). Table 2 provides a summary of the meanings associated with competence.

Table 2

*Meaning of Competence*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meaning of Competence</th>
<th>Source</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Underlying characteristic of an individual that is causally related to criterion-referenced effective and/or superior performance in a job or situation” (p. 9).</td>
<td>Spencer &amp; Spencer, 1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underlying characteristic of a person that may be a motive, trait, skill, aspect of one’s self image, social role, or a body of knowledge.</td>
<td>Boyatzis, 1982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Something an individual must demonstrate to be effective in a job, role, function, task, or duty” (p. 20). As an application to healthcare leadership.</td>
<td>Brown, 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Characteristics of employees with behavioral implications that are thought to be associated with successful performance on their job” (p. 14).</td>
<td>Garman &amp; Johnson, 2006</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additionally, competency modeling is a process of describing human performance and attributes that people need to perform a task effectively. This process generates an organized set of competencies and performance indicators (Russ-Eft, Bober, de la Teja, Foxon, & Koszalka, 2008). Critical to this approach is the idea that this process allows for the people closest to the competency are involved with developing the related criteria. For example, Russ-Eft (1995) recommended that the identification of a competency should begin by gathering information from individuals nearest to the observation of that competency. These are usually the individuals who perform the particular job. In this case, this research project would be gathering the
information from community college Presidents who have had the experience of successful conflict management.

The previous section provided a variety of meanings for competencies’ as reviewed from the literature. This section is intended to provide a context for the discussions as the Presidents give meaning to the term competence and the ways in which those meanings of competence were demonstrated in their success of conflict management. The themes derived from the stories of the community college Presidents may be informative to enhancing the competence model of the community college President as they share their experience with successfully managing conflict with the board of trustees or the faculty. The next section will review conflict competence manifestation.

Conflict competence manifestation. Leaders who have vision regarding conflict know that conflict can be the catalyst to breakthrough ideas and novel approaches to organizational issues. Leaders who can demonstrate conflict competence inspire trust and optimism for their followers. Those who show enthusiasm for different ideas provide a model of perspective taking that is critical for handling conflicts constructively (Elsner & Boggs, 2006; Runde & Flanagan, 2007).

Through self awareness and self knowledge leaders can demonstrate calmness. Runde and Flanagan (2007) offered several suggestions to remain calm by (a) making a list of trigger points and being very self aware of the trigger points so that alternative responses can be created that reveal a calm appearance; (b) counting to ten so that there is time for the body to adjust the trigger, and allow time for an alternative response in a calm manner; and (c) focusing on just the facts to allow for separation of the person and the issues or concerns involved. Further, Runde and Flanagan encourage the demonstration of civility, fairness, and safety by the leader. Effective leaders share their ability for coaching and developing others. The strongest impact that leaders can have on others is to model effective behavior. Teaching and coaching effective responses serve as great examples for direct and indirect mentorship.
When a leader handles a challenging conflict situation effectively, the leader inspires and encourages the observer to use similar behaviors and tactics (Runde & Flanagan, 2007). The most effective conflict competent leaders are overt in their actions when it comes to teaching and coaching others. The most effective leaders who manage conflict effectively are adept at providing feedback, asking questions, emphasizing, developing ideas, seeking explanations, checking for understanding, summarizing, demonstrating behaviors, intervening when necessary, and offering advice (Shechtman, 2008; Tjosvold & Tjosvold, 1995). Leaders who proactively separate people from the problem and focus instead on the issue become highly engaged in the substance of the conflict rather than the person (Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 1991; Runde & Flanagan, 2008). Leaders who are committed to resolving the conflict and confident that the situation can be resolved and that it can provide a basis for continued dialogue, options, and creativity are viewed positively as well (Pierce & Pedersen, 1997; Tjosvold, 1988; Tjosvold & Tjosvold, 1995).

Nonetheless, there are occasions when leaders who demonstrate exceptional conflict competence cannot resolve or manage the conflict so that the institution may continue its service to students and the community. In those cases, outside consultants may be needed to assist the President and the board of trustees because the consultant can be viewed as a neutral party (Tierney, 2007). The consultant must genuinely be committed to an investigative process that is beyond reproach. Recognizing a problem and asking for external help does not mean that the board should disengage or turn over decision making to another body. Ultimately, the board must make a decision based on solid information. An effective board will stay on top of the situation and develop a clear set of procedures about how to proceed. The consultant will need to ensure that a report is developed in a short amount of time and that the document will be transparent with recommended administrative actions. Ultimately, the President and
the trustees will need to focus on institutional development and not Presidential survival (Birnbaum, 1992, 1993).

Confidence will erode even further if the process is ambiguous or if the campus community is uncertain about what steps are to be taken. If the recommendation is for a new beginning, then the report must specify the steps that will allow healing to take place and a new beginning to unfold. Trust, once it has been broken, cannot be repaired simply by good intentions. Rather, the President, the board, and the faculty need to come together and agree on specific actions they will take to rebuild a lasting and mutual trust (Shaw, 2005). A conflict competent leader uses a cautious combination of the above mentioned techniques to achieve optimal conflict competence manifestation and to achieve the best results for the institution. In addition to these characteristics related to conflict competence manifestation, research question three seeks to understand how community college Presidents develops conflict competence. This is the focus of the next section.

Conflict competence development. Runde and Flanagan (2007) stated, leaders are those whose roles in organizations include accountability for influencing others . . . or those who are recognized for developing priority for the organization . . . in short, leaders are best identified by those who look to them for leadership. (p. 3)

Cottringer (2005) advocated that “leaders adopt a philosophy on conflict” (p. 3) that will drive organizational and individual success. Competence begins with the ability for continuing to learn throughout ones’ leadership career. The leaders learn to use the accumulation of their experience to become increasingly aware of their best strengths and use them always. The leaders also learn to improve upon their limitations.

Runde and Flanagan (2007) indicated leaders demonstrate conflict competence by (a) staying calm; (b) encouraging civility, fairness, and safety; (c) teaching and coaching; (d) providing learning opportunities; and (e) embracing constructive conflict. Moreover, conflict competent leaders are adept at modeling and encouraging positive responses to conflict. Further, Runde and Flanagan (2007) highly recommended that leaders fundamentally and philosophically embrace conflict as an
opportunity to (a) persevere through the tough, emotional challenges associated with
difficult conflicts; (b) get to the root of the conflict so as to come to a resolution; (c)
empower the conflict partners to have discussions about the conflict that are safe, fair,
civil; and (d) find resolutions that meet or exceed the expectations of those involve in
the conflict.

Blake and Mouton (1961) cited eight actions that assist in the development of
competencies for successful conflict management. The actions are (a) define the
problem, (b) review the problem, (c) develop the range of alternatives, (d) debate the
alternatives, (e) reach a solution, (f) explain and evaluate the solution, (g) weigh
alternative solutions, and (h) select the appropriate solution. The most effective
practices to become competent are centered on a variety of experiences when paired
with the ability to learn. People who demonstrated effective conflict management
competence were able to handle difficult people and tense situations with diplomacy
and tact, could spot potential conflict, brought disagreements into the open, helped
deescalate, encouraged debate and open discussion, and orchestrated win-win
solutions.

Deetz and Stevenson (1986) indicated that the leader must first try to
understand the type of conflict that is present. Second, the leader must be aware of the
importance of the conflict so that appropriate strategies are employed for managing
the conflict. Third, the leader must acknowledge the complexity of the conflict.
Finally, the leader must be able to assess the available energy and resources for
managing the conflict. A leader needs to understand that the objective of conflict
management is not necessarily that of conflict resolution (Holton, 1995a; Kormanski,
1982). Instead, the aim for the leader is to ensure that the conflict remains on the
creative and useful end of the spectrum as opposed to the negative or dysfunctional
end.

Shaw (2005) suggested six actions to develop conflict competence through a
partnership with the President, board of trustees and the faculty by engaging in several
practices. These were that (a) the incoming President should spend considerable time
researching and vetting the environment he or she will be entering so that there can be greater opportunity to ensure a good fit; (b) the trustee board should work with the new President to engage an external mentor who can act as a sounding board and adviser; (c) the President must surround herself/himself with loyal people who are willing and able to be honest regarding the state of affairs at the institution; (d) the President must be approachable and seek honest answers to the question, How am I doing? (e) the board needs to conduct “substantive and stylistic” evaluations at least annually with a more formal process every five years (all evaluations need to be confidential, formal and enlist participation from different constituencies); and finally (f) the faculty leadership must accept responsibility for keeping themselves informed and explaining key issues to colleagues. In addition, the President needs to schedule regular visits with the faculty leadership so that “interests and concerns can be discussed in a private, constructive way” (p. B13).

Conflict competent leaders also demonstrate competence in negotiation techniques (Eddy, 2010; Fitzpatrick & Winke, 1979; Katz & Lawyer, 1993; Maier & Sashkin, 1971; Rashid, n.d.; Shaw, 2005). In the book, Getting to Yes, the authors suggested five steps for leaders seeking to demonstrate conflict competence which can lead to mutually acceptable agreements. The steps included (a) don’t bargain over positions; (b) separate the people from the problem; (c) focus on interests, not positions; (d) invent options for mutual gain; and (e) insist on using objective criteria (Fisher et al., 1991).

Deutsch and Coleman (2000) highlight the need for leaders to demonstrate (a) the ability to be critical of ideas, not people; (b) the ability to separate personal worth issues from criticism of one’s ideas; (c) an uncompromising focus on better outcomes, not winning; (d) the ability to listen to others ideas; and (e) the effort to understand all sides of issues. Conflict competent leaders actively practice these skills and actively encourage others to act the same.

Attendance at leadership and training programs provides the opportunity for additional learning about the operations of the institution, including budgeting, public
information, and governance as well as the opportunity to connect with other Presidents (American Association of Community Colleges, 2005; Brown et al., 2002; McFarlin & Ebbers, 1998).

**Summary of Review of Literature**

The review of literature was divided according to the three primary sections as indicated within the three research questions. The section began with describing the context for this study beginning with the higher education context which presented a brief history for the emergence and structure for the American higher education system. What was most been learned through this section is that the early colonists settled America without a system for managing higher education and therefore reinvented governmental and education forms as they progressed. Lucas (1994) indicated that the early purpose for education was to prepare students to become clergymen and public servants. Further, Cohen and Brawer (2003) indicated that society used education, defined with more years of schooling, to solve societal problems. Cohen (1998), Cohen and Brawer (2003), and Lucas (1994) described the compromise between solving the dilemma of educating more students from the secondary high schools for university level professional preparative programs through the birth or emergence of community colleges.

The community college context was described which presented a brief history for the emergence and structure for community colleges in America. Specifically, what was learned was the concept that the mission of community colleges has continuously evolved to accommodate the diverse and sometimes conflicting needs of society. For example, Boggs (2011a), Brint and Karabel (1989), Dougherty (2001) and Lucas (1994) described community colleges as the compromised solutions for educating the masses through preparatory courses, specialized training, and university level professional programs. Throughout the years, multiple influences from local, state, and federal government expanded the community college mission to include vocational training (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Lucas, 1994); the need for a skilled workforce (Cohen, 1998; Dougherty, 2001; Lucas, 1994); the need to train the large
influx of immigrants to become American citizens (Cohen, 1998; Cohen & Brawer, 2003); the need to address local community needs (Cohen & Brawer, 2003) and finally the need to address global and economic forces (Levin, 2000, 2001). The expanding mission as influenced by local, state, federal, and now international needs provide the historical hindsight to see the ambiguous and paradoxical role of community colleges and simultaneously provides information regarding the critical role of the community college President who must manage the perpetual and conflicting demands for the community colleges evolution to meet increasing demands with decreasing resources.

The greatest learning from the Presidential context section is that Presidents must manage an exorbitant number of expectations, needs, and requirements that impact how the Presidents lead the institution and that there are many internal and external stakeholders attempting to influence how the President manages the institution (Elsner, 1969; Floyd et al., 2010; Maslin-Ostrowski et al., 2011; Perrakis et al., 2011). Moreover, there are greater demands placed on the President than there were in the past, including fundraising (Wenrich & Reid, 2003), changing leadership images (Myran et al., 2003), the need to better define the role of President (Vaughan, 1989c) and finally, the increasing lack of civility (Elsner & Boggs, 2006; Holden, 1984). March and Weiner (2003) described four issues and related suggestions for the Presidents experience in managing the myriad of issues. Finally, Kubala (1999) conducted research with 82 Presidents to gain an increased understanding of learning—focused transformation in community colleges to better understand several variables related to the position.

The second section of the review of literature focused on conflict by describing the conflict meaning as the terms meaning can by highly personal and difficult to define (Guill, 1990; Holton, 1995b; Pritchard, 1985). It was discovered that because conflict can be so difficult to define and give meaning to, then the meaning has been addressed from many different perspectives, contexts, situations, and eras (Rapoport, 1970). Additionally, Deutsch (1973) approached the meaning of conflict as control
over resources or different preferences on nuances, values, and beliefs, while Coser (1956) considered conflict to be a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power, and resources. It was learned that conflict has particular meanings that are imposed by those who are involved in the conflict and that the meaning of the term can by functional as well as dysfunctional (Runde & Flanagan, 2007).

Next, the conflict section described conflict sources that Presidents manage in the community college context and presented additional detail for the conflict sources with the faculty union or the board of trustees since this is the focus of this dissertation. I learned in this section that conflict sources are many for community college Presidents ranging from (a) mission complexity (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Dougherty, 2001), (b) changing role of the Presidents in response to internal and external pressures (Beehler, 1993; Bornstein, 2003; Malm, 2008; Rushing, 1976), (c) reductions in funding (Beehler, 1993; Eddy, 2010; Evelyn, 2001), (d) an underprepared and increasingly diverse student body (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Eaton, 1989; Evelyn, 2001), (e) business and industry (Vaughan, 1989c), (f) institutionally related foundations (Evelyn, 1999), and (g) employee unions (Hernandez, 2000; MacNeil, 1999) and the board of trustees (Fisher, 1991; O’Banion, 2009a; Vaughan, 1986, 2008). Special attention was paid for conflict sources from employee unions and boards of trustees, since these are the focus of this dissertation. The conflict section concluded with descriptions of conflict management strategies, because I learned that people manage conflict in different, yet habitual ways and have a tendency to regress into routine styles of leadership, communication, and conflict (Jourdain, 2004). I also learned that how Presidents use strategies or styles to manage conflict at the institution has great impact on the institution and the way others at the institution tend to manage conflict (Elsner & Boggs, 2006; Friedman et al., 2000). Finally, this section revealed that a number of instruments have been used to quantify conflict styles (Rosenthal & Hautaluoma, 1988; Thomas & Kilmann, 1974). Runde and Flanagan (2008) indicated that it is helpful to discover one’s own style and to understand and pros and cons related to that style. Five dissertations were discovered in the literature search and
focused on quantifying styles of conflict management based on variable like gender, tenure, age, and years of experience. Some of the differences were that the number of years for higher education administrators affected the conflict management styles more than any of the other variables (Guill, 1990). Finally, for the conflict management style section of the literature review, Pettit and Ayers (2002) studied community college employees seeking to analyze how various job groups used different styles of conflict communication behaviors and how those behaviors related to organizational climate.

The review of literature concluded with describing the meaning of competence which ranged from adequacy and possession of a required skill, knowledge, qualification or capacity. McClelland (1973) was initially concerned about how the use of intelligence and aptitude tests failed to provide practical outcomes, so he proposed that competencies outcome relevant measures of knowledge, skills, abilities, traits and or motives should be adopted to better understand competences. Other authors presented the meaning of competence (Boyatzis, 1982; Spencer & Spencer, 1993). Next, the competence section described how conflict competence manifestation is demonstrated. We learned that leaders who have vision regarding conflict understand that conflict can be the catalyst to breakthrough ideas and new approaches to organizational issues. Through self-awareness and self-knowledge, leaders can demonstrate calmness. Runde and Flanagan (2007) offered several suggestions to assist leaders with how to remain calm. Leaders who view conflict as a continued basis for dialogue and seeing things differently are viewed positively by the constituents (Pierce & Pederson, 1997).

Finally, the competence section concludes with conflict competence development which was the focus of research question three. We learned that Russ-Eft et al. (2008) described a type of competency modeling which examines human performance and the related attributes needed to perform a task. Also, Russ-Eft (1995) recommended that the identification of a competency should begin by gathering information from individuals nearest to the observation of that competency. These are
usually the individuals who perform the particular job. In this case, this research project was gathering the information from community college Presidents who have had the experience of successful conflict management.

Cottringer (2005) stressed that leaders adopt a philosophy on conflict so that they understand their own thinking about conflict and can drive organizational and individual success. Blake and Mouton (1961) offered eight actions to assist in the development of competencies for successful conflict management, while Deetz and Stevenson (1986) offered four steps to help a leader understand conflict. Shaw (2005) suggested six actions to develop conflict competence through acknowledging and establishing a partnership among the President, board of trustees, and the faculty and offered several examples of engagement with each group. Competency development begins with the ability to acknowledge the need for continuous learning throughout ones career as a leader. Finally, we learned in this section about a myriad of opportunities exist to help educate Presidents about the position.

The sampling data collection was varied ranging from quantitative to qualitative approaches. For example, Pettit and Ayers (2002) studied 180 full-time community college employees and analyzed how various job groups used different styles of conflict communication behaviors and how those behaviors related to the organizational climate. In contrast, Association of Governing Board of Universities and Colleges (1984) commissioned researchers who interviewed close to 900 current and former Presidents and spouses.

Nevertheless, none of the studies or literature focused on understanding the conflicts with the board of trustees or the faculty union. The present study will examine such conflicts. In addition, this study will illuminate key themes that can be used as competencies to assist others seeking to develop conflict competencies when having this type of experience. The studies reviewed provide a solid rationale for a phenomenological study that will provide insight into the experience of successful conflict management by community college Presidents.
CHAPTER THREE: DESIGN OF STUDY

“Human science wishes to meet human beings—men, women, children—there where they are naturally engaged in their worlds” (van Manen, 1990, p. 16).

The purpose of this research study was to enhance understanding of successful conflict management by community college Presidents with the faculty union or the board of trustees in the community college context. The design of the study parameters were intended to support the purpose of this study. The philosophical approach was interpretive social science, the research method was phenomenology, and the primary research technique was interviews. This chapter provides greater details regarding the philosophical approach, research method, personal and professional disclosure, phenomenological method, data needed, study sites and study participants, data collection and data analysis procedures, strategies for soundness, and strategies for the protection of human subjects. The rationale for all design decisions is included.

Interpretive Social Science Philosophical Approach

This section will describe interpretive social science. It will discuss the historical underpinnings, purpose, key concepts, and underlying assumptions about the nature of reality and truth, and the strengths and limitations of interpretive social science.

Historical Underpinnings

The purpose of this section is to describe the historical underpinnings as they relate to the origins of interpretive social science. The historical origins of interpretive social science can be traced to early discussions in sociology and philosophy by German sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920) and German philosophers Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) and Martin Heidigger (1889-1976). Weber argued that social science should study meaningful social action, and he believed that humans must learn the reasons and motives that “shape a person’s internal feelings and guide decisions to act in particular ways” (Neuman, 2003, p. 75). Dilthey emphasized two different types of human sciences. Naturwissenschaft, which is based in Erklärung, is also called
abstract explanation. *Geisteswissenschaft* (science of the mind) is based on *Verstehen*, which is empathetic understanding (Dilthey, 1883/1989). Seventeenth-century Protestant theologians developed a method to gain meaning and understanding from the reading of biblical texts (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). This method of interpretation became known as hermeneutics. Hermeneutic philosophy provided the means of interpretation for interpretive social science. The work of German philosopher Heidigger (1889-1976) was designed to eliminate any remnants of positivism and scientific rationality (Schweizer, 1998). Heidigger believed that the main function of human science interpretation was to make explicit what was already part of our awareness.

Gadamer (1900-2002), a pupil of Heidigger, expanded and modified Heidegger’s version of hermeneutics into a general theory of interpretation. Gadamer believed that it was important for interpretation to make connections between varieties of traditions (Schweizer, 1998). In this context, Gadamer sought to “extend hermeneutics to cover any understanding of meaning in the perspective of text analysis” (Schweizer, 1998, p. 48). Gadamer emphasized that all of the major traditions, including the scientific/technocratic positivist, interpretive social science, and critical theory, had incorporated text that can be analyzed, and thus, the role of hermeneutics could be applied to all research traditions.

In this research study, the interpretive social science approach provides the opportunity for the text of the stories to be created and interpreted to gain a deeper understanding of conflict management by successful Presidents within the community college context. Interpretive social science is focused on sense making and exposing hidden meanings in the natural context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Gadamer, 1987; van Manen, 1990, 1995). The task of making sense and exposing implied meanings is accomplished through the use of hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is a theory of meaning that originated in the 19th century and emphasizes a detailed reading or examination of text. Text could be a conversation, written word, or pictures. It is the researcher’s
The role of hermeneutics is revealed by carefully interpreting text from the shared voices and experiences of community college Presidents. The purpose of interpretive social science connects well to the purpose of my research study, which is to describe how Presidents understand and describe the experience of conflict management in the community college context. The research questions for this study are:

- How do community college Presidents describe the experience of conflict management in the community college context?
- How does conflict management competence manifest itself in conflict situations?
- How do community college Presidents develop the competencies to manage conflict?

The first research question—How do community college Presidents describe the experience of conflict management in the community college context?—is focused on learning about the lived experience of Presidents who have managed conflict. In seeking prolonged discussions with the participants in their own institutional context, I, as the researcher, established a rapport, which encourages deep reflection and meaningful sharing of the experience. In using this technique of prolonged interviews in their natural settings, I was able to make sense of, or interpret, the phenomena in the meanings that the Presidents made of them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Finally, Moustakas (1994) described interpretive social science and hermeneutics as a method for discovering experience within text so that the meaning and intention behind the appearances can be better understood. The aim of getting to the meaning of the conflict experience is the focus of question one.

The focus of the second research question—How does conflict management competence manifest itself in conflict situations?—is to provide an opportunity for deeper reflection on the meaning of the conflict that the Presidents described from
research question one. This will keep the experience open and shed light on how people make sense of situations (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). In the case of this dissertation, the focus is on how Presidents use their knowledge, skills, and abilities to make sense of the conflict situations as they are revealed by the Presidents within the community college context. Spencer and Spencer (1993) described competencies as “underlying characteristics of people that reveal ways of thinking or behaving” (p. 9). This question encouraged the Presidents to examine those underlying characteristics/competencies that were used to manage the conflicts. In so doing, I will be able to illuminate Carr and Kemmis (1986) statement that only through the “motives, intentions, or purposes in performing the action” (p. 92) can the full subjective meaning of the action by the actor be elucidated.

The final research question—How do community college Presidents develop the competencies to manage conflict?—takes the first two research questions to a practical level of understanding the experiences by acting as a medium to encourage the Presidents to reflect on their own development of conflict management competence. Specifically, were there personal or professional experiences that the community college Presidents explored or considered as key components to the experience of conflict management? This question will allow the Presidents to contemplate any specific or general experiences from their background or trainings that they are willing to share with others who may wish to become conflict competent. As described by Vaughn (1986), it is important that community college Presidents become conflict competent. Further, the development of a competency model may be useful in decreasing the widening leadership gap (Fulton-Calkins & Milling, 2005; Jones & Johnson, 2008a). Finally, Carr and Kemmis (1986) stressed the aim of interpretive social science as being to educate, deepen insight, and to enliven commitment . . . its work is the transformation of consciousness, the differentiation of modes of awareness and the enlightenment of action. (p. 93)
My intent is to inform the experience of conflict management so that the consciousness of the participants, the researcher (me), and readers are educated with a deepened level of awareness and understanding.

**Key Concepts**

This section discussed several key concepts related to the interpretive social science approach. The first key concept is meaning as goal or the essential invariant structure which is the essence of the experience. Interpretive researchers seek to learn about the meaning that people attribute to making sense of their lives and their social world (van Manen, 1990). In other words, the aim for interpretive social science is not to provide causal explanations of human life, but to deepen and extend our knowledge of why social life is perceived and experienced in the way that it is. (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 90)

This concept applies well to understanding and shedding light on the experience of successful conflict management by Presidents within the community college context. Specifically, how are the conflicts perceived, and how do the Presidents illuminate the meaning of that experience? A second concept is researcher as instrument. The researcher becomes the instrument for the research study. There were no attempts to remove bias or values, but instead the researcher acknowledges and brings to light her worldview (Kinzeloe & McLaren, 2005; Neuman, 2003). As part of this research study, I became the human research instrument. I interacted with the Presidents to co-create and co-research as the meaning of conflict experience was explored. I engaged in deep reflexivity contemplation of my own beliefs, values, and biases so that I was “open to being shaped by the research experience and to having my thinking be informed by the data” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 34). The researcher and the participants become co-researchers in the process as we seek to discover how the Presidents experience and manage conflict in the community college context or the natural setting of the Presidents world (Neuman, 2003).

The natural setting or world of the participant is the third concept. The best way to learn about the participants is through the researcher’s engagement in the setting in which the human behavior occurred, and therefore I visited the location or
the participant in a natural setting for them to encourage dialogue (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). This physical closeness allowed me to gain context with the community college Presidents in their own world, or their own natural setting (van Manen, 1990). However, what makes the aforementioned concepts real or true in the interpretive sense? Moreover, how can researchers authenticate and confirm the work of interpretive social science? This topic as a description for the strengths and limitations of interpretive social science is discussed in the next section.

**Strengths and Limitations of Interpretive Social Science**

An interpretive social science philosophical approach to this research was appropriate because the aim of the study was to establish shared understanding where it has not existed before (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). As such, one of the strengths of interpretive research is that it provides an opportunity to give voice to the participants by presenting their experiences in their own words from their own perspectives. For my study, this strength of interpretive research allows the voices of the Presidents who successfully manage conflict in a community college context to be heard. A second strength is interpretive research can lead to greater awareness for both the participants and the researcher (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). This second strength highlights an opportunity for the Presidents to better understand their own perspectives about conflict management, inform other Presidents who must manage conflict, and engage readers who are interested in conflict management by community college Presidents.

Third, from the perspective of an interpretive researcher, the strength of doing interpretive research is the ability to collect rich, thick descriptions about individuals in their daily lives, to be able to develop an in-depth understanding of a small group of individuals, and to be able to interact with participants in a collaborative and intimate manner. The in-depth view of conflict management can provide deep illumination into the phenomenon of conflict.

On the other hand, positivists and post-positivists express concerns that interpretive social science research is not able to produce broad generalizations in the conventional way. Through the positivist or experimental research perspective, “we
tend to forget that the change we aim for may have different significance for different persons” (van Manen, 1990, p. 7). Accordingly, my aim is to deepen and extend knowledge of conflict management for those Presidents that participate in the study, and in so doing, other Presidents as well as aspiring Presidents may better understand the phenomenon of conflict management in the community college context. While this is not generalization in the positivist’s perspective, the study was planned to be informative to others by providing personal insights to the practice of conflict competence.

A second limitation is that the results are fraught with the researchers’ biases. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) suggested that other researchers “lighten up” (p. 34). All research is affected by personal bias. Some researchers and writers may be so consumed by controlling their personal biases that they become immobilized. Instead, interpretive researchers are encouraged to “guard against their biases by recording detailed field notes which include reflections on their own subjectivity” (p. 34).

Alternatively, critical theory researchers cite concerns that the interpretive social science approach is insufficient. The notion of interpreting and understanding human social interactions falls short of addressing human science needs. Comstock (1982) suggested that the function of critical social science is to amplify the awareness of participants on the “contradictory conditions of action which are distorted or hidden by everyday understandings” (p. 371). Critical researchers seek more than interpretation of the stories and the text, but instead they seek to critique and change the human social condition. Carr and Kemmis (1986) suggested that the goals and purposes of critical theory are to help participants “recognize and eliminate any factors frustrating their educational goals and purposes” (p. 130). The role of the relationship between the participant and the researcher are expressed in uniquely different ways. Bredo and Feinberg (1982a) highlighted that the “researcher is inevitably an agent of change or a reinforcer of the status quo” (p. 6). I am seeking to give deep meaning to the stories of the participants so that the meaning of the experience is elucidated. After considerable thought and attempts to use a positivist approach for my study, the
interpretive social science research design began to resonate better with me after deeper levels of discussions with several students and professors in the program.

The critical theory approach was reviewed; however, it was not selected because of its fundamental aim to emancipate (Bredo & Feinberg, 1982b). This approach aims to transform the participants where the researcher seeks to comment on the text and act to change it. I am seeking instead to gather insight into the experience of managing a specific conflict incident. I must admit that it was the radical suggestion of a professor I admire and the conversations with my major professor that opened my eyes and allowed for deeper reflection on my intention with this topic of conflict management by community college Presidents. I was pleased to learn that finding focus for a study typically occurs nearer to the middle and the end of the dissertation process (Meloy, 1994). It was rewarding to learn that this transition occurred in the middle of the dissertation process for me. The interpretive philosophical approach resonated better with me for several reasons. First, it seems most appropriate for the research purpose, as interpretive social design emphasizes meaningful social action. Second, it most closely aligns with my core beliefs, as elaborated in the section regarding my personal disclosure. Finally, I am drawn to interpretive social science research because it aims to educate and “deepen insight through the enlightenment of action” (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 93). The strengths and limitations of interpretive social sciences include the researchers’ personal/professional disclosure which is the topic of the next section.

**Personal and Professional Disclosure**

I witnessed conflict divide and unite different factions in academic environments, among faculty, governing boards, and the community. Some rifts are so great that they become public news. I have often wondered how some leaders managed the conflict to propel an institution forward, while other leaders seem to fail or be derailed with each conflict experience. Community colleges serve as one of the first and last stops for a large number of students and a very diverse group of
constituent members. The Presidents’ successful management of the conflict is vital to the success of the institution.

During my conversations with other leaders and community college Presidents, they shared with me that most Presidents tend to avoid conflict. What is the Presidents’ experience with managing functional conflict so that the conflict does not become dysfunctional? In my conversations with more than 45 individuals who participated in the community college leadership program at Oregon State University, it became apparent that only five individuals stated an interest in pursuing the position of a community college President. Many of the potential leaders make comments that they are not interested in the issues related to leading an institution with increasing demands, declining resources, and perpetual conflict sources. They are comfortable with serving in the number two or number three positions at the institution—a dean or a vice President. Then, who will fill the pipeline of the major gap for the number one position—the President or chancellor?

Personally and professionally, I believe that my study provides insight into the experience of successful conflict management by community college Presidents. The information garnered from the study allowed for the current Presidents to be reflective about the conflict experiences they encountered which led to an opportunity for the explication of the meaning and descriptions of the different conflict experiences, the manifestation of conflict competence, and the ways to become conflict competent leaders. In addition, the study illuminates and informs my own reflection on the experience of conflict competence.

During a discussion with a community college President, she stated that conflict can be constructive and productive to an educational institution. This comment was initially troubling to me because it was stated in broad terms, while I felt a great need to eliminate the specific conflict episode I was experiencing at that time. I was seeking guidance and mentoring on how to eliminate or avoid the conflicts, when I learned that conflict, once managed, can be innovative and functional for an educational institution. What was the literature on this phenomenon? And, how
could a study be designed to address the community college leadership crisis while illuminating the practice of successful conflict management in the community college context? As indicated earlier in my rationale for selecting the interpretive approach and phenomenological method, I needed to spend considerable time analyzing the approaches, methodology, and methods. I reflected on my own epistemology, examining my own values and beliefs, biases, assumptions, and perspectives with potential for influencing this study. It is important that I remain true to the voices of the experiences for the study participants.

As I reflect on the process of obtaining my terminal degree, I am reminded that my greatest fear in reaching this pinnacle was the fear of observant research with little engagement with participants. I watched as the leaders in the community college setting allowed conflict to thrive with minimal engagement to assist those who were experiencing the conflict. What processes contributed to the decision to allow the conflict to thrive? Do the Presidents make this decision through conscious or unconscious acts? My personal values and related career choices are rooted in making a difference in the lives of others. I considered conflict to be a concept that necessitated immediate elimination. However, after substantial review of the literature on conflict management, I am now convinced that organizational change necessitates some form of conflict.

In order for the change to be innovative and constructive, conflict needs to be managed and not eliminated. I believe strongly that it is in everyone’s best interest to be mindful and intentional about the management of conflict in the community college context. I believe that leaders in our society, both within higher education and outside it, have a responsibility and an obligation to become conflict competent. Understanding conflict competence can assist in the possible prevention of psychological and financial harm to both the individuals and the institutions engaged in the conflicts. The future of many students and, in some cases, the entire community, is dependent on visionary leaders who recognize the criticalness of this competency.
and are not afraid to listen to the voices of conflict competent Presidents in the community college context.

In gaining my own understanding of the purpose of this dissertation, I learned to appreciate that an interpretive social science approach allows the researchers to understand experiences and reconstruct events in which they did not participate (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). It also occurred to me that learning the stories of community college Presidents may inform other leaders’ decisions so that they may choose to pursue the role of becoming a community college President. I changed the design of the study from one using a positivist/post-positivist approach to the interpretive social science approach, because it allowed me to delve more deeply into the experience of conflict competence.

**Phenomenological Method**

The purpose of phenomenology is to better understand the world in which we live. Phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning in our everyday experience (van Manen, 1990). It ultimately delves into our consciousness of how our perception of an experience is related to reality and seeks to understand the essence of the lived experience. The method involves intentionality and thoughtfulness in the research process in an attempt to expose hidden meaning. Ultimately, a phenomenological study is focused on the experience of the participant.

The highly subjective and personal nature of the topic of conflict competent Presidents lends itself toward personal exploration; such as the phenomenological research method. Phenomenological researchers attempt to understand the meaning of events and interactions to ordinary people in particular situations (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Van Manen (1990) described the attempt to comprehend the meaning of events and interactions as “a heedful, mindful wondering about the project of life, of living, of what it means to live a life” (p. 12). Also, the phenomenological approach is one in which the researcher enters the world of the participants and learns how the participants experience, live, and expose the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 1998; Dreyfus, 2008; Groenewald, 2004; Husserl, 1964, 1965; Sokolowski, 2000). As
someone who occasionally aspires to become a community college President, I find that entering the world of the Presidents who experience the phenomenon of conflict management resonates on a personal and professional level with my Weltanschauung, or worldview.

Phenomenology seeks to find meaning in the everyday experience by asking the critical question: What is this or that kind of experience like? In phenomenology, these experiences result in what the German philosopher; Edmund Husserl named “intentionality,” where being conscious means we direct our thoughts toward things or objects in the world that give the experiences meaning. Clues about this intentionality are given in the derivation of the word phenomenology, a compound of the Greek words phainomenon and logos. “It signifies the activity of giving an account, giving a logos, of various phenomena, of the various ways in which things can appear” (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 13). Through the concept of intentionality, Husserl argued that all phenomena can be explored since all thinking, imagining, perceiving, remembering, is thinking about something; our consciousness is not locked within itself (Sokolowski, 2000). A phenomenological study describes the meaning of the lived experiences for individuals about a phenomenon and then reduces the experiences to a central meaning (van Manen, 1990).

While I considered the case study approach, I decided against this research method, because the case study method’s aim is to explore an event, organization, or process within a closed system (Merriam, 1998) and concentrate on a single issue from a holistic and explanatory perspective. Creswell (1998) describes case studies as an exploration of a bounded system or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context. (p. 61)

Since the literature review revealed a gap in describing the experience of conflict competent leadership from the Presidents themselves, an opportunity exists to hear those stories and share them so that other leaders may learn from the exploration.

I also considered the critical incident method, a process of data collection in which observations and recollections of behavior are gathered to facilitate solving
practical problems and designing information systems and procedures (Butterfield, Borgen, Amundson, & Maglio, 2005; Flanagan, 1954; Urquhart et al., 2003). The advantages of this method is that it is relatively inexpensive to gather large amounts of data based on experience, instead of routine data, and is focused on the participants’ views and not the researchers’ views. The method is best applied when interviewees can describe what actually happened versus what they may think happened, and can be used once or systematically. I decided not to use this approach as I was seeking to understand the phenomenon of successful conflict management in the lifeworld of the participants and personally engage them in this research process. This will result in less data to be collected, but will provide the opportunity to gather rich thick data and to have the personal interaction.

**Rationale for Selection**

Van Manen (1990) recommended that the researcher identify a phenomenon that has serious interest and commits the researcher to that world. I have a passion and serious interest in understanding the experience of successful conflict management by community college Presidents and was therefore committed to the process. Further, as indicated in the focus and significance, there is a need to understand the experience of successful conflict management as it may assist in addressing the community college leadership crisis. As researchers, we purposefully question the world and deliberately attach ourselves to the lifeworld so that we can become more fully a part of the world. I visited with the Presidents in their home, their office, or a mutually convenient public location. Through their words, they shared their lifeworld and allowed me to participate in this context so that I could become committed to that lifeworld. Further, van Manen, (1990) described the phenomenological method as one with power to:

- Compel and bring forth a story that warrants human attention.
- Lead us to reflect on that phenomenon’s meaning.
- Involve us personally as we gain meaning for our own search.
- Transform us so that we are moved by the story and allows us to measure our own interpretive sense. (p. 121)

The community college leadership pipeline is in need of deeper, more meaningful human attention. There are fewer leaders choosing to fill the role of
community college Presidents once the current Presidents retire or leave the profession. The hesitation for leaders to fill this role may be in part due to the impact of conflict and its management on the role of the community college Presidents. I know that, in my case, understanding the story of conflict management may be a key element to help me decide if I choose to pursue a presidency in a community college context. This story may be beneficial for others who may need better understanding of successful conflict management. Second, as indicated in the review of literature, some individuals view conflict as a negative concept to be eliminated, but instead, the individuals need an illuminated view for understanding how conflict can be managed successfully for the betterment of the Presidents and the institution. This study presented the opportunity for me to reflect on the full and deep meaning of the conflict phenomenon. Third, as revealed through my personal disclosure, I am engaged personally and professionally as I sought to find meaning in the conflict experience. Finally, the method of phenomenology aims to transform all those who are moved by the story which is similar to the radiating cycle in Figure 3 describing the relationship between the study participant, the reader, and the researcher. As such, a radial cycle describes the cyclical and iterative influence among the individuals and the phenomenon being experienced. Figure 3 presents a radial cycle diagram illustrating the centrality of the phenomenon and its relationship to the study participant, the researcher, and the reader.

**Key Concepts**

The purpose of this section is to describe the key concepts as they relate to phenomenology. Specifically, three concepts are discussed next with the relevance to my study design. The first concept, according to van Manen (1990) is that all phenomenological research “always begins in the lifeworld” (p. 7). This is the world of everyday life of the phenomenon. Van Manen uses the concepts of Husserl to describe the lifeworld as the “original, pre-reflective, pre-theoretical attitude” (p. 7). In other words, the experience is considered without any attempt to apply meaning so that the underlying meaning or essence as experienced by the
President is illuminated. I began this research with the Presidents in their own
lifeworld. I sought to understand the conflict phenomenon without preconceived
notions (knowing this is not fully possible) so that I could fully immerse myself in the
lifeworld of the participants.

The second concept is essential, invariant structure (or essence). Creswell
(1998) cites this concept as the goal of the phenomenological method,
to reduce the textural (what) and structural (how) meanings of
experiences to a brief description that typifies the experiences of all of
the participants in the study. (p. 235)

The essence of the phenomenon is a “universal which can be described through a
study of the structure that governs the instances or particular manifestations of the
essence of that phenomenon” (van Manen, 1990, p. 10). In other words, the essence of
the phenomenon is reached when the underlying structures and internal meanings are
explicated or revealed. I achieved the essence of conflict management in the
community college context when the language and prose that I used awakened or
revealed the experience in a “fuller or deeper manner” (van Manen, 1990, p. 10).
The third concept explored was intentionality of consciousness. The intent was to be aware and conscious of objects (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994). Intentionality of consciousness was focused on being acutely aware that we direct our thoughts toward things or objects in the world which give the experiences meaning. Clues about this intentionality are given in the derivation of the word phenomenology, a compound of the Greek words *phainomenon* and *logos*. “It signifies the activity of giving an account, giving a logos, of various phenomena, of the various ways in which things can appear” (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 13). Through the concept of intentionality, Husserl argued that all phenomena can be explored since all thinking, imagining, perceiving, remembering, is thinking about something; our consciousness is not locked within itself (Sokolowski, 2000). Further, Sokolowski (2000) indicated that knowledge of intentionality requires that we be present to ourselves and to things in the world, that we recognize that self and world are inseparable components of meaning. (p. 28)

Reaching intentionality of consciousness was demonstrated as I reminded myself to be purposely aware of the meanings discovered from the interviews, the intention of the participants, and my own awareness of the meanings and experiences that I brought to the project.

The fourth concept related to the phenomenological method was epoche or bracketing. This was the first step in phenomenological reduction which was “the process of data analysis in which the researcher sets aside, as far as humanly possible, all preconceived experiences to best understand the experiences of participants in the study” (Creswell, 1998, p. 235). Further, Moustakas (1994) indicated that epoche or bracketing was preparation for deriving new knowledge but also as an experience in itself, a process of setting aside predilections, prejudices, predisposition, and allowing things, events, and people to enter anew into consciousness, and to look and see them again, as if for the first time. Epoche or bracketing is not about eliminating the biases or prejudices, but instead the “natural attitude” that tends to accompany the experience. (p. 85)
This process occurred prior to the interviews and during the interviews. The process allowed me to list my own past associations and understandings so that I could set them aside which allowed for the entire research process to be “rooted solely on the topic and question” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 97). In so doing, the reader, the researcher (me), and the participant can focus on the experience of successful conflict management in the community college context by Presidents from a different perspective or angle and thereby gain new knowledge.

The fifth concept was horizontalization. This was the second step in the phenomenological data analysis in which the “researcher lists every significant statement relevant to the topic and gives it equal value” (Creswell, 1998, p. 235). Moustakas (1994) noted that horizons are unlimited and can never be completely exhausted but only adequately described. Each and every perception is granted equal value so that the nature and meaning of the experience can bring the “experiencing person to a self-knowledge and knowledge of the phenomenon” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 96). As part of this research dissertation, I was able to describe the essence and nature of the conflict phenomenon and the way that community colleges Presidents successfully manage the experiences.

The sixth concept was imaginative variation or structural description. Once the textural description (what) was written, then I was able to write a structural (how) meaning to the experience. I modified the experience or “imagine changes in the object” (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 179). This final step in this process was necessary for me to interpret the meaning of the experiences shared by the study participants. In so doing, I examined the analysis of the themes and possible meanings, different angles, and frames of reference about the phenomenon (Creswell, 1998). I sought to view the themes or “clusters of meanings” derived from the textural descriptions of the successful conflict management experience so that I could interpret and reveal the meaning.

Clusters of meanings are the seventh and final concept. This notion is the third step in phenomenological data analysis. The researcher groups or clusters the
statements into themes or meaning units and eliminates overlapping and repetitive statements (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994). I grouped similar statements to find the common themes expressed by the Presidents who participated in the study.

**Data Needs**

Data needed for this study included the context of community colleges where the conflict experience was successfully managed, the individual stories of the participating Presidents, the media news stories, and the transcribed responses to the interview questions as they related to each of the three research questions. The compiled data from community college Presidents were then used to create the clusters of meaning or the themes and the stories to illuminate the experience of successful conflict management by community college Presidents. Data from multiple sources, including interviews and documents, were collected so the critical themes and issues related to the experience of successful conflict management in the community college context could emerge. The goal was to have sufficient information to create rich, in-depth profiles of each participants experience so that I could conduct both a within case analysis and a cross-case analysis of the experiences to determine emergent themes related to the conflict experiences.

A series of semi-structured interview questions were used to gather information to address the three research questions. The interview questions guided the interviews to provide structure to the interviews and allow participants to include information they believed was important, but that might not have been within the initial interview questions. The purpose of each of the research questions relative to the intent of this study and the interview questions identified to fulfill the purpose are provided in the next.

- How do community college Presidents describe the experience of conflict management in the community college context? Semi structured interview questions were designed to explore the meaning of conflict, and to provide an opportunity for the President to describe the conflict experience, and to develop a connection with the President.
• How does conflict management competence manifest itself in conflict situations? Semi structured interview questions were designed to explore the meaning of competence, to provide an opportunity for the President to describe how they believed conflict competence was manifested or illuminated in their actions.

• How do community college Presidents develop the competencies to manage conflict? Semi structured interview questions were designed to explore how the Presidents believed they became conflict competent and to explore suggestions from the Presidents for anyone seeking to become conflict competent.

An interview protocol was prepared for interview participants and is included in Appendix B. The questions were used as a guide or catalyst during the interviews, and were not necessarily used verbatim, in order to allow the participants to include information they felt was important, but that might not be within the interview protocol.

**Participant Selection**

As required by phenomenological research, it is essential that all of the participants experience the phenomena being studied. In this case, the phenomenon was successful conflict management. Purposive sampling (Creswell, 2005) was the strategy used to identify community college Presidents who experienced the specific conflict phenomenon. Purposeful sampling “may not know the best people to study because of the unfamiliarity of the topic or the complexity of the events” (Creswell, 2005, p. 206). Dukes (1984) recommended that a phenomenological study have three to 10 participants. There were seven community college Presidents who agreed to participate in the present study.

As indicated in the literature review, the phenomenon of conflict management is a complex concept that requires an interaction between individuals and the conflict experience. In my study, I was not aware of the Presidents who experienced the conflict phenomenon and were willing to participate in the study. However, I knew
that there were national and state opportunities for community college Presidents to
meet, deliberate, and cooperate with each other. I sent an email request to George
Boggs, President and CEO for the AACC as well as the executive directors for the
statewide agencies of the community and technical associations within a days drive or
flight near where I reside. Three criterion points were used to locate potential
participants as follows:

- Experienced a conflict phenomenon with the board of trustees or the union
  in their professional careers.
- Employed at a community or technical college currently or were employed
  at a community or technical college within the past five years.
- Remained employed at the community college for at least one year
  following the conflict.

Seven presidents contacted me and agreed to participate in the study. Moustakas
(1994) listed the essential criteria for the participants as those

who has experienced the phenomenon, is intensely interested in
understanding its nature and meanings, is willing to participate in a
lengthy interview and grants the investigator the right to tape-record . . .
and publish the data in a dissertation. (p. 107)

The Presidents who met the criteria of the study were asked to contact me directly. If
they had not been sent a copy of the IRB protocol, I sent a copy of the document for
their files.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Once each president contacted me to participate in the study, I then followed
up with each president’s assistant via phone/email. An appointment was set for the
first interview. I also sent them a copy of the protocol for the study in case they did not
receive it from the executive director or the AACC president and CEO. We scheduled
a mutually agreeable time to discuss the information for my study. For each initial
meeting, I thanked each president for taking time to participate in the study. I then
explained the epistemological framework of interpretive social sciences, the
phenomenological method, and the rationale for using the interview technique. I also
explained that data collection in this phenomenological study represented a circular process. First, the participants’ reflections and personal experiences were conveyed to the me through the semi-structured interview. I had informed them that two semi-structured interviews lasting 60-90 minutes would be arranged. Then the data were professionally transcribed. Next, I reflected on the data. Then, my interpretations were shared with the participants, and further conversation occurred.

The initial interview was used to construct a safe environment for study participants by asking the Presidents to reflect on their pathway to the Presidency, rationale for choosing to become a President, and the meaning of conflict. See Appendix C for a list of the interview questions by research questions.

The second interview explored the competencies that the Presidents exhibited during the conflict experience and explored ways to become conflict competent. After each interview, an informal member checking took place with the participant. In addition, the professionally transcribed verbatim transcript of the interview was shared with each participant. The sharing of the formal transcript with each study participant reflected the commitment in the design of this study to honor the interpretive, intersubjective agreement with the participants.

In the phenomenological method, data analysis is an ongoing effort and began once the participating Presidents contacted me for the study. The data analysis process was closely linked to the study’s three research questions. The methods described below were used to ensure that in-depth analysis was undertaken:

1. Review the research proposal to ground the analysis in the initial research and questions.

2. Read the professionally transcribed verbatim interviews repeatedly to allow for immersion in the case experiences.

3. Read through the text of interviews and other sources of case data taking notes in the margins. Look for common elements, troubling issues that need further attention, and to inform the direction of future data gathering.
4. Create a preliminary bracketing based on literature review and frequency of words or statements.

5. Place data in categories to identify patterns or themes that responded to each research question.

6. Create summary reports of each case from the data analysis and its relation to each research question.

7. Develop a detailed description of each case. Themes for analysis emerged along with my interpretations, as the researcher, of the themes and cases that were studied. The descriptions, themes, and interpretations that emerged required verification through triangulation of information and/or member checking.

8. Conduct a within case analysis, followed by a cross-case analysis. The data were first reviewed and analyzed from each college, followed by a comparison. This allowed me to look at similarities and differences within each case, as well as among the seven cases. The interviews, meeting notes, and documents were analyzed for common themes and to gain detail about the experience.

9. Make an interpretation of findings.

10. Go back and identify key research literature to confirm or deny findings made about the experience of conflict competence by Presidents in the community college context. Throughout the data analysis process, I reflected on the data and knowledge gained from the literature review. This allowed for regular reflection of what I learned in the field compared to what I learned in the review of the literature. This allowed me to be aware of and identify emergent themes across the cases. In addition, I was careful to bracket my prior understanding of conflict competence from the literature review and my own personal background and experience so the reality constructed by study participants could come through.
It is also critical to acknowledge, the interviews conducted for this study were the primary source upon which the findings were based. The documents collected from the institutions were relevant to representing other views, but the nature of phenomenology offers strength in the individual case experience. However, in response to the research questions that guided this study, the analysis of the interviews provided more specific data relevant to the research questions. Overall, the use of the phenomenological method allowed for analysis of interviews and documents in order to develop a deeper understanding of conflict competent experienced by Presidents in the community college context.

Evidence of Soundness in Data, Analysis, and Interpretation

There are several strategies used to ensure soundness of data and the related findings. This section describes the soundness of data, analysis, and interpretation. Four criteria were used: (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability.

Credibility, from the interpretive approach, is achieved if the description of the context described in the text seems credible or appears to reflect what was transpired. Two forms of triangulation were used to achieve credibility in this study: (a) the collection of multiple forms of data, and (b) multiple sources of data. The triangulation of information examined different sources of information to determine if the information converged and agreed (Stake, 2003). It also allowed for clarification of meanings by identifying different ways the process or issue could be seen. Multiple methods of data collection (i.e., interviews and document analysis) from a variety of sources (i.e., institutional materials, news and media reports, online, and print) were collected and analyzed. Where applicable this information was compared to information given during interviews for consistency.

Transferability examines to what degree the information provided fits other cases beyond what is described in the study. Cases and study participants who volunteered were diverse enough in situation and location to achieve possible
transferability. This study also provided rich descriptions of each case and the experiences of community college Presidents who successfully managed conflict. In addition, this study ensured dependability, the notion that information provided in the study is recognizable to those who are familiar with the context. Dependability is the concept that the information provided in a study is recognizable to those who are familiar with the context of the study. The use of quotes from the interviews taken from each study participant in this study are used as a key component for the analysis of each case study in response to the three research questions that guide this study. Each case analysis and cross-case analysis is supported through direct quotes from the interviews with each participating President. The quotes serve as evidence of dependability available to readers of this study. The quotes were member checked with the participating Presidents. Once I received the professionally typed transcriptions from the transcriber, I then sent the typed transcript to the participant for review and feedback. Five of the seven Presidents indicated that the transcripts were accurate as written, while two of the seven Presidents made minor clarifications regarding location and contact names. I also sent electronic and hard copies of the typewritten transcripts to my major professor.

Conformability assures the analysis and interpretation of the research remains true to the original meanings and experiences of student participants. Member checking was used to ensure conformability. Informal on the spot member checking took place with each study participant. This was followed by sharing the formal transcripts of the individual interviews with each study participant. In addition, I followed-up with study participants if there were clarifying questions about the data or if additional information was needed. During the process of sharing the formal verbatim transcript with the study participants, only one study participant provided clarification to areas of the transcript. The clarification was technical in nature, either grammatical corrections or clarifications on the name of cited participants or steps in the process. I accepted the changes submitted by the study participants and used the altered transcripts for the basis of my analysis. I also sent the synthesized
interpretation to each President of their own interpretation to obtain their review of the writing. Four of the seven Presidents responded immediately with one President making a change in the pseudonym that was being used. There were no other changes for these four Presidents. I followed up with the other three Presidents, and they did not respond to the written interpretation. In my request, I provided two response dates, and if they did not respond, then I indicated that I would interpret the information credible as written. See Appendix F for a copy of the email request focused on the member checking for the transcripts.

Finally, I, as the researcher, followed up with study participants if there were clarifying questions about the data or if additional information was needed. I shared the analysis of the findings with study participants to check on the intersubjective agreement of themes for their individual cases. The themes that emerged in the study were co-created themes between the participant and the researcher for all of the data for each case. I did not confirm the across themes cases with the Presidents. None of the Presidents were provided with the full data from this study, in large part due to confidentiality. The use of these criteria to measure the soundness of this study allowed for additional opportunities to ensure intersubjective agreement between participants, readers, and the researcher as illustrated in Figure 5.

**Strategies for Protection of Human Subjects**

To protect the study participants anonymity and confidentiality, I followed strict and comprehensive procedures to protect the participants of this research. The Oregon State Human Subjects policy was followed, and approval was sought from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) before undertaking the study. In addition, in June 2006, I completed the Oregon State University course in The Protection of Human Research Subjects (CITI). Informed consent was explained to each participant, and a signed copy of the consent form was obtained both from each participant, as well as each institution prior to conducting any interviews. Cases and Study Participants were provided with confidentiality. Cases and Study Participants were identified by the use
Figure 5. Intersubjective agreement and measures of soundness.

of a pseudonym. Any direct quotes only identify the participant by their pseudonym. Special care was exercised in the section reporting the overview of findings and case profiles. All research results and recommendations were reported in a summarized manner in such a way that participants cannot be identified.

I hired a professional transcriber who is familiar with the Oregon State University’s Human Research Handbook. I contacted the OSU Graduate School for recommendations of a paid transcriber. Several possible transcribers revealed themselves to me, and I decided to select the one with more experience, the best wage rate, and the recommendations of others. See Appendix A for the completed Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved protocol document. See Appendices E and F for copies of the member checked data. “Research on a problem is an ongoing process with each study contributing to the base of knowledge about a topic” (Pyrczak, 2005, p. 140). As I reflected on my own personal and professional epistemological approaches, then I realized that knowledge is a base to build additional knowledge which does significantly include our own personal and professional feelings.
Summary of Design of Study

The research questions posed for this study concerned the phenomenon of successful conflict management in the community college context which is an examination of the experience of the participants, not the examination of the conflicts themselves. This attention to the experience itself is unique to phenomenology, which establishes it as the best method for this dissertation. As I described in the rationale for my selection of the interpretive social science approach, and more specifically, the phenomenological method, I also revealed a few reflections on my own personal and professional reflections. The sampling, data collection, and data analysis procedures were described. Chapter Four presents the findings of the experiences as shared by the seven community college Presidents who participated in the study which is the next section.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings from the analysis of data collected in this phenomenological study of seven community college Presidents who successfully managed conflict experience(s) with a college employee union or the board of trustees in the community college context. The research technique involved interviewing seven community college Presidents representing a variety of geographical areas of the United States. As noted in Chapter Three, Dukes (1984) recommended that a phenomenological study have between three to 10 participants. The Presidents participated in two different open-ended interview sessions which made up the cases.

During the interviews, I asked each of the Presidents to describe their community college contexts, pathway to the Presidency, their rationale for choosing to become a community college President, and if they perceived any differences between presiding at a community college versus a four-year college or University. Next, I asked a variety of interview questions about the conflict(s) that qualified them for this study, their reactions or thoughts about the conflict, and the ways in which they believed the conflict was successfully managed. The rationale for this set of questions was to get the Presidents in a pre-reflective state so that they could describe the phenomenon from different perspectives so that I could elicit data for research question one. Then, I asked the participating Presidents to describe the meaning of conflict, since the term can be highly personal and subjective in its meaning. I also asked other questions focusing on the ways in which conflict competence was manifested and any advice that the Presidents could offer to others seeking to become conflict competent. The rationale for this set of questions was to get the Presidents in a pre-reflective state so that they can describe their own experience with conflict competence manifestation and advice for others seeking to become conflict competent. This set of questions was designed to elicit data for research questions two and three. See Appendix C for a list of interview questions grouped by the three research questions.
The data gathered and analyzed included two audio taped interviews with the seven Presidents, as well as review of related written and electronic public media documents. The data collected for this phenomenological study was dictated by the three research questions and supported by the literature review. This chapter is organized into seven sections. Section one provides an introduction for each of the community college context sites and ends with a summary table. Section two presents the profiles of the community college Presidents who participated in the study and ends with a summary table. The third section presents a summary description of the conflict(s) they experienced and ends with a summary table. The fourth section presents the public media documents that related to the conflict. The fifth section presents the evidence of soundness in data, analysis, and interpretation. The sixth section presents the analysis in response to each of the three research questions. The research questions are:

- How do community college Presidents describe the experience of conflict management in the community college context?
- How does conflict management competence manifest itself in conflict situations?
- How do community college Presidents develop the competencies to manage conflict?

The final section summarizes the findings overall in preparation for the discussion chapter on the implications for practice and future research.

**Community College Context Descriptions**

The purpose of this section is to provide the community college context site or the lifeworld where the conflicts occurred for the participants. The lifeworld is an integral component of the interpretative social science philosophy. Two of the community college Presidents served at multiple institutions where conflicts were experienced with the board of trustees or the union in their professional careers and the two Presidents had been employed at two community or technical colleges within the past five years, yet remained employed at the college for at least one year.
following the conflict. As a result, nine community colleges and one district site with two campuses were used in this analysis for the context. Table 3 presents a summary table that describes the nine community college contexts where the conflicts occurred. Each community college is designated as “CC,” and a nominal number that identifies the institution (i.e., CC#1A, CC#1B, CC#2).

The nine community colleges in this study represented different geographical settings and sizes. The colleges and participating Presidents in this study were assured a level of confidentiality. In keeping with the integrity of that obligation, community college site names, locations, and study participant names were intentionally not cited.

Three criterion points that were used to qualify potential participants were:

- Experienced a conflict phenomenon with the board of trustees or the union in their professional careers.
- Employed at a community or technical college currently or were employed at a community or technical college within the past five years.
- Remained employed at the community college for at least one year following the conflict.

Four of the nine community colleges were in rural areas, while two were inner city campuses, and the other three campuses were suburban. The student full-time equivalent (FTE) ranged from 2,500 credit and noncredit students to more than 15,000. Full and part-time employees ranged from 120 to 800 or more.

Five of the nine colleges were funded primarily through state allocations, while four of the nine colleges received both state and county support. Seven of the nine colleges had board of trustees who were appointed, while two of the seven trustee members were elected by the local area. All of the institutions were founded in the 1960s and were therefore 50 or more years in organizational history. All participating community colleges where the conflicts occurred had active, engaged unions, and collective bargaining was commonplace for the institutions. For the purpose of this description and analysis, the President who oversaw the two campuses counted as one college unit resulting in a total of nine community colleges in this study.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College number</th>
<th>Campus type</th>
<th>Carnegie class rating</th>
<th>Total student enroll</th>
<th>Full-time faculty</th>
<th>Part time faculty</th>
<th>Funding sources</th>
<th>Board of trustees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CC#1A</td>
<td>Multiple</td>
<td>Large suburban</td>
<td>7854</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>Appointed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CC#1B</td>
<td>Multiple</td>
<td>Small suburban</td>
<td>3163</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>Appointed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CC#2</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Medium rural</td>
<td>6408</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>State &amp; County</td>
<td>Appointed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CC#3</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Small city</td>
<td>4110</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>Appointed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CC#4</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Small rural</td>
<td>2586</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>State &amp; County</td>
<td>Appointed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CC#5</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Small suburban</td>
<td>3090</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>State &amp; County</td>
<td>Elected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CC#6</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Medium rural</td>
<td>6408</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>496</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>Appointed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CC#7</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Medium city</td>
<td>7141</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>Appointed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CC#8</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Small rural</td>
<td>2564</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>State &amp; County</td>
<td>Elected</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Adapted from State University.com*
Community College Presidents Descriptions

The participating Presidents profiles differed significantly and were as diverse as the geographic regions in which the participants served as Presidents. See Appendix D for additional details of participants by pseudonym, including a general demographic description, interview setting/context details, and individual length of time for interviews. The individual data for the participating Presidents is cited in the table as the title and an assigned number as there may be identifiable information in the text usage of the pseudonyms. Table 4 presents a summary table that describes the profiles for the seven community college Presidents. Each designation is listed as “President” and a nominal number that identifies the participant (i.e., President #1, President #2, President #3).

In response to the findings of the three research questions in the study, participating Presidents were designated by pseudonyms that were either selected by the participant or co-selected with them and the researcher. For example, President Alice selected her pseudonym based on a character in a book. President Alice indicated

Well I just read a story about an Alice and it’s actually Alice Sebold who wrote Lovely Bones, and she also wrote the one I read that was called Lucky and it was about her being raped as a freshman. But it spoke to the determination, it spoke to how—she’s really damaged. You know, her life is sort of damaged…Yet she survived and went on and followed her passion and stood up in the face of adversity and made the world look at her, and not shy away from the experience, not let them be (because they were uncomfortable), that it wasn’t going to stop her from still trying to find her place. So it’s fresh in my mind. So I’ll be Alice.

Another President selected the pseudonym President Doe as he considered the selection of the pseudonym as “one of these personality things or something where you pick something and then you’re making, you know, a statement of some egotistical—John Doe. That’s about as nondescript as we can get.” During the second session, one of the participating Presidents revealed that she would like to use the name of “Eleanor” after the first lady who was married to President Roosevelt.
### Table 4
**Community College President Descriptions Summary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>President</th>
<th>#1</th>
<th>#2</th>
<th>#3</th>
<th>#4</th>
<th>#5</th>
<th>#6</th>
<th>#7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Terminal degree</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of tenure</td>
<td>25+</td>
<td>25+</td>
<td>25+</td>
<td>25+</td>
<td>25+</td>
<td>5+</td>
<td>7+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position prior to</td>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>Advancement</td>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>Acting</td>
<td>External to</td>
<td>Acting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>first presidency</td>
<td>affairs vice</td>
<td>vice president</td>
<td>affairs vice</td>
<td>affairs vice</td>
<td>president</td>
<td>community</td>
<td>president</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>president</td>
<td></td>
<td>president</td>
<td>president</td>
<td></td>
<td>college system</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Alternatively, one participating President shared “Oh, I don’t care, use my name.” Instead, after additional dialogue, the President and I agreed to use a letter for his pseudonym to maintain the integrity of the identity of each participant. The rationale for sharing insight into the pseudonyms was to reveal to the reader the variety of reflective sharing mindsets demonstrated by the participating Presidents.

I also remind the reader that great care was taken in this study to preserve the identity of the Presidents and the community college context sites where the conflicts were experienced. There was no attempt in this study to match the individual pseudonym with the community college context site nor was there any intent to match the public document with the institution or the President. Instead, I encourage the readers to focus on the voices of experiences as illuminated through the stories and lessons learned from Community College Presidents who successfully managed conflict in the community college context.

**Conflict Experiences Description**

This section presents the description of the conflict experience as reflected upon by the participating Presidents. The descriptions are generally written in a specific order to ensure that the full description is captured for each participating President. The general order of the descriptions is listed by the (a) general description, (b) conflict meaning, (c) demographic influence, (d) inherent risks, (e) manifestation of competence, (f) successes despite the conflict, and (g) Presidents advice for becoming conflict competent. The section is then followed with an individual case analysis and is organized by the seven participating President cases, which act as headings.

**Description of Conflict Experience - President Alice**

As President Alice reflected on the conflict, she shared that the institution began to experience issues related to enrollment challenges and a budget downturn. As a result, President Alice began sharing the news with many different campus constituent groups in the hopes of engaging the groups in developing solutions to address the challenges. It was her hope and expectation that through the shared
governance process, then the challenges could be met from a holistic perspective to meet the needs of all the campus constituents.

The faculty union leadership requested a meeting with President Alice. She thought that she was going to the meeting to discuss the issues and seek participation from one of the critical constituent groups. Instead, she was presented with a list of concerns. She shared “it felt like they brought me there on pretense of something else to talk and then ambushed me.” After the surprise of the action, she indicated it would be important to bring the administrative leadership together with the union leadership to address the concerns and to work through the other established campus shared governance processes. When the two groups met, the conflict seemed to become more intensified.

It seemed to President Alice that the union was seeking co-decision making authority with her and the administration. President Alice believed that, if she and her administration allowed every decision to be made between the faculty union leadership and her leadership team, then it could seem like collective bargaining which could have implications for the faculty union contract. She also knew that, if she allowed this to happen, then she believed that she would be dishonoring the other shared governance processes which allowed for decisions to be made at the lowest possible levels. Moreover, she knew that she would not be honoring the established processes that allow the voice of different constituents to be heard regarding campus problems as she had initially set out to do. After all, these committees were comprised of a variety of constituents, including tenured faculty, non-tenured faculty, staff, administrators, and students and would allow for the greatest amount of transparency. In retaliation, the faculty union issued a vote of no confidence in the President to the College’s Board of Trustees and telephoned the media.

As President Alice reflected on the meaning of conflict, she described its inevitability, opportunities for change, a warning signal, diversity, and the dichotomous meaning of conflict as conflict is not positive or negative, but instead a concept that simply exists. For example, President Alice shared
I think that conflict can be used as a sign of opportunities for change, that when, in diverse organizations, I think conflict is an outgrowth of diverse points of view and I think that it can provide sort of a warning signal. It can also provide an opportunity to show that we are looking at things or reacting to things differently. So conflict itself doesn’t, is not negative to me. Okay? I think it, um, I think it gets that definition but I would hope that what we could do is find a way to change conflict to recognizing different perspectives, come with it the opportunity to have conversation and discourse, of which really positive things can come. But I think people often think conflict is negative and its opposing sides. To me, it results in people being on the other side of an issue or another place, and it often creates a people dealing, you know, taking position as opposed to, you know, thinking about what they want outcomes to be. So I think it’s inevitable. I can’t imagine a world without conflict. I wouldn’t want a world without conflict because then I don’t think there’d be growth and I don’t think there’d be change. I don’t think it would give us the opportunity to think about other people’s needs if everything was sort of groupthink. On the other hand, it can be very draining. Constant conflict can just sap your energy and take away from the ability to be creative and innovative which I think is just critical right now in our time, is needing to be innovative and creative.

The first meeting between President Alice and the faculty union group illuminated a warning sign that the two parties were seeing and reacting to things differently. During the conflict, President Alice believed she endured misrepresentations of her character, including an outright lie that she “stomped out of the room and slammed the door behind her.” President Alice also volunteered that she firmly believed that her gender influenced the dynamics of the experience. She believed that people often interpret her candidness as

the whole bitch sort of thing . . . and there is some jealousy tied to the fact that I came up through the ranks . . . but there is a disrespect towards my position with me in it.

In addition, to the emboldened attacks from the faculty leadership, she also experienced anonymous letter writing campaigns against her and continuous calls to the media which placed her every decision under a microscope. The college’s student newspaper interviewed President Alice and realized that she was the subject of personal attacks from a small group of individuals at the campus. President Alice also
had to manage a confederate executive team member who was providing confidential strategic information to the faculty leadership. She believed that the greatest irony of the experience was the faculty union leader kept indicating shared governance was the key motive behind the conflict, yet the faculty leader would not participate in any formalized processes and relied upon “innuendo and behind the scenes verbal assaults.” When asked if she believed there were any inherent risks that she experienced as a result of the conflict, she indicated

Physically? I mean emotionally, clearly. There was clearly emotional risk. It was pretty devastating. It was, you know, very, it was very traumatic. People were, there were some folks that were pretty confrontational. Whether they would have gone, I’ve had, I’ve had two situations where I’ve had faculty physically threaten me, you know, really get in my face and really, you know, come at me. One of those happened during this circumstance. But you know my well being, my ability to . . . , you know, to be able to take care of myself, the fact that I have a home, you know, losing, the potential for losing the job, and having financial hardship, certainly. There was a tremendous amount of emotional hardship. I felt very much emotionally threatened. People were really just, people were really disrespectful, felt they could, they felt like, I think they thought they, you know, they threw out the word “administration,” you know, and, and somehow that gives them, freedom and liberty to say and do whatever they want to do. I think they felt they had a license just to say whatever. And just, I mean, and, lies, really. I mean, not be truthful. Very emboldened, they were very emboldened.

Eventually, it became more apparent that the conflict had been personalized to President Alice by a small group of employees. The board of trustees indicated during a board meeting that the changes were difficult, but necessary. They decided to renew Presidents Alice’s contract. In the midst of the conflict, President Alice indicated that she and her administrative team negotiated a multi-year contract for the faculty with increased raises and benefits and completed a successful accrediting process.

When asked to describe how she believed conflict competence was manifested during the conflict. She shared the importance to (a) remain true to herself, (b) avoid personalizing the conflict, (c) involve her executive team, (d) follow processes, (e) possess the ability to listen, and (f) stay focused on the college mission and the
students. Finally, President Alice credits her upbringing in a diverse neighborhood for her initial conflict competence.

President Alice offered the following advice for anyone seeking to become conflict competent: (a) engage a network of family members, colleagues, friends, and other leaders; (b) read as many book as possible on the topic of conflict, confrontation, negotiation, mediation, and labor unions in higher education; and (c) know when to engage an external consultant skilled in conflict management. Additional supporting quotes are offered in the data analysis section for President Alice.

**Description of Conflict Experience - President Doe**

The board of trustees hired President Doe to make the campus successful and address a few areas where they were not comfortable which included the foundation, capital projects, and the state of faculty labor relations which had “frustrated them.” As a result, President Doe’s conflict arose from his decision to make significant personnel changes to the institution. The decision impacted an employee who became increasingly disgruntled and managed to spin the message to the faculty union in a manner that focused more attention on the personnel decisions made by President Doe. As a result, the union voted to cite “extreme disagreement.” President Doe shared his belief that many of the faculty believed he significantly stepped out of line by not engaging them in some of the decisions. Yet, he didn’t feel that people questioned his ability or authority to make the changes. He perceived it to be his job to determine if employees reporting to him were effective, because most of the campus understood “power and authority systems . . . but, if they feel I treated (the employee) unfairly, they don’t get over that very fast . . . That lingers.” He shared the importance of faculty success, and when faculty are concerned if he treated someone fair, then they are not focused on the core competence of faculty teaching and student learning and no President can succeed in an environment like that. According to President Doe, the meaning of conflict is a

*disagreement about a point of view, an idea, a pathway forward, or some sort of concept . . . It’s usually opposing, well, obviously*
involves multiple approaches or multiple points of view around a way forward.

As President Doe reflected on the conflict, he indicated conflict can be useful as long as it did not become destructive to people’s psyche or their person, and it usually results, in my experience, in an improved way for handling how, or let’s say an approach for the future. Causes you, it sharpens the conflict, those in conflict—it definitely sharpens them up.

In response to the question about any perceived risks associated with the experience, President Doe shared

actually, physically no. and financially no. I mean, I’ve, I never really worried about that. I knew it could end in my having to leave the institution but that’s different than whether you feel financially threatened or not, and I didn’t feel financially threatened. I think the biggest, the biggest fear is that—well two of them but they’re very closely associated—one is that most of us in these jobs, we really do want to play up, we want to be positive contributors to the success/failure of the institution.

President Doe was asked if there were any demographics about him personally that contributed or detracted from the experience. He responded with the importance of being conscious of difference as a leader who is building relationships with many different types of people. He described himself as a “male, getting older, white.”

Further, he shared

there’s a huge side of me that says unfortunately they matter. And mostly I think they can be overcome but, I think it would be, I don’t think it would be useful to assume that these things don’t matter. I, I think people of a certain age have some orientation for some ideas and I think there are differences among us that, that affect how we approach problems and communications. So I just think we have to keep that, it’s got to be part of the consciousness.

The success of the institution is set by the President’s ability to do the job and get things done. Eventually, members of the institution began to realize that the conflicts were more a matter relating to a disgruntled employee who “was gunnin” for President Doe and others began to take notice that the employee was insincere and that President Doe’s decision was based on the effectiveness of the employee and was not
a question of fairness. The board of trustees supported President Doe as he was doing the job they hired him to do.

President Doe believed that his conflict competence was revealed in his ability to (a) stay calm; (b) not take the conflict personally; (c) keep the board members informed of his actions and plans; (d) be direct in his conversation; (e) select his words very carefully; (f) recognize people’s propensity to not hear messages or understand them; (g) be consistent in his language and actions across parties; (h) be careful not to show anger, although some irritation was okay; (i) focus on not getting into a mindset of ill will; and (j) allow open discourse. Despite the conflict, President Doe shared that his successes included increased student enrollments and the conscious decision that he and his team made to grow the enrollment so that the growth attracted more revenue for the benefit of the institution. In addition, they developed new campus master plans and began to get some big grants for student support and student success. President Doe credited his mother as someone who demonstrated exceptional conflict competence. He shared that she could virtually diffuse any situation. He offered the following recommendations for anyone seeking to become conflict competent: (a) read books on leadership and management; (b) obtain and learn from professional mentors, including former bosses and former colleagues; (c) watch and learn from the wisdom of the board of trustees; and (d) remain focused on the students’ needs and the institutional mission. Additional supporting quotes are offered in the data analysis section for President Doe.

Description of Conflict Experience – President Eleanor

President Eleanor served as the President for three community college contexts. For the purpose of this study, she described two community college contexts that qualified her for this study. At the first community college, President Eleanor described her conflict experience with the union. At the second community college, President Eleanor described her experience with a disgruntled employee who engaged the union, the board of trustees, and the community against her leadership at the institution.
Community college #1. At the first institution, President Eleanor entered the college embroiled in conflict due to an unsettled labor contract that had been in negotiations for several months before President Eleanor arrived on campus. She was hired by the trustees to introduce innovation to the campus. She would visit with campus personnel about introducing online learning, differential use of technology, or the creation of a one-stop student services center to better serve students. She was querying as to what new initiatives would look like. Instead, she had many unfair labor practices levied against her that were unfounded. The union felt that every issue needed to be discussed before the union.

In addition, President Eleanor realized that one of the administrators on her negotiation team was not acting in good faith. She made changes to the negotiation team, and the person managed to rejoin the negotiation team on behalf of the faculty union instead of the administration. She shared this fact as an example of how sometimes unions do not negotiate in good faith.

Community college #2. At the second institution, President Eleanor served as a President following several long time and successful male Presidents. Again, in this circumstance, the board of trustees conducted a national search as they were “very interested in innovation and growing their institution.”

Once President Eleanor arrived on campus, she learned that a disgruntled employee wanted her to make some personnel changes and overturn some decisions that had been previously made before her arrival. President Eleanor declined, and this made the employee very angry. President Eleanor learned that many people on campus feared the individual as there was a track record of retaliation associated with the person. President Eleanor focused on engaging the campus to make innovative changes and visited with the individual in the hopes of obtaining support for the work. Instead, the individual indicated that support was unlikely. President Eleanor shared so one of the things that I would say in your, in your research on conflict is you have to know who the real influencers are, whether they work in a group or they work individually, whether they have any formal authority or not, or they work from a place of informal authority. So while hierarchal in the structure she didn’t have any
authority, she had a lot of informal authority. And part of that was because she was known to be mean and that she would just do things to people if she didn’t like, you know, if you didn’t get along with her. And that’s why the faculty was really afraid of her. So while I again thought that was kind of silly, and didn’t take it too seriously, I later learned how serious it really was.

Eventually, the individual retired from the institution but not until an anonymous letter writing campaign was waged and the disgruntled employee had “gained a swell of discontent, even going as far as threatening that some people would not be elected if they didn’t do something” to get President Eleanor, the outsider, fired.

In describing the meaning of conflict, President Eleanor shared her perception that not all conflict is bad and is sometimes necessary to get people to move beyond their comfort zone. President Eleanor further explained the need to understand the rationale or intent behind the conflict as well as the reactions to the conflict. This understanding allows the “opportunity to make a judgment about whether the conflict is good or bad.” When asked what the union was seeking, she shared

I don’t know to this day that I could answer the question, “What is it that they wanted?” It’s more like what they didn’t want. There was a sense that, they did not want leadership by the administration of the college. They did not want the leadership, the administration to lead the college. They wanted the leadership to be from the union.

In responding to the question about any personal demographic factors about her that she believes influenced the conflict experiences; she acknowledged very hesitantly that there were. She stated

this is a hard one for me to repeat and to say because, I don’t want it to be this way . . . over the years I’ve been asked to speak how as a woman leader, you know, the world has been or I have interacted with the world and, I used to say, you know, I used to really downplay that because, I really want the world to be on equal grounds for all people. But, I have to say that over the years that I have found that, I think, conflict is different for women. And I think we are perceived differently and I think we are either supported during conflict or not supported during conflict by others, sometimes based on gender . . . . You know, there’s no absolute. Anything that I’m saying to you is never always one way or always another way, you know, but I have been in situations where I do feel certain that, being a woman, probably
made it maybe somewhat more difficult, particularly if the conflict is between a male and female leader.

As President Eleanor reflected further on conversations that she has had around the topic of the influence of her gender, she recalled a conversation with members of her executive team who informed her “if you were a man the conflict wouldn’t be, it wouldn’t even be a conflict.” Finally, one of the campus executives made it clear to others on campus that he “couldn’t believe that they hired a woman.”

In response to questions about any inherent risks, President Eleanor offered that it is not uncommon for Presidents and Chancellors to receive actual threats. She shared

you know the presidency and the chancellor’s role is a very high profile role in the community. And as with any high profile position in a community, you have to recognize that there will be people who like that about you and those that, who will not like that about you. And you add the element of the union or some other organized group that wants to have conflict and then you, you raise the risk.

In addition, President Eleanor shared at that particular college

there was a camera that was focused on my car and I parked in the same place every day that was, in close proximity to the campus, you know, to the entrance to the campus so that, you know again, I think it’s a way to mitigate risks. So if somebody wants to, put a jack rock under your car tire to flatten your tire which, you know, some, union violence has been known to do those kinds of things [laughs], then, you know, you try to mitigate that risk to you by, you know, having, good security.

She also shared her concerns about an increasing “lack of civility and mean spiritedness” that was occurring. She also made it clear that she did not believe the threats were about her personally, but instead about the position. Although, later in the conversation, she also shared that people from one of her prior institution made a point to call the interviewing institutions and forewarn them that she was an “evil” person.

The manifestation of competence was revealed in her ability to (a) maintain her civility by controlling how she leads; (b) avoid taking conflict personally; (c) keep the board members informed of her actions and plans; (d) follow and let the processes speak, instead of attempting to respond to accusations; (e) make changes to executive
team when she realized a member was not negotiating in good faith; and (f) remain focused on the students needs and the institutional mission. Despite the conflict(s), President Eleanor shared her successes at the different institutions which included the growth of the reserves which meant a more financially stable institution, increased programming, addressing accreditation issues, and increased student retention/persistence and graduation rates. President Eleanor credited her father for helping her to become conflict competent. He was a local politician and very active in the community. She shared that she learned from him the “importance of being able to go out and present your case to people and get buy-in from folks and, to get things done.” President Eleanor recommendations for anyone seeking to become conflict competent were to (a) learn negotiation and mediation; (b) learn consensus building; (c) know peoples motivations; (d) create alliances by knowing the source of authority and power; (e) read books on conflict, especially Blanchard’s work about situational conflict; (f) learn as much as possible about the internal and external college, political, and economic environment; (g) know who you are succeeding; (h) engage current and former Presidents for advice; (i) work very closely with board of trustees; (j) recognize that some conflicts cannot be managed and an exit strategy is warranted; and (k) remain focused on student success and the institutional mission. Additional supporting quotes are offered in the data analysis section for President Eleanor.

**Description of Conflict Experience - President J**

President J served as a community college President at more than four community colleges, and he explained that he had experienced all kinds of conflict. For the purposes of this research study, he focused on two community colleges where he received a faculty no vote of confidence and at another community college where he had a conflict with the board of trustees.

**Community college #1.** For the college where the vote of no confidence occurred, he shared “I survived a no confidence vote from the faculty . . . because the institution had to be pruned back in order to be able to grow again.” In other words,
there had to be a reduction in force so that fiscal stability and profitability could be regained. As President J reflected on the experience, he likened it to a classic bait and switch . . . the place I interviewed at was not the same place I took the job at. I mean it was, they just really sold me a bill of goods . . . and I came in and the institution was in great peril. I mean financially it was in bad shape. So there we had done everything we could to get the union on board that we had to reduce staff. We offered all sorts of things. We’d try to get them to work with us on analyzing the budget. We got, we tried to get them to accept a no raise and everybody will stay and they just, they just did not want to work with us. So in the end we had to lay off staff.

President J was pleased that he and his administration “restored the institution to a place to profitability and then went forward.” After the successes at the institution, he shared his surprise when a few of the board members wanted to have a key administrative staff person report directly to the board. This was the precipice for President J to leave this institution.

Community college #2. At the second qualifying community college, the conflict was with a board of trustee member who was known to have great power and micromanaged the President of the institution. President J approached the board member and shared his concerns of the rumors that he could not work with the board of trustees’ member. President J shared that the member would call him after campus visits to report all of the problems that he saw and then call back later to get a report on how the problems were resolved. President J felt it was better to

just kind of accept those things . . . in the end he (the trustee) just decided he didn’t want me around and he had enough power to make, to make it happen.

President J believed that the reason that he could no longer work with the board member after a number of years was because President J had become so well know and involved in the community which may have threatened the board of trustees’ member. Clearly, President J knew that he could not be active in the community so he chose to leave.
According to President J, conflict can be an honest disagreement, although in his experience with community colleges, conflict means disagreements over rather fundamental things . . . which ends up being a test of wills that disregards what the topic is.

When probed further about synonyms used to describe conflict, President J used examples like “disagreement, differing priorities, and differing views of mission.” When asked if there were any demographics about President J that he believed was a part of the conflict, he shared

I tend to be—and maybe it’s personality driven—I don’t shrink from a fight. So I’m Irish, and I don’t care. My staff keeps on telling me to shrink, to be a little bit more—I have been better about choosing my fights . . . . I think, I do have a thick skin and a backbone, so it’s easier, it’s easier for me to get involved in conflict and arguing. My senior staff is, keeps on trying to pull me out of it. I mean if I see that something’s wrong, my first inclination is to go after it.

In response to the question about any inherent risks, President J shared that he has experienced someone throwing a rock through the window, that his car was keyed, and that he received hate mail. In addition, as the President, almost all controversies are covered in the media and with the ease of search technology (e.g., Google) then the controversies can follow the President as they interview for other positions. This facet can be perplexing, because the conflicts can follow the person.

President J believed that his conflict competence was revealed in his ability to (a) differentiate when to be combative and when to be collaborative, (b) weigh short term and long term consequences, (c) avoid taking conflict personally, (d) recognize that conflict is normal, (e) involve the executive team, (f) work very closely with board of trustees, (g) recognize that some conflicts cannot be managed and an exit strategy is warranted, and (h) remain focused on the students needs and the institutional mission.

President J credited his father who was a local politician and pretty combative for his initial teachings for becoming conflict competent. He then recommended the following for other seeking to become conflict competent: (a) read books on collective
bargaining, leadership, and management, which included *Mutual Gains Bargaining* and *Getting to Yes*; (b) learn from former bosses; (c) use the power of experience serving in the role of President; (d) know the college’s environment; (e) attend workshops like AACC, and (f) recognize that some conflicts cannot be managed and an exit strategy needs to occur. Additional supporting quotes are offered in the data analysis section for President J.

**Description of Conflict Experience - President M**

According to President M, the conflict originated from the failure of the faculty union to negotiate a contract with permanent raises to benefit the faculty. The faculty union was seeking three times the amount that the administration was offering. During the months of negotiations, the American financial market meltdown occurred so the administration pulled back from being able to negotiate any type of permanent raise. Instead, the administration compromised with a onetime offer settlement that was eventually accepted. President M shared

but that created lots of strife. Lots and lots of strife, because they wanted, they wanted a salary permanent raise and we would have given it to them . . . but when the financial meltdown occurred we could no longer give that to them.

The faculty union retaliated with a vote of no confidence which shocked President M.

He shared

I was really insulted. It was almost—if I, if I could ever expose my inner self—it was almost, “How dare you?” because I had worked so hard for, for that institution to turn it around and it was like, “How, why would you do this? I mean I don’t even understand why you’d do this, okay?” So there was a sense of, of hurt, but I had to put all of that away because it wasn’t about me. It was not about me. It was about the institution and it was about my leadership role within that institution and it was how I was going to respond from a leadership perspective. I could not respond from a personal perspective. That had no bearing.

When asked about the meaning of conflict, he viewed the meaning of conflict as a
disagreement or different points of view or when you have opposing points of view. Or you have something that causes a disagreement or an incident that can be translated into a disagreement.
President M believed that the conflict presented an opportunity for him to remain “open to people’s ideas, insights and suggestions and try to come out the other end in a strong leadership way.”

President M did not believe that there were any demographics about him that may have influenced the conflict. When asked if there were any inherent risks presented, President M shared that his car had been keyed on campus. He also received anonymous letters which were mailed to him and his family. He took precautions, like equipping the family with pepper spray, leaving the lights on all night at their house, and being extra cautious around their home until the height of the conflict blew over. He shared that it was most disturbing that the people chose to target his family, because he was the public official; however, to involve his family was very disturbing.

President M’s conflict competence was revealed in his ability to (a) avoid getting angry, (b) listen to people and willingness to make some adjustments, (c) keep his focus on the ultimate goal of the institution, (d) avoid taking the conflict personally, (e) keep the board members informed of his actions and plans, (f) involve executive team in the conflict management, (g) solve conflicts at the lowest level, and (h) know the power of the position. President M highlighted several successes despite the conflict. He was very proud of the creation of 14 new instructional programs, replacement of the hardware and software systems, and significant increases in the number of student enrollments in the Distance Education program. He recommended (a) using the school of hard knocks or the experience of serving as a President, including interim or acting capacity, where possible; (b) working with mentors; (c) working very closely with board of trustees; (d) recognizing that some conflicts cannot be managed and an exit strategy is warranted; and (e) remaining focused on the students needs and the institutional mission. Additional supporting quotes are offered in the data analysis section for President M.
Description of Conflict Experience - President T

According to President T, the state was going through a recession, and there were program cuts at the institution. The idea of program cuts was new to the college, and the college was not ready for an impending accreditation review. In addition, there were new steps taken to assess outcomes with documentation which was also new. So the predecessor President cancelled programs and attempted to implement assessment overhaul that were not well met particularly by the faculty. As a consequence, there was some bad behavior exhibited at board meetings and quite a bit conflict occurred at the institution, including the resignation of the President. President T was asked by the board of trustees to step in on an interim basis, and he agreed as long as civility was restored to the board meetings. During this time, the contract was not settled. He shared

the bad part about collective bargaining is it takes the people that you work with on a daily basis and depend upon, and you work together as a team, and it pits you against each other in an adversarial role. So I’ve never seen collective bargaining be in a healthy situation for any college. No college President enjoys being in collective bargaining . . . typically when you have collective bargaining, both sides come to the table with very high expectations of getting things that they probably are not going to get . . . and so, bargaining becomes an exercise in collaboration and compromise . . . and a lot of times when collective bargaining talks breaks down, it’s because different, people on either side of the bargaining table believe they really have to have something and realistically they’re not going to get it. And I think that’s, that’s going to happen anytime you get into collective bargaining.

President T described the meaning of conflict as “the competition for resources, whether that’s staff time, money or physical things, jobs, interest in programs.” He also explained that conflict can be viewed as a “zero-sum game” where one side must lose so that the other side can win. Although President T did not cite any specific demographic influences, he did reference his military background. When asked if he thought that his background contributed to his ability to manage conflict, he shared
you have to understand that because I have a military background, taking charge of people and programs and that sort of thing is just what you train to do.

When asked if his military background contributed to his ability to manage conflict, he indicated that often a stereotype exists

about military people being authoritarian in nature, inflexible in their thinking and demanding that everybody fall in line behind a decision, that sort of thing, and I would say in my case I think that’s more of a caricature than, than, being an accurate description of my leadership style. But there are some folks, most of them never having been in the military, who have that sort of, at least a thought as to what military people are like. In reality, military people are all about making teams work. If you don’t make your team work, then you can’t satisfy your mission.

Although President T did not believe that he had experienced any personal inherent risks, he did share the practical notion that, because the unions will try to create as much controversy as possible, then there is a real risk that the President could lose the position. Moreover, he highlighted the importance of getting the board of trustees involved.

President T’s conflict competence was revealed in his ability to (a) remain calm and keep emotions ramped down, (b) inform and engage the board of trustees, and (c) stay focused on student success and the institutional mission. President T credited his lifelong military background for his ability to get teams moving forward through conflict. He also recommended that anyone seeking to become conflict competent should (a) think about former bosses who were good and bad; (b) speak with others who have experienced conflicts; (c) read books like Collins’ *Good to Great*, John Kotters’ *Leading Change*, Harvard Business Press, and other leadership and management books; and (d) attend structured programs like AACC Future Leader Institutes, Harvard Business School. Finally, the best advice he felt that he could offer was to sit down and talk to Presidents in your state, because each state’s laws, funding, regulations and so forth are all different, and talk to them on an individual basis.

Additional supporting quotes are offered in the data analysis section for President T.
Description of Conflict Experience - President X

According to President X, the community college context where he served as President for many years was founded “engulfed in conflict.” The conflict centered on the deciding if the institution should remain in an urban area or move to a suburban area. President X indicated the decisions were being made against the backdrop of the turbulent 1960s and the riots. He shared

And so that really was the early formation. And then of course, even though there was external conflict within the city but there was also internal conflict in terms of the population as to where this institution should be located. Should it move away from centers of conflict and turmoil into some quiet, pristine suburban area?

Then he, as the President experienced many types of conflict during his very long tenure as a community college President; in fact, he entered the institution as an interim President with the institution steeped in major conflict. President X was appointed to serve in the position for six months which became more than 20 years. The trustees initially hired him to be a caretaker so that they could continue to micromanage the community college. Instead, President X had the internal and external community on his side. The question as described by President X was whether the

President had the power to recommend faculty and administrators for positions, and who really was the spokesperson for the institution outside of the chair of the board of trustees. And some of the leadership on the board said, “No, you will not make any appointments. We’re going to go back to the way we did things. So you are just a caretaker.” And I said “no.” I was not going to be a caretaker.

The conflict was so severe that national agencies and legal bodies had to intervene and settle the question. The answer was clearly that the President has the authority and power to recommend the leadership positions at the institution. President X also shared an example where the community always had an underlying suspicion that the inner city community college trustees always planned to relocate the main campus to the suburbs of the county. Although this was not the case, the President described an incident where people had conflict about the opening of a satellite campus in a
suburban area of the county. So he decided to take his leadership members, students, and other key community persons to visit the rented space. After the tour, the attendees agreed that the new facility offered increased opportunity and resources to enhance their main inner city campus.

President X described conflicts that arise quickly because of the collective bargaining process. He shared

one of the areas that appears very quickly in conflict is in the collective bargaining environment, especially in times of scarcity, but even in times of plenty. Certainly you’re not going to, you know, give away the store, you know? You have to be prudent managers, you know? We are stewards, you know? They’re public resources, and we have to guard them as such. But somehow part of the construct of the other side in a collective bargaining, you know, take what you can get at all costs and regardless of what the impact is on the institution. And so that has its built-in conflict.

President X shared that conflict is “inevitable because we have two diametrically opposed views of how to do things and a struggle over limited resources.” Then, there is another form of conflict which “arises out of some misunderstanding or some personalities . . . that simply can’t get things resolved.” In response to the question about any demographic influences that he believed were involved with the conflict, he shared

Personal demographics. [pause] I don’t know, I think [pause], I’ve always been delib-, deliberative before I make decisions. I don’t get excited easily. I think things through, especially when they have an impact on other people. I try not to make really rash, you know, decisions or judgments . . . I don’t know—I mean there have been challenges at the beginning but I really wouldn’t put it in the context even though some people’d say—you know, if you, if you were a white would that have made a difference? I don’t know. I don’t know. You know? I really don’t, I’ve not looked at in that way, you know? Even though there have been times, you know, where you have to tell some people off and so on, you know, but, one of the things, regardless, I’ve said to people, you know, you cannot disrespect the leader no matter, you know, whether the leader, you know, is male or female, or black or white or Latino. You cannot disrespect that leader, you know? And I think there are some who, they, you know, maybe subconsciously try to do that and you have to put that in their place,
you know, so . . . . But I, I don’t know whether there’s personal demographics. Not really. You know, I think it’s your individual personality, your makeup, your, you know, philosophy in terms of administration, how you interact with people and how people view you. And one of the things I’ve tried to do is I want people to view me as somebody who cares, view me as somebody who doesn’t go out of his way to, you know, cause conflict. But by the same token, you know, I will not shy away from the conflict if, if it comes. If it comes. But I will not go out of my way to do that, you know? But personal demographics. I guess, you know, maybe early makeup educational system, which sometimes doesn’t really comport to my management style because growing up in (a different country), the system was very hard, codes were very structured and so on. But I don’t think that’s my makeup, you know? I don’t think that’s my makeup, even though my upbringing and everything should have tended towards that, you know? But somehow it hasn’t.

When asked about inherent risks, President X, shared he had to wear a bulletproof vest during commencement as he was advised by the police officers to take the threats seriously. He also shared that, in addition to the physical threats, anonymous letters were also sent to his home, his family members, and his friends. In reflection, President X shared

but at the end of the day you say to yourself, you know what? Maybe— I wouldn’t say it’s part of the job because really it’s not. It’s really not and this is really over the top some of the things that go on, especially in a bitter collective bargaining environment.

President X’s conflict competence as manifested by him included (a) avoid taking it personally; (b) stay calm; (c) be a good listener; (d) focus on mission; (e) speak with friends, family, and colleagues to reframe; (c) accept ambiguity in the role; (d) accept that the President is always the President; and (e) remain focused on the students needs and the institutional mission. In addition to the described demonstrated competencies, President X recommended the following for anyone seeking to become conflict competent: (a) speak with other Presidents who may be experiencing similar types of conflict; (b) attend workshops where experiences, scenarios, and role-playing occurs; (c) learn about collective bargaining; (d) learn board/Presidential relationships; (e) read books on community colleges; (f) ensure that the institution is a good fit; and
(g) examine yourself and know your strengths and weaknesses. Additional supporting quotes are offered in the data analysis section for President X.

As indicated by the descriptions of the conflict experiences as shared by the seven community college Presidents, there were many different types of conflicts that were experienced. Table 5 provides a summary of the conflicts experienced by the participating Presidents. Table 5 indicates that the most frequent conflict experience for these seven Presidents revolved around collective bargaining.

Table 5

Summary of the Conflict Experiences

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Public Document Conflict Description

Related public documents that were located are noted in aggregate to describe some of the conflicts as they unfolded in the media. The documents collected in this study were intentionally not grouped with the participating Presidents or the community college contexts. Instead, the identifying documents were identified as a public document with a nominal number (i.e., PD#1, PD#2) and the type of public document (i.e., News media report, community magazine, meeting minutes, internet blog, etc.) There is no date listed as it may serve to identify the President and/or the institution.

One of the media documents discovered in these data search revealed an article highlighting the increasing use of votes of no confidence in college Presidents. Cited
reasons for the vote of no confidence ranged from labor related issues such as reductions in force, inhumane practices of cutting budgets, and exclusion from the decision making processes. There was dissatisfaction expressed by the tenured faculty that the college administration had eroded faculty voice and involvement in the shared governance and collegial processes at the college (PD#1, news media).

A second public document reported on the reasons that the small number of full-time tenured faculty are allowed to participate in votes of no confidence serve as a means to protect tenure track faculty and part-time faculty who do not have job security so the unions do not wish to put them in a position where they might legitimately fear for their employment. It was revealed further in the blog that it was standard practice for a small number of tenured faculty to issue a vote of no confidence and exclude the tenure track or part-time faculty (PD#2, comment blog).

A third public document revealed a situation where there were insufficient votes to issue a vote of no confidence from the full-time faculty and instead the faculty issued a statement of strong disagreement with the President. The faculty were upset that they were not more included in personnel decisions of several positions throughout the college (PD#3, news report).

A fourth public document highlighted academic changes that were resisted, including the addition of online courses. The article reported that the President used a dictatorial like style that caused a change and transformation in the community college by forcing the issue of online education (PD#4, news report). The report indicated that a vote of no confidence had occurred because of the changes.

A fifth public document highlighted a vote of no confidence due to the President’s failure to address budget decisions that adversely impacted instruction, employee morale, shared governance, intimidation of employees and termination of key administrators that resulted in widespread dissatisfaction among the employees.

The sixth and final document chronicles the difficulties associated with one of the colleges where much major disagreement between the college’s governing board and four Presidents occurred. The Presidents resigned for a variety of reasons, but
mostly because of the boards’ micro engagement in college operations which was referred to as “reining in the President’s authority.” In addition, there were difficulties cited at the institution regarding fraudulent documents to support students’ technical training, embezzlement of funds from one of the programs, and misuse of foundation funds (PD#7, news report). The next section describes the analysis in response to the three research questions.

Findings in Response to Research Questions

The following section provides my analysis of the data in response to the three research questions. For each research question, I reviewed the interview transcripts, and documents to determine the themes that emerged. The organization of this section is divided into the three research questions which I first present as a thematic analysis of the data from each case in response to the research question. Then, I conclude the section with a cross case analysis and overall summary for each research question.

Research Question One: Conflict Management Experience

The following section provides a description of the analysis in response to the first research question, “How do community college Presidents describe the experience of conflict management in the community college context?” The rationale for this question is to explore the reflective experience of the conflicts with the union or the board of trustees as shared by the participating Presidents and gain a better understanding of the essence and meaning of the experience. The first part of this section is organized by the seven cases, which are used as headings.

Conflict Management Experience - President Alice Analysis

My analysis resulted in five prominent themes for President Alice concerning the experience of managing conflict in the community college context: (a) Conflict is an outgrowth of diversity (The term “diversity” is used here in the broadest sense as a conceptual term meaning different points of view and different perspectives.), (b) Conflict is inevitable, (c) Conflict is perplexing, (d) Conflict is an opportunity, and (e) Conflict comes from fear of loss. The following analysis is provided using a heading for each of the five themes.
Conflict is an outgrowth of diversity. President Alice shared

I think conflict is an outgrowth of diversity and I think that it can provide sort of a warning signal. It can also provide an opportunity to show that we are looking at things or reacting to things differently. So conflict itself doesn’t, is not negative to me. Okay? I think it, I think it gets that definition but I would hope that what we could do is find a way to change conflict to recognizing different perspectives, come with it the opportunity to have conversation and discourse, of which really positive things can come. But I think people often think conflict is negative and it’s opposing sides. To me, it results in people being on the other side of an issue or another place, and it often creates a people dealing, you know, taking position as opposed to, you know, thinking about what they want outcomes to be.

Conflict is inevitable. A significant theme that emerged from the interview and the supporting documents was the inevitability of conflict in the community college context. For example, President Alice shared

So I think it’s inevitable. I can’t imagine a world without conflict. I wouldn’t want a world without conflict because then I don’t think there’d be growth and I don’t think there’d be change. I don’t think it would give us the opportunity to think about other people’s needs if everything was sort of groupthink.

Conflict is perplexing. The clearest example of this theme is how the collective bargaining process is not about what is in the best interest of all constituents at the institution but instead attempts to have a small group of people in a shared power relationship that was masked behind shared governance. President Alice shared her firm belief that

He didn’t want that. I really firmly believe that what he wanted was to be in total partnership, as a small exclusive group, that would be the decision maker. And I still believe that’s where our union struggles even today. I still think that is a major difference that they have not, that they have not figured out yet . . . . And so his whole thing, whole thing to the board was, “Shared governance, shared governance, my number one issue is shared governance,” yet he would not participate in these open, he would not participate in anything that was formalized, in which there were formal shared governance going on. It was all being done by innuendo behind the scenes.
In addition, President Alice shared the disturbing lack of civility with the assaults. She indicated “the verbal assaults, and, just this, I don’t know—it was just gross. I don’t know how else to describe it.” Further, that the union tactics have become more mean spirited and the people that the union is attempting to protect tend to be the ones who have the most fear of the union and the leadership. She described her perspective of other peoples concerns about the union tactics. She shared part of the problem was apathy because people were afraid. They weren’t afraid of me. They were afraid of them. There were people who were afraid to openly speak out in support of the administration.

Finally, when the faculty union voted for the “vote of no confidence,” only select faculty were allowed to participate in the process. President Alice described how she was perplexed by this action, because the internal campus constituency or external constituency would not know that a very small number of faculty could vote or even what this type of action truly means for a community college President. This fact was further exacerbated should President Alice choose to pursue another position. She shared her concerns about the possible choice to pursue a different position at a different location as

Only, only one thing that I will share with you, is I always worry about thinking if I really want to change jobs, what happens next? Because one of the things that I know is that, how to, how to deal with this situation in the future in an honest way that doesn’t look like I’m making excuses, that recognizes that there has been, you know, that there’s learning, and that I really value my relationships with faculty and I’m very much an inclusive, transparent person, and, and so in some ways—I mean, I love what I do. But should I ponder another job? I know that I will always have to deal with that, that issue. And my initial gut is, That isn’t fair. I shouldn’t have to . . . . And then just to have these folks turn around and, and be so, not understanding the power that they have with that action to potentially, ruin someone’s life, and in some respects, will impact my future should I choose to leave. And I will have to deal with it again. And there’s something about that that just doesn’t feel very good to me.

Conflict is an opportunity. President Alice indicated that conflict can be used as a sign of opportunities for innovation, creativity, growth and change which is needed today to assist with the challenges faced by community colleges. She added
that, without conflict, then we may not have “the opportunity to think about other people’s needs if everything was sort of groupthink.”

**Conflict comes from fear of loss.** President Alice indicated that continuous conflict can be very draining and can sap the energy from the people and the organization for creativity and innovation. As she reflected on this concept, she shared

You know, I’m not afraid of conflict . . . it’s the ongoing conflict about the same thing, you know, that’s draining. And that comes from people not wanting to move on. They want, it’s a holding on and I think it comes from fear. I think fear is tied up in it, that people are afraid of losing, whether losing—you know I guess ultimately losing their position or their life. I mean that’s pretty extreme. But losing their position (I mean their job position, not their issue that they’re dealing with). But they’d have to sacrifice value and some how they’d have to give up something. So that’s the part that makes conflict difficult. So I think fear has a lot to do with it.

The following list presents the explicated themes of the conflict experience as expressed by President Alice:

- Conflict is an outgrowth of diversity.
- Conflict is inevitable.
- Conflict is perplexing.
- Conflict is an opportunity.
- Conflict is a result of fear and loss.

**Conflict Management Experience - President Doe Analysis**

My analysis resulted in three prominent themes for President Doe concerning the perceived experience of managing conflict in the community college context: (a) Conflict is a disagreement about a point of view, an idea, a pathway forward; (b) Conflict leads to improvements; and (c) Conflict is inevitable. The following analysis is provided using a heading for each of the three themes.

**Conflict is a disagreement about diversity.** President Doe described conflict as “where you have disagreement about a point of view, an idea, a pathway forward, a, some sort of concept.” He also described the term as involving multiple approaches or multiple points of view as to a way forward.
**Conflict provides opportunity for improvements.** When asked if President Doe believed conflict was useful, he shared that as long as it does not become destructive to people’s psyche or their person, then the experience of the conflict can result in an improved way for handling future approaches. It “causes you, it sharpens those in conflict—it definitely sharpens them up.”

**Conflict is inevitable.** President Doe indicated “controversies come with the territory” as the CEO of the organization who is making change. He described the inevitability of conflict and shared the following caution

So be cautious about initiating things that can have a kickback from parts of the organization that could flare things up, and you’ve got to recognize when you’re moving to take an action, a negative action with someone who you know has strong ties to the organization, you’ve got to recognize that those moves come with some organizational risk. And those risks are what I would advise people to be sure they’re thinking, thinking through. Because the blowup, you know, the rise of the controversy can cost the organization time and attention span and thus mission work while this controversy is being dealt with.

He acknowledged that controversies are a necessary part of leadership positions and that there will be dysfunction during the conflict for a period of time, and it is the leader’s responsibility to manage the conflict. Further, the work of unions and labor relations described further the inevitability of conflict because

they (the unions) have very difficult jobs deciding what grievances to pass forward, what, when to sue the employer, when, you know, when to take an employment action, when to fight, when to settle. You know, it’s part of the work of labor relations. So they understand the trade off . . . . You don’t get to fight very many times because you’re gonna have to win your fights, or at least some percentage of them. Otherwise you get trivialized. Also, you get, it’s hard. Fights, controversies cause, they’re hard on people. So I, I think all of us in leadership positions, employees, and faculty chairs, informal leaders are making judgments about that all the time.

The following list presents the explicated themes of the conflict experience as expressed by President Doe:

- Conflict is a disagreement about a point of view, an idea, a pathway forward.
• Conflict is inevitable.
• Conflict provides opportunity for improvements.

**Conflict Management Experience - President Eleanor Analysis**

My analysis resulted in four themes for President Eleanor concerning the experience of managing conflict in two different community college contexts: (a) Conflict reveals diversity, (b) Conflict is perplexing, (c) Conflict presents an opportunity for creativity and change, and (d) Conflict is situational. The following analysis is provided using a heading for each of the five themes.

**Conflict reveals diversity.** President Eleanor shared one person thinks one thing, another person thinks something else. But for truly educated people that are open-minded, that’s just good debate. And in academics we usually have a lot of good debate.

**Conflict is perplexing.** President Eleanor was raised in a union household and saw the benefits that unions can bring to their membership. Yet, when she arrived on the campus and the contract was still unsettled, her own sense of appreciation for the work of the union and her own educational background allowed her to believe that she could settle the contract. Instead, she shared so when I walked in and found this kind of conflict immediately, it was very perplexing. It wasn’t what I was looking for. You know, I thought, “We’ve got a union. We’ve got a way to work things out. We’ve got a lot of great ideas for new things to do.” I mean I had a board that had actually said, “We’re hiring you because we like four or five things we’ve seen you do at this other institution. We want you to bring ‘em with you, those ideas, and do ‘em here.” And, the resistance to that was just, again it was a power struggle. It was just about a power struggle. Who was going to lead the institution? And, some of the union leaders, including this one particular person that I’ve already talked about, were going to make sure that those ideas did not happen. They were not going to be able to be translated into initiatives that would be worked out.

When asked what she thought the union leadership was seeking through the negotiations, she shared I don’t know to this day that I could answer the question, “What is it that they wanted?” It’s more like what they didn’t want. There was a sense that, they did not want leadership by the administration of the
college. They did not want the leadership, the administration to lead the college. They wanted the leadership to be from the union.

President Eleanor shared further about the perplexing nature of conflict because “you can’t fully name the issue because the issue remains nameless.” A clear example of this theme from President Eleanor follows:

So at the end of the day, what does it come down to? We don’t like her leadership style . . . It’s never about, “She did something wrong.” It’s only ever been about, you know, like, the leadership style. And that has to do, but it’s more with the other people than it does with you. That has to do with people’s willingness to take new ideas and begin to engage with people in those concepts and, and ideas . . . It has to do with allowing somebody to take leadership. You don’t get leadership just by getting a position . . . You become a leader because those who work with you are willing to engage in you as a leader . . . So they’re resistant because you’re a person of color. They’re resistant because you’re a woman. They’re resistant because you’re from the North and not the South. They’re resistant because you’re a Republican and, or a Democrat. They’re resistant because you’re perceived as being anti-union or union. You know, whatever it is, that they, people make decisions on whether or not they’re going to allow you to provide leadership.

Another example of the perplexing theme follows:

Listen, if somebody sat and told me the things that I’m sharing with you, before I had ever been a President and gone through some of the things I have gone through, I would have never believed it. I would have thought, “Nah, she’s, you know, she’s crying over spilt milk or whatever.” But I’m going to tell you I have seen the best of people, as President, and I have seen the worst of people. And I’m not the only one. I have talked to other Presidents, Presidents who have been in, you know, all kinds of situations. Schools that have been in difficulty and Presidents who have to come in and do some really tough things, and the mean-spiritedness that’s exhibited towards them because of what they have to do. Even if they’re doing the right things. This isn’t about, these conflicts do not arise as a result of doing the right thing or the wrong thing. These conflicts, arise as a result of relationships with people and their willingness to either engage or not engage in meaningful work and activity, in positive, in positive ways.

**Conflict presents an opportunity for creativity, change.** The clearest example of this theme is in President Eleanor’s statement
well I think I start that definition out by saying not all conflict is bad. As a matter of fact you rarely get change to happen until it becomes more uncomfortable to do what you’ve been doing, than it is to do what we’re trying to get change to happen to, to do, right? For people to sit down and to, come up with new ideas, there’s usually conflict . . . and that good debate is the incubator for great ideas.

**Conflict is situational.** President Eleanor described situations that require a leader to be very direct and controlling as is the case for crisis situations, and there are other times when a leader needs to methodically build consensus and collaboration. She indicated

there’s no one right way and I think the challenge for leaders today is to know, based on all the best guesses that you have on what’s going on with the current situation you have to pick the, the right way to try to address things. But to say, “I’m a leader, this is how I do things,” I don’t think it works very well.

In addition, President Eleanor used one of the qualifying colleges as an example. She indicated

I think for that situation, we did manage the conflict the way that this board wanted to see things done. And the way I say “this board” is because the board did not want the status quo. They wanted new things to happen at that college. They wanted to see a one-stop student services center. They wanted to see online education. And, we got some of that to happen.

The following list presents the explicated themes of the conflict experience as described by President Eleanor:

- Conflict reveals diversity.
- Conflict is perplexing.
- Conflict presents an opportunity for creativity, change.
- Conflict is situational.

**Conflict Management Experience - President J Analysis**

My analysis resulted in four themes for President J: (a) Conflict is about different points of view/diversity, (b) Conflict is inevitable and inherent, (c) Conflict is perplexing, and (d) Conflict is about resource competition (test of wills). The four themes are presented below.
Conflict is about different points of view/diversity. President J expressed his understanding that a honest disagreement can occur because people are seeing the same item with a different view. For example, he shared “conflict can just be an honest disagreement, although I find in my experience in community colleges, conflict usually means really very difficult disagreements over rather fundamental things.”

Conflict is inevitable and inherent. Clearly, President J felt that conflict is inevitable to the college bargaining process. In fact, he indicated that conflict is built in to the process and is therefore inherent. A good example is when he shared “I think conflict is just, as I say I think it’s inherent. I think in colleges conflict is inherent because there’s so little to fight over.” He also described the collective bargaining environment as

a natural venue for fighting which, it’s painful, really unfortunate but, but true. And then when you’re new like me, or you’re a change agent like I am, change, change obviously, one thing about change is people aren’t comfortable with change, you know? And I think we’re really moving the place very rapidly. So a lot of people are somewhat uncomfortable, although we haven’t fired anybody, we haven’t gotten rid of anybody, you know.

President J also described a natural creative tension between administration and faculty that he has observed at four-year universities, hospitals, public and private type institutions. He described this creative tension as part of the professional workforce—that stems from the workforce believing they are good at what they do and therefore would be good at doing what the President is doing.

Conflict is perplexing. President J described the increasing political nature associated with being elected or appointed to the board of trustees. He described the prior colleges where one board member was a dominating figure and was very deep into the operations of the college. If that person liked the individual serving as President, then he would allow the President to serve in this capacity, however, when the board member decided that he did not like that leadership then it was time to leave. President J shared

but when you lose support. I’ve got a friend of mine, a President at another college . . . . He’s hanging on by a four to three vote because
they elect trustees . . . There’s a book by Terry O’Banion called the *Rogue Trustee.* It’s a new book that’s out and what he talked about the rogue trustee was a pretty accurate description . . . and community colleges are, are so fragile when it comes to trustees because of the way they’re selected. I mean, they’re inherently political . . . I mean I understand elections and democracy and the Peers Forum. But the problem is that the election for the community college board, I mean you’ll, if you get two percent of the voters out. So real opportunity to railroad it if you’re organized. Spend a few thousand bucks, get your picture in front of people and get elected.

President J indicated that in some places and sometimes the trustees are not seeking service on the board for the right reasons. They do not serve community colleges to help them. They use them as a “first political stop,” and this explains the increasing popularity for community college Presidents to have multiple-year contracts—“you need to be protected against that type of stuff.”

In addition, President J described the perplexing idea of the increasing tactic of using a vote of no confidence by faculty unions at community colleges. He described a situation at a four-year university where the President had survived three or more no votes of confidence; however, at community colleges, it is difficult to remain in the position. He shared

the point of no confidence votes is that, I mean it, I mean my point with my faculty union leadership is choose your topic wisely. Don’t go to a no, don’t go to a no confidence vote over me over something that’s really stupid. If I don’t give you a raise or if I, if I fire people or if I eliminate a program that you think is important, maybe that’s no confidence vote material. But be careful about what you’re talking about. But they don’t. Everything’s, I mean, they’re classic—I mean, as good as they are about conflict, because they, they know how to get us involved and wrapped into conflict and that type of thing. They’re very good at that. They’re very bad at—everything’s strike. And they go, “Go! Go! Go!” And everything’s vote of no confidence. I mean they threaten stuff, you know, like you’re in a—I mean, “Okay, do it,” you know?

Finally, President J shared his concerns about the fear tactics used by unions against their own membership. He shared that he has had

the faculty comment that they’re more worried about being beat up by their faculty union leadership than they are by their campus Presidents.
They’re more worried about being intimidated by their faculty union leadership because their leadership style has been fear, intimidation, you know, getting everybody on the same page type of stuff. And it’s been that way for thirty, it’s been that way ever since the college started. So I’m just the most recent President they have to deal with, you know.

**Conflict is about resource competition (test of wills).** These disagreements end of becoming a “test of wills that disregards what the topic is.” President J provided an example over a personnel matter for one of the programs and that this conflict has become very “significant for the faculty union which will end up in a compromise designed to please both parties.” He indicated that it baffles him as to why this competition for resources for this program was so important. He indicated that in the end, he believes that they will compromise so each side will need to surrender something. The following list presents the explicated themes of the conflict experience as described by President J:

- Conflict is about different points of view/diversity.
- Conflict is inevitable.
- Conflict is perplexing.
- Conflict is about resource competition (test of wills).

**Conflict Management Experience - President M Analysis**

My analysis resulted in four themes for President M: (a) Conflict is about diversity, (b) Conflict is inevitable, (c) Conflict is perplexing, and (d) Conflict is situational. The following analysis is provided using a heading for each of the four themes.

**Conflict is about diversity.** President M indicated that conflict was about opposing points of view or a disagreement. He shared “conflict is when you have opposing points of view. Or you have something that causes a disagreement or an incident that can be translated into a disagreement.”

**Conflict is inevitable.** President M was the fifth President to work at his institution in less than seven years, and there were many kinds of conflict issues. He
realized that it did not matter if the person was internal, external, or had been a seasoned professional. President M was clear that “conflict was inevitable.”

Further, he shared “in fact the board gave me a list of personnel issues that they wanted addressed that were dysfunctional areas and dysfunctional folks. And so we addressed those issues over a period of time.” In addition, once President M was in the leadership position, the union leadership asked for a very large pay raise which the administration declined. Once the American financial market eroded, the administration could not offer any permanent raise, and this caused an inevitable conflict of a vote of no confidence.

**Conflict is perplexing.** President M indicated that the vote of no confidence was a complete surprise to him, the board of trustees, and his executive team. He believed that he had done everything possible (e.g., meeting with a variety of campus groups, meeting with individuals) so that the prior conflicts could be heard and addressed. But he had no control over the financial market, and he was pleased that the board of trustees allowed him to offer a small one time stipend for each faculty member. According to President M, the inability of the union to negotiate permanent raises resulted in a vote of no confidence. This was perplexing and created lots of strife. Lots and lots of strife. Because they wanted, they wanted a salary permanent raise and we would have given it to them . . . so the faculty union did a vote of no confidence as a strike back in terms of their failure to negotiate and to see a suitable resolution. Caught everyone off guard, caught me off guard, caught the board off guard. And, quite frankly I thought, “Well what do I do with this now?” . . . they are, very much activists and very aggressive in their approach. It is just, sort of almost in-your-face kind of approach. They’re, they’re very abrasive . . . very, aggressive. And they are, that way in terms of the union negotiations and they are that way in terms of our labor management committee meetings. And they’re that way with all of my Vice Presidents.

In addition, President M watched as the union leadership attempted to influence the election of the board of trustees. He shared

conceptually I didn’t understand why the faculty union did what they did other than they were trying to influence the outcome of the, the election of our board members, and they were trying to, really position
themselves in terms of upcoming negotiations, in the future that they would, they would not stop about taking the President down or taking board members down or whatever they needed to do to accomplish their agenda.

Conflict is situational. President M described how his coach advised him to stop holding open forums because it allowed a venue for the President to be attacked. In so doing, he reflected on how situational conflict can be. He shared everything is probably pretty situational depending on the college you’re at, because I’d been in community college work and higher education for 38 years. And I’ve been, I have done open forums at every college I’ve been at when I’ve been a dean or a Vice President. I always did that with my staff. We’d hold an open forum about the issues that are occurring in the division, allow everybody to have an opportunity to ask questions or provide feedback, and really create that openness and trust. And it’s worked in every position I’ve been at. But this particular college is very, very challenging in terms of the dynamics of the individuals involved in the leadership of the union.

The following list presents the explicated themes of the conflict experience as described by President M:

- Conflict is about diversity.
- Conflict is inevitable.
- Conflict is perplexing.
- Conflict is situational.

Conflict Management Experience - President T Analysis

My analysis resulted in three prominent themes for President T concerning the experience of managing conflict in the community college context: (a) Conflict is inevitable, (b) Conflict is perplexing, and (c) Conflict is competition for limited resources. The following analysis is provided using a heading for each of the three themes.

Conflict is inevitable. President T described the inevitability of conflict as a necessary part of the job. He shared the

But there’s, again, conflicts everyday and you can’t, you can’t, say, “Well, gee, we’ve got conflict today, therefore today’s not a good day.” It’s just an ordinary part of being at the job. Any job, whether you work
in a sawmill or a car manufacturing plant or a college or any job, there’s always going to be conflict of some kind. And you just, need to, to recognize it and do what you can to, to resolve it, but you’re never gonna have—I guess if you had a job that didn’t have any kind of conflict it could get awfully, awfully boring.

**Conflict is perplexing.** President T indicated any time that there is collective bargaining, “the unions will try to create as much controversy as possible” and that bad part about collective bargaining is it takes the people that you work with on a daily basis and depend upon, and you work together as a team, and it pits you against each other in an adversarial role. So I’ve never seen collective bargaining be in a healthy situation for any college. No college President enjoys being in collective bargaining.

Further, President T acknowledged typically when you have collective bargaining, both sides come to the table with very high expectations of getting things that they probably are not going to get . . . and so, bargaining becomes an exercise in collaboration and compromise . . . and a lot of times when collective bargaining talks breaks down, it’s because different, people on either side of the bargaining table believe they really have to have something and realistically they’re not going to get it.

President T discussed the importance of having a board that understands this facet of collective bargaining. If there is a divided board, then the President could lose the position and so Presidents need to be prepared to manage this perplexing part of the position.

**Conflict is competition for limited resources.** President T indicated, “I would say competition for resources causes most of the conflicts in the community college world.” He shared that in a community college environment, the competition for resources which could “include staff time, physical things, jobs, interest in programs” seems to cause a “kind of a zero-sum game” among people at the institution. He shared the belief that seems to operate at the institution that “if one program gets an extra instructor then mine won’t. And so there’s a competition. There’s a competition among college leaders for shares of resources at the colleges.” The following list presents the explicated themes of the conflict experience as described by President T:
- Conflict is inevitable.
- Conflict is perplexing.
- Conflict is competition for limited resources/competition.

**Conflict Management Experience - President X Analysis**

My analysis resulted in three themes for President X as follows: (a) resource competition, (b) different points of view, and (c) inevitable. The following analysis is provided using a heading for each of the three themes.

**Conflict is different points of view.** President X indicated that conflict is about opposing views or different points of view with the hope that two parties can agree that they are having different points of view. The clearest example of this theme is in President X words describing the conflict experience as one of “disagreement” with “two diametrically opposed views of how to do things and that perhaps, with the understanding that yes, we disagree.”

**Conflict is inevitable.** President X indicated that conflict is inevitable, because the college President needs to be the one to take good care of the community colleges’ public resources because through the collective bargaining process, the other side will attempt to take as much as possible. He shared:

> you have to be prudent managers, you know? We are stewards, you know? They’re public resources, and we have to guard them as such. But somehow part of the construct of the other side in a collective bargaining, you know, take what you can get at all costs and regardless of what the impact is on the institution. And so that has its built-in conflict.

**Conflict is resource competition (test of wills).** President X shared conflict comes in many forms in the higher education area, especially because there is a built in test of wills to compete for limited resources. He indicated conflict appears very quickly in the collective bargaining environment because each side is attempting to get everything they can at all costs, “especially in times of scarcity, but even in times of plenty.”
President X also shared

Certainly you’re not going to, you know, give away the store, you know? You have to be prudent managers, you know? We are stewards, you know? They’re public resources, and we have to guard them as such. But somehow part of the construct of the other side in a collective bargaining, you know, take what you can get at all costs and regardless of what the impact is on the institution.

The following list presents the explicated themes of the conflict experience as described by President X:

- Conflict is different points of view/diversity.
- Conflict is inevitable.
- Conflict is about resource competition (test of wills).

**Conflict Management Experience - Cross Case Analysis**

This section describes the conflict management experiences across the seven participating Presidents/cases. The primary goal of a cross-case analysis is to assist with the synthesis of understanding the conflict management experience by examining the essences of the experience from a particular time and place and from the perspective of the researcher after exhaustive imaginative and reflective study of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The cross case summary description of the conflict experiences managed by Presidents in the community college context is summarized in Table 6.

Three pervasive themes describing the experience of conflict management by the community college Presidents emerged from the individual cases. These themes included (a) conflict is inevitable/inherent, (b) conflict is a different points of view/diversity, and (c) conflict is perplexing.

**Conflict is inevitable.** Six of the seven participating Presidents identified conflict as inevitable and inherent. Conflict is a concept that exists because conditions present themselves that make it necessary. The structure of the faculty union negotiations and the current relationship with the administration creates this experience at the outset as described by the participating Presidents. President Alice shared
Table 6

*Research Question One Themes for Conflict Management Experience—Perplexing Cross Case Analysis*

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<th>Alice</th>
<th>Doe</th>
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<th>J</th>
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<tr>
<td>Inevitable/inherent</td>
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<td>Opportunity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Resource Competition (test of wills)</td>
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<td>Situational</td>
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I think it’s inevitable. I can’t imagine a world without conflict. I wouldn’t want a world without conflict, because then I don’t think there’d be growth and I don’t think there’d be change.

According to President Doe, conflict is “inherent with all species—both animals and people.” President J’s example is when he shared “I think it’s inherent.” It is a necessary component to the process needed to make change at the institution. He described a toxic environment in our collective bargaining process with faculty. He described the inherent nature of conflict because “they (the faculty) choose to form that conflict. We choose to try to make change which we understand sometimes creates conflict.”

President M shared that, it did not matter if the person was internal, external, or had been a seasoned professional, due to the nature of the “institution’s inner workings”—conflict was inevitable. One of the long-time serving Presidents had retired on the job and “there were lots of pockets where if there’s a leadership void, the pockets will take over the leadership role.” While President T shared but there’s, again, conflicts everyday and you can’t, you can’t, say, Well, gee, we’ve got conflict today, therefore today’s not a good day. It’s just an ordinary part of being at the job.
President X shared conflict is “inevitable because we have two diametrically opposed views of how to do things and a struggle over limited resources.” The inevitability of conflict management in the community college context across cases is summarized in Table 7.

**Conflict is different points of view/diversity.** Six of the seven participating Presidents in this study highlighted diversity as one of the themes. Presidents Alice, Doe, Eleanor, J, M, and X contributed to this theme. President Alice described conflict as “an outgrowth of diversity” where people are “looking at things or reacting to things differently. The clearest example from President Doe is his description that conflict is where you have a “disagreement about a point of view, an idea, a pathway forward, a, some sort of concept.” President Eleanor shared

  one person thinks one thing, another person thinks something else. But for truly educated people that are open-minded, that’s just good debate. And in academics we usually have a lot of good debate. But for truly educated people that are open-minded, that’s just good debate. And in academics we usually have a lot of good debate.

  President J described conflict as an “honest disagreement, although in his experience with community colleges, conflict means disagreements over rather fundamental things.” President M shared

  conflict is when you have opposing points of view. Or you have something that causes a disagreement or an incident that can be translated into a disagreement.

The clearest example of this theme is in President X words describing the conflict experience as one of “disagreement” with “two diametrically opposed views of how to do things and that perhaps, with the understanding that yes, we disagree.” The cross case summary description of the first pervasive theme for different points of view/diversity of the conflict management experience is summarized in Table 8.

**Perplexing.** Six of the seven Presidents highlighted a perplexing view of conflict management in the community college context. Presidents Alice, Eleanor, J, M, T, and X revealed this aspect relating to conflict management. President Alice shared her concerns about the increasing lack of civility and the tactics used by the
<table>
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<th>Alice</th>
<th>Doe</th>
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<td>I think it’s</td>
<td>Conflict is inherent with all species—</td>
<td>I think it’s</td>
<td>Conflict was</td>
<td>But there’s, again, conflicts everyday.</td>
<td>Inevitable because we have two</td>
<td>Inevitable because we have two</td>
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<td>inevitable.</td>
<td>both animals and people.</td>
<td>inherent.</td>
<td>inevitable.</td>
<td>It’s just an ordinary part of being at the job.</td>
<td>diametrically opposed views.</td>
<td>diametrically opposed views.</td>
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Research Question One Themes for Conflict Management Experience—Inevitability Cross Case Analysis
union. She shared “the verbal assaults, and, just this, I don’t know—it was just gross. I don’t know how else to describe it.” Further, that the union tactics have become more mean spirited and the people that the union is attempting to protect tend to be the ones who have the most fear of the union and the leadership. She described her perspective of other people’s concerns about the union tactics. She shared

part of the problem was apathy because people were afraid. They weren’t afraid of me. They were afraid of them. There were people who were afraid to openly speak out in support of the administration.

Finally, President Alice shared her concerns about if she were to pursue another position and how the vote of no confidence may have affected her career trajectory. She shared

I always worry about thinking if I really want to change jobs, what happens next? But should I ponder another job? I know that I will always have to deal with that, that issue. And my initial gut is, “That isn’t fair. I shouldn’t have to.” And then just to have these folks turn around and, and be so, not understanding the power that they have with that action to potentially ruin someone’s life, and in some respects, will impact my future should I choose to leave. And I will have to deal with it again. And there’s something about that that just doesn’t feel very good to me.

President Eleanor shared a clear example of her perspective on the perplexing view of managing conflict in the community college context. She shared

So at the end of the day, what does it come down to? We don’t like her leadership style . . . . It’s never about, “She did something wrong.” It’s only ever been about, you know, like, the leadership style. And that has to do, but it’s more with the other people than it does with you. That has to do with people’s willingness to take new ideas and begin to engage with people in those concepts and, and ideas and . . . . It has to do with allowing somebody to take leadership. You don’t get leadership just by getting a position . . . . You become a leader because those who work with you are willing to engage in you as a leader.

President J shared his concern about the increasing need for Presidents to have multiple year contracts so that they can be protected from board of trustee members who use the position as the
### Summary Across Cases of the Diversity of Conflict in Community College

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Alice</th>
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<tr>
<td>Outgrowth of diversity.</td>
<td>Disagreement about a point of view, an idea, a pathway forward, some sort of concept.</td>
<td>One person thinks one thing, another person thinks something else.</td>
<td>Honest disagreement.</td>
<td>Opposing points of view.</td>
<td>Disagreement with two diametrically opposed views of how to do things.</td>
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first political stop and therefore may not be seeking service on the board for the right reasons. They don’t serve community colleges to help them.

President M watched as the union leadership attempted to influence the election of the board of trustees. He shared

conceptually I didn’t understand why the faculty union did what they did other than they were trying to influence the outcome of the, the election of our board members, and they were trying to, really position themselves in terms of upcoming negotiations, in the future that they would, they would not stop about taking, the President down or taking board members down or whatever they needed to do to accomplish their agenda.

Moreover, he expressed concern as the union leadership were

very aggressive in their approach. It’s a, sort of almost in-your-face kind of approach. They’re very abrasive . . . very aggressive and they are, that way in terms of the union negotiations and they are that way in terms of our labor management committee meetings.

President T described the conflicts resulting from collective bargaining as “a toxic environment that pits you against each other in an adversarial role.” As a consequence, they (the faculty union), choose to form “a rather significant conflict.” When President T was offered the Presidency on an interim basis, he agreed to accept the position as long as the board of trustees agreed to restore civility. In addition, during the difficult times, the administration requested that the union assist the institution through the “recession and they declined to do so.”

President X described the collective bargaining process as one in which “you take what you can get at all costs regardless of what the impact is on the institution.” Moreover, as a long time President, he shared his dismay that the current day Presidents are struggling with the same political battles that he fought in the early 1980s. He shared

I mean we should be moving beyond that but it looks like, you know, like every generation . . . you know, not reinventive but refighting the same battles over and over and over again, you know?

President X also added to the discussion about the increasing tactic to personalize the attacks and how your own colleagues, friends, and neighbors become persons who
“vilify you. Demonize you. You know?” The perplexing view of conflict management in the community college context across cases is summarized in Table 9.

**Research Question One: Conflict Management Experience Summary**

Three pervasive themes emerged for research question one. They were the management of conflict in the community college context represents (a) diversity, (b) an inevitable that is unavoidable, and (c) an increasing perplexing perspective. Now that the ways the Presidents described the conflict experience in the community college context have been explored, the next section will describe how the Presidents viewed their own manifestation of conflict competence, which is the subject of research question two.

**Research Question Two: Manifestation of Conflict Competence**

This section presents the findings in response to research question two: How does conflict management competence manifest itself in conflict situations? The rationale for this question was to explore the Presidents perspective of how the participating community college Presidents demonstrates competence when managing conflicts. The first part of this section is organized by the seven cases, which are used as headings.

**Manifestation of Conflict Competence - President Alice Analysis**

The analysis for President Alice resulted in eight themes for President Alice concerning the manifestation of conflict competence during conflicts. They were to (a) avoid personalizing the conflict, (b) rely on executive team, (c) solve problems at lowest level, (d) stay focused on the college mission and the students, (e) inform and engage the board of trustees, (f) know and take care of yourself and know own limits, (g) engage network of colleagues and family, and (h) engage executive coach or consultant. The following analysis is provided using a heading for each of the eight themes for the manifestation of conflict competence in conflict situations.

**Avoid personalizing the conflict.** President Alice described her belief that initially the union’s intent was to “by and large to build the union. Then it became personal. I think it started a little tiny bit personal but it was really about the union.”
Table 9

Research Question One Themes for Conflict Management Experience—Perplexing Cross Case Analysis

<table>
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<th>Alice</th>
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<tr>
<td>They can ruin someone’s life . . . there’s something about that that just doesn’t feel very good to me.</td>
<td>It’s never about she did something wrong.</td>
<td>Increasing need for Presidents to have multiple year contracts so that they can be protected from board of trustee members who use the position as the “first political stop.”</td>
<td>Caught everyone off guard . . . . I thought well what do I do with this now? They (the unions) are very much activists and very aggressive in their approach . . .. I didn’t understand why the faculty union did what they did.</td>
<td>Collective bargaining pits you against each other in an adversarial role . . .. So I’ve never seen collective bargaining be in a healthy situation for any college. No college President enjoys being in collective bargaining.</td>
<td>You take what you can get at all costs regardless of what the impact is on the institution.</td>
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But then the conflict became a power struggle. The union leader went to the point of questioning the trustee members competence with institutional oversight. She also described her reflective feelings on some days where she questioned herself personally and asked herself:

What am I doing? But I was determined that I was not going to leave on their terms. And I didn’t, you know I tried to be, in every conceivable way—I mean I had open forums and they would only attack me. And, you know, in doing my own, “Woe is me. I don’t deserve this.”

In addition, President Alice realized that the union leader managed to create a contrast between me and him in that I’m much more direct, outspoken, I speak, fairly, loudly. I mean, I speak so you can hear me. So I know some people use this as a strategy.

Finally, President Alice shared the “win in all of this for me personally is, I have found some more balance.”

**Rely on executive team.** President Alice believed that part of her conflict competence was manifested in her ability to rely on her executive team despite having someone on the team who was acting as a confederate. She described her strategies for managing conflict with the confederate person on her executive team was to “keep the person close, let the individual know that” she was aware that the person was revealing discussed strategies from the executive meetings with the union leadership. Yet, she decided to focus on the “strengths that the individual brought to the team” because she believed that the person had “some real strengths.” She also shared about her reliance on her executive team. She shared

you are mine (team) and I depend on you to move this institution. So we’re in this together because she realized that her executive team was really, really challenged. Because they were struggling too (with the issues at the campus).

She also shared that she would advise anyone in the situation of dealing with a confederate on the executive team to manage the relationship carefully. She described the actions as “go really very, very carefully.”
In addition, she asked her team to realize that when they have their own challenges that they be cognizant of the idea that you’re putting me at risk, not you, because if this continues to create dissatisfaction, will this result in another movement on the part to have a vote of no confidence in the administration, which really means a no, a vote of no confidence in me.”

As a consequence, she relies on her team, but acknowledges that she does not give as much latitude because it places her at risk of another vote of no confidence.

**Solve problems at lowest level.** Through the conflict, she and the union leadership agreed to finally address issues at the “lowest level and don’t give, don’t assign malice intent and some things.” She reflected on a letter that she received from the faculty union asking her to make a decision on an issue and she shared that she reminded the faculty leadership “as in our agreements, we have agreed that we would go to the lowest level possible to resolve conflict.”

**Possess the ability to listen.** President Alice reflected on the importance of listening and being able to repeat back what was said so that others know that their concerns have been heard, especially during times of conflict. She shared

I think that’s a critical competency in conflict resolution is the ability to listen and to share back with people what you think, you know, what you think you heard. And so you know it’s just the traditional communication of good paraphrasing, good listening, good paraphrasing.

**Stay focused on the college mission and the students.** President Alice reflected on the difficult times when she believed it was most critical to focus on the college mission and the students, in spite of the conflicts that she was experiencing. She shared

But the other thing is you’ve got to focus on the mission. When you think about the mission of community colleges, it’s very energizing. It’s about, you know I started in social justice. It’s about social justice. Community colleges, that’s what it’s about. You know it’s about the great, people say education is the great equalizer. Community college education is a great equalizer. Higher education can be a real divider. You know, it can be very elitist in separating folks, but community colleges—that is about, that is the equalizer, that’s what brings groups
in our society that would not have had access to education, to give them the opportunity . . . So you just think about our mission and who the folks are and the change that happens, individually, and then the change that it creates for our society, our opportunity.

**Inform and engage the board of trustees.** President Alice indicated she “was keeping the board informed all along the way.” President Alice encouraged them to meet with others who were dissatisfied in executive session and “hear the faculty out.” She wanted the board to know firsthand about the concerns and that there were conflicts. She shared “you’ve got to keep your board informed.”

**Know and take care of yourself and know own limits.** President Alice emphasized the importance of taking care of yourself, especially during times of conflict and knowing your own limits of how far you will allow people to attack or criticize you. She shared

> you know, the learning I think is you just, you know, you have to keep yourself open, and not be afraid, and examine yourself. You know, if you’re doing things that are contributing then you’ve got to be willing to admit them if to nobody else but to yourself. And sometimes there just isn’t a good fit, but people, you know, just don’t run away. But also you have to finally be willing to say I’m not going to be abused anymore, either. You know, because I’m an administrator, you don’t get free reign on me. I don’t talk like that to you, you know, I don’t want you to talk that way to me.

President Alice also described how despite the conflict, that she was going maintain her integrity. She shared

> you know, they broke my heart but they were not going to take my integrity . . . And I think they broke my heart because I love the place, you know, and that’s been the downside. But the reason they weren’t going to take my integrity because it’s all I have

Finally, President Alice highlighted the importance to “make sure that you stay healthy and do the things you need to do.”

**Engage network of colleagues and family.** President Alice emphasized the importance of having a good network that is internal and external to the campus. She shared that she has “great friends inside,” however she must also “always recognize that you’re always the President. You don’t get to put that aside. You’ve got to find
outside resources.” She explained further the need to have spaces where she could vent and talk through her “frustrations” and check “out her points of view” with people who won’t just say

   oh yeah, you’re great . . . . You know, someone who would really give you some insights into things—“Well, have you thought about this?” or “What about that?”

**Engage executive coach or consultant.** President Alice and her executive team brought in a consultant for a retreat and “we took each other to task. I mean we did some really hard work and we did some really hard work around the confederate.” She and the union leadership also brought in a consultant to help them with the conflict which included listening skills.

The following list presents the explicated themes for conflict competence manifestation by President Alice:

- Avoid personalizing the conflict.
- Rely on executive team.
- Solve problems at lowest level.
- Stay focused on the college mission and the students.
- Inform and engage the board of trustees.
- Know and take care of yourself and know own limits.
- Engage network of colleagues and family.
- Engage executive coach or consultant.

**Manifestation of Conflict Competence - President Doe Analysis**

My analysis resulted in five prominent themes for President Doe concerning the manifestation of conflict competence during conflicts. He shared that he believed his conflict competence was manifested by his actions to (a) stay calm, (b) avoid personalizing the conflict, (c) stay focused on the college mission and the students, (d) inform and engage the board of trustees, and (e) engage network of colleagues and family. The following analysis is provided using a heading for each of the five themes.
Stay calm. President Doe described that it was important not to get upset or overreact. He shared “I didn’t overreact, either. I mean, I hope I didn’t. I hope I was viewed as not overreacting.” He also shared the leader can’t really get mad about it. You’ve got to understand that it’s people who are not of ill will and do not understand or are misinformed or have incomplete information . . . you can’t yell at people. You have to watch your tone. You can’t swear at people. You, you know, your voice level and you’ve got to be fairly even. Respect. When we’re angry with someone, that’s often accompanied by not showing respect for the other person. So you’ve got to be careful of those things. You’ve got to, you can’t, can’t lose your own control.

Avoid personalizing the conflict. President Doe indicated to others that the person may not have been sincere since he initiated some of the conflicts and made it seem as though President Doe was personally attacking him. President Doe indicated that it seemed more like the person was “gunnin for” him.

Stay focused on the college mission and the students. President Doe shared his concerns were that the conflict was “taking the eyes off the ball” of helping students. He shared the “success of the institution begins to be at stake because everybody’s got their eye off the ball. Their eye is not on teaching students or the next enrollment cycle or the capital plan.” He described further that “when they’re (faculty) spending more time worrying about whether you treated somebody fairly or not and they’re not thinking about English and chemistry and welding and, that’s, that’s all.”

Inform and engage the board of trustees. President Doe shared he knew that he was responsible to managing to the board of trustees’ direction and how important it was to keep them informed. He acknowledged that many of his action were “mostly board-driven more than me, and that was the idea.” He also shared about the board responsibility to oversee the entire institution. In the end, the board extended President Does’ contract and acknowledged that there were areas that they would work on with President Doe.

The following list presents the explicated themes for conflict competence manifestation by President Doe:
• Stay calm.
• Avoid personalizing the conflict.
• Stay focused on the college mission and the students.
• Inform and engage the board of trustees.

Manifestation of Conflict Competence - President Eleanor Analysis

My analysis resulted in seven themes for President Eleanor concerning the manifestation of conflict competence during conflicts. She shared that she believed her conflict competence was manifested by her actions to (a) stay calm, (b) do not personalize the conflict, (c) rely on executive team, (d) stay focused on the college mission and the students, (e) inform and engage the board of trustees, (f) know and take care of yourself and know own limits, and (g) engage network of colleagues and family. The following analysis is provided using a heading for each of the seven themes.

Stay calm. President Eleanor emphasized the importance of maintaining calmness during conflict situations and remaining professional throughout the experience. She shared

I keep my cool . . . I put the issues on the table, and that sometimes that includes the elephant in the room. And that can create conflict but it also, in the end, if you’re not doing that you’re not really resolving any of the conflicts. You’re just putting some things under the rug. I would, have maintained the level of professionalism that I maintained through all of the issues, good and bad things that happened, because I think first and foremost at the end of the day you always want to be able to look yourself, at yourself in the mirror, and know that you have been professional, that you have been respectful, even when others are not either of those things.

Avoid personalizing the conflict. The clearest example of this theme is demonstrated in her words that she has learned over time not to take it personal, that it’s more about the position than it is about (me) . . . because like I said before, I have talked to many other Presidents and chancellors that have received mean-spirited anonymous letters that have gone to their boards accusing them of all kinds of things. I have talked to Presidents that have been threatened by people, okay? I don’t think the threats were
against me personally. They were against the President and the change that comes through leadership that some people don’t want to have happen . . . So I just, I truly believe that it’s not about me, that it is about the position and speaking out against change.

**Rely on executive team.** President Eleanor shared that she had a member of executive team who was not negotiating in good faith. But that she relied upon the other members to offer her
good advice on processes and could have helped to organize the processes better so that we honored them and so that from both sides we could have negotiated on good faith more and more on the issues.

**Stay focused on the college mission and the students.** The clearest example of this theme is how proud President Eleanor is that for her prior institutions where she experienced conflict that she can say
But at the end of the day I can look in the mirror and know that everything that I have done has been always with one single vision and that is, “What is in the best interest of the students?” Because if we do what is in the best interest of the students, it will always be in the best interest of our institutions, financially and physically, as well as the culture of our institutions, and it will always be in my own best interest. Because when you leave an institution, your name is forever associated with that institution. You know, you were the former President whether you were there for two years or 22 years. You were the former President of the institution and so, and nobody can, nobody takes that away. So, you know, I want to continue to see very good things happen at the institutions that I’ve had the benefit of serving so, you know, I’m supporting, that the next President that follows me and you know, I want to, I would be very positive about whoever that is. Because each person brings new talents and new gifts to the position.

**Inform and engage the board of trustees.** President Eleanor expressed that the board of trustees chair needs to be kept informed and engaged about institutional happenings. This will help to ensure that there are no surprises to the full board. She shared
always keep your board chair informed of whatever’s happening, which is the rule of thumb for everything. You never want your board to have a surprise and if you’re doing things in a certain way you want them to know why.
In addition, she offered that at the time the group did a vote of no confidence and “my board, recognized that it was all about the negotiations and I had full support of my board the whole time I was there”

**Know and take care of yourself and know own limits.** President Eleanor recognized her own limits and that she could not control the actions of other people. She shared

there are some things you cannot control. I cannot control another person’s behavior. I can do my best to influence it. And, I can do my best to try to inspire good things. But at the end of the day, it’s the receiving person’s decision as to what they do with all of that.

**Engage network of colleagues and family.** President Eleanor shared that she has a “good support system within her family” which includes her daughter.

The following list presents the explicated themes for conflict competence manifestation by President Eleanor:

- Stay calm.
- Avoid personalizing the conflict.
- Rely on executive team.
- Stay focused on the college mission and the students.
- Inform and engage the board of trustees.
- Know and take care of yourself and know own limits.
- Engage network of colleagues and family.

**Manifestation of Conflict Competence - President J Analysis**

My analysis resulted in six themes for President J concerning the manifestation of conflict competence during conflicts. He shared that he believed his conflict competence was manifested by his actions to (a) avoid personalizing the conflict, (b) rely on executive team, (c) stay focused on the college mission and the students, (d) inform and engage the board of trustees, and (e) engage network of colleagues and family. The following analysis is provided using a heading for each of the six themes.

**Avoid personalizing the conflict.** President J clearly believed that conflict is a part of the job and that it should not be taken personally. He shared
I mean I talk to a lot of Presidents who go through this and that’s the first thing I say. “Don’t take it personally. It’s just part of the job.” You’ve just got to go through with it. As long as your board is supporting you, you don’t have anything to worry about it.

He also shared that the faculty union leadership style has been fear, intimidation . . . And it’s been that way for 30, it’s been that way ever since the college started. So I’m just the most recent President they have to deal with, you know.

**Rely on executive team.** President J described the importance of involving his executive team and members of the trustees. President J also emphasized the importance of listening to his executive team. He shared “you don’t hire bright people and pay them a lot of money and then, then not listen to them.” He shared that he assigns people from the executive team and gets the board members to participate in each and every conflict and try to get them to give me their best information, often involving two or three of them intimately in the conflict so they get to jump right into the fray. And that’s proved great dividends for me because I, many heads are better than one. You need to think about these types of things, and if you’ve got a, a diverse group at the top, which I do, often that diversity will come through with a different, different attitude, different viewpoints about how to, engage in a conflict, solve the conflict.

**Stay focused on the college mission and the students.** President J shared his “deep abiding commitment to community colleges, and what community colleges are about, I think, and, and to the community.”

**Inform and engage the board of trustees.** President J discussed the importance of keeping the board of trustees informed and engaged so that there were no surprises for them. He especially emphasized the importance of having a board that is supportive. For example, he shared the
board comes from all walks of life so they can be very, first of all they can be very supportive, which is nice. Nothing like having your board say you’re doing a good job when you’re in the middle of a fight, you know? But they, they can also suggest some pretty good ideas . . . . But if you don’t have the board and, and the board, and, and what’s a board support is a source of huge discussion among Presidents.

**Know and take care of yourself and know own limits.** President J shared the importance of a strong personal life. He described circumstances for other Presidents who have endured divorces because they spend more time with the job than with the spouse. I mean I’ve been very lucky. I think that’s, if you can have a strong supportive spouse.

President J also described the importance of keeping yourself “physically healthy” so that you can make better decisions.”

**Engage network of colleagues and family.** President J shared the importance or having a network of colleagues and family that can be enlisted to assist with any difficulties. He shared it’s very important to have a network of friends and family that you can talk to, just to relieve your stress, that have nothing to do with the institution. They have nothing to do with it. I think that really is helpful, so everywhere I’ve been I’ve made it a real high commitment to develop, as quickly as I can, a network of friends outside of work that I can go have a beer with or drink with or just talk about things with. and, you know, I’m able to help them too.

The following list presents the explicated themes for conflict competence manifestation by President J:

- Avoid personalizing the conflict.
- Rely on executive team.
- Stay focused on the college mission and the students.
- Inform and engage the board of trustees.
- Know and take care of yourself and know own limits.
- Engage network of colleagues and family.
Manifestation of Conflict Competence - President M Analysis

My analysis resulted in eight themes for President M concerning the manifestation of conflict competence during conflicts. He shared that he believed his conflict competence was manifested by his actions to (a) stay calm, (b) do not personalize the conflict, (c) rely on executive team, (d) solve problems at lowest level, (e) stay focused on the college mission and the students, (f) inform and engage the board of trustees, (g) engage network of colleagues and family, and (h) engage executive coach or consultant. The following analysis is provided using a heading for each of the eight themes.

**Stay calm.** President M emphasized the importance of maintaining self control and ensuring that he did not get upset. He shared

I don’t think they’ve (campus personnel) ever seen me get angry. Okay? Because I don’t get angry. Oh, well I mean I get angry but I don’t get angry in a professional sense. I don’t get angry and yell, or angry. I can get upset but it’ll be a very controlled upsetness. I can control that, emotion and start to process in terms of, “Well how do we deal with this? What are the issues? How is it, how is it going?”

**Avoid personalizing the conflict.** President M described the importance of knowing that conflict goes with the position and was not about the person. He also described that there will need to be a lot of change in the personnel, and not only at the Presidential level at some institutions where conflict is pervasive. He also described situations that can occur when the President takes the conflict personally and how other people at the institution can be childlike and mean spirited. He shared

I don’t take it personal. It’s just the nature of the beast and the way in which that campus has been shaped over the years. And it’s gonna take, I think it’s gonna take, it’s gonna take more Presidents following me when I retire and it will take people to consistently try to create openness and transparency and trust, and it’ll take a turnover in some of those folks that are in those leadership roles.

Further, President M shared

because when you, when you take it personal, I think one of the competencies there is if you, if you, you just cannot take it personal. It isn’t directed at you as a person. It may be directed at you as the leader. It may be directed at you because you are the person where the buck
stops. But ultimately it isn’t who you are as a human being. It’s your position that is causing this attraction and this grief, though, you know. I can tell you that I’ve had really horrible, horrible things written about me, on blogs. I’ve had things, written, to me, personally, which I immediately throw in the garbage. And I know many, many Presidents who get that kind of stuff from disgruntled, individuals who are upset with whatever decision. You cannot take those things personally and, and you’re best not to even read them, because, many of them are very insulting and, and almost childlike. But, communication, don’t take it personal.

President M knew that it was critical to avoid taking some of the issues personally because the President’s position is the leader. Thus, some of the concerns expressed by disgruntled employees are directed towards the office of the President and not necessarily the individual person.

**Rely on executive team.** President M was advised by his coach to stop placing himself in the spotlight with the public forums and allow his vice Presidents to “hold the meetings.” President M could attend, but he was there to support his executive team. He also shared that he operates by the rule

> there are no surprises for the President and the President never surprises the board. So I expect my VPs and others who report to me to keep me informed of what’s going on in their units.

President M discussed that he had

> some conversations obviously with my executive team who were equally as dumbfounded and equally as shocked, surprised, and disappointed with the action, but, but they didn’t have any real suggestions or solutions that, they, that they made in that process. It was more one of support.

**Solve problems at lowest level.** President M discussed his thinking as each new conflict arises. He shared his process for raising questions about the conflict where he asked

> Is this a conflict that left unchecked and unresolved satisfactorily is going to have an influence on the culture of your institution or on the day-to-day working of your institution? And that the President is always seeking to “filter things through” by asking “if people don’t resolve this exactly right or if this takes a long time to resolve, what’s the, what’s the, downside of this? What’s the outcome then?”
President M also provided evidence that the “President doesn’t necessarily need to get involved with” each conflict, but instead “a President can provide guidance to some of the people that might, help to get it resolved.” He shared that in conflicts with his deans that he might sit down and have a three-way conversation and just try to sort out what the issues are and gain some insight as to what the dean thinks are some of the issues and possible solutions.

But then based on the discussions, he “might offer some comments and suggestions and be very up front that they are suggestions and comments. They are not directives.”

Finally, President M cited the importance of not becoming the President who solves all of the conflicts at the institution. He shared

once you open up your door as President that you’re the chief arbitrator of all conflicts, you’ll have everything in your office. And your deans and your lower-level managers and your leaders within your organization will be yielded, absolutely leadershipless. They won’t have a leadership role because they will know that always those are resolved by the President.

**Stay focused on the college mission and the students.** President M explained the importance of remembering when you get into conflicts like this, then

you have to have your eye on the future. I think you have to say, “Okay, well, we’re in this conflict but where, where are we going to need to end up? Where are we going to be able to—if you could create the appropriate end to this, how would that end, what would that end look like? And then work towards that solution. So my solution in this particular situation was getting the campus refocused on students, refocused on the business at hand, refocused on all of the things that we needed to do to have a productive year, and get moving in that direction.

**Inform and engage the board of trustees.** President M also described that he operates by the rule that his VPs are responsible for keeping him informed and that “there are no surprises for the board.” He indicated that he firmly believed that it was critical to ensure the board members knew of any issues or concerns as he did not want them to be surprised by anything.
Engage network of colleagues and family. President M discussed the importance of having “trusted colleagues or someone external to the campus that you can have those conversations with” and someone with a “different level of support and a different level of being able to have some very frank conversations.”

Engage executive coach or consultant. President M shared that he considered it to be a real safe thing to be able to be candid with the leadership coach . . . and explore different options and different ways of looking at things and different ways of coping and dealing with things in a very, very safe environment, cause that was totally confidently, and didn’t have an opportunity at all to ever leak back on the campus in any, any way. And as a CEO, you need a safe room. You need a safe place that you can go to and be able to have that kind of conversation.

In addition, President M described how he “brought in a board consultant” to work with the board and discuss the “appropriate role for board members and the fact that they only have one employee, and that’s the President.” He believes that this helped some board members to do their “self-policing.” The executive coach provided suggestions for “things that I might consider” in managing the conflict. He shared there were some suggestions that he was comfortable with like stopping the forums that were led by him as the President, and instead allowing his executive team to lead the public forums.

The following list presents the explicated themes for conflict competence manifestation by President M:

- Stay calm.
- Avoid personalizing the conflict.
- Rely on executive team.
- Solve problems at lowest level.
- Stay focused on the college mission and the students.
- Inform and engage the board of trustees.
- Engage network of colleagues and family.
- Engage executive coach or consultant.
Manifestation of Conflict Competence - President T Analysis

My analysis resulted in five themes for President T concerning the manifestation of conflict competence during conflicts. He shared that he believed his conflict competence was manifested by his actions to (a) stay calm, (b) avoid personalizing the conflict, (c) rely on executive team, (d) stay focused on the college mission and the students, and (e) inform and engage the board of trustees. The following analysis is provided using a heading for each of the five themes.

**Stay calm.** President T described the importance of keeping emotions in check because “collective bargaining takes its toll on everybody, both sides of the bargaining table. I mean there’s some health risks.” He also described how the process is not a fun situation: “It kind of saps your energy, particularly if you bargain late into the night. There’s a lot of emotion that’s wrapped up around it.”

**Avoid personalizing the conflict.** President T emphasized that the Presidents should not take the conflict personally. He stated

> you know, you have to put life in perspective. In spite of some of the most intense arguments that you may get into, you’ve got to put ’em, you’ve got to compartmentalize things.

He further described how

> very few things are really life-and-death issues and I think those are pretty easy to recognize. Some people, will absorb pressure and stress much more easily than others. I think I’m pretty able to compartmentalize things.

**Rely on executive team.** President T suggested that the community college President must operate with an executive. He shared

> you need to try to take your leave as best you can and, you know, really I think the easiest way to do that is to, to train your subordinates, particularly at the Vice President and Dean level, to take charge and make decisions, without being afraid of making a mistake and to have the confidence to make decisions in your absence. Because if they won’t, then nothing gets done if you, every time you’re off campus and that’s not a way to run any organization.

President T stressed the importance of hiring the right people to be members of the executive team because the President cannot serve in all of the positions at the
college. He emphasized that the key people near the President were the executive team because they were responsible for the college in many aspects.

**Stay focused on the college mission and the students.** The clearest example of this theme for President T is in the statement

the thing that you have to keep coming back to in the community college world is, “What’s our mission? What are we trying to accomplish?” And then trying to get everybody to work forward together towards the accomplishment of the organization’s mission.

Even despite some of the issues that occurred at the college, President T emphasized that he focused on what was most important which was the college mission and the students at the college in which he presided.

**Inform and engage the board of trustees.** President T engaged board members to be a part of the collective bargaining table so that they could see firsthand the processes. He shared

I like getting the board involved in bargaining. But it needs to stay at the bargaining table. The hardest thing for some board members is when, union members call them and want to meet individually; they should decline those because bargaining needs to take place at the bargaining table. You know any time that you do this, you need to understand that, the unions will try to create as much controversy as possible. And so you have to judge your board. In my case my board was united, behind the college’s bargaining position.

The following list presents the explicating themes for conflict competence manifestation by President T:

- Stay calm.
- Avoid personalizing the conflict.
- Rely on executive team.
- Stay focused on the college mission and the students.
- Inform and engage the board of trustees.

**Manifestation of Conflict Competence - President X Analysis**

My analysis resulted in five themes for President X concerning the manifestation of conflict competence during conflicts. He shared that he believed his conflict competence was manifested by his actions to (a) stay calm, (b) avoid
personalizing the conflict, (c) solve problems at lowest level, (d) stay focused on the
college mission and the students, and (e) engage network of colleagues and family.
The following analysis is provided using a heading for each of the five themes.

**Stay calm.** President X indicated the importance of staying calm and “not
charging like a bull in a china shop. I don’t do that.” Yet, he also clarified that he can
hold his ground. And he stated “I don’t yell and scream a lot. In fact, in times of stress
I’m more reticent.” He further emphasized the difficulty for the President to maintain
calmness when there is a feeling of wanting to lash out. He shared

it’s very difficult, you know, to constrain yourself from doing that. But
I think, you know, for the good of an institution, you have to. Because
to the extent that you lash out and lose your cool, you know, then you
kind of lose something, not in terms of the leadership on the other side
that is perhaps causing all these unnecessary conflicts, but the larger
population within the institution: the faculty, the students . . . you
always have to see the President, as a statesperson, no matter what.
You’ve got to be a statesman all the time. It’s not easy. It’s not easy.
It’s not easy.

**Avoid personalizing the conflict.** President X emphasized the importance of
not retaliating and of acting as professional leaders, even when the attacks are very
hurtful.

He shared

when somebody attacks you personally, the instinctive thing is to
retaliating because you feel hurt or for whatever reason, however it is
important that the President try to look at the situation from a
professional perspective and say, “Alright, fine. I will not deal with it
on that personal level but I’ll take the high road.” And this is something
that, as leaders, you have to try the whole time—to take the high road.

President X also shared

sometimes it is difficult. I mean as a human being it’s tough to separate
one from the other. But I think part of what you try to do as a leader,
you know, and in trying to resolve conflict, you know, you do not dwell
on the personal. Because what happens, human reaction is you may
respond on a personal level. And when you do, it really doesn’t get,
you know, you anywhere because then the lines are drawn. They are
very hard. You can never really come to an amicable situation.
Solve problems at lowest level. President X emphasized the importance of listening to people, especially in times of conflict. He stated:

I’ll find a way to have it resolved or I’ll simply say, “You know what? This is all well and good, but I bet you if you went and talked to your leaders, supervisor, you can resolve it. Because this way we are going back and forth, and I’m sure the person will be reasonable, you know, if you explain. Now if your boss has a reason to say no,” I say, “Sometimes they have to say no, and then you have to decide whether you are to accept the no for an answer,” you know, “or if you think it’s reached a level of grievance, then I don’t like it, but it’s your right, and file a formal grievance if you think you’ve been wronged.”

Stay focused on the college mission and the students. President X indicated that the most important element during conflict is to focus on what is in the best interest of the student and the institution. He shared:

My mindset essentially was, I wasn’t coveting the presidency. So that did really not factor in my decision. My decisions were based solely on what was best for the institution, what was best for the, you know, for the students. And if this is what I had to do to put the institution on the right footing in terms of integrity then, you know, I had no qualms whatsoever, you know, in doing that.

Engage network of colleagues and family. President X emphasized the importance of having other people to share conversations so that you can find any issues of concern. He said:

obviously there are some people within either your organization or outside your organization that you trust. They may be colleagues. They may just be friends. And you just want to run things by them. And I said, you know, “Am I missing something?” you know, or, “This is what I said,” you know, “Can you decode something in terms of the words used that may be a trigger mechanism for that type of response?” And sometimes we don’t realize that that has happened until a neutral party listens to you and said, “You know what?” you know, “Maybe you were a little harsh in your tone,” or, “The word could have been different.”

The following list presents the explicated themes for conflict competence manifestation by President X:

- Stay calm.
- Avoid personalizing the conflict.
- Solve problems at lowest level.
- Stay focused on the college mission and the students.
- Engage network of colleagues and family.

**Conflict Management Competence Manifestation - Cross Case Analysis**

This section describes the conflict management competence across the seven participating Presidents/cases. The cross case summary of the conflict management competence demonstrated by Presidents in the community college context is summarized in Table 10.

Three pervasive themes in response to research question two—How does conflict management competence manifest itself in conflict situations?—were explicated as (a) avoid personalizing the conflict, (b) stay focused on the college mission and the students, and (c) inform and engage the board of trustees were explicated with six or more responses. The themes are listed below using paragraph format.

**Avoid personalizing the conflict.** This theme was explicated for all seven of the participating Presidents. Clearest examples of this theme are in the way that President Alice described her belief that initially the union’s intent was to “by and large to build the union. Then it became personal” although she believed that initially “it started a little tiny bit personal but it was really about the union. . . . But then the conflict became a power struggle.” Finally, President Alice shared the “win in all of this for me personally is, I have found some more balance.” President Doe shared “it became known in some faculty circles that it was really a personal issue or two that he was gunnin’ for me.” President Eleanor shared that she learned over time not to take it personal, that it is more about the position: “I don’t think the threats were against me personally. They were against the President.” Meanwhile, President J indicated I mean I talk to a lot of Presidents who go through this and that’s the first thing I say, Don’t take it personally. It’s just part of the job. You’ve just got to go through with it
Table 10

*Research Question Two Themes Manifestation of Conflict Competence—Cross Case Analysis*

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Further, President J shared,

I think is really important is you can’t take it personally. And that, it’s the presidency that, that they’re, that the conflict is about, and the role that you’re playing.

Meanwhile the examples highlighted for President M were “I don’t take it personal. It’s just the nature of the beast and the way in which that campus has been shaped over the years.” Another example is demonstrated in the text “you just cannot take it personal. It’s your position that is-causing this attraction and this grief.”

President T shared

you know, you have to put life in perspective. In spite of some of the most intense arguments that you may get into, you’ve got to put ’em, you’ve got to compartmentalize things.

President X emphasized

when somebody attacks you personally, the instinctive thing is to retaliate because you feel hurt or for whatever reason; however, it is important that the President try to look at the situation from a professional perspective and say, Alright, fine. I will not deal with it on that personal level but I’ll take the high road. And this is something that as leaders you have to try the whole time: to take the high road.

In addition, President X shared

sometimes it is difficult. I mean as a human being it’s tough to separate one from the other. But I think part of what you try to do as a leader, you know, and in trying to resolve conflict, you know, you do not dwell on the personal.

The theme of “avoid personalizing the conflict” is summarized in Table 11.

**Stay focused on the college mission and the students.** President Alice shared “but the other thing is you’ve got to focus on the mission. When you think about the mission of community colleges, it’s very energizing.”—President Doe shared his concerns were that the conflict was getting in the way of helping students because people were “taking the eyes off the ball.” He shared the
Table 11

*Research Question Two Themes for Manifestation of Conflict Competence of Avoid Personalizing the Conflict*

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<td>instinctively retaliate.</td>
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Don’t take it personally. It’s just part of the job. You’ve just got to go through with it.

You just cannot take it personal. It isn’t directed at you as a person. It may be directed at you as the leader.

You have to put life in perspective. You’ve got to compartmentalize things.

I will not deal with it on that personal level but I’ll take the high road . . . . And so when the personal attacks are made, then you have to be careful not to instinctively retaliate.
success of the institution begins to be at stake because everybody’s got their eye off the ball. Their eye is not on teaching students or the next enrollment cycle or the capital plan.

President Eleanor shared

at the end of the day I can look in the mirror and know that everything that I have done has been always with one single vision and that is, “What is in the best interest of the students?” Because if we do what is in the best interest of the students, it will always be in the best interest of our institutions, financially and physically, as well as the culture of our institutions, and it will always be in my own best interest.

President J discussed his “deep abiding commitment to community colleges, and what community colleges are about.” President M shared “you have to have your eye on the future . . . my solution in this particular situation was getting the campus refocused on students.” President T shared that you have to keep coming back to “What’s our mission? What are we trying to accomplish? Finally President X revealed “my decisions were based solely on what was best for the institution, what was best for the, you know, for the students.” Table 12 presents a summary across cases of the stay focused on the college mission and the students theme.

Inform and engage the board of trustees. Six of the seven Presidents revealed this theme for conflict competence manifestation. President Alice indicated “you’ve got to keep your board informed.” President Doe shared he knew that he was responsible to managing to the board of trustees’ direction and how important it was to keep them informed. He indicated many of his actions were “mostly board-driven more than me, and that was the idea.” President Eleanor added the importance to “always keep your board chair informed of whatever’s happening, which is the rule of thumb for everything.” Meanwhile, President J shared that “the board support is a source of huge discussion among Presidents.”

President M shared that he operates by the rule that “there are no surprises for the board.” President T discussed how he engaged board members to be a part of the collective bargaining table so that they could experience the processes. He shared “I like getting the board involved.” See Table 13 for the manifestation of conflict competence by keeping the board of trustees informed.
Table 12

Research Question Two Themes for Manifestation of Conflict Competence to Stay Focused on the College Mission and the Students

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Alice</th>
<th>Doe</th>
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<th>M</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>X</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You’ve got to focus on the mission.</td>
<td>Helping students.</td>
<td>Everything that I have done has been always with one single vision and that is What is in the best interest of the students.</td>
<td>Deep abiding commitment to community colleges, and what community colleges are about.</td>
<td>My solution in this particular situation was getting the campus refocused on students.</td>
<td>The thing that you have to keep coming back to in the community college world is, What’s our mission?</td>
<td>My decisions were based solely on what was best for the institution, what was best for the, you know, for the students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice</td>
<td>Doe</td>
<td>Eleanor</td>
<td>J</td>
<td>M</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping the board informed all along the way</td>
<td>Mostly board-driven more than me, and that was the idea</td>
<td>Always keep your board chair informed of whatever’s happening, which is the rule of thumb for everything</td>
<td>Board support is a source of huge discussion among Presidents</td>
<td>There are no surprises for the board</td>
<td>I like getting the board involved</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Question Two: Manifestation of Conflict Competence Summary

Six or more Presidents explicated three prominent themes for research question two, which were (a) avoid personalizing the conflict, (b) stay focused on the college mission and the students, and (c) inform and engage the board of trustees. In addition to the conflict competencies demonstrated by the participating Presidents, they also offered advice for others seeking to become conflict competent which is the topic of research question three and is discussed in the next section.

Research Question Three: Developing Conflict Competence

This section presents the findings in response to research question three: How do community college Presidents develop the competencies to manage conflict? The rationale for this question was to explore the Presidents perspective of how one becomes a conflict competent President. The first part of this section is organized by the seven cases, which are used as headings.

Developing Conflict Competence - President Alice Analysis

The analysis for President Alice resulted in four themes and she recommended that individuals seeking to become a conflict competent President should (a) enhance content knowledge, (b) attend structured leadership programs, (c) learn from other leaders and engage mentors, and (d) speak with current and past Presidents.

Enhance content knowledge. President Alice described the importance of reading “as many books as possible on the topic of negotiation, mediation, and labor unions in higher education.” Specific books cited included Tough, Crucial Conversations, Fierce Conversations, and The Art of Possibility. She also emphasized the need to learn negotiation, mediation, and listening skills. Finally, President Alice discussed the importance of having a great ability to “speak with clarity.”

Attend structured leadership programs. President Alice participated in a nationally known leadership program with other “leaders from all different walks of life.” The program provided an opportunity to examine topics from many different aspects and with leaders who represented many types of industries including legal, banking, educational, civic, and other private industries.
Learn from other leaders and engage mentors. President Alice described world leaders that she considered to be very conflict competent. The leaders were Nelson Mandela, Barack and Michelle Obama, Madeleine Albright, and Jimmy Carter. She viewed these individuals as “world leaders who’ve gone in and negotiated really fierce conversations.”

Speak with current and past Presidents. President Alice discussed the importance of being able to speak with fellow community college Presidents through the State Presidents Association. She also mentioned Dr. Mary Spilde at Lane Community College whom she considered to be “a really good, really strong leader.” She shared “I’ve really watched her you know; facilitate, you know, conversations.”

The following list presents the explicated themes for developing conflict competence as expressed by President Alice:

- Enhance content knowledge.
- Attend structured leadership programs.
- Learn from other leaders and engage mentors.
- Speak with current and past Presidents.

Developing Conflict Competence - President Doe Analysis

The analysis for President Doe resulted in two themes, and he recommended that individuals seeking to become a conflict competent President should (a) enhance content knowledge and (b) learn from other leaders and engage mentors. The following analysis is provided using a heading for each of the themes.

Enhance content knowledge. President Doe shared that he has “read a lot of leadership, managerial leadership over the years” and this has been very helpful. He recommended authors like “Bennis, Townsend, and Collins.” He emphasized the need to understand how to work with boards because that is a “pretty important experience in most of this stuff.”

Learn from other leaders and engage mentors. President Doe emphasized his great working relationships with prior mentors, especially former bosses who were
“superb in taking pressurized situations and, depressurizing them so that we could concentrate on the work.”

The following list presents the explicated themes for developing conflict competence as expressed by President Doe

- Enhance content knowledge.
- Learn from other leaders and engage mentors.

**Developing Conflict Competence - President Eleanor Analysis**

The analysis for President Eleanor resulted in five themes and she recommended that individuals seeking to become a conflict competent President should (a) enhance content knowledge, (b) learn from prior experience as President, (c) speak with current and past Presidents, (d) learn campus and community culture, and (e) prepare exit strategy. The following analysis is provided using a heading for each of the five themes.

**Enhance content knowledge.** President Eleanor recommended reading this dissertation, and watching *Inside Higher Ed* to read every article about “every person who has been successful as a President or who has found it not to be the right place and has moved on for whatever reason.” She also recommended “formal mediation training and formal negotiations training” and consensus building. President Eleanor was very careful to differentiate between consensus building and compromise. Finally, President Eleanor recommended the enhancement of content knowledge by learning what it means to

have courageous conversations with people and to really, you know, not let the elephant in the room just be there, but to put things out on the table and really try to resolve them.

**Attend structured leadership programs.** President Eleanor recommended the AACC Summer “Presidents Institute.” She described it as one of the best experiences that a President who is having difficulty could have because there is an environment where

there are only Presidents and you have an opportunity to talk about all of the real issues, whether they’re personal issues, institutional issues, national trend issues. It doesn’t matter. Whatever they are, they have,
you have the opportunity to have them, have a discussion there in a very, confidential and safe environment. And I encourage people to use that. I’ve been there when I’ve talked with Presidents, who were having a real difficult time at that moment, and I’ve been there to talk with people who have some brand new ideas and things that were really skyrocketing and we were sharing some of those. But it’s, it’s a supportive environment and a great opportunity for personal and professional growth and development. And I think, you know, the other thing that happens is you can build good relationships with other Presidents and then when you want to talk with somebody because you’re dealing with something specific then you feel like you have people who you can pick up the phone and call.

**Speak with current and past Presidents.** As President Eleanor described the institute, she also shared that it was an opportunity to speak with current Presidents. For example, she recalled a President, who shared with her that she remembered President Eleanor getting a vote of no confidence and thinking that it could not happen to her. President Eleanor shared “and of course it did happen to her and, and much more.” And she said, “you know, it wasn’t until then that I really understood.” President Eleanor emphasized the importance of building relationships with Presidents that are currently Presidents. She highlighted her meaning by sharing

> And by doing that I’m talking about things like going to AACC Convention and contacting a President that’s there and asking them if you can sit over coffee and talk. And then at the next year do that same thing again with that President, same President, so that you can build a little bit of a relationship and maybe open up and talk about some of the issues about being a President.

**Learn campus and community culture.** The clearest example of this theme is noted in the President Eleanor’s words describing how at one of the institutions the former President remained active in the community as a political icon. He was involved with making budgetary decisions for the college and remained on key community and professional boards in the community. As a consequence, President Eleanor was not able to effect some change that she understood that the trustees wanted her to accomplish. She shared part of becoming a conflict competent in a new community after serving a very long time serving President who chooses to remain
active in the community and “act in any ex officio capacity as the college President,”
then the new President in the community must decide

if you’re either going to align yourself with City Hall—you know, this
person is an icon of the community—or you’re not. And if you don’t,
you’re gonna have conflict consequences that you may not be able to
overcome because you’re the new kid to town. You’re not the
community icon.

At a different community college, President Eleanor discussed the importance
of “building relationships between the administration and individuals in various areas
of the college” instead of relying heavily on the union leadership.

Finally, President Eleanor discussed the importance of understanding people’s
motivations from the community and college perspective. While she reflected on the
conflicts, she shared the importance of knowing the motivation that is driving the
college or community resistance. She shared

so when I think about conflict situations, I really look a lot at, you
know, what is the motivation for it? What are people getting out of the
conflict? And is there any impetus to resolving the conflict? You have
to look at the motivation of people. Go back to what I said in the very
beginning. You have to know, what is the source of authority or the
source of power and, you know, what creates the conflict? What do I
have to win or lose?

**Prepare exit strategy.** President Eleanor indicated that there are times at
institutions where conflict is a part of the organization and the conflicts can no longer
be managed. In those cases, it can be in the best interest of the institution and the
President to prepare to leave. She shared

conflict continues there today, but I felt at least at the time that, I
wasn’t going to be able to do any more than I had been able to do at
that point for the organization. And so, I thought it in their best interest
(the organization) and my best interest to look for another opportunity.
So, I remember with this group they did a vote of no confidence and
my board, recognized that it was all about the negotiations and I had
full support of my board the whole time I was there, up through the
time I chose to leave on my own. It was not, I had, I had a multi-year
contract when I chose to leave. Because as a leader, too, you have to
recognize when the conflict is not, has potential to do harm to the
organization. And when you cannot accomplish the things that you
should be accomplishing, then you should not stay. It’s not good for you and it’s not good for the organization.

The following list presents the explicated themes for developing conflict competence as expressed by President Eleanor:

- Enhance content knowledge.
- Attend structured leadership programs.
- Speak with current and past Presidents.
- Learn campus and community culture.
- Prepare exit strategy.

**Developing Conflict Competence - President J Analysis**

The analysis for President J resulted in four themes, and he recommended that individuals seeking to become a conflict competent President should (a) enhance content knowledge, (b) attend structured leadership programs, (c) speak with current and past Presidents, (c) learn campus and community culture, and (d) prepare exit strategy. The following analysis is provided using a heading for each of the four themes.

**Enhance content knowledge.** President J suggested reading books that focused on collective bargaining, leadership, and management. Specific examples included *Mutual Gains Bargaining*, *Getting to Yes*, and *The Rogue Trustee*.

**Attend structured leadership programs.** President J attended conferences and workshops developed by AACC and recommended them for anyone seeking to lead community colleges.

**Speak with current and past Presidents.** President J shared that he “found fairly early is that you can learn by watching Presidents” and he shared that he has “always been in a position to watch Presidents deal with conflict, you know. So some did it better than others.”

**Prepare exit strategy.** President J discussed the perplexing nature of conflict in the community college context. As such, he shared a number of examples where Presidents had lost the position due to a variety occurrence at the colleges. Examples included clashes with board of trustees, faculty union, or a disgruntled employee. So
there is a need to have multiple year contracts as part of the negotiations established between the board of trustees and the college President. He shared the importance of an agile President to “work out an exit strategy.”

The following list presents the explicated themes for developing conflict competence as expressed by President J:

- Enhance content knowledge.
- Attend structured leadership programs.
- Learn from other leaders and engage mentors.
- Prepare exit strategy.

**Developing Conflict Competence - President M Analysis**

The analysis for President M resulted in four themes, and he recommended that individuals seeking to become a conflict competent President should (a) enhance content knowledge, (b) learn from prior experience as President, (c) learn from other leaders and engage mentors, and (d) learn campus and community culture. The following analysis is provided using a heading for each of the four themes.

**Enhance content knowledge.** President M emphasized that he learned much about leading from the coursework in his graduate program. He shared “you know . . . it comes from classes that I’ve taken in my graduate work.”

**Learn from prior experience as President.** President M emphasized the need to “serve as an interim or acting President, where possible” so that the breadth and depth of the position could be better understood. He shared

I started trying to prepare myself in terms of looking at opportunities that might help provide the skill set or the credentials that would allow me to move there. And ultimately serving as, an acting President, twice, certainly helped provide that credibility, that I could handle that responsibility. I was in graduate school and, in my career while I was working as the VP. I looked for ways that I could broaden myself in terms of I wanted to learn more about the administrative role. So I worked very closely with our VP of administrative services and learned more about budgeting and learning more about accounting and learning more about that side of the house. and, student development folks always have real credibility with faculty, and so, you know, because faculty believe VPs of instruction are primarily the only folks that can
be a President, you know? If you haven’t been a full-time teacher then you probably don’t know enough about instruction to be able to do those things.

**Learn from other leaders and engage mentors.** President M indicated that it is important to learn from “community college mentors” and a “variety of individuals.” Clearly, he believed that there was value in learning from the experiences of other community college leaders and others involved in leadership.

**Learn campus and community culture.** President M discussed the importance of “being sensitive about the culture of the campus” because “you can move things along too quickly” which can influence the conflict experience.

The following list presents the explicated themes for developing conflict competence as expressed by President M:

- Enhance content knowledge.
- Learn from prior experience as President.
- Learn from other leaders and engage mentors.
- Learn campus and community culture.

**Developing Conflict Competence - President T Analysis**

The analysis for President T resulted in five themes, and he recommended that individuals seeking to become a conflict competent President should (a) enhance content knowledge, (b) learn from prior experience as President, (c) attend structured leadership programs, (d) learn from other leaders and engage mentors, and (e) speak with current and past Presidents. The following analysis is provided using a heading for each of the five themes.

**Enhance content knowledge.** President T recommended reading books “like Collins’ *Good to Great*, John Kotters’ *Leading Change*, (or the) Harvard Business Press.” He suggested almost any book on leadership and management can be helpful.

**Learn from prior experience as President.** When President T’s predecessor resigned, then the board appointed him to be the interim President, then they appointed him to be the full-time permanent President. In addition, President T had served as President at a military college before becoming the chief academic officer. Both of
these experiences provided a “pretty good overview of everything” and the importance of experience with all facets of the college, including foundation, grants, “faculty on a day-to-day basis for changes in assessment . . . maintenance crews and maintenance schedules, facilities management and all that.” This was also one of the elements for advice from President T for anyone seeking to become a community college President because each of the elements will present opportunities for conflict that the President may need to manage. He shared

You’ll learn that as you work your way up through the ranks. And at that point in time, you’re going to have, make up your decision on whether or not you still aspire to be in charge.

**Attend structured leadership programs.** President T indicated that he had attended the AACC Future Leader Institutes and the Harvard Business School Leadership programs. The programs could be helpful for a good first start or general exposure.

**Learn from other leaders and engage mentors.** President T reflected on his training from his prior bosses and believed they were very effective. He shared that he was exposed to “wonderful leaders” during his tenure in the military.

**Speak with current and past Presidents.** President T emphasized this recommendation above all of the above. He shared

if you aspire to be a better President is you need to sit down and talk to Presidents in your state because each state’s laws, funding, regulations and so forth are all different, and talk to them on an individual basis.

The following list presents the explicated themes for developing conflict competence as expressed by President T:

- Enhance content knowledge.
- Learn from prior experience as President.
- Attend structured leadership programs.
- Learn from other leaders and engage mentors.
- Speak with current and past Presidents.
Developing Conflict Competence - President X Analysis

The analysis for President X resulted in four themes and he recommended that individuals seeking to become a conflict competent President should (a) enhance content knowledge, (b) learn from prior experience as President, (c) attend structured leadership programs, and (d) speak with current and past Presidents. The following analysis is provided using a heading for each of the four themes.

Enhance content knowledge. President X described the importance of the “written word and the readings” about “collective bargaining . . . board/Presidential relationships and community/Presidential relationships.” He also recommended learning more about the types of conflicts that can happen with students so that the President is prepared.

Learn from prior experience as President. For a number of months, President X served in as the interim President. He shared that he was not coveting the position as President, but that he wanted to have the greatest impact for the benefit of the students. Serving in this interim capacity allowed him to have this experience.

Attend structured leadership programs. President X recommended attending structured leadership programs so that the Presidents can do role playing and learn about the issues. He shared that attendance at workshops where some experiences are shared. Some scenarios, some role-playing is done so that you get to understand, you know, what some of these issues are going to be.

Speak with current and past Presidents. President X suggested talking with other Presidents who may be “experiencing similar types of conflict.”

The following list presents the explicated themes for developing conflict competence as expressed by President X:

- Enhance content knowledge.
- Learn from prior experience as President.
- Attend structured leadership programs.
- Speak with current and past Presidents.
Developing Conflict Competence - Cross Case Analysis

This section describes the conflict management competence across the seven participating Presidents/cases. The cross case summary of the conflict management competence demonstrated by Presidents in the community college context is summarized in Table 14.

One pervasive theme was explicated for research question number three, How do community college Presidents develop the competencies to manage conflict. The theme was enhance content knowledge as revealed by all seven of the Presidents. The theme is detailed below and is used as a heading.

Enhance content knowledge. All seven of the community college Presidents emphasized the need for enhancing content knowledge. President Alice shared the importance of reading “as many books as possible on the topic of conflict, confrontation, negotiation, mediation, and labor unions in higher education.” Specific books cited included Tough, Crucial Conversations, Fierce Conversations, and The Art of Possibility. She also emphasized the need to learn negotiation, mediation, and listening skills. President Doe shared that he has “read a lot of leadership, managerial leadership over the years” and this has been very helpful. He recommended authors like “Bennis, Townsend, and Collins.” He emphasized the need to understand how to work with boards because that is a “pretty important experience in most of this stuff.”

President Eleanor recommended reading this dissertation, and watching Inside Higher Ed to read every article about “every person who has been successful as a President or who has found it not to be the right place and has moved on for whatever reason.” She also recommended “formal mediation training and formal negotiations training” and consensus building. Finally, President Eleanor recommended the enhancement of content knowledge by learning what it means to

have courageous conversations with people and to really, you know, not let the elephant in the room just be there, but to put things out on the table and really try to resolve them.

President J suggested reading books that focused on collective bargaining, leadership and management. Specific examples included Mutual Gains Bargaining,
Table 14
Themes for Developing Conflict Competence—Seven Presidents Cross Case Analysis

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Alice</th>
<th>Doe</th>
<th>Eleanor</th>
<th>J</th>
<th>M</th>
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<tr>
<td>Enhance content knowledge</td>
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<td>Learn from prior experience as President</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attend structured leadership programs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Speak with current and past Presidents</td>
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<td>Learn from other leaders and engage mentors</td>
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<td>Learn campus and community culture</td>
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<td>Prepare an exit strategy</td>
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Getting to Yes, and the Rogue Trustee. President M indicated, “you know . . . it comes from classes that I’ve taken in my graduate work.” President T recommended reading books “like Collins’ Good to Great, John Kotters’ Leading Change, (or the) Harvard Business Press.” He suggested almost any book on leadership and management can be helpful.

President X described the importance of the “written word and the readings” about “collective bargaining . . . board/Presidential relationships and community/Presidential relationships.” See Table 15 for the enhance content knowledge theme for Developing Conflict Competence.

**Research Question Three: Developing Conflict Competence Summary**

One pervasive theme emerged for research question three which was to enhance content knowledge. The next section presents the summary of findings for all three research questions.

**Summary of Findings**

This summary of findings is divided according to the three research questions which guided the research: (a) How do community college Presidents describe the experience of conflict management in the community college context? (b) How does conflict management competence manifest itself in conflict situations? and (c) How do community college Presidents develop the competencies to manage conflict? Seven community college Presidents representing a variety of geographical areas participated in two different semi-structured interviews with explicaded data.

For research question one, three pervasive themes describing the experience of successful conflict management emerged from the data. The themes were (a) diversity, (b) inevitability, and (c) perplexity. The theme of diversity was described by President Alice as a warning signal that people are reacting to situations and circumstance differently and that the different points of view should be used as a way to engage in conversation that often leads to different sides on issues. President Doe described diversity as multiple approaches or ways to move forward. President Eleanor described the meaning and experience of conflict as different ways of thinking which
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<th>Alice</th>
<th>Doe</th>
<th>Eleanor</th>
<th>J</th>
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<td>Reading as many books as</td>
<td>Read a lot of leadership, managerial</td>
<td>Reading books that focused on</td>
<td>You know . . . it comes from classes</td>
<td>Reading almost any book on leadership</td>
<td>Readings about collective</td>
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<td>possible on the topic of</td>
<td>leadership over the years and this has</td>
<td>collective bargaining</td>
<td>that I’ve taken in my graduate work.</td>
<td>and management can be helpful.</td>
<td>bargaining board/President relationships and community.</td>
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<td>conflict, confrontation,</td>
<td>been very helpful. (He emphasized the</td>
<td>leadership and management.</td>
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<td>negotiation, mediation, and</td>
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can lead to good debate. Similarly, President J described conflict as honest disagreements revealing that people are seeing the same item in a different way. President M recognized diversity as opposing points of view in a situation, while finally President X described diversity as different points of view on how to do things.

The second theme of inevitability was revealed by President Alice as a necessary component for growth and change in the community college sector. President Doe indicated that controversies are a necessary part of leadership and was clearly inevitable due to the state of labor relations and union negotiation. Similarly, President J describes the collective bargaining process where it was natural and expected for disagreement among parties. President M indicated that conflict is inevitable because other members of the institution seek items that cannot be provided and provided the example of large pay raises in a troubled economy. President T indicated that conflict was a necessary and ordinary part of the job as the institution leader. Finally, President X indicated it is the responsibility of the President to manage the public resources while the process of collective bargaining seeks to take as much as possible from the institution.

The third and final theme of perplexing was revealed by President Alice who expressed perplexing concerns that the collective bargaining process was not about what was best for the student or the institution, but was about a power struggle of a small group of people seeking to co-manage the affairs of the institution with the President. President Eleanor believed that her background as someone who benefitted from being raised in a union household and someone who appreciated the benefits of union membership allowed her to believe that this established process could encourage positive processes, but instead the processes were manifested as power struggles which prevented new and different actions from forming at the institution. President J was perplexed by the increasing political nature associated with serving as trustees members of the institution who were increasingly using the stop as the first political steps instead of focusing what was in the best interests of the students and the institution. President M described his perplexity that the union members were seeking exorbitant
raises in the midst of a major economic downturn and sought major raise increases. Finally, President T described the experience of conflict management as perplexing because the process of collective bargaining in the institutions turned your colleagues into enemies and forces an antagonistic and almost incompatible environment.

In response to research question number two, six or more Presidents revealed three pervasive themes that emerged from the data which were (a) avoid personalizing the conflict, (b) stay focused on college mission and students, and (c) inform and engage the board of trustees. Theme one, avoid personalizing the conflict was described by President Alice as a situation that began with a personal attack and then evolved into a power struggle. President Doe indicated that several areas throughout the college came to understand that some of the persons involved with the conflict were making the situation and the conflict very personal. Alternatively, President Eleanor didn’t want to believe that the conflicts were about her personally, but were more about being the Presidential position that was seeking to make change in an institution that was change aversive. President J indicated that the President can not take any of the conflicts personally because conflicts are something that is part of the Presidents job. President M noted that the conflicts are typically directed to the person, even though the conflicts become personalized to the person in the leadership role. President T noted the importance of compartmentalizing life and keeping things in perspective. Finally, President X cautioned against taking any of the conflicts or attacks as a result of the conflict very personally.

Theme two, stay focused on the college mission and the students, was revealed by all seven Presidents. President Alice indicated the importance of always focusing on the mission and why people became Presidents in the first place. President Doe emphasized the need to focus on assisting the students. President Eleanor was clear that her main focus was always about what was in the best interest of the students. President J revealed a very strong and powerful commitment to the students and the community served by the college. President M described that through the conflict, he focused on the students and their needs. President T emphasized the continuous asking
of the question as to what the community college mission was and focusing on that throughout the conflict. Finally, President X emphasized his belief that all decisions he made were in the best interest of the institution and the students.

Theme three, inform and engage board of trustees, was revealed by six of the seven Presidents. President Alice described the importance of keeping all of the board members informed, while President Doe indicated that his decisions were primarily driven by the board so he had their support. Comparatively, President Eleanor focused on informing and engaging the trustee chair as a standard practice. President J indicated the importance of board support and that the discussion occurs for many Presidents in other situations. President M emphasized the need to ensure that there were no surprises for the board and finally President T shared his preference was to get the board involved with the workings at the institution.

Finally, enhance content knowledge was the one pervasive theme that emerged for research question number three. President Alice emphasized the need to read books on a variety of topics, including but not limited to, conflict, confrontation, negotiation, mediation, labor unions and the state of higher education. Similarly, President Doe emphasized reading books on leadership and management with boards. President Eleanor cited the importance of reading this dissertation and staying abreast of current topics and reading newspaper and journal articles about Presidents who have been successful. President J indicated that collective bargaining, leadership, and management were important. President M increased his content knowledge through attendance at his graduate classes and recommended the same for others. President T emphasized reading any book about leadership and management; while finally, President X emphasized the need to read books focused on collective bargaining and board/President relationships. There are implications that result from the findings and Chapter Five will discuss those implications.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The study provided insight into the Presidents experience of successfully managing conflict in a community college context. In addition to discussing the findings in regards to the research questions, this section describes how the findings in Chapter Four relate to Chapter One, the focus and significance and Chapter Two, the review of literature. Finally, this chapter discusses the findings of my study in relation to the study limitations, addresses implications for current practice, gives implications for future research, and concludes with a personal reflection.

Findings and Connection to Purpose and Significance

Chapter One described three needs as the (a) need to understand the meaning of conflict and its lived experience by community college Presidents, (b) need to address the leadership crisis, and (c) need to fill a research gap. For example, Presidents Alice and Eleanor expressed that conflict is neither good or bad, but instead a necessary component to effect change. The explications from President Alice and Eleanor were echoed in the research of Caudron (1999), L. K. Johnson (2004), Jourdain (2004), Schmidt (1994), and Wilson (1984) who wrote about positive meanings describing conflict while G. Johnson (2004) and Shechtman (2008) described negative meanings.

Alternatively, Presidents Doe, J, M, T, and X expressed the sentiment that the meaning of conflict and its related experience is about different points of view, or diversity, which can often lead to a test of wills about scarce resources. These sentiments were echoed in the research of Hocker and Wilmot (1985) who described conflict through a communication perspective as a disagreement among and between two or more interdependent parties who acknowledge different points of view and different goals for managing scarce resources. This expression was also echoed in the research of Vecchio (1981) who described conflict through a situational perspective wherein there were incompatible goals.

A second need for the purpose and significance was the need to address the leadership crisis. Presidents Alice J, M, and T experienced conflicts on their campus
due to budget issues or funding reductions. This experience was echoed in the writings of Beehler (1993), Eddy (2010), Evelyn (2001), and Shults (2001) who described community college funding difficulties. Presidents Doe, J, Eleanor, and X experienced conflicts due to the changing role of the Presidents in response to internal and external pressures. Presidents Doe and Eleanor were expected by the board of trustees who hired them to make personnel and/or program changes and there was resistance from campus members. Alternatively, Presidents J and X were asked to maintain the status quo and allow the trustees to micro manage the operations of the campus, and Presidents J and X resisted. The description of the changing role of the Presidents in response to internal and external pressures was echoed in the writings of Beehler (1993), Boggs (2011a), Bornstein (2003), Dolan (2005), Floyd et al. (2010), Malm (2008), Maslin-Ostrowski et al. (2011), Moser (2008), O’Banion (2009a), and Vaughan (2001).

The third and final need for the purpose and significance was the need to fill in the research gap. Research studies quantified the ways to manage a challenge or conflict to prevent it from becoming a crisis (Murray & Kishur, 2008). Other dissertations and research studies used a quantitative approach to assess conflict management styles based on age, gender, education, size of institution, location, and tenure (Adams, 2006; Baxter & Shepherd, 1978; Espinosa, 1987; Guill, 1990; Jones, 1976; Korabik et al., 1993; Pritchard, 1985; Revilla, 1984; Rosenthal & Hautaluoma, 1988; Thomas & Kilmann, 1974). Presidents Alice, Doe, Eleanor, J, M, T, and X expressed the need to understand the conflict experience, but also expressed concerns that readers may misinterpret the story sharing as one of “singing the blues.” This sentiment was echoed in the writings of March and Weiner (2003) who described apprehensions about sharing the leadership difficulties that were experienced by college Presidents. Table 16 connects the purpose and significance as discovered by the literature author, and as revealed by all seven participating Presidents.
Table 16

Connection of Purpose and Significance to Literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose And Significance</th>
<th>Presidents who expressed</th>
<th>Literature Author</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Need to understand the meaning and lived</td>
<td>All seven participating</td>
<td>Caudron, 1999; Hocker &amp; Wilmot, 1985; L. K. Johnson, 2004; Jourdain, 2004;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conflict experience</td>
<td>Presidents</td>
<td>Schmidt, 1994; Schechtman, 2008; Tjosvold, 1988;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tjosvold &amp; Tjosvold, 1995; Wilson, 1984; Vecchio, 1981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need to address the leadership crisis</td>
<td>All seven participating</td>
<td>Beehler, 1993; Dolan, 2005; Eddy, 2010; Evelyn, 2001; Maslin-Ostrowski, et.al,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Presidents</td>
<td>2011; McClenny, 2001; Moser, 2008; Romero, 2004; Shults, 2001; Vaughan, 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need to fill a research gap</td>
<td>All seven participating</td>
<td>Adams, 2006; Baxter &amp; Shepherd, 1978; Jones, 1976; Korabik et al., 1993;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Presidents</td>
<td>March &amp; Weiner, 2003; Rosenthal &amp; Hautaluoma, 1988; Thomas &amp; Kilmann, 1974</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings and Connection to Review of Literature and Research Questions

The next section reviews the findings in connection to the review of literature as described in Chapter Two of this dissertation. For research question one—How do community college Presidents describe the experience of conflict management in the community college context?—three pervasive themes emerged focused on diversity, inevitability, and perplexity. At least six of the seven participating Presidents revealed these themes and described the need to understand and recognize diverse points of view as people bring different meanings and understandings to each discussion. Second, the inevitability of conflict was explicated as a necessary element to all interactions and existing in all circumstances. Finally, the theme of perplexity was explicated as it was perplexing that the conflict experiences originate from many of the same sources in different times and places as well as the incivility of the experiences.

Table 17 presents the explicated themes for research question one with the Presidents who expressed the related theme and the related author from Chapter Three. For research question one, three pervasive themes describing the experience of successful conflict management emerged from the data. The themes were (a) diversity, (b) inevitability, and (c) perplexity. The theme of diversity or seeing different points of view was described by Presidents Alice, Doe, Eleanor, J, M, and X. This theme was echoed in the writings of Findlen (2000) and Runde and Flanagan (2007). The second theme of inevitability was revealed by Presidents Alice, Doe, J, M, T, and X for conflict as a necessary component for growth and change in the community college sector. This theme was echoed in the writings of Brim (2005), DeVoe (1999), Ready (2004), and Swain (2006). The third and final theme of perplexing was revealed by Presidents Alice, Eleanor, J, M, T, and X who expressed perplexing concerns that the collective bargaining process was not about what was best for the student or the institution but was about a power struggle of a small group of people seeking to co-manage the affairs of the institution with the President. This sentiment was echoed
Table 17

*Connection of Research Question One Explicated Themes to Literature*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research question one explicated themes</th>
<th>Presidents who expressed</th>
<th>Literature author</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inevitability</td>
<td>Presidents Alice, Doe, J, M, T, X</td>
<td>Brim, 2005; Brown, 2004; DeVoe, 1999; Gerzon, 2006; Ready, 2004; Swain, 2006</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the writings of Holden (1984), Jones and Johnson (2008b), March and Weiner (2003).

In response to research question number two—How do conflict management competence manifest itself in conflict situations?—six or more Presidents revealed three pervasive themes that emerged from the data which were (a) avoid personalizing the conflict, (b) stay focused on college mission and students, and (c) inform and engage the board of trustees. Theme one, avoid personalizing the conflict, was expressed by Presidents Alice, Doe, Eleanor, J, M, T, and X and was echoed in the writings of Deutsch and Coleman (2000) and Fisher et al. (1991). Theme two, stay focused on the college mission and the students, was revealed by all seven Presidents. This expression was echoed in the writings and research by the American Association of Community Colleges (2005), Birnbaum (1993), Cohen and Brawer (2003), Dougherty (2001), and Kubala (1999). Theme three, inform and engage board of trustees, was revealed by six of the seven Presidents. This theme was echoed by Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (1984), Birnbaum (1993), Brown (2006), Chait (2005, 2006), O’Banion (2009a, 2009b); Shaw (2005), and Trombley (2007). Presidents Alice, Doe, Eleanor, J, M, and T described the importance of keeping all of the board members informed. Table 18 presents a comparison of the research question two explicated themes with the Presidents who expressed the theme and the related authors from the literature.

Finally, enhance content knowledge was the one pervasive theme that emerged for research question number three - How do community college Presidents develop the competencies to manage conflict?. Presidents Alice, Doe, Eleanor, J, M, and T expressed the importance of reading books, attending seminars, conferences, and workshops focused on enhancing knowledge of the Presidential position.

It was imperative that Presidents be skilled in negotiation, mediation, conflict management, conflict resolution, and listening skills so that an enhanced set of skills is developed to address the variety of sources of conflict and understanding the motivations behind many of the conflicts. This sentiment was echoed in the writings
Table 18

*Connection of Research Question Two Explicated Themes to Literature*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research question two explicated themes</th>
<th>Presidents who expressed</th>
<th>Literature author</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Avoid personalizing the conflict</td>
<td>Presidents Alice, Doe, Eleanor, J, M, T, X</td>
<td>Deutsch &amp; Coleman, 2000; Fisher et al., 1991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay focused on community college mission and students</td>
<td>Presidents Alice, Doe, Eleanor, J, M, T, X</td>
<td>American Association of Community Colleges, 2005; Birnbaum, 1993; Cohen, 1998; Cohen &amp; Brawer, 2003; Dougherty, 2001; Kubala, 1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inform and engage board of trustees</td>
<td>Presidents Alice, Doe, Eleanor, J, M, T</td>
<td>Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, 1984; Birnbaum, 1993; Brown, 2006; Chait, 2005; Chait, 2006; O’Banion, 2009a; O’Banion, 2009b; Shaw, 2005; Trombley, 2007</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All research has study limitations which is the focus of the next section. As discussed in Chapter Four, the findings, I purposely divorced the Presidents from the community college contexts, initially, to maintain confidentiality of the participating Presidents. Nevertheless, after I reviewed the findings, I realized that the described experiences were shared between and among the Presidents as the themes were revealed with six or more respondents in the study. While my initial aim was not to generalize the results of this study, as the purpose of interpretive social science is to allow the findings to emerge so I did not propose an initial theory or hypothesis about the experience of successful conflict management by community college Presidents in the community college context. Instead, I allowed the findings to emerge from the data. However, Yin (1994) suggested that sometimes qualitative researchers can use replication logic that is commonly used by experimental researchers. In other words, if the finding is replicated with different kinds of people and in different places, then the evidence may suggest that the finding applies very broadly (Cook & Campbell, 1979). Yin’s key point is that there is no reason that replication logic cannot be applied to certain kinds of qualitative research (Johnson, 1997).

Alternatively, Stake (1990) uses the term naturalistic generalization to refer to the process of generalizing based on similarity. Stake (1990) shares

the more similar the people and circumstances in a particular research study are to the ones that you want to generalize to, the more defensible your generalization will and the more readily you should make such a generalization. (as cited in Pyrczak, 2005, p. 152)

So, in this light, when community college Presidents experience conflict with the board of trustees or with faculty who cite strong disagreement or issue a vote of no confidence, then I am able to suggest that the findings for the explicated themes could
Table 19

*Connection of Research Question Three Explicated Themes to Literature*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research question three explicaded themes</th>
<th>Presidents who expressed</th>
<th>Literature author</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enhance content knowledge</td>
<td>Presidents Alice, Doe, Eleanor, J, M, T, X</td>
<td>American Association of Community Colleges, 2005.; Brown et al., 2002; Fitzpatrick &amp; Winke, 1979; Katz &amp; Lawyer, 1993; Maier &amp; Sashkin, 1971; McFarlin &amp; Ebbers, 1998; Shaw, 2005; Vaughan, 1989b</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
be generalizable or in the words of interpretive researchers—transferable. Therefore, divorcing the Presidents from the community college context does not separate the President’s experience from the context, but instead heightens the awareness that conflict experiences as those described in this study are transferable to any community college President in any community college context.

**Study Limitations**

In Chapter Three, I discussed the limitations common to any study that takes an interpretive social science approach and the limitations common to a phenomenological study. In light of my study, the following limitations apply to this type of study. The limitations were (a) small sample of related gender, (b) small sample related to ethnicity, (c) single perspective to the experience, (d) results may not be generalizable, and (e) personal bias.

First, there were two females that participated in the study. Both women individually cited that some of the conflicts were occurring as a direct response to their personal demographic of being female, even though both of them were reluctant to believe the impact that their gender had on the conflicts and their interactions with the campus staff. The study failed to include a sufficient number of male and female Presidents to allow for a comparison.

Second, only one of the seven Presidents was a person of color. Again, the study was limited in its ability to distinguish or suggest whether differences occurred in the experiences of majority and minority Presidents.

Third, the protocol was written so that only the Presidents experience with the phenomenon was explored. An opportunity to engage the trustees or union employee heads with the study could illuminate additional stories and insights into the experience.

The sample was not broad and the participant subjects were not randomly sampled. For this reason, it can be difficult to generalize the findings and make full recommendations for future practice. While my initial aim was not to generalize the results of this study, as the purpose of interpretive social science is to allow the
findings to emerge so I did not propose an initial theory or hypothesis about the experience of successful conflict management by community college Presidents in the community college context. Instead, I allowed the findings to emerge from the data. As a result, Yin (1994) suggested that sometimes qualitative researchers can use replication logic that is commonly used by experimental researchers. In other words, if the finding is replicated with different kinds of people and in different places, then the evidence may suggest that the finding applies very broadly and may be transferable (Cook & Campbell, 1979).

The final limitation is that my own personal bias may have influenced the writings. It is possible according to Bogdan and Biklen (1998) that the research may be fraught with personal bias. As noted in Chapter Three, all research is affected by personal bias. I worked through the process to reveal and control my biases by recording detailed field notes. So, based on these limitations, suggestions for future review or questions for practice or practitioners will be explored in the next section.

**Questions for Practice or Practitioners**

The stories that are part of this study provide an opportunity to learn about conflict competence as experienced and described by the participants. It is my hope that the reader will be inspired and encouraged by their forthrightness and self-expression. This section presents several implications for current practice, although as is the nature of qualitative research, it is likely additional and different implications will arise for the reader.

The questions posed in this section focus on the practice of four distinct groups: (a) those individuals who are currently serving in the critical role as Presidents, (b) those individuals who aspire to become Presidents, (c) those individuals who are responsible for training community college Presidents, and (d) those individuals who have the responsibility of selecting, supporting, and working with the Presidents. The questions arise from the present study and are provided in order to assist each of these groups.
**Individuals Who Are Currently Serving As Community College Presidents**

The major question for reflection by these individuals is: Why did you decide to become a leader in an American community college, especially during times of great conflict. The work is greatly valued and desperately needed in spite of the changing roles and expectations (Basham, Campbell, & Mendoza, 2008; Bornstein, 2003). As this study illuminated, questions arise as to how the conflict might or might not be related to the community college missions and the students. What are the systems and processes that may be hampering change and progress?

**Individuals Who Aspire to Become a Community College President**

The major question facing such individuals is: To what extent are you conflict competent? This question leads to other questions, such as the following. To what extent do you know the culture of the campus that you are seeking to serve as President? What do you know about the predecessor Presidents (Bornstein, 2003)? What do you know about the trustee dynamics (Bornstein, 2003; King & Breuder, 1977; O’Banion, 2009a, 2009b, 2010)? Are you familiar with the AACC negotiations guide? Do you have a third party attorney representing you in terms of the contract? Do you have an exit strategy (Tierney, 2007)? Are you prepared to lead an organization with disagreements over issues not focused on educational objectives but rather on power dynamics (March & Weiner, 2003)?

**Individuals Who Are Responsible for Training Community College Presidents**

Questions arise from the findings of those who train current and future leaders. To what extent do those who provide such training recognize the need for leaders to engage in self reflection, to develop a solid foundation of values, and to create a clear personal vision (Fulton-Calkins & Milling, 2005)? Questions also arise regarding the ways in which the training might help to develop conflict management competencies. To what extent does the training emphasize the importance of networking with fellow Presidents, both new and seasoned, so that their experience and expertise can be available during the conflict moments (Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, 1984)?
Individuals Who Have the Responsibility of Selecting, Supporting, and Working with the Community College President

The findings of this study provide questions for those in a position to select and support leaders. Governing boards need to “demonstrate that they can treat their leaders humanely and respectfully” (Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, 1984, p. 32). Thus, these individuals should be asking about the ways in which they develop shared trust. Has there been the establishment of a special commission on human relations? Are there retreats involving trustees and campus leaders? Do department and division leaders understand that conflict is inevitable, inherent, and often necessary to evoke change, creativity, and innovation? To what extent are campus ceremonies used to recognize the roles of various groups on campus and to celebrate those roles? Are committee assignments and even job sharing used as ways to build understanding of the challenges facing leaders on campus (March & Weiner, 2003)? Finally, boards should ask about how they “support the President in the task of confronting difficult and controversial issues (Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, 1984, p. 32).

Implications for Future Research

The purpose of this study was to give voice to Presidents who successfully managed conflict in a community college context and describe those experiences so that a competency model through the themes for successful conflict management could be created. My intent in conducting research with the Presidents was to provide them with an opportunity to reflect on how they define themselves as conflict competent leaders, to take a journey of exploration with them, and to share their stories with others. While the results of the study provide an intimate look at the experience of being a President who demonstrated conflict competence in their practice, they also point to implications for future research. In this section, I will focus on nine possible future research topics.

1. What is the experience of more women who are known to demonstrate conflict competence in their leadership? There were two women who
revealed themselves as being willing to participate in the study, and both women believed that their gender had some bearing on the way the conflict experiences occurred. However, both women Presidents indicated a possibility that, as women Presidents, the conflicts that they were experiencing would not have occurred if they had been men. This was difficult for both women to share as they both indicated that they did not wish to believe that their gender could have any impact; however, others did indicate to them that gender of Presidents does have an impact. A similar study could be done exclusively with women, and the results could be compared to the results of this study.

2. What is the experience of more people of color who are known to demonstrate conflict competence in their leadership? The focus of this study was the experience of Presidents who revealed themselves as being willing to participate in the study. There was only one view from this perspective obtained, even though the sole person of color indicated that there was no influence on the way conflict was managed by any demographic factors. A similar study could be done exclusively with people of color, and the results could be compared to the results of this study.

3. What is the experience of people who work for and with leaders who are known to be conflict competent? Originally, in addition to individual interviews, I had considered interviewing members of their executive teams in hopes of getting a more complete picture of their practice. However, upon reflection, I realized expanding my data sources would be taking away from the focus of my study—the individual’s perceptions of the experience of being a conflict competent President. A future research study with a focus on what it is like to work for or with conflict competent Presidents and how that leadership is experienced by others. Such a study
could include additional interviews and observations with those who work closely with the leader.

4. Are the number of votes of no confidence increasing? And what is the meaning of such action to the communities served by a President who has received a vote of no confidence? The increasing levels of demand with decreasing levels of resources seem to have enhanced the number of territorial slates in the community college setting. When the faculty does not wish to change, even if it benefits the students or the community, then there is almost an automatic “vote of no confidence.” A future research study could look at the number of votes of no confidence and the meaning of such action to the communities served by the Presidents, especially when the board of trustees supports the President.

5. What is the experience of faculty leaders who lead a vote of no confidence in the President, and what is their experience with seeing the need for such action? Another research study could be conducted to describe the experience of the faculty leaders who lead the charge to issue a vote of no confidence for the community college President and what is their experience for the need for such action.

6. What is the experience of those Presidents who left the institution earlier than one year in the conflict experience? Would there be similarities or differences in the experiences of those who remained at the institution for at least one academic cycle of one year.

7. What is the experience of Presidents who managed conflict in a community college context like when members of the board of trustees are elected versus when the members of the board are appointed? Trustees who are elected tend to be accountable to the constituency that elected them while appointed trustees tend to be accountable to an elected political official.

8. What would the findings be if the experience of conflict management was approached from a political, power, or organizational theory point of view?
Conflict management by community college Presidents in a community college context is a complex and convoluted system, and different perspectives may yield similar or different findings.

9. What is the experience of four year college or university Presidents in comparison to community college Presidents who experience a vote of no confidence? A final research study could be conducted to describe any differences or similarities between the experiences.

**Personal and Professional Reflection**

I sent the approved IRB protocol to the state and national executive directors seeking to elicit participation from a variety of Presidents throughout the country as I was seeking to have a sample of Presidents that were leading at various parts of the country. Since I am not sure if the executive directors sent the request to every President in their state or national database, then I am exceptionally grateful that I did, in fact, end up with Presidents representing different segments of the country. Further, I was greatly impressed with the openness and candidness that was conveyed from each President. It was fortifying when the Presidents shared with me a level of appreciation that I was writing this story in a way that allowed their voices to be heard, yet maintain a sense of loyalty to the Presidential/chancellor title and not look like “bad Presidents seeking revenge or retribution” for being hurt, betrayed, or shunned by their own colleagues, community members, and other members of the institutions that they served. It was clear to me that they did not wish to look like “tattle tales,” but instead individuals who are deeply committed to student success and fulfilling the comprehensive mission of the American Community college.

Further, a few of the Presidents asked that once my research was complete to share my findings at local, state, and national conferences to help other current Presidents, aspiring Presidents, and other interested readers. I am grateful for the initial meeting appointment and hope that the Presidents who will read this story and will gain some insight from those Presidents who did participate. I believe that the Presidents who shared their stories were candid about the conflict issues facing
community college Presidents. Throughout each discussion, I promised that I would find ways to share their story and protect their confidences. It was apparent to me, through their words and their body language, that they trusted me in this endeavor, and I needed to find a way to fulfill that agreement.

They understood that often the conflicts were not about them personally, but instead about the position that they happen to hold in that moment and that no matter what—in their communities—it is not the “person” that walks into the room or out into the community, but instead, the “President” of an institution with related reputation and expectations. The Presidents had an obligation to ensure the health, vitality, and well being of the institution in every thought, action, and words as the sole representative of the organization. Yet, the reflection on the conflicts for many of the Presidents was personally exhausting, freeing, and revealing.

The Presidents needed support from the Board of Trustees and the various constituencies during times when managing conflict with persons who may not have the best interest of the institution and the students at the forefront. I came away from this experience with a renewed appreciation and deeper understanding for social learning theory as outlined by Vygotsky (1978) and Bandura (2002). The men and women in this study benefited most when they had the opportunity to engage in meaningful, social interaction with other Presidents, their executive team. It was this social interaction that led the Presidents in the study to conclude that “often the conflicts were not about them as a person, but instead about the position.” And it was this understanding of the social structure that gave them confidence to participate in this study so that their voices may be heard.

Van Manen (1988) indicated that phenomenological research is a “search for what it means to be human” (p. 12) and a search for seeking to gain a more fuller grasp of the experience so that we can “become more fully who we are.” I selected this topic, because I wanted to understand better the nature of being a leader in the community college setting knowing that conflict is inherent, unavoidable, and a necessary component of the job. I was seeking to help myself, my colleagues, current
Presidents, aspiring Presidents, and other interested readers in gaining an illuminated view of what it means to be Presidents leading despite conflicts in the community college context and that they too can fulfill these roles in a conflict competent manner.

The purpose of Chapter Five was to present a discussion of the results of this study in relation to existing literature, offer questions for practitioners based on the data collected, and suggest possible future research topics. As indicated in the themes, being a President is exciting and rewarding, and can be very frustrating, yet many of the Presidents continue forward in the face of great conflict, votes of no confidence, anonymous threats to themselves, and their families, and sometimes in the face of bodily harm. I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to the men and women who bravely allowed me to participate with them in this journey of presenting their voices of experience so that the themes may be explicated and shared. It is my hope that by listening attentively to the words of the participants from this research study and the salient themes that received an approval of creditability via member checking of the transcripts and written themes from each participant, that I have made a scholarly and practical contribution to address the leadership crisis that is affecting American community colleges.

Lastly, because of the emphasis on reflection in phenomenological research, I have decided to conclude Chapter Five and this dissertation with some personal reflection that honors the participating Presidents by describing one piece of wisdom I received from each of them. I will also reflect on why the knowledge is useful for me in my own practice as a community college leader.

**From President Alice**

I’ve received understanding about the importance of keeping your accolades always. She shared when she became President that she received so many accolades and during the difficult times, she “went back over . . . a whole slug of cards and, and emails and things that were of congratulations. And I kept those which was sort of fortuitous” and she asked herself what changed. She came to the conclusion that she was the same person who was implementing what was in the best interest of the
students and the long term benefit of the institution. This is a particularly powerful lesson for me because during difficult times—it can be too easy for all of us to forget the accolades that once served us as welcoming reminders from the people in the community that we serve. Additionally, President Alice provides a strong model for conflict competence at its best, and I thank her tremendously for participating in this study and sharing her voice of wise experience.

From President Doe

President Doe inspires me with his strong sense of fairness and dedication in his manifested level of service to others. He was clearly concerned about ensuring that his decisions were perceived as fair and realistic. I thank him for his expression of the importance of fairness, civility, and deep respect for all those in front of him—no matter where they began or who they are. I have always worked to embody this same perspective and hearing the way he led the institution instilled in my being the importance of appreciation for this trait.

From President Eleanor

I’ve received insight about staying optimistic in the face of great challenge. In spite of dealing with significant attacks on her personally, she was able to focus on doing what is in the best interest of the institution, and sometimes that means leaving for another opportunity. I have great admiration for her optimistic spirit and focusing on the positive. When I am faced with a convergence of “can’t do” and “not getting along with colleagues,” then I remember to focus on what is best so that I can achieve continued success for myself and the students that I serve.

From President J

I’ve been given permission to not be the perfect President. He was very matter-of-fact when he talked about realizing he should be more reserved instead of so overt in his thoughts. He talked about knowing his limitations and learning to better decipher which conflicts to engage and which ones not. I appreciated President J’s frank appraisal of himself during our conversation, because he gave me a different model for how I can be in my own professional role.
From President M
I am reminded of his strong ethic of service to others. His work was guided by his dedication to making the world a better place. He serves others by leading with consistency and honesty, by making decisions based on what will have the greatest impact for good in the future, and by having the courage to do the right thing. I have admiration for President M’s apparent ability to rise above politics and inertia in order to keep the best interests of students at the forefront.

From President T
I am inspired with his razor sharp wit and ability to respond to questions with the answer and very little, if any deviation. Further, his ability to categorize his life was moving as there are many roles and expectations demanded of leaders today. The ability to categorize people, places, and things is critical for me as a leader and I believe for other leaders as well. Finally, President T made his decisions based on what will have the greatest impact for good in the future, and he had the courage to do the right thing. It was most evident when he indicated that he did not care if anyone learned about his identity and participation in this study. Despite his willingness to use his actual name, I was still compelled as the researcher to use a pseudonym and do my small part in protecting his identity.

From President X
I can say only “oh the wisdom.” The shared insights of wisdom and candidness were clearly from places of great personal and professional reflection. There was assuredly great tenacity and focus to have carried him through many years of reoccurring conflicts with faculty, staff, trustees, and sometimes students—but nevertheless, he was steadfast in his devotion to doing the right thing. I have admiration for President X’s apparent ability to rise above politics in order to keep the best interests of students at the forefront of what he does. I only hope that I can embody that wisdom and have adequately described it in this study.

I appreciate the opportunity to engage in meaningful conversation with the Presidents in the study. The insight and wisdom they shared provided opportunity to
reflect on my own practice as a leader and think about how I want to engage with others when I experience conflict. Further, the information illuminated my own practice as to when I should choose to engage in the conflict or allow the parties in the conflict to work through their own situations and solutions. I seek to embrace and teach those I work with to welcome constructive conflict as a way to become active, engaged citizens who care for their communities. I hope that the iterative process of research driving leadership and leadership driving research came through in this study and that this is just the beginning of this research topic exploring what it means to be conflict competent community college Presidents. Our community colleges are in need of leaders who are conflict competent and ready to embrace the role of Presidents who focus on the mission of the American community college and who advocate and emphasize the opportunities associated with conflict instead of the danger of conflicts and thereby work to avoid conflict. After all, as noted in the focus and significance, and review of literature, conflict is unavoidable, inherent, and necessary—even in the ivory tower of higher education.
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APPENDICES
Appendix A: IRB Approved Protocol Document

Project Title: Understanding and Enhancing Successful Conflict Management by Community College Presidents

Principal Investigator: Dr. Darlene Russ-Eft, School of Education
Research Staff: Mellissia M. Zanjani, OSU Graduate Student

PURPOSE

The purpose of this research study is to describe and give voice to how you, as a community college Presidents, understand the experience of successful conflict management. In addition, the experiences that you share will offer an in-depth examination of the competencies used to become a conflict competent leader which may inform future decisions for you as a participant, current Presidents, aspiring Presidents, and other interested readers. This document provides you with the details regarding participation in the study. Please read the form carefully. The researchers encourage you to ask any questions about possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer participant, and anything else about the research that is not clear. This process is called “informed consent.” You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

PROCEDURES

Your involvement will consist of two interviews that will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes each. As a participant in this study, your interviews will be audio taped, unless you request that they not be. At any time, you may request that the taping be stopped. You may also request at any time to stop an interview or refuse to answer any question. The initial interview will be used to obtain detailed information on the experience before, during, and after the conflict incident and to identify the consequences of the experience. The final interview will delve into the competencies that you used to manage through the conflict and focus on how you developed your competency. There may be a need for additional follow-up via phone or e-mail to clarify information from the interview. The researcher will share the formal transcript of the interview with you to ensure that the researcher will capture your words in a
way that illuminates your experience. In addition, the researcher will be examining web and print communications that relate directly to the incident.

RISKS

The researcher foresees no risk to your participation in this research project. Potential unforeseen risks will be minimized by using pseudonyms for you as a participant and for your institution. The pseudonyms will be used for the interview audiotaping and the transcribed documents.

BENEFITS

There may be no direct benefits to your participation in this study. However, the researcher anticipates that the experiences you share may inform future decisions for you as a participant, current Presidents, aspiring Presidents, and other interested readers.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION

There will be no costs other than your time in participating in the interview. You will not be compensated for participating in this research project.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Records of participation in this research study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. However, federal government regulatory agencies and the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies involving human subjects) may inspect and copy records pertaining to this research. It is possible that these records could contain information that may personally identify you. Any direct quotes will only identify you as a participant by the pseudonym given to you. Your individual identity will not be disclosed. Results will be reported in a summarized manner in such a way that you cannot be identified. In the event of any report or publication from this study, your identity will not be disclosed.

AUDIO RECORDING

Audio tapes will be transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriber. A pseudonym will be assigned to you and all information obtained from you will be
associated with that pseudonym. The audiotape and transcripts will use the pseudonym. All research results and recommendations will be reported in a summarized manner in such a way that participants cannot be identified. Your identity will be known only to Mellissia M. Zanjani, researcher, and Dr. Darlene Russ-Eft, principal investigator. All written and recorded information, including interview notes, will be kept on a secure computer, and locked in a file cabinet or a safety deposit box by the researcher. The audiotapes and research notes will be kept for a minimum of three years by the researcher in a secure location.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Taking part in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you agree to participate in this study, you may stop participating at any time without repercussions. Additionally, you may decline to answer any question during the interviews that you prefer not to answer. If you withdraw from this study, information you have provided will be destroyed and not included in the final report. Within four weeks following the interview, you will receive a typed transcript of the interview via e-mail. Once you reviewed the transcript, then the researcher, Mellissia M. Zanjani, will contact you by telephone to clarify, verify, or expand upon transcribed information from the interviews.

QUESTIONS

Questions are encouraged. If you have any questions about this research project, please contact: Mellissia M. Zanjani by phone or by email or Dr. Darlene Russ-Eft by email or by phone. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, please contact the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Human Protections Administrator, at 541.737.8008 or by email at IRB@oregonstate.edu.
Appendix B: Individual Interview Protocol by Research Question

Research Question #1: How does community college Presidents describe the experience of successful conflict management in the community college context?

1. Describe your community college?
2. Describe your pathway to the presidency?
3. Is this your first presidency?
4. What process did you go through to make the decision to apply for the presidency?
5. How does being a Presidents match up with your personal and professional goals?
6. How long have you been in your current presidency?
7. What made you choose to become a Presidents for a community college versus a four year college or university or another type of leadership position?
8. Please take a moment and reflect on the conflict experience(s)...when you are ready, please describe it?
9. Who were the players?
10. How would you describe the players role?
11. What do you believe led up to the incident?
12. How did you respond to the conflict?
13. Were there alternative options that could have prevented the conflict?
14. If you had it to do over again, would you do everything the same? Differently?
   Describe inherent risks that you felt were involved...to yourself as the leader...to the institution...for others involved in the incident?
15. Describe how you see yourself as someone who is conflict competent?
16. What does success conflict management look like?
17. How would others portray the way you managed the conflict?
Research Question #2: How does conflict management competence manifest itself in conflict situations?

1. Describe how you see the meaning of conflict?
2. What does successful management of conflict look like to you?
3. Are there any personal demographics about you that you believe makes a difference in your leadership and management of conflict?
4. Is there a connection between any identified personal demographics and your practice as a President?
5. How do you think the sense of being “other” affects your work as a President?
6. What is it like for you to be a President?
7. How do you stay positive when you’re dealing with such difficult stuff?
8. How do you make those decisions? What do you base them on? What do you use as your guides?
9. How do you think your leadership feels and looks to others?
10. In what ways do you think your successful conflict management is expressed at work?
11. How would others describe your leadership in “normal” times?
12. How do you think others perceived your leadership during the conflict that you described?
Research Question #3: How do community college Presidents develop the competencies to manage conflict?

1. How do you give meaning to the term “competence”
2. How does who you are as a person show up in your work as a President?
3. How do you make decisions of which conflicts to engage and which ones not to engage?
4. How did management of the conflict affect your thoughts, words, and actions?
5. Were there any physiological changes that occurred as a result of the conflict?
6. How would you describe your knowledge, skills, and abilities that you used to manage the conflict?
7. Where do you believe your competencies for successful conflict management originated?
8. Who were the key players that you credit for helping you build your competency?
9. Describe the players influenced your competency development?
10. Were there programs, activities, conferences, workshops, etc. that you participated in that helped you to build your competency? Which ones?
11. Are there activities, programs, workshops that you recommend to others who are developing successful conflict competence?
12. Considering how demanding this job is, how do you renew and stay true to yourself in the face of the conflicts?
Appendix C: Interview Information

During each first interview, I thanked each participant for consenting to be involved in this research study. Second, I described the focus and significance of the study and key highlights from the review of literature. Next, I described the research methodology, phenomenological method and the importance of sharing their experiences with interested readers of this topic. Finally, I shared with each participant that intersubjective validity as a technique to confirm data soundness will be used in this study and described the meaning of the term if they were not familiar with it. I shared with them that I would write the text and present it to them for their review as a way of confirming the credibility and authenticity of the text. The interviews differed in duration and lasted from 37 minutes to two and one-half hours. The interviews were spaced between one week and four months due to the schedules of the participants and the researcher. For research question number one: How do community college President describe the experience of conflict management in the community college context?, I asked a set of context building questions that encouraged reflection on their paths to becoming community college President, the differences between serving as a President in a community college context versus a four year college or university structure, and their understanding regarding the meaning of conflict. Then I asked specific questions which related to research question number two: How does conflict competence manifest itself in conflict situations?, that encouraged the Presidents to reflect and describe on the conflicts they experienced in their careers that qualified them for this study, any inherent risks they perceived as a result of the conflict and elicited information from them that focused on how successful conflict competence looked to them in practice. Finally, for research question number three: How do community college Presidents develop the competencies to manage conflict?, I asked questions that focused on the meaning of competence, how the President understand and believe that conflict competence is developed, and finally the President view of how to build a conflict competency model.
Appendix D: Individual Participant President Profiles

President Alice

For both interviews, I met President Alice at her home at 8:00 a.m. and 8:30 a.m. respectively. Both interviews occurred in the month of December. The first interview lasted one hour, fifty-three minutes, and thirty-seven seconds. The second interview lasted one hour, fifty minutes, forty-seven seconds. President Alice’s home was in an area near her present institution. The neighborhood was quiet and it was a brisk chilly day. The floor plan of President Alice’s home was open and inviting with large windows accessing a beautiful view of a coveted landmark by many residents of the area. She had rows of walls with books that focused on a vast variety of nonfiction and fiction topics that focused on personal and professional development. When I arrived at President Alice’s home, she ensured that the environment was comfortable for me by offering tea, cookies, and other light refreshments. Midway through the discussion, President Alice inquired if the temperature in the home was cold and proceeded to increase the temperature. She shared that the home had electronic settings that adjusted to accommodate her busy schedule which placed her out of her home for many hours each day. One week after the first interview, I returned to her home and again her graciousness as a host was revealed. She had tea, cookies, and other light refreshments prepared. In addition, I noticed during the second interview that she had an array of catering dishes on display on the kitchen counter. She shared with me that later that night she was hosting a foundation event for her college’s board members and other community members at her home. President Alice is a medium build Caucasian woman. She was dressed in a chic pair of slacks, and a turtleneck for the first interview. In the second interview, President Alice again wore a pair of dressy slacks, and a lightweight sweater.

President Doe

The first interview occurred during the month of December and took place in President Doe’s office. The interview lasted one hour, thirty six minutes, and ten seconds. The interview occurred in the late evening so there were few people
remaining in the office location. Doe’s assistant offered me a cup of tea or coffee while I waited for Doe to join me. As it was a cold rainy evening, I accepted a cup of tea and was escorted to a small conference room. The room was enclosed almost entirely with glass pane which allowed for everyone passing by to view into the space, as well as everyone within the units could peer out. The second interview took place in the month of April and lasted fifty-three minutes and twenty-three seconds. President Doe wore a professional suit with a shirt and tie. The interview occurred at a public business building. With the noisy sounds of a steady rush of patrons in this public building, there were clearly many passerby’s who knew President Doe. As he caught eye contact with them, he waved. I offered that we relocate to another location as people may recall seeing him with me and become knowledgeable about the topic. He declined and stated that he will “focus more.” President Doe is a large build Caucasian man. He was dressed in a suit and tie for both interviews.

President Eleanor

The first interview occurred in the month of December. I met President Eleanor at her office in the late afternoon. The first interview lasted one hour, thirty-seven minutes, and forty-three seconds. President Eleanor’s office conference room was enclosed by cream colored walls with a few hanging pictures. There were two entrances/exits in the small sized conference room. Her assistant offered me a cup of tea, coffee, or a bottle of water. I accepted the bottle of water. The second interview occurred in the month of February via telephone to her office location from my own home office. The second interview lasted one hour, sixteen minutes, and twenty-one seconds. President Eleanor is a medium build Caucasian woman. She was dressed in a stylish suit and blouse for the first interview. As noted earlier, the second interview occurred over the phone so there is no reference to her dress.

President J

For both interviews, I met President J at his office late in the afternoon on both occasions. Both interviews were held in the month of June. The first interview lasted one hour, five minutes, and twenty-two seconds. The second interview took place 20
days after the first interview and lasted forty six minutes and forty five seconds. President J’s office was large with separately designed areas to accommodate a conference area, and a work area. His assistant offered me a cup of tea, coffee, or a bottle of water. I accepted the bottle of water. President J is a large build Caucasian man. He was dressed in a suit and tie for both occasions.

President M
For the first interview, I met President M at a public business building. The interview took place in the month of April. The first interview lasted fifty-two minutes, and fifty-four seconds. The second interview occurred in the month of June two months after the first interview. I conducted the second interview via telephone to his mobile telephone so there is no reference to his dress. The second interview lasted one hour, six minutes, and fifty seconds. Due to timing constraints, we scheduled a third interview to occur in the next week to complete the last two interview questions. The third interview lasted six minutes. President M is a large build Caucasian man. He was dressed in a suit and tie.

President T
For the first interview, I met President T at a semi private outside location of a public business building. The interview occurred in April during a warm seasonal front so the decision was made to have the interview on the outside terrace of the public building. The first interview lasted twenty-six minutes, and twenty nine seconds. The second interview took place in the month of June. I conducted the second interview via telephone to his mobile telephone so there is no reference to his dress. The second interview lasted forty-one minutes, and forty five seconds. President T is a large build Caucasian man. He was dressed in a suit and tie.

President X
For both interviews, I met President X at his office late in the afternoon. The interviews occurred in the months of May and June. The first interview lasted one hour, twenty-three minutes, and forty-one seconds. The second interview took place one month after the first interview and lasted thirty-five minutes and ten seconds. In
the last year, President X had been conferred an esteemed honor of President Emeritus due to his many decades of service to his community college. As a result, President X was in the process of organizing his new office. The office was decorated with many awards, and proclamations from local, state, and national officials as well as many cultural artifacts reflecting his love of his culture. President X is a medium build African-American man. He was dressed in a suit and tie for both occasions.

**Researcher (Me)**

Consistent with the methodology associated with phenomenological inquiry, it is necessary to consider the profile of the researcher, since interpretations of participants experience emerges from a filter that is made up of my preferences as participant-researcher. In addition to the personal disclosure provided in Chapter Three, I offer additional information about myself in an effort to strengthen my interpretations. My experience as a participant-researcher was made up of alternating roles and perspectives. I conducted the interviews at varying times, locations, and seasonal periods of the year as described in the President individual detail. The researcher is a medium build African and Native American woman.
Appendix E: Member Checking I of Transcripts

RE: Research on Understanding and Enhancing Successful Conflict Management by Community College Presidents
Between January 2010 – August 2010
Dear Participating Presidents,

Hello! I am writing to follow up on two details in regards to my research on successful conflict management by community college Presidents. First, attached to this email is a copy of the transcripts that resulted from our Interview. Recall that the primary purpose of sending you the transcript is to further enhance the soundness of the study. The transcripts were typed word for word by a professional transcriber who adheres to a strict code of ethics, which includes participant anonymity, and confidentiality. Second, I am forwarding to you a brief profile of you that I wish to include in my study. It is to be used for contextual purposes only.

As we agreed, your agreed upon pseudonym will be used throughout the study. Would you please read over the enclosed information that I have collected and make any corrections, revisions, or additions that you feel necessary in order to maintain the intent of your comments? I appreciate any insights you might at this juncture. Please return your comments to me via email. If I don’t receive anything from you in the next four weeks, then I’ll assume that everything was okay with the transcription. Thank you again for your participation and your continuing support in my research. I appreciate your patience in the process. My intent is to contact you in the future to collaborate further in the research process and gain more information about your learning. And of course I will be sharing more of my writing with you in time.

Regards,
Mellissia (Mel) Zanjani
home address, home telephone, email address
Appendix F: Member Checking II for Data Analysis

Dear President (Pseudonym used),

It has been several months since I have contacted you regarding my research about successful conflict management by community college Presidents. I am writing to apprise you of the progress that I’ve made on the analysis of our interviews and our time spent together. Most importantly, I am writing to invite comments about my interpretations related to the data derived from the interviews, and information gathered from the public documents that related to the conflict.

As we discussed during each initial interview, when conducting qualitative-oriented research studies, researchers seek to increase the soundness and credibility of their findings using a technique called member checking. As participant-members of the research, I want to give you a chance to tell me if my interpretation makes sense to you. As you recall, this study focuses on an in-depth description of community college Presidents who have successfully managed conflict. In order to facilitate comment about the writing I have done, I am forwarding to you key, excerpted parts of the dissertation draft. I invite you to review these parts over the course of the next three weeks and advise me of your thoughts as it relates to the following question: Is my interpretation of statements made by you reasonable in terms of your meaning and implications? If your meaning and implications were different then I conveyed, please let me know via email. What I have proposed in this research are my own tentative statements or insights about what the nature of the experience is like for you as Presidents who managed conflict successfully. As with most research, my analysis includes consistent efforts to relate the conflict experiences that you shared with me to the literature.

I am very grateful for whatever sacrifices you might have made to participate in the research. It has been my hope all along that you might benefit from the experience. I will send you the completed document when it is finished. If in reading this letter you find yourself confused about what you are to do or how to respond, please feel free to call me at my home telephone number, email me, or call me directly
on my cell phone (contact data below). Thank you for your enthusiasm and support. If you choose to respond to the invitation to comment—and it is not mandatory that you respond. I am looking forward to hearing from you.

Cordially,
Mellissia (Mel) Zanjani,
Work Address
Work Telephone
Work Email

P.S. I have enclosed below the paragraph from my original correspondence to you regarding the protocol for this study, which is offered again in order to protect you, and ensure that have necessary resources for action:

[Questions are encouraged. If you have any questions about this research project, please contact: Darlene Russ-Eft, PhD, at telephone number, email address; or Mellissia Zanjani, telephone number, personal email address. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, please contact the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Human Protections Administrator, at telephone number, or by email at email address. Thank you for your detailed consideration of my research.]