ABSTRACT

REDMOND, VALESKA VERENA MERCEDES. Examining the Relationships between Conflict Management Styles, Upward Dissent Tactics, and Leader-Member-Social-Exchange. (Under the direction of committee chair Dr. Jessica Katz Jameson).

This study examined the relationships between conflict management styles and upward dissent tactics in the context of leader-member-exchange quality, accounting for age, gender, race, education, organizational rank, direct reports, and organizational tenure. The methodology was quantitative and incorporated the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory-II (ROCI-II), the Upward Dissent Scale (UDS), and the Leader-Member-Social-Exchange (LMSX) scale. A nonprobability sampling method was used to solicit responses from 265 fulltime working employees from three different organizations in the U.S.

The results indicated that the integrating conflict management style and compromising conflict management style were positively related to both prosocial dissent tactics and superior-subordinate relationship quality, respectively. In addition, age was positively related to the integrating conflict management style and negatively related to upward dissent tactics of repetition, circumvention, and threatening to resign. Further, gender differences were observed for prosocial and repetition dissent tactics, while organizational rank indicated significant differences in the use of the integrating conflict handling style and prosocial dissent tactics. A significant difference was also found between employees with subordinates reporting to them and employees without subordinates. Employees with direct reports used less dominating and avoiding conflict handling styles than those without direct reports. Finally, regression analyses indicated that the integrating conflict management style and prosocial dissent tactics predict high quality relationships with supervisors.
The value of this study is its original contribution to the research literature on conflict management styles and upward dissent tactics. No previous research incorporated both constructs to examine relationships. Additionally, past research on leader-member-exchange theory used instruments that did not measure the notion of social exchange, although they claimed to do so. This study uses the LMSX scale, which measures both negotiation latitude and social exchange. Finally, this is the first study to use the UDS and LMSX scale in research and to confirm their validities.
Examining the Relationships between Conflict Management Styles, Upward Dissent Tactics, and Leader-Member-Social-Exchange

by

Valeska Verena Mercedes Redmond

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of North Carolina State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Communication, Rhetoric, and Digital Media

Raleigh, North Carolina

2014

APPROVED BY:

______________________________
Dr. Jessica Katz Jameson
Committee Chair

______________________________
Dr. Elizabeth Craig

______________________________
Dr. Susan Miller-Cochran

______________________________
Dr. Catherine Zimmer
DEDICATION

To my beloved grandmother, Omi Hilde, who believed in me from day one.
BIOGRAPHY

Valeska Verena Mercedes Redmond was born and raised in Germany. She studied and worked in Germany, Spain, and Great Britain before completing her master’s degree in Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Management at North Carolina State University. After graduating, she worked for six years in resource development and marketing for a national youth development organization in Raleigh, NC. Her research focuses on organizational conflict communication and employee dissent.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Gratitude is due to all of the family, friends, and colleagues who contributed to my success and helped me along the way.

Special thanks is given to Dr. Jessica Katz Jameson, chair of my committee, for her steadfast efforts and sound support. Her wisdom and guidance made this journey a joyful experience. The assistance and compassion given by each member of my graduate committee, Dr. Elizabeth Craig, Dr. Susan Miller-Cochran, and in particular, Dr. Catherine Zimmer, were also very much valued. Feedback and support were also given by Dr. S. Bartholomew Craig and Dr. Joann Keyton, for which I am very grateful.

Numerous other individuals have contributed to the development and execution of this study. In particular, I would like to thank all three HR directors, who allowed me to collect data at their organizations. You know who you are! Further, I would like to express my gratitude to my dear friend and constant proofreader, Cathy Kerr. Her feedback and editing skills made me a better writer. Moreover, I would like to extend my appreciation to my friends and family, both in Germany and the United States.

Finally, Mark, my rock and pillar, whose endless patience and love inspired me to complete this work. Could anyone ask for a better husband? Nein. Thank you!
TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES ........................................................................................................... vii
LIST OF FIGURES ......................................................................................................... viii
CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION ...................................................................................... 1
   Rationale .................................................................................................................... 2
   Research Questions and Hypotheses ........................................................................ 6
   Organization of the Study ....................................................................................... 7
CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE .............................................................. 9
   Conflict .................................................................................................................... 9
   Constructive and Destructive Conflict .................................................................... 11
   Conflict Management Style Instruments ............................................................... 12
   Limitations of Instruments ................................................................................... 15
   Conflict Management Styles .................................................................................. 16
   Gender and Organizational Rank .......................................................................... 22
   Dissent ................................................................................................................... 24
   Factors Influencing Dissent ................................................................................... 25
   Dissent Strategies .................................................................................................... 28
   Upward Dissent Measurement .............................................................................. 33
   Leader-Member-Exchange Theory ......................................................................... 34
   Communicative Aspects of Leader-Member-Exchange Theory ............................. 36
   Vertical Dyad Linkage and Social Exchange Theory ............................................. 38
   Leader-Member-Social-Exchange Construct ......................................................... 40
   Summary of the Literature Review ........................................................................ 41
CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY .................................................................................. 44
   Sample .................................................................................................................... 44
   Instrumentation ....................................................................................................... 46
   Reliability ................................................................................................................ 47
   Content Validity ....................................................................................................... 48
   Conclusion Validity ................................................................................................. 49
   External Validity ...................................................................................................... 49
   Design ....................................................................................................................... 51
   Data Collection Procedure .................................................................................... 52
   Analyses ................................................................................................................... 53
CHAPTER IV. RESULTS .............................................................................................. 56
   Descriptive Statistics .............................................................................................. 56
   Research Question 1 ............................................................................................... 64
   Research Question 2 ............................................................................................... 65
   Research Question 3 ............................................................................................... 66
   Research Question 4 ............................................................................................... 68
   Research Question 5 ............................................................................................... 68
Hypothesis 1 ............................................................................................................. 69
Hypothesis 2 ............................................................................................................. 70
CHAPTER V. DISCUSSION ....................................................................................... 73
Limitations ................................................................................................................ 89
Future Research ....................................................................................................... 90
REFERENCES .......................................................................................................... 94
APPENDICES .......................................................................................................... 112
Appendix A. IRB Approval Letter ................................................................. 113
Appendix B. Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory-II ......................... 114
Appendix C. Upward Dissent Scale ................................................................. 116
Appendix D. Leader-Member-Social-Exchange scale ................................. 117
Appendix E. Pre-notification E-mail to Participate in Survey ................. 118
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Number, Mean, Standard Deviation, Minimum, and Maximum for Averaged Conflict Management Styles of Respondents ........................................57
Table 2. Number, Mean, Standard Deviation, Minimum, and Maximum for Averaged Upward Dissent Tactics of Respondents .............................................58
Table 3. Number, Mean, Standard Deviation, Minimum, and Maximum for Averaged LMSX of Respondents .............................................................58
Table 4. Frequencies, Percentages, Mean, and Standard Deviation of Respondents’ Gender, age, Race, and Ethnicity .........................................................60
Table 5. Frequencies, Percentages, Mean, and Standard Deviation of Respondents’ Education, Number of Years Employed, Direct Reports, Number of Direct Reports, and Position .........................................................63
Table 6. Correlation Data for Conflict Styles, Dissent Tactics, LMSX, age, Number of Years Employed, and Number of Direct Reports .........................72
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. The Dual Concern Model of the Styles of Handling Interpersonal Conflict ............................................................ 15
Figure 2. Model of Managing Conflict and Expressing Upward Dissent in the LMSX Context ............................................................................................................................. 87
CHAPTER I.
INTRODUCTION

Conflict is an inevitable part of the work environment. Whether employees intentionally engage in it or try to avoid it, “every aspect of organizational life that creates order and coordination of effort must overcome other tendencies to actions, and in that fact lies the potentiality for conflict” (Katz & Kahn, 1979, p. 617). Every day, employees are faced with situations in which they encounter opposing or competing views. Greater employee diversity, flatter organizational hierarchies, increasing electronic communication, growing complexity of tasks, and the constant pressure on employees to be cost conscious and effective at managing expenses are some examples of elements that contribute to conflict in today’s organizations (Burke, 2006). Because employees are confronted with more challenges than ever before, “interpersonal skills and the ability to collaborate in distributed, cross-functional teams appear to be more important than in the past” (Barley & Kunda, 2001, p. 77). As a result, employees, and especially organizational leaders, are expected to be effective communicators and to manage conflict competently. Properly handled conflict can lead to increased productivity, reduced costs, and managed risks (De Dreu, 1997; Hocker & Wilmot, 2007; Putnam & Poole, 1987; Rahim, 2011). However, conflict can be a destructive force if organizational members fail to deal with it correctly.

The way organizational members approach a problem is essential in successful conflict communication. Thus, communication is key to conflict management at work. This is especially vital when employees express dissent, since dissent “can lead to or be part of
conflict” (Kassing, 2011, p. 50). In particular, dissent to supervisors or management is risky (Waldron & Kassing, 2011), even when organizational members have a clear idea about what and to whom to dissent (Kassing, 2000b, 2011). Yet, dissent, like conflict, is needed in organizations because “dissent serves as an important monitoring force within organizations in that dissent can signal organizational problems such as employee dissatisfaction or organizational decline” (Kassing, 2002, p. 188). The ability to express dissent and manage conflict properly can help organizational members to build and maintain strong relationships with each other and impact organizational goals positively (Green, 2008; Kassing, 2000b).

**Rationale**

Conflict is inherent in organizations because it is embedded in the structural design (Deetz, 1987; Mumby, 1988). As such, the literature on conflict is immense, and it has been studied among various disciplines for over half a century (Burke, 2006; Hooker & Wilmot, 2007; Putnam, 1997; 2006; Rahim, 2011). Above all, conflict between organizational leaders and members has received significant attention and contributed to the scholarship of communication satisfaction (Lamude, Scudder, Simmons, & Torres, 2004; Mueller & Lee, 2002), defensive communication (Becker, Halbesleben, & O’Hair, 2005), communication quality (Yrle, Hartman, & Galle, 2002), information sharing (Sias, 2005), and influence tactics (Botero, Foste, & Pace; 2011; Fairhurst, 1993; Kipnis, Schmidt, & Wilkinson, 1980; Lamude et al. 2004; Waldron, 1991, 1999; Waldron & Sanderson, 2011) to mention a few. Compared to the conflict literature, the research on dissent has only in the last 15 years generated more concrete and novel insight into this specific communication behavior
(Kassing, 1997, 2002, 2005, 2007, 2011; Garner, 2009a, 2009b, 2012, 2013). However, neither one of these two communication phenomena have been studied in tandem. In the forthcoming discussion, I attempt to establish the need for continued exploration of these two constructs as they relate to one another.

“Whether implicitly or explicitly, communication behaviors at work are evaluated formally or informally by others and often self-evaluated” (Keyton et al., 2013; p. 154). Therefore, organizational leaders and members need to be aware of how to manage conflicts constructively and how to communicate their disagreements competently. Literature on conflict management styles and dissent tactics has indicated that well managed conflict and dissent lead to organizational innovation and creativity (Olekans, Putnam, Weingart, & Metcalf, 2008; Tjosvold, 2000). Therefore, the findings from this study not only contribute to the existing body of literature, but also provide new insight about articulation of dissent in relation to conflict management styles that can lead to effective workplace communication and positive organizational outcomes.

The main goal of an organization is to perform and accomplish certain tasks. It is in this sense that the relationships between organizational leaders and members allow an organization to function. According to Scheerhorn and Geist (1997) “Without good relationships, carrying out a task is difficult, if not impossible; good relationships, on the other hand, facilitate the process” (p. 83). Good or, in other words, high quality relationships are even more desirable in conflict situations or when contradicting views clash because the way in which organizational members manage conflict and express dissent appears to have a
considerable impact on an organization’s climate and productivity (Friedman, Tidd, Curral, & Tsai, 2000). Dealing with conflict and dissent can even be more challenging when employees have low quality relationships with organizational leaders. Knowing more about the relationship between conflict and dissent is crucial and leads to a better understanding of how to deal with low or high level relationships between organizational leaders and members.

In line with the previous assertion, past research on leader-member relationships has claimed to measure the negotiation latitude between organizational members and leaders and the level of social exchange members encounter (Berneth, Armenakis, Field, Giles, & Walker, 2007; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Liden, Sparrowe, & Wayne, 1997). However, the social exchange construct has never been present in the research instruments that were used for these studies of leader-member relationships (Berneth et al., 2007). Given this shortcoming, this study uses Berneth and colleagues’ (2007) Leader-Member-Social-Exchange (LMXS) scale to assess the quality of relationships between leaders and members. Using this scale helps yield more specific insight into a person’s conflict handling style and choice of dissent strategies in the context of reciprocation.

The majority of past conflict and LMX research has relied primarily on participants who were comprised of students and parttime employees (e.g., Bauer & Green, 1996; Chung-Yan & Moeller, 2010; Day & Crain, 1992). However, these participants do not adequately represent the American working population about which scholars like to generalize. Given that the main interest of the present study is fulltime employees, different types of
participants are necessary. This research investigates conflict management styles and dissent expression of white-collar and blue-collar employees in for-profit and non-profit organizations.

Another significant contribution of this study is embedded in the use of the LMSX scale and the Upward Dissent Scale (UDS) to measure dissent expression to supervisors. While both scales have been thoroughly developed and validated, to date neither of them has been used in research. Using both scales allows further scale validation and reliability measurement that can help determine their viability for future research.

While the research findings advance the scholarship on conflict management, dissent, and LMX theory, the findings are equally of interest and use for practitioners. For instance, the results can be used diagnostically to “help gauge an organization’s tolerance for dissent and its capacity to address it effectively” (Kassing & Kava, 2013, p. 12). Managers could learn whether or not their feedback mechanisms are working effectively or being dismissed by team members. Other findings can help with determining readiness for organizational change, predicting new employees’ relationship quality with superiors, or assessing employees’ involvement in the decision-making process, to mention a few. The current study provides insight into these practitioner-oriented opportunities.

Finally, broadening the current study of organizational dissent in the context of interpersonal conflict styles and the relationship quality between leaders and members can help clarify the factors that impact such behaviors. “Like all communication behaviors, communication in organizations is socially learned (e.g., mentoring, shadowing, vicarious
learning) and often taught in organizational training programs” (Keyton et al., 2013, p. 154). For instance, using the results for employee training can help employees become better communicators by learning to voice their concerns competently and effectively to prevent or cause possible conflicts. The results of this study provide additional in-depth knowledge in the realm of conflict management and dissent expression to superiors.

**Research Questions and Hypotheses**

**Research Questions.** In light of the preceding discussion, the present study addresses the following research questions:

- **RQ1:** What are the relationships between conflict management styles and upward dissent tactics?
- **RQ2:** What are the relationships between conflict management styles and demographic variables?
- **RQ3:** What are the relationships between upward dissent tactics and demographic variables?
- **RQ4:** What are the relationships between conflict management styles and relationship quality with supervisors?
- **RQ5:** What are the relationships between upward dissent tactics and relationship quality with supervisors?
**Hypotheses.** Based on the assumptions garnered from the preceding rationale, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Higher quality of relationship with supervisors predicts the use of more integrating conflict style.

H2: Higher quality of relationship with supervisors predicts the use of more prosocial dissent tactic.

**Organization of the Study**

The study is divided into five chapters. The first chapter introduces factors contributing to workplace conflict and the importance of managing conflict. The chapter continues with the rationale behind this study by discussing conflict and dissent communication in the context of leader-member relationships. It concludes with the study’s proposed contributions to the academic field and suggestions for practitioners and introduces the study’s five research questions and two hypotheses. Chapter two begins with a review of the conflict literature, including constructive and destructive conflict outcomes, as well as strengths and limitations of existing conflict management style instruments. Then, it discusses and defines conflict management styles and reviews conflict management styles research on gender and organizational rank. The review continues with a summary of dissent literature, in particular, factors influencing dissent expression and dissent strategies. A detailed description of upward dissent strategies and a discussion of the Upward Dissent scale (UDS) follow the review. Next, the second chapter provides an overview of the literature on leader-member-exchange (LMX) theory with an emphasis on the
communicative aspects of LMX theory. Then, it discusses theories of vertical dyad linkage and social exchange, and it introduces the construct of leader-member-social exchange. The literature review concludes with a summary of the chapter. The third chapter includes data about the research sample and provides a description of the three instruments used for this study and their reliability and validity. It discusses the research design as well as data collection procedures, and a description of proposed statistical data analyses. The fourth chapter provides the findings from the analyzed data. Data analyses findings are presented to address the five research questions and two hypotheses of this study. Findings include primary data analyses of the survey respondents, a description of their preferred conflict management styles and preferred upward dissent expression, and their perceptions of the relationship quality with their superiors. Correlation tests, independent-samples t-tests, one-way analysis of variances, and regression analysis are conducted to determine relationships between conflict management styles, upward dissent strategies, and demographic variables. Chapter five presents a review and discussion of the findings, including theoretical, methodological, and practical applications, limitations of the study, and directions for future research.
CHAPTER II.
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The study is grounded in the theoretical underpinnings of three constructs: conflict management styles, upward dissent tactics, and relationship quality of organizational leaders and members. Thus, chapter two begins with a definition of conflict and discusses constructive versus destructive conflict. It continues with a discussion of conflict management style instruments and their limitations. It further discusses the five types of conflict management styles and reviews the literature on gender and organizational rank. Then, the chapter provides a review of the current dissent literature, factors influencing dissent, and three types of dissent expression. In particular, the five types of upward dissent strategies and an instrument to measure upward dissent are reviewed. Lastly, leader-member-exchange theory is introduced followed by an examination of the current LMX literature in the communication context. Then, the chapter discusses theories of vertical dyad linkage and social exchange as well as the leader-member-social-exchange instrument. A summary concludes the literature review.

Conflict

Conflict is a natural occurrence. It is a broad phenomenon and as such a well-researched topic across disciplines. As a result, various definitions have been generated for the term, and depending on the scope of these studies they range from very broad to very narrow. Communication studies are primarily concerned with the elements of interdependence and interaction in defining conflict (Hocker & Wilmot, 2007; Kassing,
The forthcoming definition describes the construct of conflict most suited for this study: Conflict occurs when two or more interdependent parties perceive incompatible goals (Putnam & Poole, 1987), and/or “scarce resources, and interference from others in achieving their goals” (Hocker & Wilmot, 1995, p. 21).

What is not indicated in this definition is the types of conflict individuals encounter. Taxonomies of conflict include relational (or affective) conflict, task (or substantive) conflict, process conflict, conflict of interest, conflict of values, and goal conflict, to mention a few (Rahim, 2011). While the characteristics of conflicts are exhaustive, the most commonly investigated types are task and relational conflicts (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Friedman et al., 2000; Greer, Jehn, & Mannix, 2008; Jehn, 1995). Task conflict is caused by differences of opinion regarding policies, procedures, resources, or content issues. For instance, a group of employees could argue about the amount of data to include in a report (Rahim, 2011). Whereas relational conflict occurs when two or more employees try to solve a problem together, but “become aware that their emotions and feelings regarding some or all the issues are incompatible” (Rahim, 2011, p. 19). Research on the effects of task conflict on relational conflict found that task conflict frequently produced relational conflict, and eventually led to stress at the workplace (Friedman et al., 2000).

Employees can experience conflict on three levels including interpersonal, intragroup, and intergroup. Interpersonal conflict is also referred to as dyadic conflict and describes conflict “between two or more organizational members of the same or different hierarchical
levels or units” (Rahim, 2011, p. 23). Studies on superior-subordinate conflict relate to this type of conflict. This study focuses on task conflict at the interpersonal level.

Constructive and Destructive Conflict

Regardless of the types or levels of conflict employees experience, conflicts can be constructive or destructive. Constructive outcomes of conflict have been found to stimulate innovation, creativity, knowledge, and change. In addition, constructive conflict contributes to problem awareness, alternative solutions, improved decision-making, higher productivity, increased performance, and personal development, while it guards against groupthink (Amason & Schweiger, 2000; Kuhn & Poole, 2000; Putnam, 2006; Rahim, 2011; Tjosvold, 2000). In contrast, destructive conflict causes job stress, lower job performance, burnout, and dissatisfaction, which can lead to higher turnover. Moreover, the literature cites reduced communication between individuals and groups, damage to relationships, increased resistance to change, and lower organizational commitment as consequences of destructive conflict (Amason & Schweiger, 2000; 1995; Rahim, 2011).

In order for conflict to be constructive, employees need to manage it together. Tjosvold (2000) uses the term co-operative conflict and urges employees to speak openly and directly and to align their goals, so that each employee can win and they can solve their problems together. Most importantly, employees need to believe that they are working with one another. In doing so, employees are able to learn and “collectively engage in the process of diagnosis of and intervention in problems” (Rahim, 2011, p. 34). Organizations that manage conflict well are those that address it constructively. After all, “Conflict itself does
not destroy; it is avoidance and other destructive ways of handling important conflicts that undermine our wellbeing, confidence, and effectiveness” (Tjosvold, 2000, p. 3). In short, the absence of conflict is not a desirable goal for organizations. Conflict is needed for learning, adaptation, and advancement of individuals and organizations. Therefore, conflict needs to be managed constructively in order to yield the desired positive outcomes (Putnam, 1997).

**Conflict Management Style Instruments**

Constructive and destructive conflict outcomes are marked by conflict management styles that organizational members exhibit. Conflict management styles are tendencies of individuals’ natural preferences to use certain conflict handling styles more frequently than others (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974) and are influenced by “individual, dyadic, and organizational factors” (Olekalns et al., 2008, p. 85). The literature on conflict management styles is substantial and has received significant attention since the introduction of Blake and Mouton’s (1964) *managerial grid*. Serving as a category system for behavioral description of five conflict management styles, the managerial grid is a two-dimensional framework that differentiates between concern for production and concern for people. Blake and Mouton (1964) categorized conflict management styles into confronting, smoothing, avoiding, forcing, and compromising. Most subsequent research and theory on conflict management styles is based on this model. For instance, Putnam and Wilson’s (1982) *Organizational Communication Conflict Instrument (OCCI)*, Pruitt’s (1983) *dual concern model*, Thomas and Kilmann’s (1974) *Conflict Instrument (TKI)*, and lastly, Rahim and Bonoma’s (1979) *styles of handling interpersonal conflict model* can all be traced back to the managerial grid.
Several scales have been developed to identify conflict management styles and strategies. Putnam and Wilson (1982) developed the OCCI to assess choices about strategies in the management of conflict across situational, structural, environmental, and organizational contexts. They introduce three conflict-handling strategies: (a) Nonconfrontation strategies include avoiding disagreements, downplaying controversies, or approaching conflict indirectly. They are a combination of what Blake and Mouton (1964) would refer to as avoiding or smoothing, and they move away from opposition; (b) solution-oriented strategies use compromise as well as a search for innovation by moving closer to the opposition; and (c) control strategies move against the opposition and are portrayed by individuals arguing persistently for their positions and demands. The OCCI assesses verbal and nonverbal tactics and “measures the various strategies the individual chooses to resolve the conflict” by providing context specific scenarios (King & Miles, 1990, p. 224; Wilson & Waltman, 1988).

Thomas and Kilmann (1974) reinterpreted Blake and Mouton’s (1964) managerial grid model by describing an individual's behavior along two basic dimensions: (a) assertiveness, the extent to which the person attempts to satisfy his or her own concerns, and (b) cooperativeness, the extent to which the person attempts to satisfy the other person's concerns. The five conflict management styles are (a) avoiding, (b) collaborating, (c) compromising, (d) competing, and (e) accommodating. The TKI is a forced-choice paired comparison, which has been popular among practitioners for a variety of training programs (Shell, 2007; Womack, 1988). The TKI measures behaviors and intentions of a person’s
preferred method of managing conflict, but it does not allow making inferences about a person’s intentions directly (Womack, 1988).

Finally, the most widely used framework across disciplines is Rahim and Bonoma’s (1979) styles of handling interpersonal conflict model (Figure 1). This approach describes conflict styles based on an individual’s concern for self and others. Using a style approach, Rahim (1983) developed the Organizational Conflict Inventory (ROCI-I and ROCI-II) which measures conflict at the interpersonal, intergroup, and intragroup level on five conflict handling styles: (a) integrating (or collaborating), (b) avoiding, (c) compromising, (d) dominating (or competing), and (e) obliging (or accommodating). Moreover, the ROCI-II allows the measurement of conflict handling styles of different targets, i.e., subordinates, peers, and superiors.
Figure 1. The Dual Concern Model of the Styles of Handling Interpersonal Conflict. Adapted from “Managing Organizational Conflict: A Model for Diagnosis and Intervention,” by M. A. Rahim and T. V. Bonoma, 1979, Psychological Reports, 44, p. 1327. Reproduced with permission from the (c) Center for Advanced Studies in Management. Further reproduction is not allowed without permission in writing from the Center.

Limitations of Instruments

While the reviewed scales employ an organizational context and use the individual as a unit of measurement, they differ in their measurements and psychometric qualities. The TKI was not designed from a communication standpoint, but it indirectly provides information about a person’s conflict communication. The ipsative nature of the TKI limits the type of statistical analysis that researchers can use when compared to Likert-type scales
as implied in the OCCI and ROCI-II (Womack, 1988). The ROCI-II measures style, while
OCCI measures behavior. This distinction is important because style is a reflection of a
“predisposition, habit or stable, internal preferences” (Wilson & Waltman, 1988, p. 386).
The OCCI does not assume styles as pervasive and is focused on the situation (Wilson &
Waltman, 1988). The ROCI-II is currently the most widespread instrument used to conduct
conflict management style research and has consistently shown strong psychometric
qualities. Rahim and Bonoma’s (1979) styles of handling interpersonal conflict model is
selected as one of three theoretical frameworks for the study. Consequently, Rahim’s (1983)
ROCI-II is used for the research, since it is the best-suited instrument for this type of
investigation. The ROCI-II focuses on conflict styles, presuming style as “a mode, an
intention, or a habitual way of handling conflict” (Olekans et al., 2008, p. 83), and assumes
that “a style is an individual’s preference for handleings conflicts that is determined by the
individual’s concern for either self or others” (p. 83), unlike behavior, which focuses on the
situation at hand.

**Conflict Management Styles**

Understanding conflict management style preferences helps improve conflict
management and conflict resolution, although the literature on conflict management styles
cautions that no single conflict management style is the best and not all conflict management
styles are perceived the same way (Gross & Guerrero, 2000; Papa & Canary, 1995). For
instance, the assertiveness literature states that assertive behaviors or actions are more
effective in managing conflict than passive behaviors; yet studies have shown that observers
rate assertive responses to conflict situations less favorably than passive responses (Papa & Canary, 1995).

The following sections define the five conflict handling styles and review recent literature on conflict management styles.

**Integrating.** Employees who engage in an integrating conflict management style show a high concern for themselves and others. The integrating conflict handling style is more of a mutual than an individual orientation because two or more individuals come together to find a satisfying solution for both parties. Employees exhibiting an integrating conflict management style want to understand the other person’s reasons, are open to learn from the other person, and ultimately, merge insights from different perspectives to gain a consensual decision to address and solve a conflict (Papa & Canary, 1995; Song, Dyer, & Thieme, 2006; Thomas & Kilmann, 1974). Using a collaborative approach is helpful if one person cannot solve the problem alone, enough time is provided to tackle the issue, and when “skills, information, and other resources possessed by different parties to define or redefine a problem” are needed to come up with an alternative solution (Rahim, 2011, p. 53). Moreover, the integrating conflict management style is usually appropriate for long range planning and dealing with strategic issues pertaining to an organization’s policies and objectives (Rahim, 2011). Trudel and Reio (2011) studied 615 employees from three U.S. companies and found that employees using the integrating conflict handling style tended to experience less workplace incivility themselves and decreased the likelihood of being a target of workplace incivility. A collaborative conflict management style was also perceived as both appropriate
for the relationship and situation as well as effective in solving issues (Gross & Guerrero, 2000; Papa & Canary, 1995). Moreover, Friedman and colleagues (2000) found that integrating produces a less conflict-laden environment. Green (2008) surveyed 605 employees and found that high quality relationships between leaders and members were associated with an integrating conflict management style. In line with Green’s (2008) findings, Rahim, Magner, and Shapiro (2000) found that subordinates used integrating more often when subordinates perceived leaders were fair. Barbuto, Phipps, and Xu (2010) found that a supervisor’s agreeableness and openness showed direct effects on an integrating conflict management style, which suggest that leaders “may be predisposed to an integrating conflict management style” (p. 441). Weider-Hatfield and Hatfield (1995) deduced from their study that supervisors who scored higher levels on integrating with their subordinates reported significantly more intrapersonal conflicts than those supervisors who scored lower levels on integrating. Their study concluded, “integrating is a viable approach for managing conflict, but that its use with subordinates tends to create problems that might be avoided by using more aggressive action” (Weider-Hatfield & Hatfield, 1995, p. 692).

**Compromising.** A compromising conflict handling style is characterized by settling a conflict through mutual concessions, and both parties give a little to gain a little (Van de Vliert, Euwema, & Huisman, 1995). The compromising conflict management style is used when an impasse in negotiation has been reached (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974; Rahim, 2011). Compromisers do not want to put the relationship in harm and want to be able to work together after the conflict has been resolved (Hocker & Wilmot, 2007). Hocker and Wilmot
(2007) further state that the compromising conflict management style has an “external moral force; therefore, it appears reasonable to most parties” (p. 157). The main features of compromising include the amount of information that disputants exchange with each other and the amount of time that is available to them to solve the conflict. Compromising is a quickly executed style that uses less information (Kurylo, 2010). Rahim (2011) notes that a compromising conflict management style is inappropriate for situations in which complex problems need to be solved by using a collaborative approach. Morley and Shockley-Zalabak (1986) observed that compromisers send informative and innovative messages more frequently than regulative or integrative messages. Thomas, Thomas, and Schaubhut (2008) surveyed 2,400 employees at six organizational levels and found the compromising conflict handling style “the most frequent one at levels below top executives” (p. 159). Song and colleagues (2006) found the compromising conflict management style to be associated with destructive conflict, giving credence to Chung-Yan and Moeller’s (2010) findings that compromisers experienced more interpersonal conflict. Lastly, Green (2008) discovered that lower quality relationships between organizational leaders and members were associated with a compromising conflict handling style.

**Obliging.** Employees use an obliging conflict management style when they care about the personal relationship with the disputing party, realize that they are wrong, have little power, feel that the issue is much more important to the other party, want to build up social credits for future conflicts that might be important to the other party, or are outnumbered by others (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974). This style is appropriate in situations
when a “party is not familiar with the issues involved” (Rahim, 2011, p. 53) or to prevent further disagreement or escalation of the conflict for the time being. The obliging conflict management style can signal weakness and strengthen the other party (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974). Friedman and colleagues (2000) found that the obliging conflict handling style hinders creative problem solving, and disputants missed opportunities for joint gains. Moreover, they were likely to experience higher levels of stress at work (De Dreu, 2011; Friedman et al., 2000) by settling the issue on their own expense “with its negative consequences for self-esteem and self-efficacy” (De Dreu, 2011, p. 479). A study by Gross and Guerrero (2000) on the appropriateness and effectiveness of conflict management styles rejected the hypothesis that “Perceptions that a partner used an obliging style will be positively associated with perceptions that a partner’s behavior was relationally and situationally appropriate” (p. 207). The researchers further observed that employees using an obliging strategy saw themselves as less effective (Gross & Guerrero, 2000).

**Dominating.** A dominating conflict handling style is characterized by a high concern for oneself and low concern for others. Competitive conflict handling styles are usually marked by a win-lose strategy pressuring the other party to give in, making a decision quickly, being convinced to be right on an issue, and not caring about the relationship with the conflicting party (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974). Supervisors may use this conflict style to deal with assertive subordinates and the implementation of “unpopular courses of action” (Rahim, 2011, p. 52). The competitive approach might be effective if a repeated encounter with the other party is not anticipated or if the relationship is short lived. It can also be
appropriate in environments in which a dominating conflict strategy is considered a sign of strength (Hocker & Wilmot, 2007). Song and colleagues (2006) concluded that competing conflict handling styles led to higher levels of destructive conflict, while Papa and Canary (1995) suggested that the dominating conflict management style was to some extent effective when the organizational goals were task related. Gross and Guerrero (2000) supported these findings, arguing that a competitive conflict style was more effective, but less appropriate for the relationship than for the task. Van de Vliert et al. (1995) discovered that high scorers in competitive conflict management styles engaged with fellow employees regardless of whether they were supervisors, subordinates, or peers. In a cross-sectional study of 3,374 government service workers, Meyer (2004) found that when managers’ use of the dominating conflict management style increased, the rate of accidents, absenteeism, and overtime increased as well. Using a competitive conflict handling style in combination with an initial collaborative conflict management style could be very effective for the conflict situation and the relationship between leaders and members (Van de Vliert et al., 1995).

**Avoiding.** The avoiding conflict handling style is used when one party believes that the disagreement is not important enough to be discussed, is afraid of the other party, does not care enough about the relationship with the other party, believes someone else can solve the issue, or that the issue is part of a bigger or related problem (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974). Using an avoiding conflict handling approach is appropriate when dealing with “trivial or minor issues or when a cooling-off period is needed before a complex problem can be effectively dealt with” (Rahim, 2011, p. 54). Friedman et al. (2000) found that an avoiding
conflict approach affects work performance negatively and is connected to higher levels of task conflict. Van de Vliert and colleagues (1995) asserted “avoiding is the least effective and least agreeable manner of solving conflict” (p. 278). This trend is even more interesting because it has been “observed equally for subordinates and superiors” (Van de Vliert et al., 1995, p. 278). Morley and Shockley-Zalabak (1986) found that avoiders reported a “tendency to send more integrative and informative messages to their superiors than either regulative or innovative messages” (p. 395) and that they were the least satisfied with overall organizational communication and conflict outcomes. Brewer, Mitchell, and Weber (2002) surveyed 118 employees from upper and lower level organizational ranks and found that employees with lower ranks reported greater use of avoiding conflict management styles. Organizational tenure played an important role in Green’s (2008) investigation, discovering that those followers who had 16 or more years of tenure with the organization viewed their leaders as more avoiding than collaborative or compromising. Interestingly, Rahim et al. (2000) learned that employee perceptions of “distributive justice were positively related to their use of the avoiding style of managing conflict with their supervisors” (p. 26).

**Gender and Organizational Rank**

The choice of conflict handling styles is driven by individual, relational, and organizational goals. These choices impact relative outcomes, and a considerable amount of research has also examined the role of gender (e.g., biological sex, stereotypes) and organizational tenure on its influence on managing conflict. It is important for employees to understand and effectively manage conflict at any level within an organization. Conflict
management skills become even more vital when considering the retirement of baby
boomers, resulting in a younger workforce moving into leadership roles. Moreover, an
increasing number of women are occupying decision-making positions and will continue to
move into leadership roles. However, the literature on gender and organizational tenure in the
context of conflict management styles has been inconsistent. Therefore, it seems appropriate
to investigate if there are any gender differences among research participants using conflict
handling styles (in this study gender is operationalized as biological sex), and if
organizational tenure impacts the choice of conflict management styles.

For example, some studies that looked at gender differences showed no disparity in
using one conflict handling style over another (Bartlett, 2010; Morley & Shockley-Zalabak,
1986). Other studies have shown that men made more use of the competing conflict
management style (Thomas et al., 2008), while females made more use of the avoiding
conflict management style (Brewer et al., 2002; Ergeneli, Camgoz, & Karapinar, 2010).
Especially when dealing with superiors, men were more likely than women to prefer a
dominating, avoiding, compromising, and obliging conflict management style. However,
when dealing with peers, men preferred using the dominating and obliging conflict
management style, whereas women exhibited the avoiding conflict management style
(Ergeneli et al., 2010). Contradicting these findings to some extent is a gender role analysis
study of over 2,000 working adults by Davis, Capobianco, and Kraus (2010) who found that
women were rated as behaving in more active constructive ways in managing conflicts,
whereas men were rated as behaving in more active destructive ways.
As demonstrated above, research on gender is only consistent in that it is inconsistent. Organizational tenure is another widely controversial indicator. Morley and Shockley-Zalabak (1986) found that higher ranked employees, such as managers, used significantly more competitive conflict management styles than lower ranked employees. These findings were, however, contradicted by a more recent study by Brewer et al. (2002) who demonstrated that upper level organizational employees were more likely to use the integrating conflict management style, while lower status employees reported greater use of avoiding and obliging conflict management styles. Moreover, a study of 800 hospital employees by Copley (2008) found that men and women used an integrating conflict handling style when resolving conflicts with subordinates. Lastly, Thomas and colleagues (2008) found that “people report a steady increase in assertiveness [competing and collaborating] at higher organizational levels” (p. 159). Clearly, more research is needed in order to address the presently controversial research findings on gender and tenure. This study re-examines these issues.

Dissent

While the reviewed conflict literature demonstrated the benefits of addressing and managing conflict effectively using the appropriate conflict management styles, some “organizational parties, traditionally stakeholders and senior managers, view conflict as a disruption” (Kassing, 2011, p. 34). The same holds true for dissent. Organizational dissent is defined as a particular form of employee voice, which involves the verbal expression of contradictory opinions and disagreements (Hegstrom, 1990; Redding, 1985; Stanley, 1981),
as well as divergent views about organizational practices, operations, or policies (Kassing, 1997, 2005, 2008). “Dissent can lead to conflict, be directed to management, center on ethical issues, involve protest, evolve from dissatisfaction, and be adversarial” (Kassing, 2011, p. 29).

The expression of dissent is a fundamental democratic right and an important component to freedom of speech (Redding, 1985). As a result, dissent is part of the social fabric in organizations and can serve as an indicator of an organization’s tolerance for freedom of speech (Kassing, 2000a). Dissent can be viewed as protest and resistance, and it ultimately challenges the legitimacy of authority (Berg, 2011; Shahinpoor & Matt, 2007). Articulating opinions contrary to the prevailing sentiment in organizations has contributed to previous research on employee voice (Bishop & Levine, 1999; Farrell, 1983; Hirschman, 1970), whistle-blowing (Kennedy-Lightsey, 2007; Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005; Sims & Keenan, 1998), boat-rocking (Redding, 1985; Sprague & Rudd, 1988), fact-checking and minority dissent (De Dreu & De Vries, 1997; Schulz-Hardt, Mojzisch, & Vogelgesang, 2008), as well as playing devil’s advocate (Nemeth, Brown, & Rogers, 2001; Stanley, 1981), the loyal opposition, and the non-conformist (Shahinpoor & Matt, 2006). All of these studies have suggested the value of organizational dissent and the corrective feedback it provides to organizations in an attempt to be adaptive and innovative.

Factors Influencing Dissent

A review of the literature indicated several factors and triggering events that influence employees’ decisions to express dissent. Situational factors such as culture, power,
responsibility, and accountability were some examples that impacted employees’ decisions to express dissent (Kassing, 2011; Shahinpoor & Matt, 2007). Identity was another situational aspect that contributed to employees’ considerations of speaking up. Studies have shown that high levels of organizational identification were beneficial for organizations (Kassing, 2000a, 2008).

Motivational factors such as dissatisfaction and fairness were two of the most commonly cited reasons why employees dissent, but also the most frequent motives for leaving the organization (Goodboy, Chory, & Dunleavy, 2008; Kassing, 2011; Kassing & McDowell, 2008). Fairness in the decision-making process, referred to as procedural justice, was another motivational factor for employee dissent. In other words, “people are more likely to be satisfied with and abide by decisions that they feel have been reached as the result of fair processes” (Kassing, 2011, p. 81).

Lastly, explanatory factors helped employees make sense of organizational dissent. Employees consider the impressions they form when deciding whether to dissent. As Kassing noted “Dissenters must balance the possibility of being perceived as adversarial with their desire to offer constructive feedback” (Kassing, 2011, p. 83).

Several factors influence employees’ choice to dissent, but not every member of an organization feels comfortable expressing dissent. For example, concerns about a colleague’s or supervisor’s competence or performance was rated as the most frequent issue that subordinates hesitated to bring up with their superiors, followed closely by issues with organizational processes and suggestions for organizational improvement (Milliken,
Morrison, & Hewlin, 2003). Loss of status and embarrassment have been frequently cited as reasons for not speaking up (Milliken et al., 2003; Kennedy-Lightsey, 2007). Other motives for remaining silent included the loss of expert power and being viewed as incompetent, which could in turn hurt an employee’s “reputation and chance of promotion” (Jameson & Johnson, 2006, p. 5). Additional reasons cited in the literature included fears of being viewed negatively by others, feelings of futility, concerns about negative impact on others, fears of damaging a relationship, and receiving low job performance evaluations (Milliken et al., 2003; Sprague & Rudd, 1988). Moreover, employees who challenge the status quo and dissent to superiors risk becoming victims of organizational shunning and enduring exclusion by other members of the organization (Anderson, 2009; Hegstrom, 1990; Redding, 1985; Shahinpoor & Matt, 2007).

The research cites many factors that explain employees’ decisions to speak up or to remain silent. The literature further suggests dissent is guided by specific triggering events. According to Kassing (1997), dissent starts when a “triggering agent exceeds an individual’s tolerance for dissent” (p. 322) in such a way that an individual experiences incongruence between what he or she expects and what he or she actually experiences. Triggering events that led to the expression of dissent included employee treatment, organizational change, decision-making, role/responsibility, resources, ethics, performance evaluations, preventing harm, supervisor inaction, supervisor performance, and supervisor indiscretion (Kassing, 2011; Kassing & Armstrong, 2001). For instance, Kassing and Armstrong (2001) found that employees were more likely to express dissent to supervisors and coworkers about decision-
making and organizational change issues than about ethical practices or the prevention of harm.

**Dissent Strategies**

Employees have a very clear idea of how to express their disagreements and to whom to direct their dissent. In order to illustrate this phenomenon, Kassing (1997) developed the *Organizational Dissent Scale (ODS)*, which measures and quantifies dissent expression. Organizational dissent can be directed to internal or external audiences and is categorized into three types: (a) upward dissent, (b) lateral dissent, and (c) displaced dissent (Kassing, 1997, 2011). Upward dissent entails the expression of disagreement to supervisors, superiors, or management. Employees who perceive their organization as being tolerant of criticism report using more upward dissent than employees reporting either moderate or low levels of workplace freedom of speech (Kassing, 2000a). Lateral dissent is the expression of disagreement to peers or coworkers (Kassing & Armstrong, 2001). Lateral dissent is associated with nonmanagement status, length of tenure on the job, and total years of work experience. Interestingly, Kassing and Armstrong (2001) found that employees also engaged more in lateral dissent in smaller organizations. Displaced dissent occurs when dissent is communicated to people outside the organization such as friends and family. All three categories of dissent can be viewed as forms of employee resistance:

Expressing disagreement or contradictory opinions in effect derives, like employee resistance, from some perceived organizational constraint – a constraint that may be
veiled in policies, practices, or operations. So it may be accurate to say that all dissent is resistance, but not to assume that all resistance is dissent. (Kassing, 2011, p. 52)

**Upward Dissent.** The expression of dissent is primarily influenced by individual, relational, and organizational influences (Kassing, 1997). Relational influence in particular is sensitive, because employees need to weigh the level of relationship quality they want to maintain with others in the organization, including relationships with coworkers and superiors. A variety of individual and organizational outcomes have been associated with upward dissent. For instance, Kassing (2000a) found employees that reported high levels of workplace freedom of speech reported using more upward dissent than employees reporting either moderate or low levels of workplace freedom of speech. Moreover, employees that reported high levels of workplace freedom of speech reported higher levels of organizational identification than employees reporting either moderate or low levels of workplace freedom of speech. In a subsequent study Kassing (2000b) investigated the relationship quality between superiors and subordinates. The findings showed that employees who perceived having higher quality relationships with their superiors reported engaging in more upward dissent than did those employees who perceived having low quality relationships with their superiors (Kassing, 2000b). Another study by Kassing (2002) found that employees expressed upward dissent about functional workplace issues when they had more total work experience across comparably fewer employers. Avtigs and colleagues (2007) found that high levels of emotional exhaustion, feelings of failure, and isolation from fellow workers were associated with low levels of upward dissent. The decision to express upward dissent versus lateral
dissent was influenced by organizational climate, adversarial position/retaliation, and organizational attachment (Kassing, 2008). Moreover, in a study of dissent expression as an indicator of work engagement and intention to leave, Kassing and colleagues (2012) found that upward dissent emerged as a significant predictor of work engagement.

Upward dissent provides a means for employees to express their concerns about organizational issues to superiors or management. When doing so, employees select a specific dissent tactic in order to be heard (Kassing, 2002). Upward dissent tactics are specific communication strategies used by employees to express their concerns or disagreement to superiors or management. Research on upward dissent tactics identified five types of dissent strategies (Kassing, 2002): (a) solution-presentation, (b) direct-factual appeal, (c) repetition, (d) circumvention, and (e) threatening to resign. The forthcoming segment provides an overview of the five upward dissent tactics.

**Solution-presentation.** Solution-presentation is defined as providing a solution to a dissent-triggering event. It is seen as the most effective, appropriate, and competent manner to express dissent, especially when dealing with serious issues (Garner, 2012; Kassing, 2005). In his study, Kassing (2002) found that:

employees provided varied [solutions] in terms of form (e.g., written letters, workgroup discussions with supervisors, direct discussion with supervisors) and apparent viability (e.g., flexible work schedules, rearrangements of physical work space, restructuring work tasks), but all employees who used this strategy provided some form of solution to the perceived dissent-triggering problem. (p. 199)
Providing solutions to a problem can be viewed as active constructive voice in which employees present a solution that allows “managers and supervisors to be receptive to employee dissent in specific and meaningful ways” (Kassing, 2002, p. 199). Moreover, offering solutions to an issue allows employees to exercise influence over their superiors, while still being perceived as collaborative, proactive, and competent (Kassing, 2005, 2011).

**Direct-factual appeals.** Providing physical evidence and factual information in support of the dissenter’s claim is referred to as direct-factual appeal (Kassing, 2002). Similar to solution-presentation, direct-factual appeals are a form of active-constructive voice – active in a sense that employees actively collect data and/or evidence and constructive in the sense that employees ground their claim in their assertion of these facts and/or evidence. It works under the premise that employees use their organizational experience and knowledge of organizational policies and practices (Kassing, 2002). Garner (2012) found that messages of direct-factual appeals were an appropriate but not necessarily effective form of dissent. Kassing’s (2005) study revealed that direct-factual appeals were rated second only to solution-presentation on grounds of competency. Yet, direct-factual appeals were used more often than solution-presentation (Kassing, 2009a). Upward dissent tactics of solution-presentation and direct-factual appeals are both considered prosocial dissent tactics (Kassing & Kava, 2013).

**Repetition.** Repetition is defined as bringing up an issue over and over again to steer attention to the problem and the supervisor’s unresponsiveness (Kassing, 2002). When employees engage in repetition, they initially rely predominantly on prosocial dissent tactics
and then move toward more face threatening and less competent forms of upward dissent tactics. Garner (2012) found that repetition was positively related to conversational effectiveness, but not to conversational appropriateness. Repetition is a comparatively moderate strategy when compared to other upward dissent strategies (Kassing, 2009a).

**Circumvention.** Bypassing an immediate supervisor and expressing dissent to someone higher in the organization’s hierarchy to address the issue is referred to as circumvention (Kassing, 2002). Circumvention carries a considerable amount of risk (Waldron & Kassing, 2011; Kassing, 2007) and poses high face threat to one’s immediate supervisor. Thus, it can damage the relationship between superiors and subordinates, and Kassing (2007) cautions that circumvention has the ability to dampen a supervisor’s current or future receptivity to dissent claims. Explanations for circumvention included supervisor’s inaction, supervisor’s performance, and supervisor’s indiscretion (Kassing, 2009b). Circumvention also bears relational and organizational consequences. Superior-subordinate relational decline was the most prevalent outcome by far when subordinates circumvented their immediate supervisors, while organizational-level outcomes, such as addressing policies or sanctioning supervisors, resulted more favorably for the dissenter (Kassing, 2007).

**Threatening to resign.** Kassing (2002) defines threat of resignation “as a form of leverage for obtaining responsiveness and action from supervisors and management” (p. 201). Threatening to resign occurs when employees or customers are placed at risk, employees feel a threat to their integrity, or employees perceive the situation has become intolerable (Kassing, 2002). It is not a widely used upward dissent strategy. Threatening to
resign is the least competent form of upward dissent and usually a last resort to elicit a response from superiors (Kassing, 2005). It can be a powerful tool, but costly when it fails.

**Upward Dissent Measurement**

Expressing upward dissent to leaders, managers, or superiors is important because dissent provides valuable feedback to organizations. In an effort to capture variations in upward dissent tactics, Kassing and Kava (2013) developed the Upward Dissent Scale (UDS). The UDS draws from Kassing’s (1997, 1998, 2002, 20005, 2009a) extensive qualitative and quantitative dissent research and derives from his development of the Organizational Dissent Scale. The UDS groups upward dissent into four categories of upward dissent tactics, prosocial (including solution-presentation and direct-factual appeals), threatening to resign, circumvention, and repetition. To generate evidence of validity for the UDS, Kassing and Kava (2013) incorporated subscales from three additional measures to their initial survey questionnaire which included the *Delaying subscale of the Supervisors Responses to Dissent Measure*, the *Open Upward Influence subscale of the Upward Influence Measure*, and the *Supervisor Treatment subscale of the Perceptions of Fair Interpersonal Treatment Scale* (see Kassing and Kava, 2013). After a series of tests, correlation analysis indicated that the expected relationships between the dimensions of the UDS and other measures were statistically significant (Kassing & Kava, 2013). In particular, the UDS is not only able to quantify the amount of upward dissent that occurs, but it recognizes the variation of dissent expressed within organizations (Kassing & Kava, 2013). Given that dissent is informed by individual, relational, and organizational influences...
(Kassing, 1997), it is “expressed in nuanced and strategic ways. The UDS captures those differences and allows for empirical examination of them — both concurrently and in isolation” (Kassing & Kava, 2013, p. 54). This dissertation is the first study to be using the UDS.

**Leader-Member-Exchange Theory**

Communication is a central element to the experience and management of conflict (Olekalns, et al., 2008) as well as the “vehicle for the productive or destructive management of conflict” (Hocker & Wilmot, 1995, p. 22). Leaders in particular need to be aware of their communication styles because they are a direct reflection of their ability to lead (Green, 2008). Effective communication is bound to high quality exchanges as suggested in leader-member-exchange (LMX) theory because it notes the “importance of communication in leadership” (Northouse, 2001, p. 119).

Initially, LMX theory emerged from the works of Dansereau, Graen, and Haga (1975) and Graen and Cashman (1975) who found that leaders do not use an average leadership style, but rather develop differentiated relationships with their subordinates (i.e., dyads within units). Labeled as the vertical dyad linkage (VDL), the VDL approach is based on the degree of latitude (i.e., negotiation latitude) that supervisors grant their subordinates in negotiating work roles (Dansereau et al., 1975), and it is different with each subordinate (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

LMX theory developed out of this notion, and once the relationship between the leader and member has been validated through a series of tests in which subordinates
demonstrate their competence, LMX researchers then investigate the nature of these differentiated relationships and their organizational implications (i.e., dyad level effect) (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

LMX theory is grounded in role theory, which “suggests that organizational members accomplish their work through roles or sets of behaviors that are expected of position holders” (Liden et al., 1997). In doing so, the leader first communicates an explicit role expectation or assignment to the member, to which the member responds and in turn the leader evaluates. This process is referred to as the role taking phase (Graen & Cashman, 1975). The role taking phase is followed by the role making phase entered into by both parties and is defined as a:

set of processes by which an actor and a functionally interdependent other (a) work through how each will behave in certain situations (interlocking behavior by reciprocal reinforcement), and (b) agree upon the general nature of their relationship (constructing relationship norms) against the background of the formal organization. (Graen & Cashman, 1975, p. 143)

The second phase is the most critical part of the role process since it determines the level of relationship quality the parties engage in. If the leader and member contribute resources valued by each party and both parties view their exchange as fair based on the social exchange, then the likelihood of a higher LMX relationship develops (Liden et al., 1997).
Regardless of whether the dyadic relationship develops into high quality exchanges or low quality exchanges, as soon as the dyadic relationship develops a set pattern of normative behaviors, role routinization occurs (Sin, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2009). This final stage implies that the exchange between the leader and member typically remains stable from this point on (Liden et al., 1997). Dansereau et al. (1975) differentiate between in-group members and out-group members. In-group members are those with higher levels of negotiation latitude with superiors, whereas out-group members are those with lower levels of negotiation latitude with superiors (Dansereau et al., 1975).

**Communicative Aspects of Leader-Member-Exchange Theory**

A substantial body of research on communication behaviors within the context of leadership has developed over the past 30 years (Avtgis & Kassing, 2001; Becker et al., 2005; Bisel, Messersmith, & Kelly, 2012; Fairhurst, 1993; Fairhurst & Chandler, 1989; Madlock, Martin, Bogdan, & Ervin, 2007; Mueller & Lee, 2002; Sias, 2005; Waldron, 1991, 1999). For example, in a discourse analytic approach, Fairhurst (1993) illustrated the culturally recognized functions of language use that are associated with particular types of leader-member exchanges. The research revealed that the quality of leader-member-exchange could be discerned from patterns of talk. Most relevant here is that leaders and followers in higher quality exchanges exhibited language patterns indicative of mutual, rather than one-way, influence. Members exhibited a tendency to question and challenge leaders’ decisions, which led to the assumption that in higher quality LMX relationships both parties engaged in
a two-way communication approach. Each party is open and eager to learn what the other has to say.

A study by Deluga (1998) investigated communication behaviors of leaders and members through the lens of organizational citizenship behavior (i.e., courtesy, altruism, civic virtue, and sportsmanship) and conscientiousness (i.e., the extent to which one is dependable, achievement oriented, responsible, deliberate and persevering in goal oriented behavior). Survey data were collected from 127 subordinate-supervisor dyads employed in diverse organizational settings. The results supported that dyads with more similar levels of conscientiousness experienced higher productivity and higher quality leader-member relationships.

Recent communication research has examined the consequences of LMX on employee job satisfaction, information experiences, and organizational commitment. For instance, Fix and Sias (2006) examined the relationships between employees’ perceptions of their supervisors’ use of person-centered communication, the quality of their leader-member relationship, and their job satisfaction. Their findings indicated that a supervisor’s use of person-centered communication contributed to higher quality leader-member relationships, which in turn lead to rewards for employees (e.g., job satisfaction, organizational commitment).

In line with the previous study, Sias (2005) explored how subordinates perceive the quality of information they receive from leaders and peers in conjunction with the quality of the relationship they have with these leaders and peers. The results suggested that employees
in a supervisor’s in-group enjoyed a clear and strong information advantage over those in the out-group. “Information quality and LMX were significant predictors of employee job satisfaction, with information quality accounting for the most variance in satisfaction scores” (Sias, 2005, p. 386). This finding indicated that information quality “may be a mechanism underlying the LMX-outcomes link. In particular, information quality was a better predictor of employee job satisfaction and commitment than was LMX” (Sias, 2005, p. 388), which emphasizes the communicative nature of LMX.

Clearly, subordinates who receive higher quality information are able to execute their job according to their supervisor’s directions and in turn feel a higher sense of accomplishment when the job is done to their supervisor’s expectation. This supports the notion that in today’s workforce, employees “with the best access to information are the most likely to succeed” (Eisenberg, Goodall, & Trethewey, 2003, p. 16).

**Vertical Dyad Linkage and Social Exchange Theory**

The above reviewed literature demonstrated the communicative aspect of LMX and provides a good theoretical approach for the investigation of conflict styles and upward dissent tactics. A limitation of research on LMX is that while it operated under the assumption that it included the constructs of social exchange and negotiation latitude, previous LMX scales measured negotiation latitude exclusively, but failed to measure social exchange (Berneth et al., 2007). More recent studies elaborated on the principle of social exchange within LMX theory.
There are two different theoretical conceptualizations of LMX: (a) vertical dyad linkage and (b) social exchange theory. Vertical dyad linkage can be viewed as a default conceptualization of LMX and thus is commonly referred to as LMX. It is based on the degree of latitude that supervisors grant their subordinates in negotiating work roles (Dansereau et al., 1975). Social exchange theory proposes that recipients of positive actions experience a sense of indebtedness (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). The following three aspects embrace the idea of social exchange: (a) Social exchange states an unspecified return; (b) Social exchanges are based on a general expectation of some future return; its exact nature is definitely not stipulated in advance. Hence, equivalence of a counter gift is left to the giver; (c) Social exchange is a behaviorally oriented construct and is therefore more observable and concrete than general feelings (Berneth et al., 2007; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Liden et al., 1997; Waldron, 1999). According to Blau (1964) social exchange implies that as individuals act in ways that benefit others, an implicit obligation for future reciprocation is created. Specific commodities such as trust and competence are only part of the exchange cycle and do not define the general exchange themselves. Moreover, social exchange needs to be distinguished from economic exchange. Social exchange engenders feelings of personal obligation, gratitude, and trust, whereas economic exchange does not. Instead, economic exchange specifies exactly how and when each party fulfills his or her obligations and clarifies the equivalence of values, gifts, etc., while social exchange lacks a standard of value against which gifts, favors, or contributions can be measured (Blau, 1964). In other words, in an economic exchange material exchange is the basis for the relationship. “The process is not
really leadership; it is closer to managership or supervision” (Graen & Uhl-Bien, p. 238). The employment contract is the basis for behaviors by both leaders and members. As such a dyadic social exchange process begins with more limited social transactions, and can develop into an exchange that engenders more social transactions.

**Leader-Member-Social-Exchange Construct**

In an effort to address the omission of social exchange from previous LMX research, Berneth et al. (2007) called for a more accurate scale that “reflects the social exchange conceptualization of LMX” (p. 980). Through an assessment by 25 LMX subject matter experts, Berneth and colleagues’ (2007) findings revealed that the investigated scales were not representative of the construct of social exchange. Subsequent studies included the development of the Leader-Member-Social-Exchange (LMSX) scale to address issues of (a) dimensionality and (b) validity. Statements such as “My manager and I have a two-way exchange relationship” and “When I give effort at work, my manager will return it” (Berneth et al., 2007, p. 987), measured the social exchange between leaders and members 100% and in a manner not previously assessed and measured by existing LMX scales. Therefore, the LMSX is able to assess “different, as well as the same, components of the supervisor-subordinate relationship as previous scales while being more theoretically consistent with the notion of social exchange” (Berneth et al., 2007, p. 979). Importantly, Berneth et al.’s (2007) scale measures members’ perception of the negotiation latitude as well as social exchange (reciprocity) and not that of the leaders.
To the best of my knowledge, there are no studies that examine conflict management styles and upward dissent tactics using the LMSX. The present study serves to fill this void.

**Summary of the Literature Review**

Conflict is an omnipresent phenomenon in organizations driven by the differences between two or more interdependent parties’ perceptions of incompatible goals. It has many sources, and it can either be handled constructively or destructively, but for organizations to remain viable, conflict needs to be managed constructively (Putnam, 1997). The way employees handle conflict is marked by conflict management styles, which are individuals’ tendencies for using certain conflict handling styles over others more readily. Conflict management styles can have pervasive effects on work life in organizations and “affect the degree to which a person’s environment is filled with [or without] conflict” (Friedman et al., 2000, p. 35). The integrating conflict handling style seems to be the most appropriate and effective for the task and relationship, while the avoiding conflict management style is considered the least competent. Moreover, conflict handling styles can be combined either over time or at the same time to improve conflict outcomes (Putnam, 1997; Van de Vliert et al., 1995). Conflict styles associate with a variety of organizational variables such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, communication satisfaction, organizational tenure, job burnout, organizational climate, gender, and relationship quality (Barbuto et al., 2010; Chung-Yan, & Moeller, 2010; Rahim, 2011; Rahim, Antonioni, & Psenicka, 2001; Rahim et al., 2000; Thomas et al., 2008; Trudel & Reio, 2006). However, the literature on gender and
organizational tenure in relation to conflict management styles is inconsistent and more research is needed.

Similar to conflict, dissent is an integral part of organizations. Organizational dissent is a form of protest by choosing an oppositional stance (Kassing, 1997). Like conformity, dissent is needed in organizations. “Conformity allows for the development of reliable, consistent behavior, the necessary foundation for roles and coordination among roles. Dissent can provide the corrective feedback that allows a group or organization to adapt and innovate” (Berg, 2011, p. 52). Employees dissent for various reasons to various audiences, while some employees remain silent out of fear of negative repercussions. In particular, expressing dissent to organizational leaders or supervisors is risky. The type of upward dissent strategies employees choose to express dissent can be viewed form highly proactive to highly face threatening. Though employee expression is influenced by organizational practices, dissent essentially remains an individualized behavior (Kassing, 1997).

In line with this notion, leaders need to be aware of their communication styles because they are a direct reflection of their ability to lead (Green, 2008). Competent communication is tied to high quality exchanges as suggested in LMX theory, underlining the significance of communication in leadership (Northouse, 2001). Employees who perceive high quality relationships with their supervisors experience collaborative forms of communication and also receive more information from their supervisors. High LMX further facilitates productivity and promotes higher job satisfaction among organizational members. While the literature on LMX is vast, the various instruments measuring LMX have failed to
take into account the social exchange construct that they claimed to measure. The current construct in LMX scales is thus flawed, and in an attempt to measure the negotiation latitude and social exchange components of leader-member-exchange theory Berneth et al. (2007) developed the LMSX scale and advocate for more reliable and consistent LMX research.

In conclusion, the way in which employees handle conflict and express upward dissent is central to organizational functioning. This dissertation provides insight on organizational members’ preferred conflict management styles, upward dissent tactics, and relationship quality.
CHAPTER III.

METHODOLOGY

This study was designed to explore the preferences for conflict management styles and upward dissent tactics in a sample of fulltime employees in the U.S. Moreover, the present study measured the relationship quality of organizational leaders and members including negotiation latitude and social exchange. The latter part is particularly important because past LMX research has failed to measure the construct of social exchange. Additional variables, such as gender, age, race, ethnicity, and education, as well as organizational rank, organizational tenure, direct reports, and number of direct reports have been assessed to yield a more comprehensive picture of employee conflict management and dissent communication. The following section describes the research sample, research measures, construction of measures, including reliability and validity, and the research design. It concludes with a description of statistical tests used to analyze the data.

Sample

A nonprobability sampling method was used for this study. The selection of participants was based on purposive sampling. The participants consisted of fulltime employees of three organizations: a roofing company in the Southeastern U.S. with 430 employees; a bank with 104 employees with offices in Raleigh and Charlotte, North Carolina; and a national youth development organization with 244 employees in North Carolina.
After Institutional Review Board approval was obtained (see Appendix A), data were collected from each organization during a two-week time frame ranging from September 19, 2013 until October 31, 2013. Data were collected through an online survey.

There were a total of 265 respondents from the three organizations. Ninety-nine participants were recorded for the roofing company, and 66 participants were recorded for the bank, yielding a combined response rate of 31%. Sue and Ritter (2007) refer to this sampling approach as saturation sampling. “Saturation sampling is commonly used in settings such as universities, corporations, government agencies, and professional associations” (Sue & Ritter, 2007, p. 27) where the number of respondents receiving an e-mail invitation is known. This allows the investigator to compute a response rate and address non-response errors during the time of data collection. While this sampling approach was used for the roofing company and the bank, a less controllable sampling approach was used for the youth development organization. There, the human resources director asked that all chief professional officers in North Carolina share the online survey with their fulltime employees. However, there was no way to ensure that the e-mail was shared with all fulltime employees and thus, it is unknown how many chief professional officers forwarded the survey to their employees. As a result, a response rate for the youth development organization could not be calculated; yet, 100 respondents were from the youth development organization.
Instrumentation

Conflict Management Styles. The ROCI-II (Rahim, 1983) was used to measure conflict management styles (see Appendix B). Based on an individual’s disposition, the ROCI-II consists of a series of statements represented on a 5-point Likert-type scale format (e.g., 1 = strongly disagree ... 5 = strongly agree). The 28-item scale indicates preference for each conflict management style as follows: (a) integrating: 1, 4, 5, 12, 22, 23, and 28; (b) obliging: 2, 10, 11, 13, 19, and 24; (c) dominating: 8, 9, 18, 21, and 25; (d) avoiding: 3, 6, 16, 17, 26, and 27; and (e) compromising: 7, 14, 15, and 20 (Rahim, 2013). A high score in a given cluster shows greater reported identification of the corresponding conflict management style. The instrument contains three forms, i.e., Form A, B, and C that measure how organizational members handle conflict with supervisors, subordinates, and peers, respectively. Conflict with superiors was measured from the perspective of subordinates, and thus Form A was used for this investigation. The preference for conflict management styles was the average of the derived ratings for the questions associated with each conflict management style.

Upward Dissent Expression. The UDS (Kassing & Kava, 2013) measures upward dissent along four dimensions: prosocial, threatening to resign, circumvention, and repetition (see Appendix C). The 20-item scale measures responses on a 5-point Likert-type response format that ranges from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Preference for each upward dissent tactic is as follows: prosocial: 2, 5, 10, 13, and 20; threatening resignation: 4, 7, 9, 14, and 19; circumvention: 1, 8, 11, 15, and 17; and repetition: 3, 6, 12, 16, and 18. The
higher a score in a given area, the greater reported identification with the upward dissent tactic. Upward dissent tactics were measured from the perspective of subordinates.

**Relationship Quality of Leaders and Members.** As discussed in the literature review, previous LMX instruments failed to measure the construct of social exchange. To address this issue, Berneth et al. (2007) developed the LMSX scale (see Appendix C). The 8-item scale measures responses on a 7-point Likert-type response format that ranges from *strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7)*. A high score corresponds with a higher perception of negotiation latitude and a higher perception of social exchange with one’s supervisor. Negotiation latitude and social exchange were measured from the perspective of subordinates.

**Reliability**

Cronbach’s alpha served as an estimate of internal consistency of the three scales used in this study (i.e., ROCI-II, UDS, and LMSX). The ROCI-II consisted of 20 items ($\alpha = .80$). Cronbach’s alphas for the five conflict management styles were: integrating: .89; obliging: .77; dominating: .80; avoiding: .82; and compromising: .74. Cronbach’s alpha for the 28-item UDS was .88. The four upward dissent tactics have Cronbach’s alpha levels of: prosocial: .81; threatening resignation: .90; circumvention: .88; and repetition: .87. Lastly, the LMSX scale consisted of seven items ($\alpha = .94$).

Generally, the basic tenet of repeatability is that a scale should perform reliably under similar testing conditions (Netemeyer, Bearden, & Sharma, 2003). The value of Cronbach’s
alpha for all three scales suggested that the reliability of the instruments used was at an acceptable level for social science (Babbie, 2004; Trochim, 2001).

**Content Validity**

The ROCI-II has been also satisfactorily tested for construct, convergent, and discriminant validity (Rahim, 2011). Other studies using the ROCI-II have shown consistently similar results (see Gross & Guerrero, 2000; Friedman et al., 2000; Weider-Hatfield, 1988). The UDS has good psychometric qualities (Kassing & Kava, 2013), but the instrument has not been used in other studies as of yet. Similarly, Berneth et al.’s (2007) LMSX scale has satisfactorily demonstrated content, convergent, discriminant, and predictive validity, but the instrument has not yet been employed in other research.

Given that two of the instruments, i.e., the UDS and the LMSX scale, had never been used in previous studies, it seemed appropriate to conduct a pilot study. The pilot test was administered to a small group of participants ($N = 28$) who were “similar to those individuals who form the population” (Keyton, 2010, p. 177). Data for the pilot study were collected from August 19, 2013 to September 04, 2013. Conducting the pilot test allowed for the identification of semantic issues and problems with question comprehension. After a review of the participants’ comments, all three instruments were clearly understood for their content and no changes were made. While scales are intentionally repetitive, three respondents felt frustrated by multiple, similar statements of the UDS. As a result of this observation, the survey instructions for the UDS were revised to make participants aware of the highly repetitive nature of the instrument’s statements.
Conclusion Validity

The focus of the present research is the relationship between conflict management styles and upward dissent tactics in the leader-member context. It is hypothesized that the findings will point to a relationship between a particular type of conflict management style and quality of relationship with supervisors as well as a particular type of dissent tactic and quality of relationship with supervisors. The following controls were put in place to strengthen conclusion validity: (a) The correct sample size was employed to control for high statistical power (.09); (b) the established questionnaire items were used to control for construct and content validity and to assure reliability for measurements.

External Validity

External validity is the degree to which conclusions in a study would “hold for other persons in other places and at other times” (Trochim, 2001, p. 347). Given this definition it is reasonable to believe the current study employs characteristics that would lend external validity.

First, a major requirement of this study was that the population of interest needed to be fulltime-working adults. Samples of parttime employees and students were excluded intentionally from this study, since these populations do not represent the overall working population in the U.S. to which this study seeks to generalize. Second, the population of interest represented a diverse pool of employees, namely, bank employees (i.e., exclusively white collar environment), roofing employees (i.e., predominantly blue collar environment), and youth development employees (i.e., non-profit environment). Third, the sample size was
large enough \((N = 265)\) to allow the generalization of findings to others.

The nonprobability sampling method used in this study might be considered a limitation to external validity. However, nonprobability samplings are used commonly “in communication research when no other sampling method will result in an adequate and appropriate sample” (Keyton, 2010, p. 129). Furthermore, “nonprobability sampling is also used when researchers study communication variables that are believed to be generally distributed through a population” (Keyton, 2010, p. 129), which is the case in the present study.

Finally, self-reported data in the form of a summated rating scale were employed to capture the perspectives of the participants. Summated scales do not have right or wrong answers, which make them different from the multiple-choice test. Thus, summated rating scales cannot be used to test for knowledge or ability (Spector, 1992). This notion is particularly important since participants indicate their personal opinion, not knowledge to statements about handling conflict, expressing dissent, and perceiving one’s relationship with supervisors.
Design

The first set of dependent variables in the study was the respondents’ preferences for the five conflict management styles as measured by the ROCI-II: integrating, avoiding, dominating, obliging, and compromising. These dependent variables measured the extent to which participants perceived their use of the conflict management styles on a 5-point Likert-type scale.

Upward dissent tactics served as the second group of dependent variables and measured the respondents’ preferences of four upward dissent tactics: prosocial, threatening to resign, circumvention, and repetition. Upward dissent tactics were determined by the responses the UDS on a 5-point Likert format scale.

The first set of independent variables was in-group versus out-group orientation, as indexed by the LMSX. Following a 7-point Likert-type scale, participants indicated their perceived relationship quality with their supervisor. The in-group condition was operationalized in terms of having high quality relationships with supervisors and the out-group condition was operationalized in terms of having low quality relationships with supervisors.

Nine independent variables were demographic in nature. Gender, race, ethnicity, and direct reports were measured as nominal variables. Age and organizational rank were measured as ordinal variables. Interval variables included level of education, number of years employed at current organization, and number of employees reporting.
**Data Collection Procedure**

Prior to the data collection, the human resources directors at the roofing company and the bank sent a pre-notification e-mail to all fulltime employees asking for their participation in the present study (see Appendix E). At that time, participants were also informed about the data collection procedures, voluntary nature of their participation in the survey, and that the results were treated confidentially. These latter two points were reemphasized at the time of the data collection. Further, participants were informed that their organization would receive a final report once the research was completed. Two days after employees received the pre-notification e-mail, the human resources directors sent an e-mail with the link to the survey to all fulltime employees. Two days later, employees received a reminder e-mail and a second reminder e-mail was sent the following week. At the last day of data collection, a final e-mail was sent to all employees thanking them for their time and reminding them once more to participate in the survey to increase the response rate.

The human resources director of the youth development organization followed the steps outlined above. However, he sent his correspondence to all chief professional officers in North Carolina asking them to share the online survey with their fulltime employees. In addition, the human resources director sent an e-mail on behalf of a North Carolina chief professional officer during the data collection period reemphasizing the significance of this study and asking for their participation.

The survey was administered online using Qualtrics, which facilitated the automatic rotation of questions on the LMSX scale. All participants began the survey with a set of
demographic questions. After completion of these questions, one half of participants continued the survey with questions on the LMSX scale, while the remaining half received questions on the LMSX scale at the end of the survey. This approach was recommended to guard against possible response biases and ordering effects.

Data were analyzed using the statistical software program Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) version 21.0.

**Analyses**

Research question 1 seeks to determine relationships between conflict management styles and upward dissent tactics. The descriptive variables include the five conflict management styles of collaborating, accommodating, avoiding, compromising, and competing, as well as the four upward dissent tactics of prosocial, repetition, circumvention, and threatening to resign. These dependent variables are presented as interval level data. To test for relationships between these variables a Pearson correlation test will be conducted.

Research question 2 seeks to find relationships between conflict management styles and demographics. A Pearson correlation test will be run for all five conflict management styles and, age, education, number of years employed, and number of direct reports. T-tests will be administered for the five conflict management styles and, gender, ethnicity, and direct reports. An ANOVA will be run for the five conflict management styles and, race, and position.

Research question 3 seeks to determine relationships between upward dissent tactics and demographics. A Pearson correlation test will be run for all four upward dissent tactics
and, age, education, number of years employed, and number of direct reports. T-tests will be administered for the four upward dissent tactics and, gender, ethnicity, and direct reports. An ANOVA will be run for the four upward dissent tactics, and race, and position.

The third research question seeks to find relationships between conflict management styles and the relationship quality of members with leaders. A Pearson correlation test will be conducted for the five conflict management styles and relationship quality variable.

Similarly, the fourth research question seeks to determine relationships between upward dissent tactics and the relationship quality of members with leaders. A Pearson correlation test will be run for the four upward dissent tactics and relationship quality variable.

The objective of hypotheses 1 and 2 is to predict the choice of conflict management styles and upward dissent tactics, respectively, on grounds of the perceived relationship quality with supervisors.

Hypothesis 1 seeks to find out if higher qualities of relationship with supervisors predict the use of more integrating conflict styles. First, an independent-samples t-test will be used to determine if respondents with higher quality of relationships (i.e., in-group members) differ from respondents with lower quality relationships. Then, a one-tailed Pearson correlation test will be conducted for the integrating and relationship quality variables. Lastly, a regression analysis will be administered for integrating (criterion) and relationship quality (predictor) variables.
Hypothesis 2 seeks to find out if higher qualities of relationship with supervisors predict the use of more prosocial dissent tactics. First, an independent-samples t-test will be used to determine if respondents with higher quality of relationships (i.e., in-group members) differ from respondents with lower quality relationships. After that a one-tailed Pearson correlation test will be conducted for the prosocial and relationship quality variables. Finally, a regression analysis will be administered for prosocial (criterion) and relationship quality (predictor) variables.

The forthcoming chapter will provide the results from the statistical tests that were performed for each of the five research questions and two hypotheses.
CHAPTER IV.

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to investigate conflict management styles and upward dissent tactics of fulltime employees in the leader-member context. Demographic variables such as age, gender, race, ethnicity, education, organizational rank, organizational tenure, direct reports, and number of direct reports were also included in the present analyses to determine relationships of preferred conflict styles and upward dissent tactics used with superiors. This chapter presents descriptive statistics about the study respondents and the results from the statistical tests performed for each of the five research questions and two hypotheses.

Descriptive Statistics

The participants’ responses to their preferred conflict management styles and upward dissent tactics were averaged to yield a variable for each of the five conflict handling styles and four upward dissent tactics. Integrating ($M = 4.09$, $SD = .50$) was the highest self-perceived conflict management style among respondents. The scores on the other conflict management styles ranged from 3.69 ($SD = .48$) for obliging to 3.05 ($SD = .71$) for avoiding. Table 1 provides descriptive statistics about the five conflict management styles of the study respondents.
Table 1

*Number, Mean, Standard Deviation, Minimum, and Maximum for Averaged Conflict Management Styles of Respondents*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Integrating</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>4.09</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obliging</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominating</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>4.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>4.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compromising</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The scale ranges from 1 to 5 with 1=Strongly Disagree and 5=Strongly Agree.

Prosocial (*M* = 4.05, *SD* = .61) was the highest self-perceived upward dissent tactic among respondents. The scores on the other upward dissent tactics ranged from 1.63 (*SD* = .64) for threatening to resign to 2.92 (*SD* = .78) for repetition. Table 2 depicts descriptive statistics about the four upward dissent tactics of the study respondents.
Table 2

Number, Mean, Standard Deviation, Minimum, and Maximum for Averaged Upward Dissent Tactics of Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prosocial</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threatening to resign</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>4.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circumvention</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repetition</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The scale ranges from 1 to 5 with 1=Strongly Disagree and 5=Strongly Agree.

The participants’ responses to their perceived relationship quality with their supervisors were averaged to yield one variable. Quality of relationship with supervisors was labeled LMSX ($M = 5.17, SD = 1.28$). Table 3 provides descriptive statistics about the relationship quality of the study respondents.

Table 3

Number, Mean, Standard Deviation, Minimum, and Maximum for Averaged LMSX of Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LMSX</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>5.17</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The scale ranges from 1 to 7 with 1=Strongly Disagree and 7=Strongly Agree.
Of the 265 participants, 138 participants (52.10%) were male and 125 participants (47.20%) were female, while two participants (0.80%) did not provide their gender. Age ranged from 21 years to 72 years. The average age of participants was 43.18 years ($SD = 10.85$). Nine participants did not provide their age. As for race, 201 participants (75.80%) were White, 47 participants (17.70%) Black, four participants (1.50%) Native American, one participant (0.40%) Asian or Pacific Islander, and 11 participants (4.10%) responded other, while one participant (0.40%) did not provide information about race. The majority (91.50%) of participants ($n = 247$) did not consider themselves Hispanic or Latino, whereas 14 participants (5.40%) considered themselves Hispanic or Latino. Four participants (1.50%) did not indicate their ethnicity. Table 4 provides descriptive statistics about the respondents’ gender, age, race, and ethnicity. The valid percentage is given for each variable to address missing responses. Age was broken down by intervals, and race was recorded by grouping Native American/American Indian, Asian/Pacific Islander, and other in one category ($n = 16$). This approach was recommended for calculation purposes given the small values for race.
Table 4

*Frequencies, Percentages, Mean, and Standard Deviation of Respondents’ Gender, age, Race, and Ethnicity*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>52.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>43.18</td>
<td>10.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≤ 24</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≥ 65</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>76.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>94.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regarding the educational background of the respondents, less than a third (27.90%) of participants (n = 74) reported having received a high school degree, GED, or below, while 31 participants (11.70%) indicated having received a trade degree or associate’s degree. Less than half (47.50%) of participants (n = 126) reported having received a bachelor’s degree, and 34 participants (11.70%) reported having earned a master’s degree or higher.
Two hundred and sixty-two participants (98.90%) reported the organizational tenure with their current organization, while three participants (1.10%) did not. Some participants provided numeric information in months as well as years. In some instances, participants wrote out the number of months and/or number of years they had been employed at their current organization. To calculate the number of years employed at the current organization, a decision was made following these guidelines: 0-2 months = 0 year; 3-8 months = 0.5 year; and 9-11 months = 1 year. Total years of experience at current organization ranged from less than one year to 33 years ($M = 5.80, SD = 5.75$). Less than one third (32.10%) of participants ($n = 84$) indicated that they have been employed for two years or less at their current organization. One quarter (25.60%) of participants ($n = 67$) reported an employment length of three to five years, whereas 23.30% of participants ($n = 61$) have been with their current organization between six and nine years. Fifty participants (19.10%) indicated employment length with their current organization of 10 years or more.

More than half (55.50%) of respondents ($n = 147$) indicated employees reporting to them, while 117 participants (44.20%) did not have employees reporting to them. One participant (0.40%) did not respond to this question. With regard to the number of employees reporting directly to respondents, a few participants did not provide a number, but a range. The mean was calculated in such instances. Of those participants ($n = 147$) that had employees reporting to them, six respondents (0.40%) did not indicate how many employees reported to them. The number of direct reports ranged from 1 to 60 employees. Outliers were detected after more than 12 employees. As a result, 12 and higher were top coded, and the
new variable entails ranges from 12-60. Each participant had at least one employee reporting, except cases 12, 14, 15, 16, and 25, which had five, four, four, three, and two employees, respectively. After adjusting for the outliers, the number of direct reports ranged from 1 to 12 employees for respondents ($M = 1.62, SD = 1.43$). Thirty-eight participants (27%) indicated having one to two employees reporting to them, while 41 participants (27%) indicated having three to five employees reporting to them. Six to eight employees were accounted for 16.30% of respondents ($n = 23$), and 14 participants (9.90%) indicated having nine to 11 employees reporting to them. Twenty-five respondents (17.70%) accounted for 12 or more direct reports.

As for organizational rank, on a few occasions participants provided their job title as an indication for their organizational rank. Based on the participants’ previous indication of employees reporting to them (or not) and their job title, responses were sorted into nonmanagement or management position. Approximately 12% of respondents ($n = 32$) reported holding top management positions within their organizations, 52.50% respondents ($n = 139$) management positions, 34.70% respondents ($n = 92$) nonmanagement positions, and 0.80% respondents ($n = 2$) indicated other organizational ranks. Given the small number and category for other ($n = 2$), it was later counted toward nonmanagement. Table 5 provides descriptive statistics about respondents’ education, number of years that respondents have been employed at their current organization, whether respondents have employees reporting directly to them, number of employees reporting directly to them, and organizational rank.
The valid percentage is given for each variable to address missing responses. Education, number of years employed, and number of direct reports was broken down by categories.

Table 5

*Frequencies, Percentages, Mean, and Standard Deviation of Respondents’ Education, Number of Years Employed, Direct Reports, Number of Direct Reports, and Position*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≤ High school degree</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade/associate’s degree</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≥ Master’s degree</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of years employed</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5.89</td>
<td>5.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≤ 2</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>32.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-9</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≥ 10</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Direct reports</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>55.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>44.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of direct reports</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>1.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-8</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≥ 12</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The first research question sought to find relationships between conflict management styles and upward dissent tactics. The participants’ responses to their preferred conflict management styles and upward dissent tactics were averaged to yield a variable for each of the five conflict handling styles and four upward dissent tactics. A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between the five conflict management styles and the four upward dissent tactics. Significant correlations between four conflict management styles and three upward dissent tactics were found.

The integrating conflict style related positively with the prosocial dissent tactic, $r = .570, p < .01$. Integrating related negatively with both threatening to resign, $r = -.266, p < .01$ and circumvention, $r = -.155, p < .05$. The prosocial dissent tactic related positively with the compromising conflict handling style, $r = .342, p < .01$ and negatively with the dominating conflict management style, $r = -.170, p < .01$ and the avoiding conflict handling style, $r = -.172, p < .01$. Repetition dissent tactic was not related to any conflict management style. The obliging conflict handling style was not related to any upward dissent tactic as depicted in table 6 at the end of chapter four.
**Research Question 2**

The second research question examined the relationships between conflict management styles and demographic variables. A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between the five conflict handling styles and age, education, number of years employed, and number of direct reports. A positive correlation was found between integrating and age, \( r = .128, p < .05 \). No correlation was found between any of the five conflict handling styles and education, number of years employed, and number of direct reports as shown in table 6.

An independent-samples t-test was conducted for the five conflict management styles and gender, ethnicity (i.e., Hispanic), and direct reports. The Levene’s test did not show any significance (> 0.005), thus homoscedasticity was assumed. No difference of means was found for gender and ethnicity. A significant difference was found for direct reports and dominating and avoiding. Respondents who indicated having employees reporting directly to them scored lower on the dominating conflict management style \((M = 3.08, SD = .62)\) as compared to respondents who do not have employees reporting directly to them \((M = 3.27, SD = .60)\), \( t(261) = .012, p < .05 \). Further, participants with direct reports scored lower on the avoiding conflict handling style \((M = 2.95, SD = .71)\), while those without direct reports scored higher \((M = 3.16, SD = .70)\), \( t(261) = .020, p < .05 \).

The participants’ conflict management styles were compared to race and organizational rank using a one-way analysis of variance. A significant difference was observed for race and obliging, \( F(2, 259) = 3.40, p < .05, n = .035 \) and race and avoiding \( F \).
In a follow up to this question, a Scheffe post hoc was conducted. The Scheffe post hoc indicated a significant difference between race and obliging, however, the Scheffe post hoc test did not find a significant difference between race and avoiding, as initially observed in the ANOVA. Specifically, the Scheffe post hoc indicated a significant difference between Black ($M = 3.58$, $SD = .54$) and other ($M = 3.94$, $SD = .50$) in obliging, $F (2, 259) = 3.40$, $p = .035$, $\eta^2 = .02$. However, given that other ($n = 16$) comprised a fairly small sample when compared to Black ($n = 47$), it is assumed that no relationship exists between Black and other and that the results can be considered a type I error.

Position in comparison to conflict management styles was significant for integrating $F (2, 260) = 3.66$, $p < .05$, $n = .027$. Post-hoc analysis using the Scheffe test confirmed this observation and found a significant difference between top management ($M = 4.27$, $SD = .42$) and nonmanagement ($M = 4.00$, $SD = .58$), using an integrating conflict handling style, $F (2, 260) = 3.66$, $p = .027$, $\eta^2 = .02$.

**Research Question 3**

The third research question sought to find a relationship between upward dissent tactics and demographic variables. A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between the four upward dissent tactics and age, education, number of years employed, and number of direct reports. A negative correlation was found between age and threatening to resign, $r = -.169$, $p < .01$, circumvention, $r = -.199$, $p < .01$, and repetition, $r = -.138$, $p < .05$. No correlations were found between any of the four upward dissent tactics and education, number of years employed, and number of direct reports.
An independent-samples t-test was conducted for the four upward dissent tactics and gender, ethnicity (i.e., Hispanic), and direct reports. The means were homogeneous since the Levene’s test did not show any significance (> 0.005). Gender differences were noted for prosocial and repetition dissent tactics. Male respondents scored higher on prosocial ($M = 4.14, SD = .44$) than female respondents did ($M = 3.95, SD = .56$), $t(260) = .002, p < .05$. Female participants also scored lower on repetition ($M = 2.74, SD = .79$) than male participants did ($M = 3.09, SD = .75$), $t(260) = .000, p < .05$.

Respondents that considered themselves Hispanic scored higher in threatening to resign ($M = 2.20, SD = .52$) than non-Hispanic respondents ($M = 1.59, SD = .63$), $t(259) = .001, p < .05$, whereas non-Hispanic respondents ($M = 2.90, SD = .78$) scored lower in repetition than Hispanic respondents ($M = 3.35, SD = .67$), $t(258) = .035, p < .05$. Yet these results ought to be considered a type I error since the number of Hispanic participants was significantly smaller ($n = 14$) as compared to the number of non-Hispanic participants ($n = 258$).

Respondents that indicated having employees reporting directly to them scored higher on the prosocial dissent tactic ($M = 4.13, SD = .45$) as compared to respondents who do not have employees reporting directly to them ($M = 3.95, SD = .56$), $t(261) = .003, p < .05$.

The participants’ upward dissent tactics were compared to race and organizational rank using a one-way analysis of variance. No significant difference was observed for race. However, a significant difference was seen between the respondents’ position and prosocial $F (2, 261) = 7.23, p < .05, n = .001$ and position and threatening to resign, $F (2, 261) = 5.08$,
In a follow up to this question, a Scheffe post hoc was conducted. The Scheffe post hoc indicated a significant difference between top management \((M = 4.24, SD = .44)\) and nonmanagement \((M = 3.90, SD = .56)\) in relation to prosocial dissent tactics, \(F (2, 261) = 7.23, p = .001, \eta^2 = .05\). Further, the post hoc using the Scheffe test indicated a significant difference between management \((M = 4.11, SD = .46)\) and nonmanagement \((M = 3.90, SD = .56)\) in their use of prosocial dissent tactics, \(F (2, 261) = 7.23, p = .001, \eta^2 = .03\).

**Research Question 4**

The fourth research question investigated the relationship between conflict management styles and relationship quality with supervisors. A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between the five conflict handling styles and the relationship quality with superiors. Significant positive correlations were found between LMSX and integrating, \(r = .388, p < .01\) and LMSX and compromising, \(r = .347, p < .01\). Significant negative correlations were found between LMSX and dominating, \(r = -.160, p < .01\) and LMSX and avoiding, \(r = -.184, p < .01\) as shown in table 6.

**Research Question 5**

The fifth research question investigated the relationship between upward dissent tactics and relationship quality with supervisors. A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between the four upward dissent tactics and the relationship quality with superiors. A significant positive correlation was found between LMSX and prosocial, \(r = .158, p < .05\) and a significant negative correlation was observed between LMSX and threatening to resign, \(r = -.177, p < .01\) as depicted in table 6.
**Hypothesis 1**

The first hypothesis assumed that a higher quality of relationship with supervisors predicts the use of more integrating conflict management styles. First, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to determine if respondents with higher quality relationships (i.e., in-group members) differed from respondents with lower quality relationships (i.e., out-group members) with their supervisors. In-group members and out-group members were determined by using a median split of the LMSX scale ($Mdn = 5.50, SD = 1.28$) (see Kassing, 2000b). Participants that were above the sample median comprised the in-group, while respondents that were below the sample median consisted of the out-group. The Levene’s test did not show any significance ($> 0.005$), thus homoscedasticity was assumed. While in-group members ($M = 4.24, SD = .44$) scored higher than out-group members ($M = 3.94, SD = .52$), $t(261) = .855, p > .05$, no difference of means was found for in-group members versus out-group members. To test the hypothesis further, a one-tailed Pearson correlation test was administered for integrating and LMSX. A significant positive correlation was observed between integrating and LMSX, $r = .388, p < .01$. Lastly, a regression analysis was applied to test if a higher quality of relationship with one’s supervisor significantly predicted the use of more integrating conflict managing style. The criterion variable (integrating) was significantly related to a higher quality of relationship with one’s supervisor, $F (1, 261) = 46.56, p < .001$. The sample correlation coefficient, $R$, was .38, which indicates that the predictor explained 15.1% of the variance. It was found that
a higher quality of relationship with one’s supervisor significantly predicted more use of the integrating conflict style ($t = 6.80, p < .0005, \beta = .38$). Hypothesis one was confirmed.

**Hypothesis 2**

The second hypothesis suggested that a higher quality of relationship with one’s supervisor predicts the use of more prosocial dissent tactics. Similar to the first hypothesis, an independent-samples t-test was applied to determine whether respondents classified as in-group members differed from out-group members. In-group members and out-group members were determined by using a median split of the LMSX scale ($Mdn = 5.50, SD = 1.28$). Participants that were above the sample median comprised the in-group, while respondents that were below the sample median consisted of the out-group. The Levene’s test did not show any significance ($> 0.005$), thus homoscedasticity was assumed. In-group members ($M = 4.09, SD = .55$) scored higher than out-group members ($M = 4.01, SD = .46$), $t(262) = .028, p < .05$. Further, a one-tailed Pearson correlation test was administered for prosocial and LMSX. A significant positive correlation was observed between integrating and LMSX, $r = .158, p < .01$. Finally, a regression analysis was used to test whether a higher quality of relationship with one’s supervisor significantly predicted the use of more prosocial dissent tactics. The criterion variable (prosocial) was significantly related to a higher quality of relationship with one’s supervisor, $F (1, 262) = 6.68, p < .001$). The sample correlation coefficient, $R$, was .15, which indicates that the predictor explained 25% of the variance. It was found that a higher quality of relationship with one’s supervisor significantly predicted
more use of prosocial dissent tactics \((t = 2.58, p < .0005, \beta = .15)\). Hypothesis two was confirmed.
### Table 6

**Correlation Data for Conflict Styles, Dissent Tactics, LMSX, age, Number of Years Employed, and Number of Direct Reports**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Integrating</td>
<td>4.09</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.147*</td>
<td>-0.091</td>
<td>-0.137*</td>
<td>.569**</td>
<td>.570**</td>
<td>-0.266*</td>
<td>-0.155*</td>
<td>-0.025</td>
<td>.388**</td>
<td>.128*</td>
<td>0.027</td>
<td>0.035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obliging</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>.147*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.48**</td>
<td>.406*</td>
<td>.153*</td>
<td>0.033</td>
<td>-0.112</td>
<td>-0.079</td>
<td>-0.084</td>
<td>0.042</td>
<td>-0.087</td>
<td>-0.011</td>
<td>0.030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominating</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>-0.091</td>
<td>.480**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.968**</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>-0.170*</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>0.031</td>
<td>-0.093</td>
<td>-0.160*</td>
<td>-0.086</td>
<td>0.066</td>
<td>0.094</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>-0.137*</td>
<td>.406**</td>
<td>.968**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-0.033</td>
<td>-0.172*</td>
<td>0.030</td>
<td>0.051</td>
<td>0.089</td>
<td>-0.184*</td>
<td>-0.108</td>
<td>0.083</td>
<td>0.077</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compromising</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>.569**</td>
<td>.153*</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>-0.033</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.342**</td>
<td>-0.051</td>
<td>0.064</td>
<td>0.085</td>
<td>.347**</td>
<td>-0.051</td>
<td>-0.017</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prosocial</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>.570**</td>
<td>0.033</td>
<td>-0.170*</td>
<td>-0.172*</td>
<td>.342**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-0.098</td>
<td>0.093</td>
<td>.235**</td>
<td>.158*</td>
<td>0.039</td>
<td>-0.070</td>
<td>-0.040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threatening to  resign</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>-0.266**</td>
<td>-0.112</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>0.030</td>
<td>-0.051</td>
<td>-0.098</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.444**</td>
<td>.346**</td>
<td>-1.77**</td>
<td>-1.19**</td>
<td>-0.086</td>
<td>0.092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circumvention</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>-0.155**</td>
<td>-0.079</td>
<td>0.031</td>
<td>0.051</td>
<td>0.064</td>
<td>0.093</td>
<td>.444**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.440**</td>
<td>-0.119</td>
<td>-0.199*</td>
<td>-0.086</td>
<td>0.048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repetition</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>-0.025</td>
<td>-0.084</td>
<td>-0.093</td>
<td>0.089</td>
<td>0.085</td>
<td>.235**</td>
<td>.346**</td>
<td>.440**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-0.073</td>
<td>-1.138*</td>
<td>-0.014</td>
<td>0.042</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LMSX</td>
<td>5.17</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>.388**</td>
<td>0.042</td>
<td>-0.160**</td>
<td>-0.184**</td>
<td>.347**</td>
<td>.158*</td>
<td>-0.177**</td>
<td>-0.119</td>
<td>-0.073</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-0.025</td>
<td>-0.119</td>
<td>0.023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>43.18</td>
<td>10.84</td>
<td>.128*</td>
<td>-0.087</td>
<td>-0.086</td>
<td>-0.108</td>
<td>-0.051</td>
<td>0.039</td>
<td>-0.169**</td>
<td>-0.199**</td>
<td>-0.138*</td>
<td>-0.025</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.284**</td>
<td>0.016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Num. of years</td>
<td>5.89</td>
<td>5.75</td>
<td>0.027</td>
<td>-0.011</td>
<td>0.066</td>
<td>0.083</td>
<td>-0.017</td>
<td>-0.070</td>
<td>-0.066</td>
<td>-0.086</td>
<td>-0.014</td>
<td>-1.128*</td>
<td>.284**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.171**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>employed</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>0.035</td>
<td>0.030</td>
<td>0.094</td>
<td>0.077</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
<td>-0.040</td>
<td>0.092</td>
<td>0.048</td>
<td>0.042</td>
<td>0.023</td>
<td>0.016</td>
<td>0.171**</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The mean difference is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).  
**The mean difference is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).
CHAPTER V.

DISCUSSION

The goal of this study was to examine relationships between conflict management styles and upward dissent tactics of fulltime employees in the context of leader-member relationships. Demographic variables including age, gender, race, ethnicity, education, organizational rank, organizational tenure, direct reports, and number of direct reports were also examined to determine whether they helped explain preferred conflict management styles and upward dissent tactics used with superiors. This chapter discusses and interprets the results presented in chapter four and provides theoretical, methodological, and practical implications. It concludes with the study’s limitations and recommendations for future research.

To date no studies have investigated the relationships between conflict management styles and upward dissent tactics within the leader-member context. The findings of this research are the first to empirically support the idea that relationships exist between conflict handling styles and upward dissent tactics. To reiterate, conflict management styles are tendencies, or an individual’s natural preferences, for managing conflict situations (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974). Upward dissent tactics are a particular form of voice, in which employees verbally express disagreements about organizational practices, policies, or operations directly to supervisors or management (Hegstrom, 1990; Redding, 1985; Kassing, 2011).

The first research question sought to find relationships between conflict management styles and upward dissent tactics. As expected, a correlation between the two constructs was
found. Positive relationships were found between the integrating conflict management style and the prosocial dissent tactic and also between the compromising conflict management style and the prosocial dissent tactic. The findings support the idea that dissent is an active and assertive form of expressing one’s disagreement in a conflict situation. Employees who use an integrating conflict handling style have a high concern for their supervisors and a high concern for themselves. This means that employees who use prosocial dissent tactics with their managers also have a high concern for their managers as well as for themselves. They want to find a solution that is satisfying for both parties and use appeals that are appropriate for the relationship and the task. They have an assertive voice and want to be heard without harming the outcome of the dissent expression. Similarly, employees who use a compromising conflict management style have a moderate concern for their supervisors and a moderate concern for themselves. However, compromisers also use prosocial dissent tactics to be heard and elicit responses from their supervisors. This is an interesting finding because prosocial dissent tactics appear to work for both conflict management styles. It seems that integrating and compromising conflict management styles make use of prosocial dissent tactics, although the conflict styles are different. This observation has a theoretical implication. It leads to the question of whether there is a difference in the type and frequency of a particular prosocial dissent tactic (i.e., solution-presentation, direct-factual appeals) for employees who use an integrating conflict management style as compared to employees who use a compromising conflict handling style. From a practical standpoint, this finding bears meaning for organizational members, who are perceived by others as compromisers but see
themselves as integrators. This study helps explain how prosocial dissent tactics may be used with both styles. Yet since integrative strategies are found to have more optimal outcomes, conflict training would be a helpful tool to provide employees with knowledge and skills to distinguish between the integrating and the compromising conflict management styles.

Further, negative relationships were found between the integrating conflict management style and the circumvention dissent tactic as well as the integrating conflict style and the “threatening to resign” dissent tactic. Circumvention and threatening to resign are assertive and competitive upward dissent tactics. Employees who use the integrating conflict handling style do not want to harm the relationship with their supervisors by threatening to quit or going around their backs to receive responses. The dissent aftermath would most likely have negative relational consequences.

Moreover, the dominating conflict management style was negatively related to the prosocial dissent tactic. Employees who use the dominating conflict handling style have a high concern for themselves and a low concern for their supervisors. They are assertive with their managers in conflict situations and push their own agendas rather than using prosocial dissent tactics. The avoiding conflict management style correlated negatively with the prosocial dissent tactic, which was expected, since it is a passive style of dealing with conflict. No correlations were found for the obliging conflict handling style and any of the four upward dissent tactics, which makes sense because individuals who accommodate others do not express upward dissent. They have a high concern for their superiors, thus remain quiet and may use other, more passive, ways to express their disagreements.
It did not come as a surprise that the repetition dissent tactic did not relate to any of the five conflict handling styles. When employees engage in repetition they rely initially on competent upward dissent tactics (e.g. solution-presentation), but as repetition progresses, they adopt less competent upward dissent tactics and more face threatening strategies (e.g., circumvention) to elicit responses from their managers (Kassing, 20009a). In this sense, specific dissent tactics become less prosocial over time, which suggests that they become more competitive over time. This explains why repetition did not correlate with either the integrating or the dominating conflict management style. Furthermore, it seems that the dissenter is not willing to compromise either, since no middle-ground can be achieved, and thus the repetition dissent tactic did not show any correlation with the compromising conflict handling style. Figure 2 on page 87 shows a model mapping conflict management styles and upward dissent tactics in relation to leader-member-social-exchange.

These findings also have methodological implications. Given that respondents perceived the integrating and compromising conflict management styles as similar styles, it might be reasonable to combine them. This argument was made three decades ago by Putnam and Wilson (1982) in their development of the OCCI, which unites solution-oriented strategies such as integrating and compromising as a means to measure choices about strategies in the management of conflict. On the other hand, researchers may want to consider investigating only the compromising and integrating conflict handling styles to gain a deeper understanding of the two styles. More information about the distinctions in
communication used in integrating versus compromising might allow for more precise measurement of these conflict management styles.

The second and third research questions sought to find a relationship between conflict management styles and demographic variables and upward dissent tactics and demographic variables, respectively. Several correlations were found that add new knowledge to our understanding of conflict management styles and upward dissent tactics and also support the existing bodies of literature. A positive correlation was found between the integrating conflict management style and age, and negative correlations were found between age and the upward dissent tactics of threatening to resign, circumvention, and repetition. These findings lead to the conclusion that older employees are more likely to use an integrating conflict management style. Older employees are usually more mature, with comparatively more work experience than younger employees, and they have come to understand and learn their organizations’ inner workings. It is reasonable to believe that older employees collaborate with their supervisors because they know that this approach allows them to accomplish their tasks. Younger employees, on the other hand, may be more competitive, as they feel a need to prove themselves, thus using tactics such as repeating themselves, going around their boss, and threatening to resign. It appears younger employees have not yet figured out how organizations operate and as a result of their inexperience are testing their boundaries by using less competent upward dissent tactics with their supervisors. From a practical standpoint, this finding brings into focus the need for more effective and competent upward dissent expression in the workplace. Younger employees would benefit from dissent
training, mentorship programs focused on organizational structure, operations, and employees’ roles as well as increased teamwork and cross-departmental communication. Organizations that invest into their younger workforce through communication and conflict management training and provide opportunities for them to learn more about the organization from various perspectives may contribute to higher levels of organizational effectiveness as evidenced in higher leader-member quality relationships, lower employee turnover, and decreased employee absenteeism (Avtgis et al., 2007; Becker et al., 2005; Kassing, Piemonte, Goman, & Mitchell, 2012).

There were also positive correlations between gender and prosocial and repetition dissent tactics. Male employees used prosocial and repetition dissent tactics more frequently than female employees. This is interesting since no relationship was found between gender and conflict management styles. The conflict management style literature is inconsistent in that respect, and these findings contribute to the ongoing debate of contradictory gender research on conflict management styles (see Bartlett, 2010; Thomas et al., 2008). It seems that men and women use all five conflict handling styles equally; however, given that prosocial dissent tactics share characteristics with the integrating conflict style, one would have expected to find gender differences. Since this is not the case, the findings have methodological implications. While the UDS was able to detect nuances between men and women’s upward dissent tactics, the ROCI-II was not able to sense any gender differences. Researchers who are interested in exploring gender differences or gender similarities in conflict communication of organizational members with managers may want to consider
using the UDS for such purposes. It appears that the UDS paints a more delicate picture of individuals’ upward communication tendencies. It remains uncertain, however, why men use prosocial and repetition dissent tactics more frequently than women. One explanation could be that women use additional upward dissent tactics to express their disagreement with their supervisors that the UDS did not measure. Given that this study examined upward dissent tactics, another possibility might be that women use lateral dissent (i.e., expressing dissent to colleagues) in the hopes that the message reaches superiors through a third party, or women may engage in displaced dissent (i.e., expressing dissent to people outside the organization) to express their disagreement. Women may be more likely to use lateral or displaced dissent because of their historically marginalized position in the workforce or the perception that they have less power than men. This may explain why women use fewer prosocial and repetition dissent tactics than men, since men may feel more confident using prosocial and repetition dissent tactics. As suggested earlier, the latter become more competitive over time. However, when women use competitive tactics they can be perceived as catty, and they may fear getting a reputation for being spiteful or may fear other negative consequences.

A further assumption could be drawn from the forthcoming supported finding that employees in higher organizational ranks use the integrating conflict management style more frequently. While this study did not set out to examine organizational rank in relation to gender, today more men hold management and top management positions than do women. Although this representation has been changing rapidly over the past years (Bureau of Labor
Statistics, 2013), this may help explain why men use more prosocial and repetition dissent tactics with their superiors than do women.

A significant difference was found between direct reports and the dominating and avoiding conflict handling styles, respectively. Accordingly, a significant difference was also found for direct reports and prosocial dissent tactics. People who have employees directly reporting to them seem to be less dominating and avoiding in conflict situations with their supervisors, and more prosocial in their upward dissent expression when compared to employees without direct reports. One explanation for this observation is that employees without direct reports do not experience the responsibilities and complexities that come with managing employees. As organizational members gain supervisory experience, they may come to use the kinds of conflict management styles with their supervisors that they want their direct reports to use with them. People in management or supervisory roles are also accountable for their employees’ actions. They may better appreciate the face threatening implications that can come with using a dominating conflict management style with their superiors. Similarly, employees with direct reports depend on their managers for information and decisions that impact their own work and that of their subordinates. Thus, employees with direct reports cannot afford to use an avoiding conflict handling style as much as employees without subordinates. This notion lends credence to the finding that employees with direct reports use more prosocial dissent tactics with their superiors. It seems they try to be more proactive and assertive in solving issues together with their managers. Furthermore, employees with direct reports usually have larger responsibilities within the organization and
are expected to collaborate with other employees, teams, and departments, especially since they most likely will be working with other employees again in the near future. In this sense, they need to be concerned about good relationships with others in order to accomplish their tasks successfully. Employees with direct reports might also face more complex situations related to increased negotiation and decision-making. These situations allow superiors to learn more, and it is therefore possible that greater experience results in less destructive communication tendencies than those displayed by employees without subordinates.

These findings might be vital during times of organizational change when unexpected challenges rise in organizations, e.g., introduction of new policies, merger/acquisition, or change of compensation packages. Employees are likely to feel more of a need to dissent during times of change. This study suggests that providing training for employees who do not have subordinates might help them achieve the skills to express their disagreement constructively and contribute to a better organizational climate.

Organizational rank emerged as an indicator for the use of specific conflict management styles and upward dissent tactics. Significant differences were found between top management and nonmanagement and use of the integrating conflict handling style as well as prosocial dissent tactics. As employees move up within the ranks of an organization, they report more use of integrating conflict handling styles and prosocial dissent tactics. This finding parallels the previously reported findings about age and supervisory role in that younger employees without supervisory responsibility use less competent conflict management styles and upward dissent tactics with their superiors when compared to
seasoned, mature employees with supervisory responsibilities. These findings bode well for management, since it seems that their upward progression within an organization provides them with valuable experience and informal training. After all, managers delegate tasks to their subordinates, while they simultaneously receive instructions from top management. Therefore, it makes sense that management uses an integrating conflict handling style and prosocial dissent tactics more frequently than nonmanagement, but less frequently than top management. Top management, on the other hand, uses the integrating conflict handling style and prosocial dissent tactics most frequently. One reason for this might be that employees in top management positions are often removed from the day-to-day affairs, yet must make major decisions that impact employees organization wide. As a result, they regularly depend on information from their subordinates, peers, and clients to make sound decisions. In doing so, they need to communicate their concerns, needs, and expectations in a constructive manner. After all, employees in top management positions are frequently viewed as organizational leaders and expected to be competent communicators (Northouse, 2001). This observation supports the notion that leadership is linked to communication competence and that employees can, to some extent, learn qualities that are associated with leadership. Many companies have already recognized the importance of leadership training, which frequently incorporates conflict management training, but little, if any, investment has been made into dissent training programs, which bear equally large, if not larger, implications for employees and organizational effectiveness. After all, dissent is an important monitoring force within organizations, and it can point out issues that can go
unnoticed when not addressed properly (Kassing, 2002). Lastly, the results from this study also support Brewer et al.’s (2002) finding that upper level organizational employees are more likely to use an integrating conflict management style than lower status employees.

Research question four investigated the link between conflict management styles and relationship quality with supervisors. As expected, significant positive correlations were found between LMSX and the integrating and compromising conflict management styles, while negative correlations were found between LMSX and the dominating and avoiding conflict handling styles. Employees who have high quality relationships with their supervisors (i.e., in-group members) also exhibit a high concern for their relationship as evidenced in their use of an integrating conflict management style. These employees also enjoy a clear and strong information advantage over those employees who have low quality relationships with their supervisors (i.e., out-group members) (Sias, 2005). As a result they also receive more attention, support, and inside information from their supervisors than do out-group members (Dansereau et al., 1975; Graen & Cashman, 1975; Liden & Graen, 1980).

While the compromising conflict management style was positively correlated to a high LMSX, it was not as highly correlated as the integrating conflict handling style. A moderate form of conflict management style, compromising has been labeled as a give-and-take or middle ground approach to solve conflicts. Subordinates using compromising might have a stronger orientation toward the task than the maintenance of the relationship with their supervisors. Supervisors are likely to appreciate the task focus, as supported by Gross and Guerrero’s (2000) finding that the compromising conflict management style is perceived as
moderately effective and appropriate for the relationship and task. It therefore makes sense that employees who use a compromising conflict management style with their superiors have in-group membership.

Negative correlations were found between LMSX and the dominating and avoiding conflict handling styles. In turn, employees with low quality relationships with their managers are little concerned about the relationship quality and are more likely to use avoiding or dominating conflict handlings styles. It therefore does not come as a surprise that out-group members experience lower satisfaction with their supervisors and also face more severe problems and conflicts with them than do in-group members (Chen, Lamb, & Zhong 2007; Graen & Cashman, 1975). Low quality relationships with superiors are also indicators of employee burnout and associated with high levels of defensive communication (Becker et al., 2005). Employees in low quality relationships with supervisors appear to restrict their performance to expectations of the formal employment contract, while employees with high quality relationships tend to go beyond it. Avoiding and dominating conflict handling styles strain employees’ relationships with supervisors, and as a result employees will engage in fewer social exchange behaviors with superiors.

While these findings may seem obvious, they are important because there is likely a mutually reinforcing spiral that occurs which has implications for ongoing relationships. For example, we do not know which comes first: the superior-subordinate relationship or the conflict management styles. But using an integrating conflict management style would reinforce positive relationships, while using a dominating or an avoiding conflict
management style would reinforce negative relationships. So the implications of using competing or avoiding conflict handling styles are vital since they will likely lead to continued decrease in information, support, etc. from one’s supervisor.

These findings also support Green’s (2008) research, which found that higher quality relationships were associated with the integrating conflict management style and lower quality relationships were associated with the compromising conflict management style. Correspondingly, the avoiding conflict management style was linked to the lowest relationship quality between superiors and subordinates, which further supports Green’s (2008) findings.

Research question five examined the connection between upward dissent tactics and relationship quality with supervisors. A significant positive correlation between LMSX and prosocial dissent tactics and a significant negative correlation between LMSX and threatening to resign were observed. This means that employees who use prosocial dissent tactics appear to have high quality relationships with their superiors, while employees who use threatening to resign dissent tactics seem to have low quality relationships with their managers. Threatening a supervisor with one’s resignation is a risky undertaking and can result in the deterioration of the superior-subordinate relationship. Certainly, threatening resignation may help focus the attention on an issue or possible damage that is intolerable for employees. It seems that employees using pressure tactics have a low concern for the relationship with their managers. Threatening to resign is a very powerful tool, but costly when it fails (Kassing, 2002). On the contrary, prosocial dissent tactics are active and
constructive approaches to expressing disagreement. “Packaging one’s dissent alongside evidence from any number of sources shifts attention away from the individual dissenter and toward the issue at hand” (Kassing, 2011, p.146). It makes sense that employees who use prosocial dissent tactics have high quality relationships with their supervisors because they focus on the problem and engage in a collaborative manner to solve the issue. This finding is corroborated by research suggesting that in-group members participate more frequently in decision making (Dansereau et al., 1975), receive better communication quality from their supervisors (Yrle et al., 2002), and report higher performance ratings with their superiors (Chen et al., 2007) as compared to out-group members.

The findings from research questions four and five have practical implications for employees in supervisory roles, management positions, and leadership functions. It seems that the type of conflict management styles and upward dissent tactics subordinates use are a direct reflection of supervisors’ communication style. Past research has emphasized what can be gained from high quality leader-member relationships and the impact of the choice of constructive communication (Botero et al., 2011; Fairhurst, 1993; Graen & Cashman, 1975; Green, 2008; Sias, 2005). From a practitioner standpoint, understanding the current relationship quality between superiors and subordinates can inform the design of management training on building high level relationships with subordinates to improve organizational functioning. Training should emphasize teaching managers to use open and constructive forms of communication, so that subordinates, in turn, have the ability to respond in such ways. Communication openness, in particular, is important because it
provides both parties with a better understanding of their shared responsibilities, expectations, and abilities to reach personal and organizational goals. Relationship development is a communicative process, and managers have the ability to impact the relationship through their choices of constructive or destructive communication styles. By virtue of their positions, superiors influence the development of the relationships. Ultimately, the ability to hear prosocial dissent is valuable to organizations since it provides corrective feedback that can be used to monitor and assess overall organizational effectiveness.

Figure 2. Model of Managing Conflict and Expressing Upward Dissent in the LMSX Context. This model integrates both conflict management styles and upward dissent tactics with an overlay of leader-member relationship quality.
In addition to the research questions, this study tested two hypotheses. Hypothesis one stated that higher quality relationships with supervisors would predict the use of integrating conflict styles. Similarly, hypothesis two stated that higher quality relationships with supervisors would predict the use of prosocial dissent tactics. As expected, and parallel to the preceding research findings, both hypotheses were supported. High LMSX predicts the use of the integrating conflict management style and the use of prosocial dissent tactics, respectively. These results not only support Kassing’s (2000b) findings that subordinates in high quality relationships with their supervisors use more upward dissent than those in low quality relationships, but they also reinforce the importance of the superior-subordinate relationship in fostering collaborative ways of managing conflict constructively and “channels for hearing [constructive upward] employee dissent” (Kassing, 2000b, p. 66).

Moreover, this was the first study to use the UDS and the LMSX scale. The findings of this study matched the predicted expectations of what the scales were supposed to do and thus, confirm the scales’ construct validity and recommendation for future research. While the findings have methodological implications for scholars in the field of organizational communication, industrial psychology, sociology, and management, they are equally beneficial to practitioners. Organizations that use these scales and the ROCI-II can assess the level of relationship quality between superiors and subordinates, as well as the types of conflict management styles and dissent strategies as ways of learning what types of training interventions may be needed and be productive. In addition, organizations that have assessed prevalent conflict management styles and upward dissent tactics can set communication
expectations for current and new employees and socialize new employees into the organizational culture. This will give existing and new employees opportunities to understand the organization’s values and expectations for superior-subordinate communication.

Furthermore, organizations that choose to use these tools can help managers to better understand and potentially predict how new employees will engage with them. Knowing more about their communication preferences may help supervisors build relationships with employees more quickly and allow them to create stronger relationships; after all:

Higher levels of involvement, influence, and persuasion create a communication climate within the superior-subordinate relationship that invites opinion sharing, apparently even when those opinions may be contradictory. Thus, supervisors who maintain high-quality relationships with their subordinates receive both positive and contradictory employee feedback. (Kassing, 2000b, p. 65)

Limitations

As with all research, this study is not without limitations. The study only investigated the perspective of subordinates. Assessing both dyads of the relationship may help draw a more detailed communication picture of the relationship quality between leaders and members and their perceived conflict management styles as well as dissent expression.

In addition, this study focused primarily on correlation data and made no attempt to address the cause and effect issues related to conflict management styles, upward dissent tactics, and leader-member-social exchange.
Moreover, including additional variables may provide more information about respondents’ conflict management styles, dissent expression tactics, and relationship quality with managers.

Additionally, this study relied on self-reported data. While respondents may see themselves in a certain light, others may perceive them entirely differently. Furthermore, self-reported data are influenced by the respondent’s emotions at the time of answering the survey. These disadvantages of using self-reported data may impact the validity of the study.

Lastly, the sample size and the geographic locations were relatively controlled for and could be expanded. A larger sample size from geographically diverse organizations could be solicited to provide more generalizable data.

Future Research

The findings from the current study highlight several observations that suggest recommendations for future research. First, this study found positive relationships between prosocial dissent tactics and the integrating and compromising conflict management styles, respectively. While both conflict handling styles are more constructive approaches to dealing with conflict, each of the conflict management styles may be associated with more or less prosocial dissent tactics. It is unclear whether employees use the two conflict styles interchangeably with their supervisors, and how this influences the use of prosocial dissent tactics with their managers. More in-depth understanding of how employees use integrating and compromising conflict management styles with their superiors in relation to prosocial dissent tactics would require qualitative approaches that would help explain the current
findings.

Second, this study showed that men use prosocial and repetition dissent tactics with their managers more frequently than do women. Future research ought to investigate why this is the case and the effectiveness of these tactics. If women are less likely to use these tactics with their managers, what are they doing to engage in conflict or dissent expression, and how effective are these strategies? Using a qualitative approach, such as interviews, could help shed light on the current findings. Further, rating respondents’ behaviors following a specified observation period for men and women might yield a more concrete insight into the study’s findings.

Third, the notion of social exchange or exchanges of psychological benefits or favors ought to be investigated in greater detail to see in which context prosocial dissent tactics are communicated and what type of conflict management styles are being used and how they impact superior-subordinate relationship quality. For instance, follow-up interviews with respondents high in LMSX and respondents low in LMSX would help explain the context in which prosocial and threatening to resign dissent tactics are verbalized. Similarly, investigations should examine the context in which respondents use constructive versus destructive conflict management styles with their superiors in order to gain a deeper understanding of the nature of social exchanges.

Fourth, this study examined three organizations that have no union association. It therefore would be interesting to examine conflict management styles and upward dissent tactics in unions. Employees in union organizations may exhibit different communication
tendencies with their superiors than employees who are not regulated and protected by unions.

Fifth, the findings of this study revealed that top management made the most use of integrating conflict styles and prosocial dissent tactics with superiors as compared to management and nonmanagement. The question here is then, do top managers and managers use different tactics because they are in top management and management positions, respectively, or did they achieve these organizational ranks because of the tactics they choose to use?

Finally, this study examined correlations between the number of direct reports employees have and conflict management styles and upward dissent tactics, respectively. While no correlations were found for either construct when using the top coded variable for number of employees, a positive correlation was found between threatening to resign and the number of direct reports when using the original variable. This leads to the assumption that employees with a larger number of direct reports were more likely to report using threats of resignation than employees with a smaller number of employees reporting directly to them. A possible explanation for this finding is that an increase in the number of direct reports also increases the level of responsibility supervisors feel for their employees. With that in mind, it seems comprehensible that work complexity and power would increase as well. It might be out of this organizational knowledge and power position that employees with more direct reports feel safe enough to speak up and threaten their supervisors with resignation. After all, they carry responsibility for their direct reports and may speak on their behalf as well, which
lends credibility and urgency to the issue. It seems that as subordinates “become more powerful through positions, expertise, information access, or other power bases, their tactical options increase and their tactics become more assertive, particularly when the influence attempt appears to be ‘legitimate’ from the organization’s point of view” (Waldron, 1999, p. 275). Given this observation, future research should target organizations with large superior-subordinate teams to find out if size, i.e., the number of employees reporting to managers, mediates the type of upward dissent tactics subordinates use.
REFERENCES


Bartlett, M. (2010). Workplace incivility and conflict management styles of community
college leaders in the nine mega states (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from Dissertations & Theses (UMI No. AAT 3355130).


doi:10.1108/10444061011079930


leadership within formal organizations. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performances, 13*, 46-78. doi:10.1016/0030-5073(75)90005-7


doi:10.1177/0893318990004002005


Gelfand (Eds.), *The psychology of conflict and conflict management in organizations* (pp. 149-177). New York, NY: Taylor & Francis.


APPENDICES
Appendix A

IRB Approval Letter

From: Deb Paxton, IRB Administrator
North Carolina State University
Institutional Review Board

Date: July 5, 2013

Title: Examining Conflict Management Styles and Upward Dissent Tactics of Leaders and Members

IRB#: 3357

Dear Yareli,

The research proposal named above has received administrative review and has been approved as exempt from the policy as outlined in the Code of Federal Regulations (Exemption: 46.101 b.2). Provided that the only participation of the subjects is as described in the proposal narrative, this project is exempt from further review. This approval does not expire, but any changes must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

NOTE:
1. This committee complies with requirements found in Title 45 part 46 of The Code of Federal Regulations. For NCSU projects, the Assurance Number is: FWA00003429.

2. Any changes to the research must be submitted and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

3. If any unanticipated problems occur, they must be reported to the IRB office within 5 business days.

Please forward a copy of this letter to your faculty sponsor, if applicable.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Deb Paxton
NC State IRB
Appendix B

Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory-II

1. I try to investigate an issue with my supervisor to find a solution acceptable to us.
2. I generally try to satisfy the needs of my supervisor.
3. I attempt to avoid being "put on the spot" and try to keep my conflict with my supervisor to myself.
4. I try to integrate my ideas with those of my supervisor to come up with a decision jointly.
5. I try to work with my supervisor to find solution to a problem that satisfies our expectations.
6. I usually avoid open discussion of my differences with my supervisor.
7. I try to find a middle course to resolve an impasse.
8. I use my influence to get my ideas accepted.
9. I use my authority to make a decision in my favor.
10. I usually accommodate the wishes of my supervisor.
11. I give in to the wishes of my supervisor.
12. I exchange accurate information with my supervisor to solve a problem together.
13. I usually allow concessions to my supervisor.
14. I usually propose a middle ground for breaking deadlocks.
15. I negotiate with my supervisor so that a compromise can be reached.
16. I try to stay away from disagreement with my supervisor.
17. I avoid an encounter with my supervisor.
18. I use my expertise to make a decision in my favor.
19. I often go along with the suggestions of my supervisor.
20. I use "give and take" so that a compromise can be made.
21. I am generally firm in pursuing my side of the issue.
22. I try to bring all our concerns out in the open so that the issues can be resolved in the best possible way.
23. I collaborate with my supervisor to come up with decisions acceptable to us.
24. I try to satisfy the expectations of my supervisor.
25. I sometimes use my power to win a competitive situation.
26. I try to keep my disagreement with my supervisor to myself in order to avoid hard feelings.
27. I try to avoid unpleasant exchanges with my supervisor. I try to work with my supervisor for a proper understanding of a problem.
Note. Items 1, 4, 5, 12, 22, 23, and 28. Integrating; items 2, 10, 11, 13, 19, and 24. Obliging; items 8, 9, 18, 21, and 25. Dominating; items 3, 6, 16, 17, 26, and 27. Avoiding; items 7, 14, 15, and 20. Compromising

© Center for Advanced Studies in Management
Appendix C

Upward Dissent Scale

1. I talk to someone higher up in the organization than my direct supervisor.
2. I gather evidence to support my concern.
3. I bring up my concern numerous times.
4. I say I’ll quit if the organization doesn’t do something about the problem.
5. I focus on the facts surrounding the issue.
6. I raise the issue repeatedly.
7. I suggest that I’m considering quitting if the organization doesn’t do something.
8. I talk to an organizational officer higher in the chain of command.
9. I threaten to resign if my concerns aren’t addressed.
10. I present solutions not just problems.
11. I talk to my boss’s boss.
12. I make several attempts to draw attention to the concern.
13. I use facts to support my claim.
14. I claim that the problem is serious enough to make me quit.
15. I go above my direct supervisor’s head to voice my concern.
16. I continue to mention my concern until it gets addressed.
17. I go over my boss’s head.
18. I repeat my concern as often as possible.
19. I threaten to quit.
20. I present a well-thought-out solution to the problem.

Note. Items 2, 5, 10, 13, and 20. Prosocial; items 4, 7, 9, 14, and 19. Threatening Resignation; items 1, 8, 11, 15, and 17. Circumvention; and items 3, 6, 12, 16, and 18. Repetition.
Appendix D

Leader-Member-Social-Exchange scale

1. My manager and I have a two-way exchange relationship.
2. I do not have to specify the exact conditions to know my manager will return a favor.
3. If I do something for my manager, he or she will eventually repay me.
4. I have a balance of inputs and outputs with my manager.
5. My efforts are reciprocated by my manager.
6. My relationship with my manager is composed of comparable exchanges of giving and taking.
7. When I give effort at work, my manager will return it.
8. Voluntary actions on my part will be returned in some way by my manager.
Appendix E

Pre-notification E-mail to Participate in Survey

Dear employees,

We have been recently approached by doctoral student, Mrs. Valeska Redmond, at the Department of Communication at North Carolina State University to participate in an online survey. Mrs. Redmond is currently collecting data about people’s communication behaviors at work as part of her dissertation. The purpose of her study is to gain a deeper understanding of how employees express concerns at work and how they manage disagreements with their supervisors.

We agreed to participate in Mrs. Redmond’s research, as we believe that the findings will be insightful for us as we grow our organization, serve more customers, and develop new strategies. We kindly ask you to participate in this confidential online questionnaire. The survey is quick and should take less than 8 minutes to complete.

In two days you will receive an e-mail with the link to the survey. While participation is voluntary, we hope you will take the time to fill out the survey and help us improve our communication efforts.

Thank you for consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

HR