

From Covert to Overt Interpersonal Conflict:
An Exploration of the Role of Cognitive Processes
Used by Faculty in Liberal Arts Colleges

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This dissertation reflects a lifetime of experiences in working with people – as a waitress, nurse, faculty member, healthcare educator, and academic administrator. Added to these experiences are the God-given opportunities to serve as a daughter, niece, wife, mother, grandmother, and friend. These relationships include people from all backgrounds, creeds, ethnicities, perspectives, and intentions. The richness of these interactions has enabled me to pursue the doctorate for the purpose of understanding individuals and enhancing my effectiveness in working with them in many arenas – personal, professional, and social. Throughout my research on interpersonal conflict, these relationships have illuminated the literature and facilitated my methods.

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ABSTRACT

Life within the academy is depicted frequently in literature, film, and theater as a series of relationship issues involving students, faculty, and administrators. These fictional stories present life as a series of interpersonal conflicts, leaving a sense of dissonance that is unsettling. One wonders how or whether the key actors are using their highly developed intellects. This study addresses the research question: *What roles do cognitive processes play in covert and overt interpersonal conflicts between faculty members at private, liberal arts colleges?* To answer this question, I derive a conceptual framework from five stage-theories of conflict. I then identify nine cognitive processes from the perspectives of the individual reaction, the social interaction, and the organizational influence. I describe the role these cognitive processes play in overt and covert conflicts between faculty and identify similarities and differences.

This qualitative study is based on semi-structured interviews with 16 deans of liberal arts and professional schools within five, small, private colleges distributed across the United States of America. Each dean provided two cases of faculty-to-faculty conflict (one overt and one covert) that occurred within the previous three years. I analyzed the 32 cases of faculty-to-faculty conflicts by identifying themes and subthemes, creating cross-case displays, and arraying the data on meta-matrices.

Cognitive dissonance formed the basis for both covert and overt conflicts with *social inference* creating a spark to ignite public displays of conflict. The *perception of self interest* and an *evaluation of fairness* were processes used in all types of conflicts. A *perception of inequity* was distinctive to cases of overt conflict. The faculty's *assessment*

of congruence with departmental norms and culture and the institutional mission and values was not a strong influence in either type of conflict. Three basic conditions that influenced individual reactions to conflict situations included *change in usual work expectations, strong emotion, and personality traits*.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The art of the theater and literature can create a life-like experience that illuminates a setting and its inhabitants. Life within the academy is depicted frequently as a series of relationship issues involving students, faculty, and administrators. These fictional stories present life in raw form, leaving a sense of dissonance that is unsettling. For example, Wendy Wasserstein in her play, *Third* (2002), creates a haunting story of a highly-respected senior faculty member's interactions with a student and a colleague. The resulting interpersonal disagreements leave the audience with a sense of the academy as a closed society, living in the reality of a faculty focused on an earlier era and unable to accept alternative views. Ms. Wasserstein's play is about the need to examine continually our biases and perspectives as a means of using healthy conflict to develop individuals, departments, and institutions. In Jon Hassler's novel, *Dean's List* (1997), the academy is fraught with disagreements regarding the focus of the institution and the role of faculty and administration in creating a future. These examples show how the idyllic life of learning in a liberal arts college can produce a setting for human conflict that can consume, and even destroy, individuals.

Is the academy, as an institution, different from other types of highly-specialized organizations? These artistic depictions support the uniqueness of the academy, despite many similarities with other organizations. At the heart of this uniqueness is how the individuals, specifically faculty, within the academy approach interpersonal disagreements. My research seeks to examine the role that cognitive processes play in

interpersonal conflict, both as part of the ongoing, covert life within the various academic departments and at the point where the parties engage in overt fighting to defend their perspectives. Mid-level administrators, such as deans, are often caught in the crossfire of these processes, left to respond to the questions: “What were they thinking?” or “How were they thinking?” or “Were they thinking?” This task is central to a dean's work. As a dean of an East African college said, when asked about his role as dean, "to keep the peace while trying to understand what they are thinking." (Tangaza College, Kenya, personal communication, May, 2000)

My research uses a derived conceptual framework based on various representations of the phase theory of conflict (Walton, 1969; Pondy, 1967; Filley, 1975; Rummel, 1976; Robbins, 2000). The process of working through faculty conflicts generally involves an administrator who is charged with managing the interpersonal issues inherent in life within a department or school. This study uses the administrator as the focal point for describing the cognitive processes of faculty members engaged in covert and overt interpersonal conflicts.

Statement of the Problem

Amid increasing expectations of mid-level higher education administrators, the daily tasks of keeping the peace require attention and expertise. A major part of this expertise involves addressing interpersonal conflict among various constituencies of the academy. Administrators are often unprepared for this role and may end up replicating what was done by a predecessor. A clearer understanding of how to promote peace, while still encouraging collegial, critical exchanges, may enhance the effectiveness of

departments and institutions in addressing the learning needs of students, the research expectations of the disciplines, and the service expected by the greater community.

Background

Interpersonal conflict, like true love, is a state of being that is universally recognized by individuals when they experience it. At the same time, it is difficult to find one universally accepted definition of conflict at either the individual or organizational level. There are many variables involved in conflict such as personality type, power differential, resource availability, and values. The general approach to understanding organizational conflict has changed since the first part of the twentieth century when all conflict was viewed as destructive. In the 1950's through the 1980's, conflict was viewed as a neutral state, whereas currently conflict is seen as a necessary condition for improvement and growth (Gmelch & Carrol, 1991). The perception of conflict has changed over time. The traditional view in the 1930's and 1940's portrayed conflict as a negative consequence of poor group communication and unresponsive management. This view gave way in the mid-twentieth century to a human relations view that accepts conflict as a natural part of group life. More recently organizational behaviorists have approached conflict as a state to be encouraged in order to avoid "a harmonious, peaceful, tranquil, and cooperative group becoming static, apathetic, and nonresponsive to needs for change and innovation" (Robbins, 2000, p.169).

Definitions of conflict incorporate the emphasis of specific fields or disciplines including psychology (Hilgard & Bower, 1966), sociology (Clark, 1988), organizational development (Robbins, 2000), economics (Blau, 1964), and education (Holton, 1998,

Gmelch & Carroll, 1991). These cross-disciplinary definitions incorporate the phase theories of conflict that describe the process by which a conflict emerges and is implemented. (Pondy, 1967; Walton, 1969; Filley, 1975; Rummel, 1976; Robbins, 2000). In this study, I derive a definition that spans these disciplines: *interpersonal conflict is a disagreement or dispute between two or more parties that involves an individual reaction, a social interaction, and an organizational influence. Interpersonal conflict begins in a covert state and may progress to an overt state.*

I now discuss the context and conditions surrounding the disagreement or dispute and the perspectives that inform how the individuals interact in conflicts.

Context and Conditions of Conflict

A conflict situation requires that parties identify actual or perceived incompatibility in their relationship (Heitler, 1990). The focus of the incompatibility can be either in the goals to be achieved through interaction or in the approaches for achieving the goals. According to Levinger & Rubin (1994), all social conflicts originate from divergent perspectives and involve multiple motives.

The motivations involved in conflict situations shed light on the nature of the perceived disagreement. Competition, cooperation, and individualism are the three motives underlying all conflict relationships (Deutsch, 1960). Competition involves the notion that one party must lose in order for the other to win, while cooperation enables both parties to win. Both competition and cooperation incorporate the other party in the overall approach to the conflict. Individualism connotes ignoring the other party when determining actions; it is a “go it alone” mentality. By some definitions of conflict that

emphasize interdependence of parties, the individualism motive is incongruent with the nature of conflict. Usually the conflict relationship is complex and thus has a mixed-motive nature. An example of mixed motivation is the conflict situation that has the nature of a resource pool for division among players. If one is to create value, the pool is enlarged by cooperative actions and then divided by competitive demands (Lax & Sebenius, 1986).

How conflict situations are handled and resolved affects the emergence and resolution of future conflicts. A destructive conflict is one that ends with harm to all parties involved, whereas a constructive resolution results in overall well-being. These polar opposites represent the ends of a continuum along which most conflicts can be placed. A conflict that is settled usually involves behaviors that are changed to reflect the established outcomes. A resolved conflict involves a behavioral change along with an attitudinal change that forms an underlying understanding and acceptance of terms (Levinger & Rubin, 1994). Whereas either settlement or resolution may end a conflict and be perceived as a constructive endpoint, their distinctiveness is evident in future conflicts.

Many aspects of individuals, groups, or organizations can provide fuel for disagreements. Levinger and Rubin (1994) categorize these factors as physical, social, and issue contexts. Time and space are examples of the physical context, while the intricacies of communication styles, personalities, and formal roles are illustrative of social contexts. Issue contexts are often diffuse and controversial as they can include such frequently debated areas as academic quality, workload, and resource allocation.

An alternative categorization schema uses the variables that lead to potential opposition: communication, structure, and personal attributes (Robbins, 2000). While communication and personal attributes are similar to the social contexts of Levinger and Rubin (1994), Robbins extends the discussion to include “semantic difficulties, insufficient exchange of information and ‘noise’ in the communication channels” (p. 170). He also emphasizes the potential for individual expectations of role, task, and rewards and semantic differences to lead to misunderstandings between units. Of special note are semantic differences based on various backgrounds, socialization, and value systems.

Structural variables elaborate the description of conditions fueling a disagreement. Structural factors leading to increased conflict include large groups with high specificity of task, fewer years of membership by individuals, a high turnover of members, too much participation, restrictive leadership, rewards based on the loss to another group, and dependence on other groups for existence (Robbins, 2000). In his earlier work, Robbins (1990) presents an expanded view of antecedents of conflict describing more specific structural variables. A power differential exists when one group is dependent upon another with no incentive to cooperate — for example, departments that serve as course providers for general education with few students as majors. A high potential for conflict exists when groups of similar standing in an organization have very different tasks and environments (e.g. academic departments and student affairs). Inconsistent methods of evaluation and rewards increase conflict potential, especially if one group is perceived to benefit beyond the other. If there are minimal rules and a lack of formal ways of interacting, the ambiguity of group behavior is high and leads to a high potential for

conflict. An example is the valued management strategy of joint decision-making which frequently involves high interaction and a lack of formal rules. Such a process can produce more conflict than cooperation as the high interaction among parties and lack of formal processes can mitigate any positive outcomes.

The spark that initiates a conflict situation is an actual or perceived disagreement. Thomas (1976) uses the term “frustration” to set a context for this interpersonal disagreement. He goes on to argue that personal frustration carries attributes of subjective musings that involve perception and misperception. A second context involves framing the disagreement as a distribution of limited resources and connotes a system of justice and fairness. A disagreement over resources forms the basis for the social exchange theories based on the principle of self-interest. In addition, the conflict situation can be viewed as a set of problems to be solved within an environment or organization. This organizational, problem-solving approach depersonalizes the disagreement and suggests that multiple parties can benefit from working through the difference to produce a comprehensive resolution (Bush & Folger, 1994).

Perspectives of Interaction in Conflict

A perspective is a way of viewing a phenomenon with accompanying assumptions (Folger, Poole, & Stutman, 2005). They continue by stating that “a good perspective is one that enables the viewer to explain the product or process in question and act on the explanation” (p. 40). I use the perspectives of the individual, the group, and the organization to represent the range of responses to interpersonal conflict.

Research in psychology emphasizes the incompatible differences between individuals

and addresses conflicts from a personal attribute perspective. Social theorists describe conflict in terms of group norms and behaviors toward groups with opposing perspectives. Organizational theorists study group conflict in terms of structural factors that include dependence on others for essential activities and resources for goal attainment (Levinger & Rubin, 1994).

The interdependence of all parties is an essential ingredient of conflict (Holton, 1998). Without interdependence, the individual is free to engage in behaviors without need to consider the effects of that behavior on anyone. This point seems obvious, yet it is a key to understanding the intricacies of working through conflict situations. Isenhardt (2000) emphasizes that “conflict is an inevitable consequence of social life” (p. 12). He describes conflict spirals where individuals react to the perceived threat of others in a series of predictable moves and counter-moves. Conflicts thus always involve more than one person in a series of actions that reinforce future actions. (Carpenter & Kennedy, 1988; Folger, Poole, & Stutman, 2005).

Considering the reactions of individuals in conflict situations, one must address the question: “What were they thinking?” The individual, group, and organizational perspectives provide a plethora of theories from which can be gleaned a list of cognitive processes. A cognitive process is a mental function manifested in mental activities (VandenBos, 2007). One can observe mental activity in others by identifying behaviors and attending to verbal cues. The role of each cognitive process can be deduced in order to illuminate the covert and overt conflict situations.

Research Question

This research examines the cognitive processes used by faculty while engaged in overt and covert interpersonal conflicts with other faculty members. The research question is: *What roles do cognitive processes play in covert and overt interpersonal conflicts between faculty members at private, liberal arts colleges?* To answer this question, I describe the cognitive processes used by faculty in each type of conflict from the perspectives of individual reaction, social interaction, and organizational influence. I discuss the role of each process based on the theory that introduced the cognitive process. Finally, I identify similarities and differences in the roles of each cognitive process in overt and covert conflicts.

Overview of Method

This study is in an arena with well-delineated constructs. The literature on interpersonal conflict has a long history, and I derive a conceptual framework from this literature. Multiple perspectives can be considered when examining interpersonal conflict including the psychological, sociological, and organizational perspectives. Within each perspective are well-established theories from which can be selected a list of cognitive processes. My exploration of the roles of these cognitive processes, occurring in actual interpersonal conflicts between faculty members, is a unique application of the previous research.

I used a qualitative approach as the research design. Fraenkel and Wallen (2006) present characteristics that support the use of qualitative methodology including data collected in the natural setting, the use of words as data, an inductive analysis process,

and the emphasis on the participants' perspective of events. A range of specificity exists between an unstructured, highly inductive approach (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008) and a pre-structured, confirmatory approach (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Since this study is based on established constructs, I used the more structured approach to qualitative research, as outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994).

The participants are mid-level academic administrators selected from private, liberal arts institutions in three regions of the United States of America. I collected data using interviews with a protocol developed from the research question and the theories informing the conceptual framework. I used a case-oriented approach to analysis that incorporates a theory-based coding structure, enabling clustering of the data to form conclusions.

Outline of the Dissertation

Chapter 2 presents a literature review. After reviewing five phase theories of the conflict process, I combine these theories to derive a conceptual framework of the conflict situation. I select a primary theory, from each of three general perspectives, to identify cognitive processes. These processes are then used to guide data collection and analysis. The final section of the literature review is a discussion of faculty-to-faculty conflict within the academy.

In Chapter 3, I outline a qualitative research design to address the research question, including interviews with 16 school deans from 5 geographically dispersed, liberal arts colleges. Each dean describes two cases of conflict between faculty members — one case that became overt and one that remained covert. In Chapter 4, I analyze the

resulting data from the 32 cases using a theory-based coding schema, modified by a constant comparative approach. Finally, I state and discuss my findings along with their implications for theory and practice in Chapter 5. I conclude by suggesting areas for further research in the study of interpersonal conflict in the academy.

Academic administration plays an essential role in the functioning of the academy today. Most administrators come to their positions out of faculty positions and have little formal preparation in administrative functions. Much has been written about the need for future faculty to learn how to teach students, and many programs of faculty development have been established to assist faculty to learn instructional skills. There is a similar need for training in the administrative functions, especially those related to managing interpersonal conflict between various stakeholders of the academy.

My research explores the various forms of interpersonal conflict in order to support a dynamic model of teaching and learning. I seek to explicate the roles of cognitive processes involved in maintaining an environment of spirited debate surrounding various intellectual perspectives. If this process is better understood, a healthy environment representing diverse perspectives and approaches — the ideal of the academy — can be nurtured by academic leaders for all constituencies.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter includes a review of the literature related to my study of interpersonal conflict between faculty members as described by mid-level academic administrators. In the first section, I review five phase theories of conflict from which I derive a conceptual framework of the conflict situation, presented in the next chapter. These phase theories describe a process of moving from covert to overt conflict. I then examine a representative theory from each of three perspective in order to identify potential cognitive processes that faculty may activate during interpersonal conflicts. Attribution theory is associated with the individual reaction perspective; equity theory represents the social interaction perspective; interactional theory informs the organizational influence perspective. Finally, I provide an overview of conflict within the academy as represented by the roles of key actors: faculty and deans.

Phase Theories of Conflict

Conflict situations are displayed frequently as a series of stages, phases, or elements. These displays are referred to in the literature as representatives of the phase theories of conflict. I review the two phases of Walton (1969), the five stages of Pondy (1967), the six elements of Filley (1975), the five phases of Rummel (1976), and the four stages of Robbins (2000). I select these five theories for comparison as they present a longitudinal and multidisciplinary overview and are cited frequently in the conflict literature (see Table 1).

Table 1: Comparison of Five Phase Theories of the Conflict Situation

<i>Walton (1969)</i>	<i>Pondy (1967)</i>	<i>Filley (1975)</i>	<i>Rummel (1976)</i>	<i>Robbins (2000)</i>
Differentiation	<i>Stage 1</i> Latent Conflict	<i>Element 1</i> Antecedent Conditions	<i>Phase 1</i> Latent	<i>State 1</i> Potential Opposition
	<i>Stage 2</i> Perceived Conflict	<i>Element 2</i> Perceived Conflict	<i>Phase 2</i> Initiation	<i>Stage 2</i> Cognition and Personalization
	<i>Stage 3</i> Felt Conflict	<i>Element 3</i> Felt Conflict		
Integration	<i>Stage 4</i> Manifest Behavior	<i>Element 4</i> Manifest Behavior	<i>Phase 3</i> Balancing of Powers	<i>Stage 3</i> Behavior
	<i>Stage 5</i> Conflict Aftermath	<i>Element 5</i> Resolution or Suppression	<i>Phase 4</i> Balance of Powers	<i>Stage 4</i> Outcomes
		<i>Element 6</i> Aftermath	<i>Phase 5</i> Disruption	

Walton's Two-Phase Theory

This approach to outlining the process of conflict originates with Walton (1969) and is expanded to a three-phase approach by later researchers in the fields of management and communications (Papa & Papa, 1997; Cupach & Canary, 1997). While the two, eventually three, phases present an elegant simplicity, each phase encompasses many tasks. The phase labeled *differentiation* begins the process and involves raising issues, clarifying positions, pursuing the rationale for position, and acknowledging the severity of the differences. A cognitive process during *differentiation* is the personalization-depersonalization that occurs while clarifying issues and positions.

One enters the *integration* phase upon arriving at a depersonalized definition of the problem. The importance of the process of arriving at a mutually-defined problem statement is emphasized by the later researchers as a separate phase, called the *mutual problem description phase*. A key success factor in this phase is acknowledging relational interdependence as the parties seek to restructure the conflict situation (Folger, Poole, & Stutman, 2005). The *integration* phase is characterized ideally by acknowledging common ground, exploring options, and moving to solutions. Specific tasks revolve around communication strategies of displaying cooperation, gathering alternatives, evaluating solutions, selecting actions, and monitoring progress (Papa & Papa in Cupach & Canary, 1997). The difficult work of the *integration* phase is disrupted frequently by three actions: escalation, avoidance, and rigidity. This simple two-phase theory of *differentiation* and *integration* includes many cognitive processes in order to culminate in a resolved conflict.

Pondy's Five-Stage Model

This model is the basis for many future depictions of the conflict process. The *latent* stage is characterized by a sense of calm with potential sources for disruption just beneath the surface. These sources were presented in the Chapter 1 as conditions surrounding the disagreement including interdependence, differences in goal identification, and differences in methods for goal attainment, structural factors, and competition for resources. Stage two is *perceived conflict*, characterized by an initial awareness of difference by the involved parties. The primary action in this phase is an attempt to determine the causes of the differences. The conflict escalates into *felt conflict* and emotional responses dominate. The parties become polarized and assume protective behavior in order to further their positions on the issues.

The fourth stage is *manifest conflict* where the mechanisms of fighting may take many forms from open aggression to passive aggression. During this phase, the efficiency and effectiveness of the individuals, groups, or organizations are diminished. In time, the conflict proceeds to the *conflict aftermath*. This fifth stage is very important, as it sets the stage for how the parties will conduct future conflict situations. The aftermath is a primary predictor of how the perceived and felt conflict stages will be implemented in the inevitable future conflict situations (Pondy, 1967).

Filley's Six Elements of Conflict

While many of Filley's elements are similar to Pondy's stages, Filley expands the processes occurring within the elements (Filley, 1975). He applies social research to

solving problems within organizations, and his practical approach is cited in the literature of various disciplines including higher education (Holton, 1998), communications (Folger, Poole, & Stutman, 2005), organizational development (Isenhardt & Spangle, 2000), and counseling psychology (Heitler, 1990). Conflict is seen as a cyclical process beginning with *antecedent conditions* that are comparable to those mentioned in Pondy's initial stage of latent conflict. These *antecedent conditions* create the opportunities for conflicts to occur, based on the individuals involved, and lead directly to the next step of perceived or felt conflict.

Perceived conflict between individuals happens when they misperceive the antecedent conditions between them or fail to see the variety of options available to them in addressing the situation. In addition, a conflict could be perceived if it is based on antecedent conditions that really do not exist; the individuals involved have taken positions based on limited or erroneous information. Individuals may avoid conflict by ignoring the antecedent conditions either by suppressing them or by disregarding them. This step of perceived conflict involves cognitive processing that either creates or avoids a conflict behavior.

Felt conflict, or feelings associated with the conflict, is present simultaneously with the process of perceiving conflict based on the antecedent conditions. Personalizing or depersonalizing the situation is a major predictor of whether a full-fledged conflict erupts. In personalizing, one makes a judgment about the being of the other or his intentions rather than referring to his behavior as the object of disagreement. The personalities of the involved individuals also play a role in felt conflict, especially the tendency toward passivity or dominance. A greater probability of conflict exists when

individuals are similarly dominant or passive as opposed to a mixed dominant-passive relationship. Regardless, individuals may have an emotional sense of meaning and value for the relationship that manifests in trust and tends toward cooperative exchanges. These trusting relationships may prevent conflict even when the antecedent conditions warrant conflict. However, the lack of trust often ends in conflict despite the lack of actual antecedent conditions. Felt and perceived conflict form an iterative process that is essential to predicting how the actual behavioral set will proceed.

Filley calls the next element *manifest behavior* and includes behaviors that are blocking or problem-solving in nature. These behaviors are either programmed or not programmed, suggesting that facilitative behaviors or techniques can be learned. The behaviors at this stage frequently are culturally-based and learned at an early age. The norms of interactions within organizations and nations are evident in how conflict behavior is manifested and whether conflicts are resolved or suppressed. Filley, like Pondy, emphasizes the *conflict aftermath*, whereby the resulting outcome of the conflict becomes part of the antecedent conditions, perceptions and feelings for future conflicts. For example, if the conflict took a competitive turn resulting in winners and losers, the losers will be staged to win in the next interaction. In a compromise situation, neither party is completely satisfied and will have less trust in the future. A resolution, viewed as solving a problem, enables both parties to declare victory and future interactions have a higher probability of preventing manifest behaviors of a conflict (Filley, 1975).

Rummel's Five Phases of Conflict

Rummel (1975) studies conflict in the context of large group and international struggles to develop a phase theory of conflict. Rummel's phase theory begins with the *latent* conflict and moves through *initiation*, *balancing of powers*, *balance of power*, and *disruption*. There are infinite variations of physical, social, and cultural attributes, norms, and classes of people. These differences represent potential areas of conflict among people with disparate needs, traits, beliefs, and values. During the *latent* phase, people become aware of these differences through acculturation and life experience and form "an attitudinal lattice" (p. 267). These sets of attitudes result in sociocultural distances reflecting the potential for conflict based on opposing interests, capabilities, and expectations. Attitudes become activated by a situation where self interests are placed in mutually-perceived opposition, and the *initiation* phase begins.

The *initiation* phase includes creating the structures to oppose actively the target of the conflict. This phase involves preparing for the struggle by gathering resources and determining the rules of engagement. The third phase, the *balancing of power* phase, is where the complex behaviors of fighting occur, including three subphases: status quo testing, manifestations-of-power, and accommodations or force. Initially, there is a trial-and-error testing of the opponent to assert and determine future actions. These actions can be minor irritations or testing behaviors that do not lead to overt physical or psychological violence. At times, the conflict process may end at this point, if the parties determine that the risk of further engagement is too great, thus returning to the previous phase. Various clashes occur during the manifestations-of-power subphase involving noncoercive and coercive actions. Noncoercive actions lead to accommodation of the

parties, while coercive actions tend toward violent force. “Force is the final means of adjudicating opposing interests... Might may not make right, but it does decide rights” (Rummel, 1976, p. 278).

Phase Four is the *balance of power* phase where the parties come to a restructuring of the power between them resulting in a “structure of expectations” (p. 279). These expectations balance the interests, capabilities, and credibility of all parties and can be formal or informal. A new status quo is created and continues to require incremental adjustments as time passes setting the stage for the disruption phase.

Disruption does not appear congruent with the previously described elements of Filley, as it connotes an unstable state or lack of conclusion. Rummel suggests that conflict is ever present, and following Phase 5 the parties enter into the conflict helix, returning to previous phases depending on the type of disruption in Phase 5. This approach is similar to the “conflict spirals” described by Isenhardt and Spangle (2000). Since the process purports to include a more highly developed sequence of interactions as the phases are reenacted, Rummel views this process as a helix rather than a spiral or cycle.

Robbins’ Four-Stage Theory

The general theory presented by Robbins summarizes the previously discussed theories into four stages: the *potential for opposition, cognition and personalization, the behavior, and the outcome*. The *potential for opposition* is the same as the antecedent conditions or latent phases of previously discussed approaches with communication

processes, structural factors, and personal attributes forming the categories of variables that may lead to opposition between individuals or groups.

The second stage of *cognition and personalization* requires that the parties perceive a difference in the goals or approaches for attaining the goals. While this perception of difference may not lead to personal involvement in the form of anxiety, frustration, or hostility, it frequently does lead to emotional involvement in some form. Displays of oppositional behavior, ranging from subtle to explosive, signal the initiation of the third stage called *behavior*. This broad stage includes all forms of behavior related to the conflict including the expressions of disagreement (fights) and various moves to address the disagreement such as competition, collaboration, avoidance, accommodation, and compromise.

Finally, the *outcomes* of a conflict are achieved and are deemed either functional or dysfunctional. Robbins (2000) states that the functional outcomes are:

“constructive when they improve the quality of decisions, stimulate creativity and innovation, encourage interest and curiosity among group members, provide the medium through which problems can be aired and tensions released, and foster environment of self-evaluation and improvement” (p.174).

Dysfunctional outcomes, on the other hand, create greater dissatisfaction and lead to the ultimate failure of future group activity.

Three Perspectives

A perspective is a way of viewing a phenomenon with accompanying assumptions. According to Folger, Poole, and Stutman (2005), “a good perspective is one that enables the viewer to explain the product or process in question and act on the explanation” (p. 40). I identify three perspectives in order to examine conflicts from multiple dimensions — the perspectives of individual reaction, social interaction, and organizational influence. I select a theory to represent of each perspective including attribution, equity, and interactional theory, respectively. These theories are used to explicate more fully the roles that cognitive processes play by participants in conflict situations.

Individual Reaction Perspective: Attribution Theory

Attribution theory, a branch of social psychology pioneered by Heider (1958), explains how one understands the actions of others in order to determine how to behave in a socially acceptable manner. The theory is referred to as *naïve psychology* since the emphasis is on the layman’s, not the professional psychologist’s, attempt to develop meaning for interactions in daily life. The focus of attribution theory is on dyadic interactions or small units rather than on group structures. Jones, et al. (1971), Ross (1977), and Sillars (1980) have expanded this theory beyond the naïve status to a theory that has applicability for studying interpersonal conflict.

There are three broad assumptions of attribution theory. First, a person seeks to assign a cause for feelings and behaviors resulting from interactions that occur with others and will then seek information in order to make a determination of cause.

Individuals use a systematic process in this determination of cause. Finally, the resulting cause plays an important role in subsequent interpersonal interactions (Jones, et al., 1971). These assumptions are operationalized to include three cognitive processes that are relevant to the interpersonal conflict situation. The processes are causal judgment, social inference, and prediction of outcomes. One attempts to determine the cause of an action, identify the intention, and finally decide on a probable behavior (Ross, 1977).

A key concept of attribution theory is the immediate area surrounding individuals (which include proximal stimuli) called their *life space* (Heider, 1958). This area can be imagined as an invisible bubble encompassing each person and object that becomes familiar through perception and memory. The ability to make sense of what is within one's life space is considered a sign of well-being resulting in personal power. As new people or objects are encountered, they are brought into the life space and matched with the pre-existing standards in a process of ordering and classifying called "attribution" (Heider, 1958, p. 296). Since the attribution is based on an individual's internal knowledge of acceptable fit with past experiences, the potential exists for distortion and bias in establishing interpersonal relationships. The determination of consonance and dissonance plays an essential role in determining future actions. If there is an acceptable match, the person or object becomes part of the life space with either a favorable (consonant) or unfavorable (dissonant) reaction. This entire attribution process results in a change in the *life space* and environment. Continuous change is a desired state as it populates the *life space* with a rich mixture of relationships for future use. The level of attributional complexity is hence a function of developmental maturity and experiences.

While the *life space* can be viewed as the environment of an individual, in attribution theory the environment is depicted as a larger sphere that includes many individual *life spaces* involving a complex causal network. Balance or harmony exists when the *life spaces* within the environment have similar valences or signs, either positive or negative. Conversely, conflict or disharmony results when individuals with different signs are in close proximity. Greater interaction among individuals, which may result from closer proximity, is another factor leading to harmony among individuals. As individuals become familiar with each other, they become interdependent, thus leading to a tendency toward a balanced state in human relationships (Heider, 1958).

The primary concern of attribution theory is individual people, even though the theory recognizes the existence of things, events, and other people within the life space. The interpersonal exchange is called *mediation* and includes developing a schema with properties such as motives, affects, beliefs, and former actions. Since the mediation involves perceptual styles and misperceptions, attribution theory pays special attention to the psychology of perception. Perception is a major factor in establishing control of one's *life space* since control comes from direct observation. Given direct observation, immediate evaluation of what is perceived occurs, and this judgment is usually favorable or unfavorable. A neutral reaction is rare. Upon perceiving, an individual is motivated to act by initiating communication with the other party. The mediation is in effect and the *life space* is changing (Heider, 1958).

Another psychological construct incorporated in attribution theory is motivation and how it leads to action. A person expects an action to occur if the other person has the ability to carry out the action. If the action does not happen, additional activities are

initiated such as changing the expectation, removing obstacles, or teaching (Heider, 1958).

Heider's work in attribution theory also studied the motivational processes of desires and pleasure. Desires are personal wishes, and they do not necessarily lead to actions involving pleasure. This desire toward pleasure may result in dissonance within the *life space* given preexisting standards and desires. The standards within the life space may be reevaluated resulting in a restoration of harmony. Two variables in the desire and pleasure drive are the value, or intensity, of the desire and the psychological distance between the person and the desired object. The psychological distance can be manipulated in interpersonal relationships in order to support or hinder the fulfillment of pleasure. This phenomenon is important in considering the mediation process that results in lasting meaning within an individual's life space and the effect this could have on another. The attribution of enjoyment, or lack thereof, has a high valence in the prediction of future action (Heider, 1958).

Individual values have a role in attribution theory as individuals invoke concepts such as justice, duty, and gratitude when internalizing the behaviors of others. A person establishes a *cognitive objectivity of values* by creating a consensus through interactions with others. Without a consensus, the person reevaluates previously held values or discredits the disagreeing member. The benefits and harms of each action are assessed in relation to the individual's overall life space. This struggle to maintain one's cognitive objectivity of values is a vital force in reacting to the events of life that do not conform to one's personal wishes and welfare (Heider, 1958).

Heider (1958) applies attribution theory to one's work life, the specific use of activities to earn a living. Working is seen as the opposite of playing and has psychological importance beyond simply producing an income. The amount of work one does should be equal to that of another with similar energy and abilities. When an inequality of work is perceived, individuals react with emotions of envy, sympathy, or pity. Attribution theory not only describes the interpersonal relationship, but it also allows one to predict and control the behaviors of others. The complexity of work life is therefore fertile ground for the application of this theory.

Attribution theory has been applied to interpersonal conflicts in relationships that represent a close association between two individuals. Sillars (1980) studied college roommates and found that strategies for engaging in conflict were based on the attributions about the roommate's intent to cooperate, acceptance of responsibility for the situation (locus of responsibility), and whether the conflict is based on a temporary situation or misperception. Fincham, et al. (1990) draws connections between attributions and satisfaction in marriage relationships. Sillars and Scott (1983) researched intimate relationships including married couples, parents and children, and close friends. While one would expect greater congruence in attributing cause or intent to behaviors with long-term, close interaction, this is not the case. Suggested explanations for this lack of congruence are familiarity leading to overconfidence in prediction, emotionality leading to reduced perception, and interdependence leading to attribution bias.

Attribution bias refers to the phenomenon of individual differences in perceiving the same event. Since perception is a primary method of data collection for creating an attribution, differing views of the event represent a major contributor to potential conflict

(Jones, et al. 1971). Due to attribution bias, the meaning of an event requires the consideration of the context of the event. Examples of attribution bias include Thomas and Pondy's (1977) findings from examining how executives in a large federal agency handled conflict. Three quarters of the executives attributed competitive intent to the conflict to the other person, compared to 21 percent who attributed such intent to themselves. Similar findings are seen in Sillars' (1980) study of roommates in which roommates viewed the other as more responsible for the conflict than were they. Reasons provided for attribution bias are ignorance of the other's reasons, lack of self-awareness, hypersensitivity to uncooperative behavior, and cognitive dissonance (Thomas & Pondy, 1977).

Sillars and Scott (1983) present contexts in which bias is most likely to occur and thus affect the attribution process. These contexts are common in academic settings and include the presence of strong positive or negative emotions, highly stressful interactions, dissimilar attitudes, personal change, and ambiguous issues. The nature of collegiality within the academy is similar to that of a family with long-term, intimate relationships. The concept of a *life space* surrounding faculty and students and mediation with a distal environment is descriptive of the university setting.

Attribution theory is useful in identifying cognitive processes used by faculty in interpersonal conflict situations. The *life space* concept informs the contextual aspects and the antecedent conditions present in covert conflicts. The *life space* concept provides a visual dimension to the cognitive process of personalization. Personalization may involve the attribution process of matching novel events and people with pre-existing standards, to establish a fit with the context and antecedent conditions. Causal judgment

and social inference are descriptive of the stage theories where covert conflict escalates to overt conflict. The extensive reference to perception, motivation, and values, as essential cognitive processes in attribution theory, provide other strong links to the phase theories of conflict.

Attribution bias is another essential cognitive process related to conflict situations and is most evident as a cognitive process that precedes overt conflict. Attribution bias results from differences in perception, ignorance of the other person, insensitivity, lack of self-awareness, and cognitive dissonance (Thomas & Pondy, 1977).

Social Interaction Perspective: Equity Theory

The social interaction perspective includes the concept of a social exchange involving the reciprocal transferring of some object or activity between individuals. The theories posit that a basic human tendency is to seek resources for oneself from others. If this exchange occurs in a mutually acceptable manner, the interpersonal relationship flourishes and both parties benefit. Conflict results when the exchange is considered inequitable by either or both members (Blau, 1964).

Various typologies of exchanges are described in the literature. Roloff (1981) presents four types of exchanges that may not be mutually exclusive. An *economic exchange* involves an impersonal, specific obligation that carries a timeframe for repayment. This transaction usually involves bargaining for terms of repayment and may involve the legal system. *Social exchange* is developed without bargaining and based extensively on trust and gratitude. Social exchange usually involves a general obligation

without a timeframe for repayment, and the value of the exchange is based on the status or characteristics of the persons involved. Both economic and social exchanges may be considered restricted or generalized. A *restricted exchange* limits the benefits to the dyad while a generalized exchange benefits more people. The *generalized exchange* often involves a chain or group-benefit process that may obscure the original source of the benefit.

Two other forms of exchanges are described as *negotiated exchanges* and *reciprocal exchanges* (Emerson, 1981; Molm, Peterson, & Takahashi, 1999). In *negotiated exchanges* the benefits and costs are jointly agreed upon by individuals and could be depicted as including Roloff's economic and restricted exchanges. *Reciprocal exchanges* are more closely linked to Roloff's social and generalized exchange categories and are particularly salient for examining interpersonal conflicts. In a reciprocal exchange, individuals deliver benefits to another along with associated costs in a more diffuse manner over a period of time. The sense of fairness differs between these two forms of exchanges.

Molm, Collett, and Schaefer (2006) explore the person's sense of fairness based on negotiated and reciprocal exchanges using a controlled laboratory experiment to generate data for causal modeling. Their conclusions support the notion that conflict is present in all experiences of social exchanges. The exchanges related to reciprocal exchanges are considered fairer than those of the negotiated exchanges, because negotiations appear more competitive and less based on the good faith efforts of colleagues. While negotiated exchanges may appear more structurally fair, individuals

ascribe greater fairness to the interpersonal aspects of a reciprocal exchange with colleagues.

I select equity theory as a representative of the social exchange theories, because it integrates the various social exchange theories resulting in a general theory of social interaction. The vocabulary of equity theory is similar to that of the other exchange theories using terms such as rewards, costs, assets and liabilities. The purpose of equity theory is to determine what is fair in a world of multiple inequities, where societies are changing their values and methods for obtaining wealth (Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978).

There are four interlocking propositions in equity theory. The first one is a basic statement about the nature of humans. It states that “individuals will attempt to maximize their outcomes, where outcomes equal rewards minus costs” (Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978, p. 6). It is human nature to seek the desired needs and wants with as little investment as possible. One will act to maximize personal outcomes even if it involves inequitable behavior towards others. In essence, the theory states that individuals will act on motivations of self interest.

The second proposition relates to social interaction within groups. Groups have the capacity to maximize the rewards for each member by developing systems for equitably distributing resources. The group leadership must convince the members to accept this apportionment of resources through processes that often include compromises to the self-interest proposition. Since this system of equitable distribution of resources creates an orderly and peaceful society, members will usually reward those who conform to the system and punish those who disavow the system. Societies have differing

definitions of what constitutes an equitable system; however, there are general principles that transcend societal differences. These general principles are that the more a person contributes to the situation, the more she should profit. Also, the context of the situation must be taken into account when calculating the outcome. In good times, large contributions warrant large profits. The losses should be determined in proportion to the contribution so that the largest contribution warrants a lower proportional loss. One should get out what one contributes, in times of no gain. Fairness or equity of rewards is thus defined as proportional to the amount invested (Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978).

Proposition three states that “when individuals find themselves participating in inequitable relationships, they will become distressed. The more inequitable the relationship, the more distress individuals will feel” (Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978, p. 6). In an employment situation, inequity often involves salary earned for work provided. This proposition suggests that employees feeling unfairly compensated will experience distress whether they are underpaid or overpaid. Employees will then act to rectify the perceived inequity, thus decreasing their distress.

The fourth proposition states that not only will the individual work to restore equity (eliminate distress), but the extent of effort expended toward restoring equity is in proportion to the degree of inequity perceived and distress felt. In other words, a distressed person will work harder to restore fairness than one experiencing a slight annoyance. Equity is restored by adjusting the actual or the psychological elements of a situation. The actual elements include the participant’s concrete contributions (inputs)

and rewards (outcomes), whereas the psychological elements involve the meanings attributed to the inputs and outcomes.

An essential question in equity theory is, “How do we determine what is fair?” The theory refers to two forms of social justice: equal justice and proportional or distributed justice. The rewards are distributed equally among individuals in equal justice, whereas in proportional justice, the merits of individuals are taken into account in determining the distribution of rewards. While both forms are used in determining fair distributions, society has tended toward patterns of use. Proportional distribution involves more complex cognitive processing, thus adults use proportional more often than children in their daily dealings with others. Equal distribution is used when time is short, it is a onetime only event, it costs more to negotiate, and rewards are small. Proportional distribution usually involves much time to implement and results in setting precedence for future distributions within the culture.

When distributing rewards for group performance the two forms of social justice affect behavior in different ways. Equal justice will promote group harmony and collegial exchanges. Proportional justice, with its emphasis on merit, fosters individual performance and excellence. In order to attract inputs into an equitable exchange relationship, the rewards must match the type of input sought. Rewards based on equity (all labors paid the same) will be appropriate for labor that is basic humanity-oriented. People are needed for their basic skills. For higher level inputs such as specific skills, attributes, political acumen, and social/family connections, the proportional justice approach is required (Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978). According to equity theory,

the inputs needed and rewards provided by the academy are primarily of the distributed justice form.

Society is the basic determinant of who gets the rewards and what factors into their apportioning. According to the self-interest proposition of equity theory, each person views his situation as the most worthy of maximum reward. Yet equal justice is not the preferred mode of distribution of rewards for more complex inputs and resulting contributions. Powerful individuals and coalitions emerge to create a system of distribution of wealth along with justification for the system using proportional justice. Formal laws and norms follow to ensure that some form of equity exists within the society. People will accept this system and work within its structures as long as the power base remains stable and peace ensues. A disruption in the power structure may produce an opportunity for other groups to gain a more profitable position resulting in unrest or outright conflict. This situation is common with the entrance of a new president or academic leader to a university. Various constituent groups form to seek a greater share of the distributed justice in resource allocation and rewards.

A more recent application of equity theory includes the variable of *equity sensitivity* that accounts for individual differences (King & Miles, 1994). Nauman, Minsky, and Sturman (2002) extend the notion of equity sensitivity to include the concept of *entitlement* and posit three types of individuals: *benevolents* who prefer to contribute more than they expect to receive, *equity sensitives* who expect equal benefits for their outputs, and *entitleds* who require more benefits for their inputs. The concept of psychological entitlement is an extension of the self interest cognitive process and has been observed in faculty members. As Campbell, et al. state, "Psychological entitlement

is clearly perceived to be a curse potentially affecting a wide range of individuals” (Campbell, Bonacci, Shelton, Exline & Bushman, 2004, p. 30).

Organizational Influence Perspective: Interactional Theory

The organizational influence perspective considers the behavior of individuals and groups within the context of organizational life. Political approaches involving power and influence are central constructs in this perspective, in which efforts to affect the behavior of others are centered on negotiation, coalition formation, and consensus-building processes. The organizational behavior theories tend to be more general, and thus inclusive of the entire conflict situation in addressing large scale and long term approaches. I use interactional theory to represent this perspective as it has greater applicability to individual relationships of faculty within an academic setting.

Interactional theory emphasizes the meaning and values used to guide assimilated behavior within a stable, institutionalized way of being until a future conflict disrupts the peace (Strauss, 1978). Interactional theory emphasizes the importance of the combination of persons and situations. While the measurement of individual and group variables is well developed and based primarily on studies of individual differences and group characteristics, situational variables are less developed and have traditionally been identified in terms of job task (O’Reilly, 1977; Miner, 1987), profession (Holland, 1985), and organizational characteristics (Jones, 1983). This historical lack of specificity in the situational variables and comparability with the person variables has resulted in inconclusive findings in testing interactivity (Chatman, 1989).

What is known about interactivity is that people actively influence situations. Individuals choose situations for interaction that are compatible with their strengths or interests and perform optimally in these self-selected environments (Emmons & Diener, 1986). Individuals also modify the situation to become more congruent with their personal characteristics. For example, employees influence their work positions more than the work positions change the employee. A more intellectually flexible person is likely to add complexity to her job requirements, which then becomes part of future expectations of the job (Kohn & Schooler, 1978).

The majority of research involving interactional theory is in the context of human resources development and understanding personnel selection and workforce or vocational decisions. An examination of the situational variables at the organizational level, as opposed to the dyadic or group level, presents a more complex and less developed field of study. The Attraction-Selection-Attrition model (Schneider, 1987) conceptualizes the interaction of people within an organization and how each person changes to become more similar to the others in the organization. Austin (1991) suggests that faculty interact within four primary cultures: “the academic profession, the discipline, the academy as an organization within a national system, and the specific type of institution” (p.62). Subsequently, Holton (1998) provides the basis for further research on the interactions of people and conflict situations in higher educational institutions by explicating the environment of a college or university along with roles of faculty, students, and administrators.

A model of person-organization fit developed by Chatman (1989) is useful for conceptualizing the complex dynamic of the interaction of persons and situations. The

variables used to represent the person and the organizational aspects in this model must be comparable and mutually relevant. Chatman uses the values of individuals and the values and norms of organizations as the fundamental characteristics for determining behavior in the model. The operational definition and measurement of norms and values, both in individuals and organizations, are well developed (Katz & Kahn, 1978). A Q-sort methodology is used to compare the values of individuals and organizations enabling measurement of intensity of the values and how the values change over time. Outcomes of this approach suggest that high levels of person-organizational fit are favorable for creating an atmosphere where conflict situations are harmoniously and effectively addressed. Yet conformity and low innovation are negative aspects of high person-organizational fit and may interfere with the individuals' or organizations' future growth and development. There appears to be an optimal range of fit for effective functioning of all parties in organizational life (Chatman, 1989).

The interactional theory emphasizes the dynamic nature of conflict by paying attention to the context and antecedent conditions of the conflict situation in addition to the cognitive processes of the individuals involved in conflict. Faculty members reside within departments, schools, colleges, and institutions with specific cultures, norms, and values for appropriate behaviors. While attribution and equity theories emphasize the human interactions of individuals, the interactional theory demands a global understanding of the environmental considerations of the academy. The notion of a person-organization fit is a useful approach for extending the exploration of the role of faculty's cognitive processes in overt and covert conflict situations.

Conflict within the Academy

The focus of my study is on interpersonal conflict between faculty members within liberal arts colleges. In this part of the literature review, I discuss faculty-to-faculty conflict as an aspect of academic life. I then explore the role of the dean as an academic administrator responsible for facilitating a culture conducive to learning and the creation of knowledge.

The Role of Faculty in Interpersonal Conflict

While conflict is inevitable whenever individuals work together in close proximity, the nature of academic work and the setting of the academy create a fertile ground for disagreements among faculty. Berryman-Fink (1998) presents the dimensions of the academic culture that contribute to conflict including the expectations of shared governance for decision-making, high levels of autonomy, longevity based on the tenure system of employment, and propensity for critical thinking and debate. Added to these are the structural elements of loyalty to departments and disciplines, diversity of roles (teaching, research, service), and a peer-based supervisory system (department chairs).

Crews and West (2006) suggest that conflict within the academy is more of an interpersonal matter, rather than a matter of culture or situation, as explicated by Berryman-Fink. Crews and West differentiate academic integrity from professional integrity. Professional integrity emphasizes the relationship among faculty and other colleagues in the institution. The lack of collegiality is seen in petty jealousies, competition for resources, erratic productivity, and personality clashes. Crews and West state that “some may argue that the worst enemy an academic can have is another

academic” (p.144). An extreme form of this personal disrespect is discussed by Cassell (2011) in the form of academic bullying.

Personal disrespect, in the form of incivility, among faculty continues to emerge within the academic literature. The academic environment fosters and expects an exchange of diverse perspectives as part of the process of teaching and creating knowledge. The concept of respect for colleagues and their perspectives takes on an almost hallowed tone within the academy (Gappa, Trice & Austin; 2007). Twale & De Luca (2008) emphasize the nature of academic work as a prime cause of conflicts. These aspects include the use of confidential committees for key decisions regarding faculty status, the rise of funding concerns that fuel competition for resources, and the changing demographics of the professoriate.

Role of Deans in Interpersonal Conflict

Tucker and Byron (1987) describe the work of a dean as “dove of peace intervening among warring factions ... dragons driving away internal or external forces that threaten the values of system ... and diplomats guiding, inspiring, and encouraging people who live and work in [the college]” (p. ix). Deans serve as arbitrators in many of the faculty-to-faculty conflicts. Wolverton, Wolverton, and Gmelch (1999) and later Montez, Wolverton, and Gmelch (2003) examine the various aspects of “role ambiguity” and “role conflict” (p.244) associated with the primary function of a dean to manage academic personnel, specifically the faculty. Case studies have examined the effectiveness of deans in promoting a “conflict positive” environment (Gallant, 2007;

Steele, 2008). Academic administrators in the dean role have a key responsibility for maintaining the integrity of the learning community.

Summary

I represent interpersonal conflict using a conceptual framework derived from the phase theories of conflict. In this chapter, I compared and contrasted the five phase theories of Walton (1969), Pondy (1967), Filley (1975), Rummel (1976), and Robbins (2000). These phase theories describe a process of moving from covert and overt conflict. I then examined attribution, equity, and interactional theories as representatives of the individual reaction, social interaction, and organizational influence perspectives respectively. These theories provide the background for identifying the roles of cognitive processes activated by faculty in interpersonal conflicts. Finally, I provide an overview of conflict within the academy as represented by the key actors in my study: faculty and deans.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the research design used to address the research question: *What roles do cognitive processes play in covert and overt interpersonal conflicts between faculty members at private, liberal arts colleges?* I organize this chapter with sections on the conceptual framework followed by the methodology. In the initial section, I provide a conceptual framework derived from five phase theories that illustrate the covert and overt forms of conflict. I use nine cognitive processes identified from attribution, equity, and interactional theories. The methodology section includes descriptions of the research design with rationale for its use, the setting, the participants, the instrumentation, and the procedures for data collection and analysis.

Conceptual Framework

I derived the conceptual framework for my research from the previously presented five phase theories of Walton (1969), Pondy (1967), Filley (1975), Rummel (1976), and Robbins (2000). I selected these five theories for comparison as they represent a longitudinal and multidisciplinary overview of conflict and are cited frequently in the conflict literature. These various representations can be synthesized into a conceptual framework by examining the utility of each for depicting the conflict situation. I selected descriptors for the stages, from the five phase theories, that provide the greatest clarity at each point in the conflict process. The resulting framework provides a mechanism for

focusing my research toward an aspect of conflict that is not thoroughly developed in theory or application, that is, the role of conceptual processes (see Figure 1).

The conflict situation is set in a dynamic context that may include several simultaneously occurring conflicts. The antecedent conditions reside in this context and may or may not proceed to the level of cognition by the participants in the conflict. The initial cognitive processing phase includes both perceived and felt conflicts identified by Pondy (1967) and Filley (1975), the initiation of conflict identified by Rummel (1976), and cognition with personalization identified by Robbins (2000). These cognitive processes lead to a state of covert conflict. Individuals may move in and out of covert conflict as antecedent conditions or the overall context change.

A second set of cognitive processes emerges to trigger the behaviors of overt conflict. According to the phase theories of conflict, participants in the conflict cannot return directly to covert conflict. They must initiate actions to address the overt conflict, including suppression, settlement, or resolution. The participants then return to the antecedent conditions or the initial cognitive processing that represent the aftermath stages of Pondy (1967) and Filley (1975). Rummel's (1976) disruption process, with continuous conflict helixes, is part of the overall context wherein each conflict situation resides.

In order to identify the role of cognitive processes used by faculty, I included two phases in the framework that specify cognitive, rather than behavioral, functions. Theories from the three perspectives of individual reaction, social interaction, and organizational influence form a structure for identifying the cognitive functions that represent maintaining covert conflict and moving toward overt conflict.

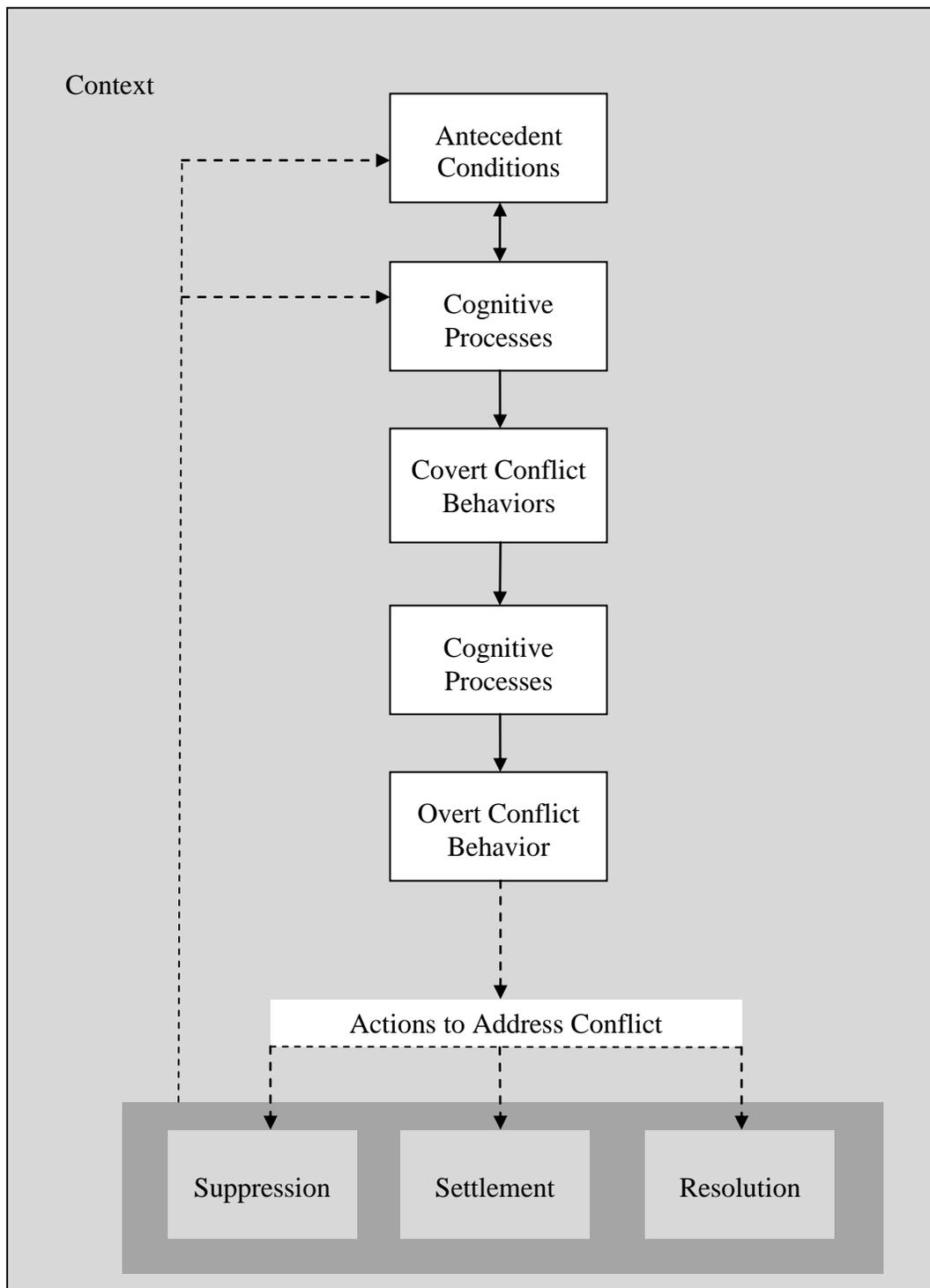


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework: The Conflict Situation

These nine cognitive functions are cognitive dissonance, social inference, prediction of outcomes, assessment of status, perception of self interest, evaluation of fairness, perception of inequality, assessment of congruence with departmental norms and culture, and awareness of congruence with institutional mission and values (see Table 2).

Attribution theory, used to explicate the individual reaction perspective, presents three conditions that are the basis for the theory's applicability to a situation. These basic conditions are changes from the usual activities of life, presence of strong emotions, and personality traits. The basic conditions for use of attribution theory can be incorporated into the antecedent conditions phase of the conceptual framework. The three cognitive processes from attribution theory are defined in Table 2.

I used *equity theory* to identify the cognitive processes associated with the social interaction perspective. The theory's emphasis on determining fairness provides a values framework that included a consideration of societal expectations and rewards. The four interlocking propositions of equity theory (see Chapter 2, p. 28-30) provide a cognitive structure whose elements are human motivations, social expectations, distress, and comparisons. The four cognitive processes identified from equity theory are defined in Table 2.

Finally, I used *interactional theory* to determine cognitive processes related to the influence of life within an organization. Interactional theory emphasizes the meaning and values used to guide behavior. Individuals cognitively assess the congruence of their actions with the norms and culture of a proximal unit, the academic department, and the overarching institutional mission and values.

Table 2: Definitions of Nine Cognitive Processes

<i>Cognitive Process</i>	<i>Definition</i>
<i>From Attribution Theory:</i>	
1. Cognitive dissonance	“An unpleasant psychological state [in two or more individuals] resulting from inconsistencies between ... elements [expressed in their respective] cognitive systems.” (VandenBos, 2007, p. 189, Folger, et al., 2005, p. 52)
2. Social inference	“Drawing conclusions about individuals or social groups based on a set of underlying premises.” (Beike & Sherman, 1994, p. 209)
3. Prediction of outcomes	“An attempt to foretell what will happen in a particular case, generally on the basis of past instances or accepted principles.” (VandenBos, 2007, p. 721)
<i>From Equity Theory:</i>	
4. Assessment of status	One compares his employment status [longevity and tenure] with that of the other party. (Walster, et al., 1978)
5. Perception of self interest	“The process or result of becoming aware of one’s personal advantage or benefit by means of the senses.” (VandenBos, 2007, p. 683, 831)
6. Evaluation of fairness	“A careful examination or overall appraisal of something to determine its worth, value, or desirability.” (VandenBos, 2007, p. 347)
7. Perception of inequality	“The process or result of becoming aware of [an unequal accounting of rewards earned for investment contributed] by means of the senses.” (VandenBos, 2007, p. 683)

Table 2: Definitions of Nine Cognitive Processes (continued)

<i>Cognitive Process</i>	<i>Definition</i>
<i>From Interactional Theory:</i>	
8. Assessment of congruence with departmental norms and culture.	“An identification of cognitive consistency, agreement, or conformity with an accepted standard or position.” (VandenBos, 2007, p. 217)
9. Awareness of congruence with institutional mission and values	“A consciousness of internal or external events or experiences that is consistent with an established purpose or principle.” (VandenBos, 2007, p. 96)

Methodology

Though the literature suggests a variety of cognitive processes used in covert and overt conflicts, there is a lack of specificity regarding the role of cognitive processes in keeping a conflict covert or engaging in the public display of overt conflict. In the literature, cognitive processes are expressed in terms of theories associated with interpersonal interactions, but not directly connected to a conflict situation. The research design proceeded from the derived conceptual framework (see Figure 1).

I used a qualitative approach to determine the role played by cognitive processes in covert and overt conflicts. The criteria for selecting qualitative methodology are discussed widely (Patton, 2002; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006; Glesne, 2006; Creswell, 2007). These criteria include data collection reflective of the natural setting, words used as the data source, a recursive data analysis process, emergent design specifications, and a holistic view of the social phenomena.

While I used a qualitative approach to investigate the role of cognition in conflict situations, the underlying assumptions stem from both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The use of a conceptual framework and research question to explicate phases of the conflict situation connotes the positivism represented by the quantitative approach; yet, the postmodernism of qualitative designs is reflected in the suggestion of social construction of meaning and values in the conflict situation. The acknowledged complexity of the conflict situation and the use of multiple perspectives (individual reaction, social interaction, and organizational influence) in my investigation recommended a qualitative approach (Fraenkel, 2006). Creswell (2007) provides a

justification for this combination of approaches with his use of paradigms within qualitative research that span a wide spectrum. Accordingly, this research used a post-positivist paradigm or worldview, thus centering this research within a qualitative approach with a relatively scientific schema for the research design. I used the structured, qualitative analysis approach of Miles and Huberman (1994) to conduct this study, including the development of a semi-structured interview instrument and analysis through cross-case displays for describing and explaining the data.

Setting

I selected the private, liberal arts college sector of higher education, because its institutions tend to be less-widely studied than are the larger research universities. Due to the relatively small size of the institutions, faculty in liberal arts colleges tend to know their colleagues, administrators, and students in a more familiar way than do faculty in larger research institutions. Teaching and advising students are their primary focus. This familiarity provides a ready source of information regarding faculty conflicts as reported by deans of the schools.

I sought liberal arts institutions that were similar in size and mission. My institutional selection criteria included colleges that have at least four schools representing the traditional liberal arts and professional disciplines, an administrative structure with deans overseeing the schools, and a nation-wide geographic representation. I also sought colleges that were accessible to me for data collection.

The five liberal arts colleges included in my research are private, not-for-profit institutions. The colleges are part of a global system that is faith-based and purports a

charism of student-centered teaching that serves underserved populations. They are relatively similar in size with fewer than 2,500 traditional students and 150 tenured faculty members. Each college has four to five constituent schools representing the disciplines of the traditional liberal arts and professional areas such as education, engineering, nursing and business. An administrator, with the title of Dean, oversees the administrative functioning of each school. The institutions are geographically dispersed throughout the United States with two colleges in the East and one college in each of the Southern, Midwestern, and Western regions of the country.

Participants

Patton (2002) suggests the use of a purposive sample in qualitative research in order to generate “information-rich cases” (p. 46); therefore, I selected a group of participants based on their potential to experience and reflect on a variety of conflict situations. The participants are mid-level academic administrators with the title of “dean” who have had at least three years of service in their current positions. The participants have responsibilities within the academic arena of the institution, as opposed to the student services or executive administrative arenas, and have daily contact with faculty, students, and peer administrators. Table 3 provides a demographic perspective of the participants by disciplinary area and gender. The participants were dispersed geographically throughout the United States including four deans in the East, five deans in the South, four deans in the Midwest, and three deans in the West.

Table 3: Demographic Perspective of Participants

<i>Disciplinary Area</i>	<i>Gender</i>		<i>Total</i>
	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	
Arts and Sciences	1	5	6
Business	3	1	4
Education	2	1	3
Engineering	0	1	1
Nursing	2	0	2
<i>Total</i>	8	8	16

Since the data are analyzed in terms of number of cases described, rather than the number of participants, a small number of highly qualified participants is preferable to a large number with unknown experience (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Sixteen deans met the selection criteria, and each dean provided two case descriptions of faculty-to-faculty conflict, resulting in 32 cases descriptions. I acknowledge that having a dean provide two cases of conflict may have produced overlapping perspectives, resulting in a lack of independent representations of covert and overt cases. Yet I wanted to elicit a comparison between overt and covert cases by the deans. This comparison provided another lens for determining differences in the role of cognitive processes between covert and overt interpersonal conflicts.

Instrumentation

Miles and Huberman (1994) recommend a well-structured interview protocol for research involving multiple cases with cross-case comparison. I followed the detailed approaches to instrument development described by Patton (2002), Glesne (2006), and Corbin and Strauss (2008) in creating my semi-structured interview protocol. I conducted a pilot study of this instrument with two academic administrators, not included in the study, who met the selection criteria for participants. The pilot study tested whether the items provided sufficient stimulus for generating “rich data” and a capacity for comparisons across cases. I made modifications based on the pilot. Appendix A displays the interview protocol.

My questions were designed to encourage the participants to describe and reflect upon the overt and covert cases of conflict. I began with general descriptive questions in

order to elicit the context of the conflict and the behaviors of the faculty members involved. I ordered the cases with overt conflict preceding the covert conflicts as one can often describe more easily the public or outright manifestation of interpersonal conflicts. This sequencing created a means to become familiar with the participants and their methods of expression prior to requesting data on the more subtle case of covert conflict. I provided a list of prompts, generated from the conceptual framework and list of cognitive processes, to use as follow-up questions, if needed, to elicit greater depth of description. Glesne (2006) suggests that “for qualitative inquiry, the interview is rightly conceived as an occasion for depth probes — for getting to the bottom of things. By so doing, you do justice to the complexity of your topic” (p. 96). My prompts were used only if the participants did not mention the item in their case descriptions, and the items facilitated a comparison between cases.

As a summary and to facilitate a deeper analysis of the cases by the deans, I asked each dean to compare the two cases. I intended to use the data from this summative question to validate the differences that I observed when analyzing the case descriptions. I sought to determine if the participants saw similarities and differences in the role of cognitive processes as conflicts escalated from covert to overt interpersonal conflicts.

Procedures for Data Collection and Analysis

I completed the University of Minnesota Institutional Review Board process for a study in the Exempt Category #2 and gained approval prior to any data collection (see Appendix B). This approval included the permission to record the interviews. In this section, I discuss the process of selecting participants, followed by the conduct of the

interviews and data recording procedures. The analysis process includes a description of my coding processes and reliability checking. Finally I describe the presentation of the data in Chapter 4.

Selection of participants

I generated a list of deans from the public websites of five liberal arts colleges meeting my institutional selection criteria. I researched the public websites to verify that the deans met my selection criteria of being in the position of dean for at least 3 years. This search yielded 19 individuals meeting the criteria for inclusion. I sent electronically an invitation to participate to each of these 19 deans. I followed up with email and telephone calls to obtain interviews with 16 deans. I made arrangements for a recorded telephone call to each dean and sent each participant the consent form and interview questions prior to the scheduled interview.

Conduct of the interviews and data recording

I conducted the interviews by phone using researcher notes and audio tapes, with the respondent's expressed permission, for accurate representation. The interviews were conducted over a nine months (June, 2010 through February, 2011) including a gap of four months when the participants were not available for interviews. The tapes were transcribed by a professional transcriber within two weeks. After checking for accuracy of the transcriptions, I destroyed the taped conversations. I compiled the transcriptions along with my notes and identifiers in paper and electronic files secured by physical locks and passwords, respectively.

Coding processes and reliability

While several approaches exist for structuring qualitative data analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 2008; Wolcott, 1994; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002; Glesne, 2006; Creswell, 2007), all follow the basic structure of data reduction through coding, combining codes into categories or themes, and displaying the findings often with comparisons and contrasts. I use this general approach for my analysis of the data representing 32 cases of conflict obtained from the 16 school deans.

I created what Miles and Huberman (1994) refer to as “a provisional ‘start list’ of codes prior to fieldwork” (p. 58) from my conceptual framework and the attribution, equity, and interactional theories. My initial coding structure included a set of main themes: the conflict situation (SIT), antecedent conditions (ANT), individual reaction or attribution theory (ATT), social exchange or equity theory (EQU), and organizational influence or interactional theory (INT). As the interview transcriptions were completed, I coded the cases of covert and overt conflicts using the original list of codes and the table function in Microsoft Word©.

I then created subthemes (Miles & Huberman, 1994) or axial codes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to represent the components and cognitive processes expressed in the main themes. When I encountered fragments of the interview data that could relate to more than one cognitive process, I used the code that most clearly illustrated the cognitive process definitions. On the initial four transcriptions, I compared my coding at the subtheme level with the codes of a second coder. I revised the description of the codes, following discussions of our inconsistencies, to be more precise in identifying the

cognitive process. After these initial revisions, I completed the coding of all 32 cases of conflict without further revisions to the codes (see Appendix C).

I conducted a reliability check of eight cases (25 percent of the total cases) with a second researcher. We concurrently coded a representative sample of cases using the main themes described on my coding list. We compared our results after the first pass of the data and adjusted our codes following a discussion of the discrepancies. Our agreement after this discussion represents our second pass of the data. A difference in total codes assigned for each pass was due to the dropping and adding of codes following discussion. I applied the formula provided by Miles and Huberman (1994, p.64) to measure reliability of coding:

$$\text{Reliability} = \# \text{ of agreements} / (\# \text{ of agreements} + \# \text{ of disagreements})$$

The reliability on the first and second passes was very similar for all eight cases. The total reliability measure for the eight cases is .76 on the first pass and .97 on the final pass. These results meet expectations of second pass-coding reliability of .9 or greater (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 64).

After coding all cases of overt and covert conflicts, I returned to the data to code the final question asking deans to identify differences, if any, between overt and covert cases. I used the same codes established for the cases of conflict to code this additional interview question and then identified major themes to discuss the findings.

Analysis and presentation of the data

I used a cross-case method for analyzing the coded data as described in Miles and Huberman (1994, p 172-185). Initially, I generated case-specific displays for each of the 32 cases using the table function of Microsoft Word©. I then categorized the cases, by type of conflict, into two stacks: overt (16 cases) and covert (16 cases). I proceeded with “stacking comparable cases” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 176) using the five primary start codes: situation (SIT), antecedent conditions (ANT), attribution theory (ATT), equity theory (EQU), and interactional theory (INT). At this point, I had a “meta-matrix” (p. 176) with ten cells.

I continued partitioning the data to create displays of the subthemes, while maintaining the original stacking of overt and covert cases. I now had a meta-matrix for each type of conflict with 10 cells each: situation or case description, cognitive dissonance, social inference, prediction of outcomes, assessment of status, perception of self interest, evaluation of fairness, perception of inequality, assessment of congruence with departmental norms and culture, and awareness of congruence with institutional mission and values. I identified patterns and compared and contrasted various aspects of the data in order to address my research question. I selected quotations from each cell to represent the subthemes in the data display.

The concluding data were generated by the question, “What differences, if any, do you see in these two situations?” I coded these data using the code for antecedent conditions (ATT) and the nine subthemes of the cognitive processes.

In Chapter 4, I first display and present results by capturing the nature of overt and covert conflicts in narratives of the cases. I then represent the stacking of data by comparing the role of each cognitive process within overt and covert conflict. I discuss the forms of conflict in the order in which I generated the data — overt preceding covert. I use the voices of the participants in addressing the research question with references to the originating theories: attribution, equity, and interactional. Finally I present the data, organized by the four themes from the deans' reflections on the differences between overt and covert conflict.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This research examines the cognitive processes used by faculty while engaged in overt and covert interpersonal conflicts with other faculty members. The research question is: *What roles do cognitive processes play in covert and overt interpersonal conflicts between faculty members at private, liberal arts colleges?* For each type of interpersonal conflict, I describe the cognitive processes identified from the perspectives of individual reaction, social interaction, and organizational influence. I discuss the role of each process based on the theory that delineated the cognitive process. Finally, I identify similarities and differences in the roles of the cognitive processes in overt and covert conflicts.

I begin this chapter with a discussion of the 16 overt and 16 covert cases of conflict by providing a summary of the collected cases, followed by a sample case of each type. I then present the antecedent conditions identified in the cases: change from usual activities, presence of strong emotion, and relevance of personality traits. I categorize nine cognitive processes within the three theories from which they originate. *Cognitive dissonance, social inference, and prediction of outcomes* refer to attribution theory. Equity theory contributes the cognitive processes of *assessment of status, perception of self interest, evaluation of fairness, and perception of inequality*. Finally, interactional theory includes the two cognitive processes of an *assessment of congruence with departmental norms and culture* and an *awareness of congruence with institutional mission and values* (see Table 2).

Within each of these sections, I include interview data from overt and covert conflict cases, analyze the role each cognitive process plays in these conflicts, and compare the use of faculty's cognitive processes between overt and covert conflict cases. I conclude the chapter with a comparison of overt and covert conflicts from the deans' perspectives.

Cases of Conflict

The 32 cases represent 16 situations of overt conflict and 16 situations of covert conflict described by deans who observed and interacted with faculty in the conflict situations. As part of the interview protocol, I provided the definitions of overt and covert conflict and discussed with the deans whether their cases met the definitions. Two deans initially presented cases of covert conflict that did not meet the definition, and these deans substituted cases meeting the definition prior to any further questions. I use these case descriptions to set the context for identifying the roles played by cognitive processes when faculty engaging in interpersonal conflict. For each type of conflict, I provide a summary of the cases followed by a more complete description of a representative case.

Cases of Overt Conflict

Overt conflict is the public display of a disagreement between two or more parties. The 16 cases of overt conflict between faculty members addressed a range of issues in the lives of faculty members in liberal arts colleges. The topics of these conflict were: personnel actions (six cases), academic issues (five cases), broader institutional directions (three cases), and resource allocation (two cases). The personnel-related cases included unprofessional behaviors and actions of hiring, promotion, and tenure review.

The academic issues involved disagreements over educational philosophy, curricular structures, teaching approaches, and engagement with students. The cases related to institutional directions described disagreements over governance, leadership, and the future of the institution. Finally, resource issues included space allocation and access to support staff.

An example of the type of conflict that became public was a case involving student progression and the two faculty members who directed programs for Freshman English students. The dean described the setting:

“The disagreement was about the placement of incoming students in our freshman English courses ... We have a requirement that students complete two courses in freshman English to graduate, and the disagreement was over the placement process, the policy of placement and also the practice of how students were placed ... So, the circumstances are that we have an English composition program which provides the freshman English courses for the vast majority of our students, and we also have, and have had for 30 years or so, a small program for international students which offered special ESL[English as a Second Language]-type freshman English courses for non-native speakers. So, the two programs needed to work together in order to properly identify the students who belonged in the two different programs, and then, once they'd made that determination, the question of whether to place the student in a very beginning course or the basic introductory course or an advanced course, so what level within each program, the student belonged

in. And, this involved for many years a placement exam given during the summer during the new student orientation with a writing sample that was then read by a group of three faculty, and the determination was based on that evidence, where the students should go, and, over the years, this practice led to tension between the two programs in terms of where students belonged. This had to do with whether students showed evidence of second language interference. It had to do with whether domestic students who came from homes where English was not spoken should be in the basic English program or in the same course with non-native international students. So, that was the setting.”

The dean brought the faculty directors together to discuss the situation, including the use of assessment protocols and course placement. His story continued:

“And during that meeting, it became clear that there was fundamental disagreement about both the validity of the protocols and how they should be implemented ... It wasn’t simply a question of clearing up misunderstandings. That there were very basic disagreements between the two sides about what should be done, what had been done, what agreement was reached that led to the protocols. It was all obviously a very controversial situation.”

Only one of the faculty members responded to the dean’s request for proposals to revise the protocols and procedures. The dean then shared the proposal he received with the non-complying member for feedback. The dean stated that the sharing of the proposal “led to a very strong negative reaction” with the result that the faculty member “refused

to comply with the procedure and tried various ways of evading, subverting, ignoring, and undermining the process.” Eventually, the disagreement involved faculty from throughout the school.

The deans interviewed were readily able to identify conflicts that became overt. The focus of overt conflicts covered a wide range of aspects within the academic life of faculty members. Overt conflicts frequently extended beyond the initial faculty involved in the situation.

Cases of Covert Conflict

Covert conflict is a disagreement between two or more parties that does not result in an outright or publicly expressed dispute. The topics of the covert cases were: personnel actions (ten cases), resource allocation (four cases), academic issues (one case), and strategic directions of the institution (one case). The personnel-related cases focused on teaching assignments or schedules, professional status, and role expectations of classroom faculty. The academic issues involved disagreements over engagement with student activities and interpretation of assessment data. Space allocation and involvement in resource decisions were the resource topics. Finally, the strategic direction conflict involved a disagreement regarding intellectual expectations of faculty and students.

An example of the type of conflict that did not become public was a case involving a faculty member who was removed from a leadership position, returned to a teaching position, and had not acquired the basic computer skills required for effectiveness as a faculty member. The dean stated:

“She’s not computer savvy at this point, for whatever reason, and we’ve tried to help her with that. She misses big things, and then will accuse people of not having minutes on the portal and things like that. So, that comes up in meetings, and you can actually see that in meetings when [another faculty member], in a very measured way, points out that there are options to improve computer skills and that sort of thing. So that’s been going on for awhile, and other people see that. And it is below the surface, and it had to do with the discontent of the one that was removed from the position, who was fairly miserable in the position as well and didn’t have the capacity to deal with the crazy expansion in the undergraduate ... numbers. Because of her insistence on doing everything by hand and getting in a mire and not learning the computer, just some basic computerization stuff ... It led to inefficiencies ... This woman is Xeroxing everything instead of using Blackboard, and people even across different programs are complaining because she’s ruining their budgets.”

I questioned whether this case was really covert based on the public complaints regarding the lack of computer skills and overuse of printing funds. The dean went on to describe a series of interactions that occurred over a period of years between this faculty member and others. These interactions presented a complex picture of interpersonal conflicts that never came to the attention of other faculty within the department. It was not until she was relieved of her leadership role and needed to interact as a colleague, that the bizarre behaviors became more evident. The psychological state behind the behaviors

represented the covert part of this case. The case remained covert with the resignation of the faculty member at the completion of the academic year.

As with overt conflict, the focus of covert conflict covered a wide range of issues within the academic life of faculty members. The vast majority of the cases (10 of 16) involved personnel matters and remained within a small group of people, rather than becoming known throughout the department or institution.

Antecedent Conditions

My derived conceptual framework suggests that within the context of a conflict situation lie conditions that precede the emergence of covert conflict and the subsequent movement to overt conflict. Furthermore, attribution theory posits that in order to apply attribution theory, one must check whether three basic conditions are present: change from the usual activities of life, presence of strong emotion, and relevance of personality traits (Heider, 1958). I identify the presence or absence of these conditions in the 32 cases and analyze the differences between the overt and covert conflict cases.

Change from Usual Activities

Thirty of the 32 cases of conflict involved a change in the usual activities of faculty life. I present the changes in the 14 cases of overt conflict followed by the 16 changes in covert conflict. The two cases of overt conflict, in which a specific change was not identified, involved unprofessional behavior of faculty members: gender discrimination and disrespectful interaction with students. The disregard of professional norms of the academy by faculty in these two cases could be considered a change from

the expected behavior of faculty. To understand the antecedent conditions of conflict and their role in subsequent cognitive processes, I examine the changes from usual activities in overt and covert conflicts. These data were depicted in the dean's descriptions of the cases and not as a result of my prompting.

Cases of overt conflict

The most frequently cited situations involved changes in academic directions or teaching assignments. One dean said, "Well, we were having discussions about some changes we need to make for our initial program ... We have graduate and undergraduate initial programs for certification ... And the discussion was about some changes to math and finance." A disagreement over the placement process for freshman English students was an example of a change in assessment policy and protocols resulting from the appointment of a new dean. He stated, "So, this came to a head. When I became dean, I learned how the process had been set up and operated, and I began hearing anecdotal evidence that one side or the other was unhappy with a particular placement ... Later on there'd be a student transfer from one into the other, and the reasons why were subject to controversy."

The change in the type of evidence gathered to assess the learning of students upon completion of their academic program resulted in another conflict situation. When an externally-produced content examination was used, "Faculty B was basically very upset — against doing the test at all — and his reasoning was, 'I've been teaching here for over how many years, 30 or 40 years. I am a master teacher and I know, so I don't need to be assessed for the knowledge in my area' and so on."

Some cases described changes related to teaching assignments. A program was discontinued and the dean reassigned a faculty member “to teach many of the statistics classes ... We’ve put him into stats reluctantly.” Another example of teaching assignment change involved two faculty members team-teaching a large introductory course. The second teacher was added to support the unexpectedly large class size and “was basically running counter to the syllabus [of the primary teacher] and really causing trouble with the students, adding different assignments and really pressuring the students that this was the way it was going to be.”

Personnel-related change was another area represented in the cases of overt conflict. In describing a change in departmental leadership style, a dean stated:

“So at the start of this whole issue, Professor X is dissatisfied that their department has essentially ceased to exist, and now they’re under the direction of Professor Y. ... Now, as the next couple of years evolve, Professor Y did not do things the way Professor X was used to having things done in the former department.

.....

Part of the motivation from X’s perspective was that it was felt that, if Y had not been accommodating to absorbing that department, they would have remained in their own area. Another part of it was that they were used to doing things a certain way, and it was not Y’s way.”

A second case dealt with a departmental leadership change that became an overt conflict between faculty members that lasted more than a year. The dean presented the context:

“We needed a new chair ... and they brought in an outside person. And the outside

person's charge was to improve the department and really shape it up, because there were some problems in the department.”

Two cases exemplified change that was resource-related: one involving support staff available to faculty and the other concerning the physical space in a new building. The staffing case resulted from a reduction in human resources available to faculty as part of a college-wide reduction in the salary expenses. Conflict over the allocation of physical resources was evident with the design, construction, and occupation of a new building housing faculty and their laboratories. Plans for the facility had been drawn years earlier, yet by the time the funding was secured and construction occurred, the necessary changes created a heated disagreement between the department chair and two faculty members. According to the dean:

“The donor had certain requirements that we had to meet. There [were] a couple different iterations, and ... many of the details to that construction were consulted with the department, but many more weren't, because of the nature of construction: that items had to be decided pretty much real soon. A lot of these things were during the semester when people could be consulted, but many of them were during the summer where people were not available to be consulted, and decisions had to be made. And so there were some disagreements over those particular types of decisions.”

Finally, three cases represented conflicts related to strategic directions at the levels of the program, the department, and the university. The first case related to program governance was a disagreement between a program director and several of the full-time faculty members within the department that housed the program. At issue was

the selection of faculty to teach. As the dean said, “Decisions were made and implemented that everybody else believed to be counter to the purpose of the school.” She continued, “The problem is that you do not take a permanent faculty and basically ram something that they believe to be wrong, as far as accreditation is concerned, down their throats.” The second case related to a change in departmental culture that came with a change in leadership and direction. The dean presented the context for the overt conflict that lasted more than a year: “The chair was looking for more writing in classes, more formal departmental meetings. He wanted to really do things, crossing the t’s and dotting the i’s. It had kind of been a slack, easygoing department.” The final case involved two faculty members, from different disciplines, during an institutional strategic-planning process. The dean stated, “We were talking about . . . divisions on the mission statement, and the question was whether, to what extent, are we a liberal arts college and what role professional programs play in the college.”

Change in the usual processes, whether related to matters of academics, personnel, resources, or strategic directions, was present in cases of overt conflict between faculty members. The presence of a change provided a catalyst for disagreements that became public. The changes that became more widely public involved a deviation from the perceived intellectual authority of faculty work.

Cases of covert conflict

All cases involved a change from the usual way of operating. The four categories of changes used to describe overt conflict were present also in the cases of covert conflict including changes related personnel actions, academic activities, resource allocation, and

strategic directions. Personnel-related changes were the most frequently cited category of covert conflict. Of the 11 cases of personnel actions, five cases involved a change of teaching assignment or schedule, four cases related to change of status, and two cases suggested a lack of openness to change itself. The remaining five cases were distributed between the final three categories: academic activities (one case), resource allocation (two cases), and strategic directions (one case).

One illustrative case involving changes in class schedules was exacerbated by an institutional milieu that stressed adherence to the scheduling policies in the *Faculty Handbook*. The dean cited the policy as: “faculty should be given the teaching schedules that they want as long as the schedules accommodate the required course delivery.”

Regarding the implementation of this policy, the dean continued:

“It’s interpreted by faculty that they tell the chair what they want to teach and when they want to teach it ... And unless everybody asks for the same time, they kind of work it out. ‘Well, I’ll be a morning person.’ ‘You be an afternoon person.’ ‘I’m only going to teach two days a week.’ ‘Well, then I’ll only teach three days a week.’ And, ‘I want one night off, I’ll take Tuesday.’ ‘Okay, you can have Thursday.’ And the chair just sort of sits there ... The chair just can’t manage the schedule in a way to try to, you know, promote the discipline and increase majors or serve other departments better.”

A senior professor complained to the dean stating, “Guess what? The chair didn’t give me the schedule that I want.” The schedule sounded like “cruel and unusual punishment” to the dean, who then discussed the schedule with the department chairperson stating,

“You know, you’re going to have to start asking people.” The chairperson responded, “I did ask. I always ask. I ask every time. I sent something out. He won’t answer my emails. You know, he just ignores me. So I go down and I ask him verbally. And then he never remembers ... I’m tired of going down there and listening to this.”

The tradition of course scheduling based upon faculty preference was a long-established process and had not caused concerns for the other faculty members within the department. While this case had the potential for public confrontation, the disagreement remained within the domain of these two individuals, due to the periodic intercessions of the dean. In the future, however, the changing demographics of this faculty may suggest a movement toward more overt conflict regarding teaching loads and scheduling.

Another case included elements of change in course assignments and hiring. An adjunct faculty member was hired to teach a course in which a tenured faculty member had to be removed, because he “doesn’t care about political correctness. ... One of the students covertly taped the class, and that tape was subsequently sent [to administration].” A substitute adjunct faculty member was put into the class immediately, and the case remained out of the public arena.

Four of the 16 cases related to changes due to hiring practices and promotion and tenure decisions. One dean described a lobbying effort by a faculty member against the tenure of a colleague by stating that “she made the accusation that the [tenure committee chairperson] hadn’t presented a negative enough case about the person. But all this was going on behind the scenes.” A second case involved a department chairperson “writing a letter that was not recommending promotion for an individual faculty member B ... and B decided not to actually take on any of the issues in public or even one-on-one with me

or the department chair.” The decisions that created changes in faculty status remained covert when the outcome was not positive toward the involved faculty member or became contentious in nature.

An example of an academic-related change was the implementation of an accreditation requirement to produce evidence of student learning and to design curricular changes to improve scores. The student test data needed to become public rather than reside within the records of individual faculty or departments. While this change created a situation with potential for public conflict, the concerns among the faculty remained covert as the faculty committees worked these new requirements into their departmental planning processes.

A resource-related change that remained covert involved the use of a faculty member’s office by her replacement during her sabbatical year. The dean described the situation as, “We don’t have enough space, so when somebody’s on sabbatical, we let the replacement use that office ... I had no other place to put the [interim faculty] ... [the departing faculty] just didn’t want anybody in her office. She is a very, very neat person. Very organized. And just didn’t want anybody in her office.”

The one case involved a change related to strategic directions of the school “regarding faculty intellectual contributions.” A faculty committee framed a policy with guidelines that included a change in the level of research expectations for faculty and students. While the discussions were lively between two faculty members with differing opinions, the disagreement remained within the committee and was not expressed publicly to the school faculty. As in other cases where faculty disagreements occurred within a committee structure, the conflict remained covert.

Change from the usual process was always present in cases of covert conflict between faculty members, regardless of the topic of the change. Conflict remained covert predominantly when the focus of the change was the individual's professional status or work conditions. Faculty appeared to work through disagreements privately when working in a committee structure.

Presence of Strong Emotion

While emotion is an outcome of various cognitive processes, it is not considered a cognitive process; and thus, emotion is included as an antecedent condition (Lazarus, 1989). All of the 32 cases of conflict had an emotional overtone. As in the antecedent condition of change from the usual activities, these data are a result of spontaneous description by the deans. I did not use prompts to obtain these data. I present the emotional descriptions in the cases of overt conflict first, followed by covert, in order to further understand the antecedent conditions of conflict and their role in subsequent cognitive processes.

Cases of overt conflict

In describing overt conflict situations, deans noted a range of emotional responses along a continuum of very strong to more subdued. They used phrases such as "very upset," "extremely upset," "out of control," "rather vigorously critical," "a very strong negative reaction," "the hostility was quite clear," and "pretty mad and pretty vocal about it to the point of yelling." Examples of subdued emotions included "a certain level of dissatisfaction," "the tone was not...a professional tone," and "semi-rude."

The emotional expressions in overt conflicts tended toward a strong and unfavorable exchange of words; however, there was a range of emotions expressed. All cases reflected some emotional response. The stronger responses tended to be in more public settings and the more subdued responses were in settings that involved the participants in the conflict, a few colleagues, and the dean who witnessed the interactions. The presence of emotion, as a condition of attribution theory, was satisfied in these cases, though that emotion may not always be characterized as “strong.”

Cases of covert conflict

In the covert-conflict situations, deans described the emotional responses as more subdued than in the cases of overt conflict. One dean summarized this difference in the valence of emotional response as: “these people are not as visibly upset. I mean, that’s part of the reason why it’s covert and not overt.” Instead of having a public altercation, the faculty involved in covert conflict “had a strong discussion.” One description of the emotional response of a faculty member demonstrated how anger is not always the reaction. The dean stated, “She doesn’t care, and she’s miserable with people. She’s not happy here ... because she is just so miserable ... It is also about fear.”

Faculty used avoidance in cases of covert conflict as described by one dean: “He won’t speak. He doesn’t speak to me and he doesn’t include me on emails.” In a case where departmental leadership was the focus of conflict, the outgoing chair “originally had a temper tantrum and said, ‘If I can’t have my way, I’ll step down.’ ... but when it became clear that the new regime was there, and it was no longer run like it had been run the past 20 years, that person became a real pussycat.” The stronger emotional response

subsided as time and conditions changed; the faculty's disagreements with the new leadership were kept covert.

The changes that preceded covert conflict tended to be personal in nature, and the emotions expressed were less strong than was seen in overt conflict. The disagreement occurred out of the public arena when a strong emotion was expressed. The cases involved emotional content, yet the expression of the emotion was more subdued in covert cases. The expression is represented as "filled with tension," "silence," "avoidance," "controlled expression in private space," "unhappiness," and "respectful exchange."

Relevance of Personality Traits

Personality involves the external manifestations of internal processes that develop over time to represent a means of reacting to oneself and others in a consistent pattern of thought and behavior (Shaver, 1986). While personalities are categorized using various schema that include "normal" and "deviant", I did not attempt to test or measure mental status and patterns. Rather, if the deans did not mention the participants' personalities when describing the case (12 of 32 cases), I followed with a prompt asking whether or not the personalities of the faculty had any effect on the conflict situation. Some deans' descriptions included statements that could be considered diagnostic, such as "borderline and narcissistic personality disorder," "manic," and "passive/aggressive." These diagnostic-type descriptions were provided by deans who did not represent disciplines related to psychology or healthcare. Other descriptions were based on popular psychological typologies including "super Type A" and "classic Type B."

Cases of overt conflict

Frequently the participants of the overt conflict were identified as similar in personality types. Deans described the faculty as: “grumpy,” “stubborn,” “manipulative, short tempered, brusque, curt,” “vocal and confrontational,” and “so confident in [their] opinions that there is no point in continuing discussions.”

Some cases involved faculty of opposite personality types: “She is very contentious ... in a quiet way ... the other is very extroverted, loud, opinionated.” One faculty member is “very well-liked and gets along extremely well with students” while the other person is described as “having a short temper and uses it.” In another case, the faculty member is “easygoing ... and his easygoing personality together with his perceived less rigorous discipline ... set the stage for the other professor, who is super energetic, very aggressive ... He challenges everybody” to publicly disagree.

One dean described the personality trait in terms of an analogy: “She has a tendency to just be like a bull in a china shop. She doesn’t always think before she speaks.” Another dean used the play, “The Odd Couple”, to describe the “slob” and the “neat freak.”

Many deans began their statements with comments such as “I think a lot of conflict revolved around ... the individual temperaments of the people involved” or “Both individuals have been perceived by others as difficult to work with.” One dean stated, “Professor A’s personality is such that you can’t really negotiate with him on anything and come to a mutual agreement. He is so confident in his opinions that the only way to deal with Professor A is, if you are unwilling to agree with him, to simply say

‘There is no point in continuing this discussion.’ Anything beyond that, he considers an opportunity to continue the argument.”

Cases of covert conflict

The general descriptions of personality traits were similar to those expressed in overt conflict situations. Faculty were described as: “very annoying,” “fairly dominant and pushy,” “assertive,” “aggressive,” “argumentative,” and “just an extreme workaholic.” The resulting behaviors were further described by traits such as “The individual faculty member is highly sensitive. Emotionally vulnerable. Not a strong ego ... She was fragile.” and “She’s miserable to staff at times and to colleagues. She won’t even greet them. Even with the staff, she was insulting.”

When deans described the personality traits of faculty members involved in covert conflict, they tend to explain the trait within a context of the interactions within the department. For example:

“They’ve been around for awhile together in the department, and there’s tension ... And it’s actually not in overall philosophy ... It’s more of a personality clash ... Faculty A tends to have a personality that’s a little abrasive and tends to evoke knee jerk responses.

.....

Faculty B is much more low-key ... speaks his mind, but definitely much more low-key and the demeanor is much more calm.”

In a situation regarding a disagreement over a recommendation on granting tenure, another dean stated:

“[The person making accusations] tends to be a little immature in her interactions with students

.....

[the other] is less popular as a teacher, maybe less so because of some of her personality. And she’s a lovely person, and student say she’s kind, she’s helpful, she’s all of these things, but she’s sort of a high-level intellectual and she loves to think about and ponder and engage in this recursive conversation ... She gives too much information, so there is a style there of interaction that for someone who is very action-oriented can drive them nuts. The other woman is much more action-oriented, much more active, has a younger style.”

A third example involved a covert conflict regarding the use of a faculty member’s office during her sabbatical year by the temporary person. The dean described the personality traits of the faculty member on sabbatical:

“She is a long-standing faculty member who does have a reputation of wanting her way ... teaching that class and wanting everything to be just the way it always was. She’s not great with change.

.....

She doesn’t want anybody else coming in and saying, ‘Well there’s another way we might want to consider doing this.’”

One dean connected personality traits and with covert conflict by stating that the faculty involved have “a classic passive/aggressive personality ... I think those personalities

would like to keep their passive/aggressive covert, anyway, it's like they don't want it advertised.”

These cases demonstrated how the relevance of personality traits contributes to the conflict behavior of faculty. There was no single personality trait that explained the covert state of conflict.

Summary of Antecedent Conditions

The three antecedent conditions posited by attribution theory — change from the usual activities of life, presence of strong emotion, and relevance of personality traits — were present in the 32 cases of conflict. The character and valence of the conditions were different between the overt and covert forms of conflict.

The topics of change in overt and covert conflicts represented similar categories including changes in process related to academics, personnel, resources, and strategic directions. Overt conflicts covered a wider range of topics, while the covert conflicts emphasized disagreements related to personnel issues. Conflict remained covert predominantly when the focus of the change was the individual's professional status or working conditions. Faculty appeared to respond to disagreements privately when participating in a committee structure, as a tenure review process. The changes that became more widely public involved a deviation from the perceived intellectual authority of faculty work.

All cases reflected some emotional response. The stronger responses tended to be in public settings, and therefore, were described by deans as overt conflicts. Yet not all overt conflicts involved strong emotional responses. The more subdued responses were in

settings that involved the participants in the conflict, a few colleagues, and the dean who witnessed the interactions. Since covert conflicts tended to be more personal in nature, one may expect a stronger emotional reaction; however, the emotions expressed in covert cases were more subdued than were the emotions seen in overt conflict.

Of the three antecedent conditions, the relevance of the personality traits of the participants was the most evident contributor to the overt conflict. Every case involved a disgruntled or volatile person who reacted to the change in ways counter to other members of the department or institution. The cases indicated that the mixing of personalities, whether similar to or different from each other, rather than the presence of a single individual, contributed to the overt nature of the faculty-to-faculty conflict. In other words, it takes at least two individuals disagreeing with each other to spark an overt conflict.

The relevance of personality traits of faculty engaging in covert conflict was reflective of a broad range of individuals. There was no single personality trait that explained the covert state of conflict. The conflict event stemmed from individual reactions to changes that tend to be personal, within the department, rather than to the personality trait itself. Of the three antecedent conditions, the relevance of personality traits of the participants was less evident, than the nature of the change, as a contributor to the covert conflict.

Individual Reaction Perspective: Attribution Theory

Attribution theory seeks to explain how one understands the actions of others in order to determine how to behave in a socially acceptable manner. The theory is based on the concept of a *life space* that includes the immediate cognitive area surrounding individuals. This area includes people and objects that become familiar through the processes of perception and memory (Heider, 1958). Attribution theory includes three broad assumptions regarding how a life space is populated. One seeks to determine a cause, identify the intention, and decide on probable behaviors (Ross, 1977). The initial step of causal judgment involves a determination of whether the newly encountered stimuli is favorable (consonant) or unfavorable (dissonant) to the life space. An unfavorable judgment results in *cognitive dissonance* and sets the path for determining the cause of this dissonance through the systematic process called *social inference*. The process concludes with a cognitive *prediction of outcomes* that translates into immediate behavior and subsequent interactions (Jones, 1971).

In the following three sections, I present and analyze interview data from the cases of overt and covert conflict to determine the role of the three cognitive processes: *cognitive dissonance*, *social inference*, and *prediction of outcomes*. In a fourth section, I compare the role of the three cognitive processes associated with attribution theory in overt and covert conflict situations.

Cognitive Dissonance

An individual attempts to maintain internal cognitive consistency between an experience or new data and previously held beliefs. With each additional stimulus, one

identifies discrepancies and seeks to disregard or disagree with the newly presented ideas, plans, interpretations, or actions. In interpersonal situations, the additional stimuli stem from expressions by another person, resulting in cognitive dissonance experienced by each participant in the interaction. The individual experience becomes shared experiences of unpleasant psychological states (Folger, et al., 2005). While the deans spontaneously described cognitive dissonance in the vast majority of cases, I used a prompt to elicit responses in four cases.

Cases of overt conflict

In the process of describing overt conflict behaviors, the deans frequently mentioned aspects of a cognitive dissonance. One dean summarized a disagreement between two faculty members working on an institutional strategic planning team as “obviously they came from completely different perspectives.” In describing a clash between faculty in a faculty meeting, another dean stated, “So it was about a pragmatic issue. But it really ran much deeper than that.”

The terms “fundamental disagreement,” “fundamental difference” and “different views” on deeply held beliefs are frequently used in reference to cognitive dissonance. These beliefs tended to focus on academic issues and changes. For example, one dean, when talking about working on accurate placement of students into courses, said:

“And so I brought the two directors together ... to see if we couldn't make sure we understood what the protocols meant and review what the problems might be in following the protocols. And during that meeting, it

became clear that there was fundamental disagreement about both the validity of the protocols and how they should be implemented.”

Another example involved student progression through the major portions of their degree, and the dean described how the conceptual issues can become pragmatic issues when the implications of implementation are considered.

“The basic motivation is fundamentally different views about what’s the right thing to do about students. On the one side they’d like to have very high GPA’s and ACT’s to get into the program. They don’t feel bad if a whole bunch of students withdraw from their courses. They obviously feel it’s okay to fail students. The other side feels that, as a faith-based institution, we needed to ensure our students’ success, and sometimes that means maybe not holding them to the highest standards. Sometimes it means making sure they all get the support they need ... The other department said, ‘Well, you can do that, but we can’t afford to do that because we don’t have the time. We don’t have the energy. We have a whole lot of other things to do.’ It was a fundamental difference in what an institution owes its kids.”

A third case demonstrated how deeply held beliefs regarding what it means to be a teacher are challenged as two faculty members engaged in an overt conflict.

“Professor A is of opinion that [on] day one they [the students] need to start working on computers ... Professor B takes them slowly [through the basic understanding] before getting to the [computer application].

.....

Professor A believes that if they don't understand it, we're going to move on, and that's their problem and not ours.

.....

Professor B sees his role as a professor as a nurturer and a guide, and he's there to work with students to get them through ... and to teach them as much as he can.

.....

He does work with students. But he doesn't work with students unless they have shown some willingness to work for him. And his perspective is, if they can't meet the standards, then that's not his problem.”

Since the central focus of the faculty was on teaching and learning, it is not surprising that academic issues created a context for deeply held, fundamental disagreements. The predominance of cases focusing on academic issues supported the commitment of these liberal arts faculty to defend passionately what may be considered the core of their careers of meaningful work. The process of cognitive dissonance was consistent with a move to overt conflict when confronted with a need to defend a position or philosophy that undergirds professional action.

These examples involved a fundamental disagreement surrounding decisions made with facts or contexts. Cognitive dissonance can also result from a disregard for new facts such as in cases where the person cannot comprehend a need for change. One case involved a faculty member who was about to lose a key support person. The dean stated, “The whole campus knew of the personnel situation of reductions and non-replacements except for Professor A. Professor A had an expectation despite many

signals that this wasn't going to happen, that things would just go on as normal."

Professor A became "out of control" and "began attacking" in the faculty meeting where the plans for redistributing work were being finalized.

Cases of covert conflict

Cognitive dissonance occurred equally as often in cases of covert conflict. A dean described a disagreement between faculty members, on what constitutes excellence in teaching, which came to light over a recommendation for tenure. She stated that one faculty member

"fancies herself to be an excellent teacher. In fact, she's very popular with students, and so on one level, if you measure her popularity; you would say 'Yes, She's a good teacher.' ... The other woman ... has always struggled more in terms of demonstrating high level of teaching. She's a very bright woman. I have observed her teaching ... So there's this sort of measuring of me as the one who is popular against the other person who is less so."

The dean concluded that this conflict has remained covert even though the faculty "probably have reality differences there, mild differences." Another dean described the outcome of an ongoing covert disagreement about the need to infuse technology into departmental communications as: "We just agree to disagree."

Two cases of cognitive dissonance related to how professional identity is affected by differing interpretations of the same facts. One case involved a covert conflict between

departmental faculty over the value of outside employment by one professor. The dean described:

“For [the chair and other faculty] it was a problem because [the faculty member] couldn’t attend any meetings before noon ... And that was not good for her department because they frequently would have to have meetings and do advisement of students before those times ... For her, she just thought that it enriched her teaching ... She tried to make the case that what she was doing was a real community service which would be related to the institutional mission.”

In a second case regarding academic credentials, the first professor “thinks that his experience and wonderful degree at a better institution proves how valuable and how strong he is ... [The other] with a lesser degree but a very strong publication record believes that [the first professor] is out of touch, out of date, and doesn’t have the best credentials.”

Cognitive dissonance can be part of a longstanding relationship between faculty members that in time became an expected reaction to various changes or issues in the department. A pair of professors exemplified cognitive dissonance on the issue of complying with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in their laboratories:

“[Doctor A] tends to be ‘things are right or wrong’ and he’s going to stand on principle ... [Doctor B] is more, ‘Okay. It’s the law. Let’s get it done, and let’s do it right’... Doctor A is very principled and said, ‘This rule makes no sense, so let’s not follow it, and if the EPA challenges, we’ll challenge in court.’ But Doctor B is more, ‘Well, this is the law. Let’s

obey the law. And even though it's inconvenient for you, and it may be a stupid law, it's still the law, and we don't want to pay those fines, and we don't want to take all the resources to go to court.”

Another example of longstanding covert conflict involved cognitive dissonance over an underlying belief structure. Their dean stated:

“Neither of them has anything to gain. This was just a viewpoint conflict ... It's two different worldviews...If you sat in the department meetings when they were discussing academic issues — you know, course assignments, scheduling, textbook selection, laboratory budgets, any of the things that would normally cause sources of conflict, that are self-interest oriented — ... They were both very generous to each other and the department as a whole. It was strictly when one of them or the other said something about politics ... the conversation just kind of degenerated. But there was no interest to be gained, and neither of them did harm to the other in any operational sense for the university or department.”

The cases of covert conflict involved faculty with longstanding positions on aspects of academic life including professional excellence, resource sharing, and pedagogical approaches. The references to regulatory compliance, politics, and worldviews suggested disagreements involving belief systems or values structures. The disagreements were fundamental in nature and suggested that cognitive dissonance plays a role in the covert nature of these situations.

Social Inference

Following a perception of dissonance between two individuals, one moves through a systematic process of determining the cause or intent of the disagreement. Attribution theory labels this cognitive process: *social inference*. Social inference is a cognitive process that results in assumptions made about the persons involved. These assumptions include expectations and motivations regarding the character, beliefs, and actions of the persons in the conflict. The assumptions may be generalized to a group or class of people and are frequently labeled “attribution bias” (Ames, 2004; Hamilton & Sherman, 1996). In seven cases, I used a general prompt, emphasizing an accusation or intent, in order to clarify the case descriptions by the deans.

Cases of overt conflict

Most cases of overt conflict included examples of assumptions made by each faculty member regarding the motivations of the other for holding a particular position or acting in a manner that was counter to the other’s preferences. Assumptions regarding a particular position or belief were expressed in a variety of ways. One dean stated, “I would say they’re outspoken ... They’re very passionate, certainly invested in their discipline and believe strongly in the importance of what they do and what they bring to the strategic direction of the college.” Another stated, “As much as anything else, it was a perception of lack of quality.” In a case of conflict regarding grading standards between two departments, the dean described the faculty members as having “a high level of confidence in the rightness of the position they were taking ... Maybe lack of open mindedness to try to fully understand ... the position the other person was taking.”

Different teaching styles of faculty were catalysts for overt conflict in several cases. Team teaching brought faculty members in immediate contact with these differences in assumptions regarding the appropriateness and efficacy of instructional approaches. For example, “The primary instructor did 90% of the preparation ... The secondary instructor attended all the classes, observed, and later [said] that he was not impressed with the content preparation that the primary instructor provided.” This conflict continued in interactions with students: “The secondary instructor challenged a few students. He did not challenge the other students in the class because he didn’t think they were worthy of being challenged.” The teaching style of the secondary instructor was described as:

“It doesn’t matter what you say; he’s going to have a dispute with you. I mean ... He sees it as an academic conversation. He doesn’t see it as confrontational at all. He is highly respecting you, but, whatever you say, he’s trying to tease out what’s really behind what you are saying. He’s trying to tease it out, and he’s constantly challenging ... It was not well received.”

The dean summarized the social inferences behind this overt conflict thus: “The primary [instructor] was trying to defend his chicks from being attacked by the evil fox. The secondary [instructor] was trying to get these chicks to think more deeply ... to understand the other side of a question that they were not seeing.”

Assumptions of intent were present in the cases of conflicts between faculty members across disciplines. In a case involving setting standards for teaching a core general education course, the dean described the dissenting faculty members as

“economics faculty, and their tradition has always been they may have their disagreements, but they cover each other’s back. If anybody criticizes one econ faculty member, he’s criticizing them all.” Loyalty to colleagues within a department or discipline was expressed as a bias in another case of overt conflict played out in a large faculty meeting. A professor was challenged by a second professor from another school as the dean described:

“Now the faculty member A, who spoke out, nobody else cheered her on, but they all silently liked ... that she took on [faculty member B]

.....

B basically started lecturing everyone about what’s going on nationally, and we didn’t know what we were doing ... Then A just said, ‘Well, you don’t know what you are talking about, and this isn’t what the discussion is and you always have something to say. And this is just enough.’

.....

B does have a tendency to want to always be right.”

Conflicts involving legal or regulatory issues and unprofessional conduct included evidence of biased assumptions. In a hiring committee the dean suggested that one faculty member “tried to use [his] kind of personal influence and tried to influence a group with [his] personal choice, regardless of the particular criteria. I think there’s ... bias.” Another case resulted in charges of gender discrimination: “It’s just bias ... It just so happened that the fields he considered substantive have largely male professors ... whereas the department he considers fluff or lightweight happen to be staffed mainly by

females. So yeah, there are some issues here.” A conflict surrounding the safety standards in the laboratory setting was described as:

“Dr. C was proud of his safety concerns, and yet he was probably one of the biggest violators of some of the safety items. He thought he knew better than the government. So there were some gross violations of safety that he would dismiss because he didn’t think they were [gross violations], but he would point out other things, especially in other people’s labs, that were gross violations, and he wanted something done immediately about it.”

Finally, a public disagreement erupted in a case of post-tenure review chaired by a professor whose department was closed. The professor being reviewed was on the team, some years back, that recommended closure of the undersubscribed department and merger with a similar department. The dean stated that the committee chair “was not evaluating Professor Y objectively. For lack of any other term, it was payback time.”

Cases of covert conflict

There were positive and negative assumptions made regarding the motivations of faculty in covert conflicts. Examples of positive inferences were: “very nice people,” “is just interested in a smooth operation,” “are trying to do their best.” Negative inferences were: “He happens to have a rather low opinion of the full-time faculty,” “a bit of one-upmanship,” and “exaggerated sense of her own importance.”

Covert conflict frequently involved groups of faculty disagreeing over an issue and inferring motivations for action, or lack of action, in an indirect manner. One dean

described a group of faculty concerned about the decision-making process of the department chair in obtaining resources for the department. She stated, “They have a tendency not to confront each other, so they do little talking ... That is why I think the faculty in the department probably don’t even really realize what’s going on and then some are allied with one side and some are allied with the other side ... They’re not being direct.” Another example of behind-the-scenes lobbying involved a tenure decision:

“It was all going on behind the scenes.

.....

The woman making the accusations was probably communicating with students about her colleagues, so she doesn’t draw appropriate lines.

.....

The woman who was running around behind the scenes probably had the very exaggerated sense of her own importance and the value of her judgments. She feels that she is in a position to make those judgments of other people.”

In a case where a faculty member was not promoted, based on his lack of scholarly contributions to the discipline, the dean stated, “It’s just a very narrowness of mind ... There’s no sinister motivation or anything like that. It’s just more a very, very tunnel vision about an idea — you know, this is what should be and there’s no room for broadly defining it.”

One dean described inferences made that represent unprofessional behavior. A faculty member who directed a special program was attributed with currying influence with administration. “He currently is a golden boy ... He doesn’t want anybody telling

him what to do.” The dean continued to describe the person as: “He likes people working in his office who are young and cute and female. That’s okay. And there is no impropriety there ... Women are fine as long as they’re helpers and young and cute, and they look up to him.” This situation had a potential to become an overt conflict, yet it remained covert with mounting attributions regarding the motivations involved and the individual’s character.

Prediction of Probable Outcome

Attribution theory suggests that as a result identifying the *cognitive dissonance* and making a *social inference* regarding the cause of the dissonance, one should be able to anticipate or *predict a resulting behavior or outcome*. The participants in conflict attempt to foretell what will happen in a particular case, generally on the basis of past instances or accepted principles (Ross, 1977). The insight regarding the consequences of the conflict is not always available immediately to the participants; rather, the cognitive process of prediction may be applied by an observer of the conflict (Jones, et al., 1971; Ross, 1977). Of note is the distinction between predicting the behavior of the faculty involved in the conflict and predicting the outcome, or consequences of, the conflict. Predicting the behavior of the individuals involved is helpful in creating a milieu, while predicting the broader effect is essential in leading a department or school. This cognitive process was rarely mentioned spontaneously by deans; I used a prompt in 28 of the 32 cases.

Cases of overt conflict

Faculty behavior in overt conflicts was predicted by a few deans with observations: “They don’t tend to necessarily make everything real public with all the faculty.” and “[Faculty member A] is usually able to control herself, at least somewhat in a public setting.” These examples show that a pattern of behavior is revealed in overt conflict situations. Some deans spoke more generally about their observations following overt conflict interactions, as in: “There is a pattern of interaction that pops up here and there in a variety of circumstances.” A dean also reflected on the process of overt conflict by saying: “The longer the argument continues, the worse the situation becomes.” and “They will be upset, but they will actually mellow out. It’s only if you allow the discussion to continue that the situation spirals downward.”

Several deans predicted the outcome of an overt conflict as an effect on the teaching and learning of students. An example was a case of disagreements over teaching philosophy. The dean, in analyzing the conflict, stated: “The problem is that students are not getting consistently taught ... We don’t know that everything is being covered. We don’t know what’s being overlapped ... What’s being omitted.” Further into this case, the dean reflected on the effects of faculty conflict on students: “Professor L will say — tell you till he’s blue in the face — that the students have to sink or swim, but time after time I find him going in and rescuing them. He says he won’t, but he does.” An indirect effect on student learning was the interference with procedures for placing students in appropriate courses. “The director of the international program refused to comply with the procedure and tried various ways of evading, subverting, ignoring, and undermining

the process, which made it very difficult for the director of English composition to effectively implement the new procedure.”

Cases of covert conflict

Two deans predicted faculty behavior in a generalized manner: “It keeps smoldering, but I don’t think it’s going to burst out into the open any time soon.” and “So people try to keep it down. We don’t want anything incendiary to happen ... We want to de-escalate.”

Other deans predicted behavior in more specific terms. Regarding a faculty member directing an entrepreneurial program in the community, the dean reflected:

“Seems that the major employer, where most of our [program X] student enrollment is coming from, is having financial difficulty and has announced the layoff of 2,000 people ... I’m guessing that if they’re laying off people, they’re limiting tuition reimbursement.

.....

It looks like, my reading of the tea leaves is that, he’s promised the president he’s going to deliver all this cash flow, and there is some evidence for that ... He wants to come back [to the traditional faculty department] thinking that either we can protect him or that we will be his scapegoats.”

One case involved the prediction of an outcome rather than a faculty behavior. The dean described a situation where a benefactor gave funds for a new building with the

expectation of expanding the academic offerings and, ultimately, increasing student enrollment.

“Doctor A moved to introduce a new degree that would play a big part in the [new area]. Doctor B was not in that area and thought the new degree would drain resources and students away from the original degree in the department ... Doctor A thought the new degree would raise the overall enrollment in the department and actually contribute students to the old degree.”

Role of Cognitive Processes from Attribution Theory

I selected three cognitive processes from attribution theory to represent the individual reaction perspective: *cognitive dissonance*, *social inference*, and *prediction of outcomes*. All of these processes were evident in most of the 32 cases of conflict as either a direct description of the conflict or in response to a reflective interview question. I now discuss the role of each cognitive process as it relates to overt and covert conflicts.

Cognitive dissonance was present, as the focus of the conflict, in the deans' descriptions of most cases of overt and covert conflict. The presence of cognitive dissonance presumes a set of beliefs and values that have been incorporated in the individual's "life space", a concept based on attribution theory (Heider, 1958). Faculty members in liberal arts colleges are highly educated and have access to a wide variety of perspectives; thus, they live in an environment with the potential for encountering situations that may challenge their belief systems. This challenge can come from colleagues, students, or administrators. I suggest that the academic environment supports

a wide use of cognitive dissonance among faculty members, thus contributing to what Heider (1958) refers to as a rich mixture of relationships and experiences contributing to “attribution complexity”. While cognitive dissonance is the foundation of all faculty-to-faculty conflicts, whether they occur publically or privately, it does not often provide the spark resulting in overt conflict.

Social inference is a cognitive process that also underlies most cases of overt conflict. Attribution bias, the generalized assumptions associated with social inference, was manifested in various intensities that harkened back to the antecedent conditions following a change in the environment (teaching assignment, personnel action, departmental planning, and resource allocation). The inferences — all negative — were exacerbated based on the level of emotion and relevance of personality traits of the individuals involved. The deans expressed readily the attribution biases present in each case as involving an invalidated assumption regarding the other’s character, beliefs, or actions. Social inference appears to be a spark that ignited overt conflict.

Faculty members made social inferences regarding the motivations of their colleagues in situations of conflict that remain covert. The inferences were both positive and negative and involved assumptions regarding the general character of the individuals, the belief structures that underlying the actions taken, and the behavior itself. In covert conflict, these social inferences tended to be less strong and less negative than in overt conflicts. The statements of intent, while felt, are frequently unspoken. They remained below the surface, as a dean reflected: “It was all going on behind the scenes”.

The third cognitive process, *prediction of outcomes*, was the most difficult to identify without direct discussion with or observation of the faculty involved in the

conflict. The prediction of outcomes does not seem to have the same behavioral and verbal visibility as cognitive dissonance and social inference. Many of the faculty members discussed in the cases were long-term colleagues, and one could assume that they enjoyed a high level of familiarity with each other. Long-term relationships, studied as part of attribution theory (Sillars, 1980; Sillars & Scott, 1983; Fincham, et al., 1990), do not necessarily result in accurate predictions. While prediction of outcomes may be more evident in one-on-one conflicts within intimate relationships, most of the 32 cases represented disagreements that were more professionally-oriented rather than personally-oriented.

There was evidence that the deans, reflecting on the covert conflicts, were able to describe probable behaviors or outcomes that explained why the conflict remained covert. Faculty may be weighing the alternative behaviors or outcomes of escalation to overt conflict, and therefore, consciously deciding to retain conflicts in a covert state. Prediction of outcomes may play a role in maintaining covert conflict and does not seem to play a major role in escalation to the overt state.

Social Interaction Perspective: Equity Theory

The social exchange theories state that individuals act according to their best interests when involved in a social interaction. Equity theory, one of the social exchange theories, integrates these theories and enhances the social inference process described in attribution theory. The result is a general theory of social behavior that seeks to determine what is fair in an environment of multiple inequities (Walster, Walster, & Bersheid, 1978). I restate the propositions of equity theory as four cognitive processes regarding the

interactions of faculty members engaged in interpersonal conflict: *assessment of status*, *perception of self interest*, *evaluation of fairness*, and *perception of inequality*. One determines her position within a group; perceives the rewards that should come to her; judges the fairness of the rewards she receives; and considers whether an inequality has resulted. She will become distressed if the result is an inequality, identify the conflicting aspects, and take action to rectify the situation.

In the following five sections, I present and analyze interview data from the cases of overt and covert conflict to determine the role of these four cognitive processes: *assessment of status*, *perception of self interest*, *evaluation of fairness*, and *perception of inequality*. In a fifth section, I compare the role of the four cognitive processes associated with equity theory in overt and covert conflict situations.

Assessment of Status

The status of faculty has several dimensions including longevity, rank and tenure, credentials, productivity, personality, reputation, and international acclaim (Gappa, et al., 2007). In order to discuss faculty status consistently with the 16 deans, I specified status to include the most objective of aspects: length of service and tenure status. I prompted the dean (in 10 of 32 cases) by asking “the position within the department” if status was not mentioned in the description of the case. Some deans described faculty status, in their description of the case, using terms other than tenure and longevity.

Cases of overt conflict

In half of the 16 cases, the faculty involved in the overt conflict situations were tenured, full professors. These faculty were also described as “long term” or “long timers” within their departments. These eight cases represented a public disagreement among faculty of equal status.

The other eight cases were overt conflicts between faculty of dissimilar status. Six of these cases involved junior faculty members in disagreements with more senior faculty. One case was about a newer faculty member suggesting the use of an external content exam to assess the student learning outcomes within the department. “The faculty who got upset ... has been here much longer than the faculty who was making the proposal.” In a second case, the dean stated that “In terms of fairness in treatment ... I think that the newcomer really resented that the other one had the more coordinating position than she did.” A situation regarding the lack of hiring of support staff due to budget shortfalls was explained by the dean as involving a person who was “fairly new in her position, and therefore, probably feeling more challenged to some extent and probably follows a pattern of over-reliance on a program assistant for a lot of tasks that actually might belong to other people. And then I think she also sees herself as ... contesting my authority and capacity to deal with these situations.”

Only two cases involved the opposite situation with longer-termed faculty members taking to task recently hired faculty administrators. In one case, the faculty member publicly objected to the newcomer’s “arrogant” and “semi-rude” behavior. The faculty member instigating the overt conflict “is a full professor, tenured, department chair. ... Her position helped her. ... She’s been here a long time so that’s going to make

a difference.” The other case represents a struggle for departmental leadership. “One of the faculty members had been chair prior to bringing in a new outside chair. But he didn’t want it. It wasn’t an issue where he wanted to continue as chair, and they brought someone in ... His term was over. He didn’t want to do it again, and then they brought in someone from the outside.” The result was overt conflict over the expectations of faculty regarding scholarly productivity and departmental administrative functioning.

Cases of covert conflict

The status of faculty members was rarely mentioned by the deans as a factor in retaining the conflict in a covert state. The cases of covert conflict included a wide range of faculty: full professors to adjunct teachers, tenured to non-tenured, full-time to part-time, long-term and new-comers. Deans described the faculty using aspects of status other than longevity and tenure. The faculty involved in covert conflicts were described predominantly in a positive light such as “outstanding individuals,” “very popular with students,” and “have distinguished careers.” Only two faculty members were described with a negative connotation of “not the best” and “more marginal.”

Perception of Self Interest

The perception of self interest revolves around the question ascertaining “What’s in it for me?” and represents the frequently-cited “turf protection” within the academy. Self interest has also been described as *equity sensitivity* (King & Miles, 1994) and *entitlement* (Nauman, Minsky, & Sturman, 2002). The cognitive process involves “a process or result of becoming aware of ... one’s personal advantage or benefit ... by

means of the senses” (VandenBos, 2007, p.683, 831). The deans described faculty behaviors that demonstrated faculty awareness of and advocacy for personal gain that included self-promotion and maintenance of the status quo. While I had two prompts that related to the perception of self interest, I used them only occasionally as 30 of the 32 deans included this cognitive process in their case descriptions.

Cases of overt conflict

Several deans described situations of faculty members protecting their influence over ownership of courses and academic directions, faculty positions, and departmental resources. The senior professor who objected to having his students tested on a standardized examination for content knowledge felt “that he’s a master teacher. [He] doesn’t need to be assessed.” Another dean described a faculty member in a professional program: “She feels that it’s her course ... The director and I have had some discussions with her over the past year, about how she probably would want to restructure her course. And that’s not gone over well.” In one case the ownership went beyond the course to the scholarly direction of the department. The dean stated:

“They were part of a joint department with this other college. And that wasn’t working out too well because when we had this joint department, we would alternate. The chair would be one term from [X school] and then the next time that the chair had to be appointed, it would be from the other college. With this group of people, that wasn’t working out too well either. So the two faculty members really didn’t like the idea of “outside people” telling them what to do. They wanted to do their own thing as they had for

a long time. Part of the issue also was that they're not really doing any research anymore because they're tenured and not interested in getting promoted, and certainly we'd like to see some research out of the [department].”

Faculty also demonstrated self interest in hiring and promotion cases. In a post-tenure review case, “Professor X’s comments about leadership, management, and organizational skill were highly personalized.” When it came to light that Professor X had a personal relationship with the faculty member being reviewed, “Professor X refused to recuse himself from the vote.” A dean described the conflict that ensued when a faculty member participated on a search committee in a highly selective department. “I think it was a bit unprofessional in the sense that the person really wanted to have his friend on the faculty — really a personal interest.”

The allocation of departmental resources was the focus of two cases of self interest. The dean in the first case discussed the reaction of a faculty member involved in an administrative decision that went against the historical process of placing students in courses.

“The conflict was over the new procedure, and ultimately we agreed that the director of English composition needed to have authority over the graduation requirement in freshman English, and that it didn’t work to have it shared between two programs that had a conflict of interest and were in opposition to each other. The international program was so small and had so few resources that it was always struggling for its own survival, and so much of the behavior of the director was motivated by

trying to protect the turf basically of the program and to justify its continued existence.”

In the second case of overt conflict, regarding laboratory space and equipment, the dean said, “I think it was more protection of a person’s lab . . . and not wanting anybody else to come in and tell that faculty member how or what to do in their lab. But the faculty member would frequently violate that principle by telling other people what was wrong with their labs. So, that rubbed both ways.”

Cases of covert conflict

In response to a prompt about a case of covert conflict, one dean stated, “I think there’s probably self interest involved in almost every kind of people.” The faculty members’ desire to maintain the status quo was a common theme in most covert cases. One dean described a sabbatical case:

“This faculty member really believes she owns a certain course. And the new faculty member was going to come in and teach the course, and she didn’t want the new faculty member teaching the course. She wanted to set it up with one of her friends to teach the course so everything would be the same. And I said ‘No’, because we’re growing anyway, and I’m going to need other faculty members to teach other sections. So, that was a big part of it too. So, she wasn’t sharing materials like normally we do. In her case, in my mind, this was all self interest.”

Another case of covert conflict involved two faculty members working on a student activity involving political lobbying. “The faculty member who was in charge of the

lobby day, finally said, 'Okay. This is good. She can be doing it.' But it could have been a potential thing. To me, that was just a turf issue. Someone was stepping into where I'm supposed to be working."

Other cases referenced how faculty sought to maintain the status quo in their working conditions. The perception of self interest was present during a leadership change resulting in an unhappy faculty member. The dean stated, "But that person was most distressed because that person had had their way and done whatever they did. It was the perception of the remainder of the department that that person was performing the way that person wanted to, but not up to the standards of the school." In the case of a faculty member's unwillingness to become technology literate, the dean suggested, "Why it hasn't become an overt disagreement is because there's no changing the person's position. She's tenured, and she will get kind of nasty and back off a little bit in the meetings, but then she'll come, she came to me last week when she was confronted by the fact that minutes were, in fact, posted." The perception of self interest through maintaining the current workflow harkens back to the antecedent condition of change from the usual way of operating. The change will create a potential for covert conflict.

Evaluation of Fairness

The evaluation of fairness goes beyond the perception of self interest resulting in the question: "How do we determine what is fair?" To address this question, Homans' (1961) early writings on equity theory apply Aristotle's rule of distributive justice. The rule emphasizes the proportionality of the rewards to the costs incurred in an exchange relationship. Fairness is seen as an equitable accounting of the rewards earned in a

situation for the amount of investment contributed by each party (Roloff, 1981). The cognitive process involves appraising the situation and judging the results in terms of a fair exchange. Later developments of equity theory involve expanding the notion of proportional justice to account for the influence of groups in defining a fair exchange. Fairness is based on societal norms and established expectations for behavior (Roloff, 1981). Once again, the cognitive process includes an appraisal followed by a judgment. The distinction resides in whether the judgment references an individual's specific loss or a more generalized affront of a normative outcome. Most deans included a fairness element in their case descriptions. Since this cognitive process was so central to most of the cases of conflict, I used a specific prompt to clarify the data in virtually all cases.

Cases of overt conflict

Two overt cases demonstrated the initial proportional definition for fairness based on a personal outcome. One case involved a new building and a corresponding expanded academic major. The dean described the faculty members' conflict:

“There was some sense that this particular area of the department was gaining more influence or getting more of the benefits than the other areas of the department.

.....

The department at the school received a major funding for a new building, and [the faculty receiving the new space] certainly had influence into the area of the department that was going to be really magnified. And of

course, that wasn't the area that [the faculty not receiving the new space] was in. So that added to the appearance of preferential treatment.”

The allocation of support staff to faculty members occurred in the second case. The dean described the faculty member's reaction to a reduction in services by stating, “She believed that I was being unfair.”

Two cases illustrated the cognitive process of determining the fairness of a situation based on normative expectations by the group. A dean recalled an overt conflict based on a disagreement regarding admission criteria and academic standards. She stated:

“What is fair in this situation was a big part of what they were arguing about. I mean, one says it's not fair to students to admit them and not make sure they succeed. The other side says, ‘It's not fair to admit them, graduate them and not have them fully prepared for successes’. So both of them thought they had fairness on their side. But they had a different definition of fairness.”

The outcome of a second case, involving post-tenure review, was summarized by the dean, “We have an obligation to the community, not necessarily to the individual Professor Y, but to the community to the integrity of the process.”

Cases of covert conflict

The covert cases of conflict involved judgments based on proportional and normative approaches to the definition of fairness. Proportional judgments are present in cases related to resource allocation and decision-making; yet the cases became normative when the issues became more complex.

Proportional equity was demonstrated in a dean's description of a covert conflict over resources need to expand an academic offering. She stated:

“The resource allocation, when you're talking sociology and political science, I mean, nobody is going to fight over it because it doesn't amount to diddly squat. But in this department, they do have to buy a lot of equipment, but there's a limit on it. And so, which part of their programming would the equipment go to if we're going to hire a new person? Which part of the programs that are in that department is this person going to serve? Or, if they look really good to this side, but they're not so good to that side, how do we address those choices?”

The tangible nature of the expenditures or costs was viewed proportionally to the rewards of additional students and the influence that came with large, more vibrant departments. Another case of proportional equity was based on a compromise negotiated by the dean to maintain the conflict in a covert state. The input in this case was the authority to hire adjunct faculty by a program director, and the rewards were the revenue and departmental status that came with revenue generation. The dean described the compromise:

“The entrepreneurial program was given exemptions on faculty hiring of adjuncts. It's been working pretty well. The tensions are still there, but I think, considering that this [program director] has created a winning revenue producing program, we have to give him some leeway. I think even the [faculty] recognize that.

.....

I think in the end, the solution that we reached strikes me as fair because both sides are served reasonably well by it.

.....

I think the [faculty] are well-served or it's a fair arrangement for the [faculty] because, on the one hand, the [faculty] still has the power over credentialing, and also the [faculty] look good if that program produces good numbers. That doesn't just rub off on the [program director]. It's also good for the school as a whole, and the university as a whole."

Proportional equity also involved inputs and rewards that were symbolic, rather than tangible. For example, a dean stated emphatically about a situation that remained covert based on the intervention of an executive administrator, "If that's what the [executive administrator] wants, he's the one who put us in our job. You know, and we are real loyal to him. If that's what he wants, that's what he's going to get." The symbolic nature of this case demonstrated the connectedness to normative equity. Loyalty, while tangible, connoted aspects of culture and norms within the human interaction.

While decisions regarding rank and tenure were considered frequently to be fair based on the literal application of specific criteria, the outcome had a normative focus.

One dean described his reflections about the process:

"It was being very narrowly defined what had to be done for the [promotion]. Here's the scholarship area that had the problems in promotion.

.....

Rank and tenure is obviously a difficult situation. I think to the letter of the law, fairness was there ... but flexibility wasn't.

.....

Rank and tenure when someone doesn't get a positive decision that's going to be viewed as unfair.”

Another dean expressed the dilemmas inherent in addressing interpersonal relationships in an equitable manner. This situation involved a tenured faculty member who was no longer assigned to a department, yet needed to teach a full course load. He stated:

“They shared a value that gave priority to academic rigor and effectiveness rather than collegiality and making accommodations for a senior colleague.

.....

Both sides felt that equity was on their side. And it involved competing narratives about what had actually happened in the past that led to the break ... Since both sides wanted the same result, which was maintaining the status quo, I knew that if I determined that this situation was absurd, and intolerable, and made no sense, and she really needed to have a program, and this was the program where the person belonged given her background, that that would have renewed the conflict, or would have inflamed the circumstances. So it was really my decision. Did I want to keep it covert or not? And, I serve every year. I've asked myself that same question.”

Perception of Inequity

Several cases of conflict represented situations where there was a determination of “unfairness” regarding the exchange between faculty members. Equity theory states that individuals will be distressed if they perceive an injustice in the conflict situation (Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978). In order to determine the perceptions of faculty through the descriptions of the deans, I looked for whether there was an emotional response to the situation. Most deans described an emotional response, on a range from anxiety to suffering, consistently in their initial presentation of the cases. I used a prompt related to perceptions and misperceptions in a few cases to elicit data on this process.

Cases of overt conflict

Deans presented examples of distress in cases where the faculty suggested that inequity played a part in disagreements over departmental leadership, interpersonal exchanges, resource allocation, and legal matters. In a change of departmental leadership that brought with it a change in strategic direction, the dean stated that the faculty:

“Disagreed with everything that the new chair wanted to do, and the way he went about scheduling them, and the initiatives he wanted. They were diametrically opposed to his initiatives.

.....

They felt that the new chair was kind of violating their academic rights. He changed those. He wanted them to have more writing in their classes, and they felt that was an infringement on their academic freedom. So they were vocal about it, and expressed this to other people. Well, Faculty

Members A and B, when they first came to see me, they played this out like it was affecting their health, and they couldn't sleep at night, and they were so upset about working under this new chair that it affected their health. And the chair just said that he felt that he had been given an endorsement by the dean for the actions that he was taking in trying to straighten out the department. So, he felt justified, and they felt that they had performed a certain way for 10, 15 years, and why should they have to change?"

In another case of disagreement over a governance issue, the dean stated, "Unfortunately, you can only have one queen or one king. And you have a department that basically says, 'We are going to do it this way, and we don't care what you say.'" She continued, "The fairness and equity is perceived to have been absent and still perceived to be absent. To quote one faculty member, 'We wind up being clerks rather than having any say so at all' and that includes all the way down which has been a very sore point."

Distress was expressed in conflicts involving interpersonal communications within departments. A dean stated, "I had several faculty members ... come to me and just say, 'I can't deal with this woman. She needs to be quiet, and does she always have to be an expert at anything and everything?'" In a case of conflict between faculty team-teaching a course, the dean said,

"So the primary instructor asked me to intervene, didn't have a particular request. He just thought the secondary instructor owed at least these two students, and maybe the whole class, an apology. And he said he was

okay. He was just fine, not to worry about him. He was an adult. He could handle it. But it was clear that he was *not* fine.”

One dean addressed a legal matter that caused many women faculty distress. He replied, “It was becoming quite clear that something needed to be done. You know, that the women in that school were clearly not comfortable in the workplace anymore. They felt that they were being held to a higher standard than their male colleagues.” In another case involving personnel matters, the dean described the faculty member who initiated the overt conflict:

“I think [she had] a very heavy orientation towards blaming others, blaming the administration, blaming the dean, blaming other people who might also express a need for support and so on ... Because of her reaction, she wasn’t able to listen to the rational voices around that said there are ways through this. You know, we need to consult with the program assistants. We need to see how we can redistribute resources, and so on. She simply cut that discussion off

.....

She believed that I was being unfair.”

Cases of covert conflict

There was minimal evidence of direct reporting of perceived inequality and little distress expressed in the cases of covert conflict. Only one case expressed distress in extreme terms. This dean described the teaching schedule of a faculty member as, “He considers it to be cruel and unusual punishment. So it sounds like cruel and unusual

punishment to me too.” The deans in other cases describe the faculty members as being “a little perturbed,” “a little bit of discontent between the two,” and “a little bit short tempered.” A dean summarized a situation as, “We have never had an overt screaming quarrel. There was an exchange this fall that all happened all over email ... Outspoken ... Doesn’t care about political correctness ... There is bad blood ... Basically stabbed him in the back ... So those two don’t have any use for each other.”

Role of Cognitive Processes from Equity Theory

I identified four cognitive processes from equity theory to represent the social interaction perspective: *assessment of status*, *perception of self interest*, *evaluation of fairness*, and *perception of inequality*. These processes were evident, in varying degrees, within the 32 cases of conflict. I now discuss the role of each cognitive process as it relates to overt and covert conflicts.

Assessment of status was indirectly measured by identifying the objective characteristics (longevity and tenure status) of the faculty members in conflict. In overt conflict, half of the cases involved faculty of a similar status. The eight cases of equal status involved full professor, tenured faculty. These individuals were described in a more negative manner with references made to the antecedent condition — relevance of personality traits. The remaining eight cases of unequal status involved predominantly faculty with a shorter tenure confronting higher ranking faculty. The assessment of status of the participants in a conflict situation appeared to be a cognitive process used by junior faculty as they escalated a disagreement to overt conflict. This finding is in opposition to that of Becher and Trowler (2001) who suggest that professors with greater status are

more likely to retain lower-ranking faculty in subservient positions. My data could be explained, however, as a result of frustration on the part of junior faculty who feel they must resort to overt conflict in order to be heard.

Covert conflict involved a wide range of individuals with no pattern of discrepancy in status. The assessment of status did not seem to play a role in covert conflicts. The lack of emphasis on the assessment of status of faculty engaged in covert conflict suggests that covert conflicts, present throughout the academy, are a part of community life. All groups, regardless of status, have the capacity to express interpersonal disagreements privately. This finding is consistent with the academic culture described by Twale and De Luca (2008).

The cognitive process of *perception of self interest* is at the center of equity theory, and emphasizes the notion that humans will seek to satisfy their own needs with as little investment as possible (Walster, et al., 1978). The perception of self interest characterized most cases of overt conflict. In the interest of self first, faculty focused on how the situation would affect them, rather than an approach that looked for the effect on the other member(s) in the conflict.

The cases of covert conflict demonstrated that the perception of self interest was part of retaining the covert state of an interpersonal conflict. The focus on self interest was more evident in cases involving a need to change the usual way of performing their role as faculty members. There was a lack of perception of self interest, identified by deans, in the cases relating to actions of tenure and promotion. Since there was a range of faculty statuses represented in covert cases, this finding could reflect the socialization process by junior and non-tenured faculty. Reynolds (1992) describes how junior

members navigate the tenure process in a manner that avoids overt conflicts and yet is not devoid of self interest. The perception of self interest is inherent in their quest to seek a positional advantage.

The *evaluation of fairness* involves the judgment of equity of rewards and is based on an explicit accounting structure (proportional) or, more recently, a structure that emphasizes societal norms (normative) and expectations (Roloff, 1981). The cognitive process in proportional and normative fairness includes an appraisal followed by a judgment. The distinction resides in whether the judgment references an individual's specific loss or a more generalized affront of a normative outcome. All cases represented an element of this cognitive process. The cases of overt conflict involving resource allocation emphasized a strict accounting of inputs or efforts in proportion to the rewards of a situation. The vast majority of cases of overt conflict related fairness to the congruence of the action of others with the accepted norms of the department. The emphasis was on the *rightness* of the positions taken by each member leading to a philosophical justification.

The evaluation of fairness in cases of covert conflict was present in both proportional and normative aspects. Faculty looked to each other and to mediators to maintain this atmosphere of equity. Situations of resource allocation were more likely to consider proportional equity whereas personnel actions tended toward normative equity. The historical culture and professional nature of the professoriate may contribute to this distinction. Several cases illustrated that retaining a conflict in the covert state was not a passive action. An active process was used by mediators in faculty-to-faculty conflict

situations. Over time, the result became an ongoing covert conflict within department.

This finding points to the organizational influence discussed later in this chapter.

A perception of inequity, connoting a negative outcome in the evaluative process, is the cognitive process following an evaluation of fairness. This cognitive process was determined by the evidence in the cases and by the deans' recounting of the situation — directly or in response to prompts. Equity theory states that individuals will be distressed if they perceive an injustice in the conflict situation (Walster, et al., 1978). A distress-oriented emotional response was described by deans in most overt conflict situations. Several cases included direct statements of inequitable treatment in personnel matters, resource distribution, and interpersonal interactions: “fairness and equity is perceived to have been absent,” “violating their academic rights,” and “were being held to a higher standard.”

The cases of covert conflict did not display the perception of inequality to the extent seen in overt conflict. While faculty in the covert cases did evaluate the fairness of the situation, their resulting judgments rarely led to a perception of inequality, or distress, based on this judgment. As in the antecedent conditions to conflict, the emotion expressed in the covert cases is more subdued than in the overt cases. Distress, as an outgrowth of inequity, is not seen in the cases of covert conflict.

Organizational Influence Perspective: Interactional Theory

Interactional theory emphasizes the meaning and values used to guide assimilated behavior within a stable, institutional way of being, until a future conflict disrupts the peace (Strauss, 1978). I selected this theory, from the plethora of organizational theories, to represent the organizational influence perspective because of the theory's emphasis on an individual's cognitive processes for determining meaning and values within an organizational context. The cognitive process for identifying the person-organizational fit involves a comparison of one's cognitive norms and values with those of an external environment (Chatman, 1989). I define the external environment as involving the norms and culture of academic departments followed by the mission and values of the institutions.

In the following two sections, I present interview data from the cases of overt and covert conflict to determine the role of these two cognitive processes: *assessment of congruence with departmental norms and value* and *awareness of congruence with institutional mission and values*. In a third section, I analyze the findings and compare the role of the two cognitive processes associated with interactional theory in overt and covert conflict situations.

Assessment of Congruence with Departmental Norms and Culture

The norms of a department include the typical patterns of activity seen between the members of the department. The culture represents more deeply embedded behavioral expectations that include the norms and historical contexts for these norms. I do not critique the appropriateness of a norm or the culture when analyzing the cases; rather, I

provide examples of how the faculty involved in conflicts may have assessed the atmosphere for clues regarding the appropriateness of their behavior. While most deans referred to departmental culture in their reflections of the cases, I used a specific prompt to verify this assessment of congruence in virtually all cases.

Cases of overt conflict

Deans referred to a lack of congruence with departmental norms and culture when describing overt conflicts in several cases. One dean said, “The values of the group would be for reasoned discussion and shared problem solving ... in this situation behaviors appear to block that from happening.” Regarding the overt conflict focused on placement in Freshman English courses, the dean reflected:

“Culture here is one that tends to avoid ensuring accountability for performance. So people can develop idiosyncratic behaviors and they don’t get called on it. And so the fact that this had been a sort of simmering conflict for years prior to my becoming, coming into this position, made it harder to deal with, because it was an established pattern of behavior that my two predecessors had been unable to resolve satisfactorily.”

In another case, the dean stated, “The previous dean stepped down because of the conflicts in this particular department ... So, it’s one of those departments.” A dean described how she has maintained the culture of the school, “We tend to be very consensus building when we make decisions. This preceded me, and I pretty much still do this. You know, at times, I’ll make decisions, but I often get feedback from

everybody, and sometimes we agree to disagree, but we do try to spend time talking things through and coming to somewhat kinds of consensus.”

Several deans described how outright emotional outbursts are considered an accepted behavior in light of departmental norms. One stated, “There is a division in the department, and there tends to be some fairly emotional exchanges about departmental policies, decision-making.” Another comments, “We’ve got a [discipline-specific] faculty member that periodically throws a screaming tantrum, but people just write that off. That’s just her. So and so’s on a rampage again.” In a case of a vocal exchange within a large school-wide meeting, the dean reflected that the exchange was:

“somewhat [of] an anomaly within the school, and that’s what so shocked the other people who were part of the group. However it is not an anomaly in her program. There have been struggles of this sort, that they’ve tried to deal with over the last couple of years. So I think that pattern of demonstrating extreme anger and stomping out, and so on and so forth, ... doesn’t happen all the time, but has happened in a way that most of us find sort of hard to comprehend.”

Finally, the dean positioned a case of two faculty members engaged in a public dispute over the definition of a liberal arts education as, “I think people were not surprised. The rest of the faculty were not surprised. It was pretty tolerated actually.”

Not all descriptions of departmental norms and culture presented a negative view of faculty interaction. One dean stated, “This is one of the most congenial faculty groups I have ever seen.” Another dean described the department:

“It’s almost like a family in terms of you have your, you may have disagreements ... but you don’t air them in public and especially in front of outsiders.

...

There may be disagreements, but there’s a consensus that you don’t bring in disagreements about stuff. You don’t scream at each other. If you don’t agree on something, you don’t talk about it.”

Cases of covert conflict

As in the cases of overt conflict, I provide examples of how the faculty involved in covert conflict may have assessed the atmosphere for clues regarding the appropriateness of their behavior. Deans referenced the departmental norms and culture when describing covert conflicts in a more positive manner than they did when describing the culture in cases of overt conflict. Regarding faculty disagreements, the deans stated, “It is very counter to our culture. Very different. Everybody’s very friendly. Except, she isn’t.” and “I think, in general, it’s a very collegial.” One dean responded with a comparison: “This has been the most congenial faculty with whom I have ever worked. And I can’t say, there are ups and downs, but there are not long-term ups and downs. It’s not like, I’ve seen in large medical schools which would be a real turf battle between one and the other. There’s no turf battle here.” Another dean summarized, “We’re a pretty cohesive group here. We all have our own personalities ... but, when something happens, when push comes to shove, we’re all together.”

There were departmental concerns that exacerbated covert conflict. In a case regarding teaching schedules, a dean stated, “This is a very talkative campus ... if something happens; you tend to hear about it. Lots of rumors going around.” Another dean suggested a contributor to a covert conflict regarding teaching schedules:

“I would say it is the absence of clearly established departmental procedures for decision-making. Who does what? How things work. Very few departments have written bylaws, and I’ve been imploring the departments to address that, because so many of these kinds of disagreements that become personal are rooted in either a lack of a process or the failure to follow a process.”

In the case of a faculty member not sharing her course materials and office space with a replacement instructor during a sabbatical, the dean said, “There are some issues in that department. The department chair is a wonderful person and is fabulous with students, but she can’t always deal with, like, this faculty member who does everything under the table. Who’s always trying to undermine things.” Another dean discussed the dynamic within her department:

“I think that there’s some interesting features about this [discipline-specific] department, and there may be many [discipline-specific] departments that permit that sort of thing to happen. ... We often see a pattern where there are senior faculty who kind of adopt younger faculty, and become almost gurus in the sense that they’re the ones that give direction and so on and so forth. And sometimes they extract a price for that. In fact most often they do. It may not be an unpalatable price, but I

think there is some of that going on in this particular situation, that the young woman who was running around doing, what I consider, rather bad things, doesn't necessarily get support for doing that. But gets support as a person. And so it allows her to continue. Nobody calls her on it."

Finally, the cultural aspects of the department were elaborated on by deans. One stated, "I think perhaps the administrative structure potentially lends itself to silos to an extent which I think leads to some level of lack of communication which leads to conflict." A second dean reflected, "Sometimes I think that because we tend to be very heavily female in our mix, or make up, and I think also our orientation to our work is to be helpful and non-confrontative, and all of those things, and so many factors, return to the fact that we don't know how to deal with the situation when we see it."

Awareness of Congruence with Institutional Mission and Values

The deans interviewed are in faith-based institutions with explicit and focused mission and values statements. These statements include specific intellectual, moral, social, and religious principles that guide the decisions and actions of all employees and students. As with departmental norms and culture, I do not critique the appropriateness of the behaviors related to the mission and values of the institution. Rather, I provide examples of how the faculty involved in conflict may have assessed the atmosphere for clues regarding the appropriateness of their behavior. I used a specific prompt to elicit data on this cognitive process in 29 of the 32 cases.

Cases of overt conflict

Deans describing faculty engaged in overt conflict frequently referenced the institutional level as justification for the positions taken by each party in the dispute. For example, two faculty members engaged in overt conflict over the need to design a new major within an established department. The dean stated, “Both people did claim that [their position was] right in that ‘This is not the direction’ or ‘This is the direction we should go’. ‘This does correspond to our mission’ or ‘We’re getting away from our mission.’” Another dean described the frequent reference to the religious order of the institution’s founder:

“Anybody who wants to win an argument here explains that other side is not being [related to the institution’s foundation].

.....

I’ve been here 8 years, and I’ve never been in an institution, this is my fourth institution, I’ve never been in an institution where you just sort of hear this shouting back and forth.

.....

‘This is [related to the institution’s foundation]’ ‘No. this is [related to the institution’s foundation].’ And maybe neither one of them is [related to the institution’s foundation]. And certainly shouting back and forth is not [related to the institution’s foundation].”

One dean illustrated the effect of an institutional perspective on a case of overt conflict over faculty hiring, He stated:

“I think our institution is very – likes to turn away, likes to ignore and let things, just likes to avoid conflict. In other words, likes to avoid jumping in and resolving conflict

.....

And so I think individuals tend to, you know, they tend to be able to abuse that autonomy when no one calls them on it. No one calls them on bad behavior. There's good, there's great autonomy. There's good autonomy and also bad autonomy.”

Faculty initiate the cognitive process of evaluating fit within a standard of behavior when confronted with discordant views on how they fulfill their roles.

The focus of two overt conflicts related directly to the mission and values of the institution. The first case involved a vocal disagreement in a faculty group engaged in revising the mission documents prior to an accreditation visit:

“I think we were talking about divisions on the mission statement, and the question was whether, to what extent are we a liberal arts college, and what role professional programs play?

.....

As in, do we mean liberal arts versus liberal education, and what's that difference.

.....

And from there became internalized, as in what does it really mean for us.”

In the second case, faculty disagreed over the admissions criteria, academic rigor, and student progression policies, the dean explained:

“We’re an institution that is proud of serving a high percentage of first generation students, providing access to students that may not have access to higher education without our existence. So what does that access and the willingness to work with the student that might not be prepared for a research one institution ... what’s the right thing for us to do given that that’s part of our mission?

.....

I do think mission is a part of it, and I do think both of them believe they’re speaking to an important part of the mission of the university, which is why it’s a conflict that’s really hard to adjudicate.”

Faculty referenced the mission and values of the institution as they determined the appropriate mechanisms for interacting with other faculty. A dean stated, “I think that the institutional values are about caring for people and caring for students, faculty and staff. It’s a community environment. It’s a learning community, and it is an emphasis on a community as a whole, not just one component of it.” When asked about the role of mission and values in faculty overt conflict, a dean reflected, “Sometimes it’s raised ... because one of our realities is association. How should we be working with each other? That’s what the faculty member would say. The other faculty member would probably point to justice somewhat.”

Cases of covert conflict

The cases of covert conflict do not contain a widespread assessment of personal fit with the institutional mission and values. Two cases, from the same institution, referenced a similar value. One dean stated, “One of our mission values is association, so I guess, if you wanted to choose anything, it would probably be that. You know, getting along, working with peoples.” The other dean reflected, “One of our mission values is association, so I mean, and justice, so even if there is disagreement, you can be respectful. You are not expected to ... just overtake the whole conversation ... so there are some expectations, absolutely, and ... I see faculty, they try. I mean most of them do follow these values. I mean, it’s harder for others as we know.” Since the two cases are from the same institution, I suggest that the institution may have emphasized these values, rather than the individuals recognizing the role that the values play in their interpersonal interactions.

Role of Cognitive Processes from Interactional Theory

I explicated two cognitive processes from interactional theory to represent the organizational influence perspective: *assessment of congruence with departmental norms and culture* and *awareness of congruence with institutional mission and value*. The mechanism of how a faculty member comes to comprehend the acceptable behavior within a departmental setting is the cognitive process of evaluating ones actions within the accepted norms of the organizational unit. Interactional theory defines this cognitive activity as determining the person-situational fit. These data were generated by a reflective question of deans as observers of the conflicts and included their analysis of the

broader context. These cognitive processes were more difficult to observe except in relation to the discrepancy, reported by the deans, between the behaviors and the norms, culture, values, and mission of the institution. Discrepancies were evident, in varying degrees, within the 32 cases of conflict. I now discuss the role, based on an analysis of discrepancies, of each cognitive process in overt and covert conflicts.

The *assessment of congruence with departmental norms and culture* is particularly focused at the department level. The departments described in all cases of overt and covert conflicts were distinctive. The deans provided examples of how the departmental milieu influenced the faculty's conflict behavior. The resultant expression of overt conflict by faculty members was tempered or exacerbated by these cultural aspects and tended to be a more negative influence. There was a more positively directed contribution of departmental norms and culture in the cases of covert conflict. In other words, the department milieu tended to support maintaining conflicts in the covert state, yet when overt conflict erupted, the departmental culture played a role in the cognitive processes expressed.

Finally, the *awareness of congruence with institutional mission and values* was used by faculty engaged in overt conflicts to justify their positions within a conflict and to assess how to disagree among colleagues. The faculty also had overt conflicts with the interpretation and expression of the institutional mission and values. In covert conflicts this cognitive process was minimally evident. The awareness of congruence with institutional mission and values in covert conflicts may have had a greater affect on who remained at the institution than on the daily interactions of faculty members — the ultimate awareness of person-situation fit.

A Comparison of Overt and Covert Cases: The Dean's Perspective

Overt conflict is the public display of a disagreement between two or more parties, while covert conflict is a disagreement that does not result in a publicly-expressed dispute. The deans of liberal arts schools described cases of overt and covert conflict. At the completion of each interview, I asked the dean, "What differences, if any, do you see in these two situations?" I provided time for reflective comments by the deans and did not use any prompts. In this section, I present four themes that distinguish the cases of covert and overt conflicts as a reflection of the 16 deans. These themes are: antecedent conditions, cognitive process of social inference, cognitive processes related to equity, and cognitive processes related to assessment of congruence.

Antecedent Conditions

The first theme related to a difference in two antecedent conditions of interpersonal conflicts. The *presence of strong emotion* was frequently cited as a distinctive element in overt conflicts by statements such as "adrenaline rush," "were riled up," "wouldn't be able to tolerate and keep quiet," and "rather dangerous." Deans did not state the presence of strong emotions related to covert conflicts other than suggestions of a situation being "a small, nit-picky kind of thing that's aggravating, aggravated both of them." Another dean described a faculty member's reaction to a covert situation as "she felt bad." The presence of strong emotion connotes overt conflict.

Deans frequently mentioned the *relevance of personality traits* as a reason for differences in conflicts using statements such as: "it had more to do with personality traits" and "a lot of it just has to do with overall temperaments of the individuals involved

... in personalities, types.” Faculty engaged in overt conflicts are described as: “more outspoken,” “more emotive,” and having a tendency to “just stay after them ... until you’ve really beaten that horse.” Meanwhile, the relevance of personality traits of faculty involved in covert conflicts are described as: “more reasonable,” “quiet,” “tends to not want to bring up conflict out into the open,” and has a “tendency to let things slide, you know, let it go.”

Cognitive Process of Social Inference

Social inference is a cognitive process that involves drawing conclusions about individuals or social groups based on a set of underlying premises (Beike & Sherman, 1994). These conclusions include expectations and motivations regarding the character, beliefs, and actions of the persons in the conflict. Deans frequently made statements differentiating overt from covert conflict that relate to the cognitive process of social inference among faculty members. Examples of overt conflicts included: “more of a plot,” “she always was right,” “[the faculty members] don’t know enough ... I need to be here to tell them how they need to do things,” “There’s really unprofessional conduct, underhanded conduct going on ... it’s not acceptable,” and “professionalism versus unprofessionalism ... kind of crossing that line in terms of unduly trying to influence the department ... because of personal relationships rather than, you know, criteria for a position.”

The deans did not allude to social inference in the cases of covert conflict, except for one reference to a faculty member “feeling threatened.” Social inference was related

to overt conflicts, and not covert conflict situations, when viewed from the deans' perspective.

Cognitive Processes Related to Equity

The *perception of self interest* revolves around the question "What's in it for me?" Several deans referred to the perception of self interest as a factor in both overt and covert conflicts. Regarding a case of overt conflict, one dean stated, "Professor X had a personal agenda, and their personal agenda had priority over the operation of the department or the university as a whole ... They could not separate their personal agenda from the institution." Another dean said, "It was extreme self interest with no concern for the college's position." Finally, a dean provided an emotional description of an overt conflict, "it is a whole lot nastier, in part because ... [individual involved] is interested only in what is in it for him." "He's dangerous. He's toxic, and he has trashed our people."

Deans used equally direct words for a perception of self interest in covert conflicts. One described a faculty member's motivations as "very self interested, very self motivated. It was all about [her]." She continued that the "motivation was purely self interest ... Doesn't want to change one thing. Wants things left the way they are. Wants to protect herself." In the case of a new building, the dean referred to covert conflict over laboratory space based on "coming into his personal space" and the faculty member's reaction of "I can survive until I'm going to retire." The perception of self interest was prevalent both in overt and covert conflicts; thus, the perception of self interest does not seem to differentiate the type of conflict.

On the other hand, the *perception of inequality* was discussed frequently as creating a difference between covert and overt conflicts. Equity theory states that individuals will be distressed if they perceive an injustice in the conflict situation (Walster, et al., 1978). I looked for whether there was a negative emotional response to the situation. An overt conflict involving a faculty member publically attacking a notorious, condescending colleague ended with the dean stating, “She was getting sick of it all ... was trying to move everything forward.”

Several deans referred to distress when a faculty conflict related to the treatment or affect on students. A dean reflected on an overt conflict: “no alternative would have prevented this from becoming overt. That students were suffering. They were being misplaced, so the students were being directly harmed. There’s really unprofessional conduct, underhanded conduct going on ... it’s not acceptable.” Another dean emphasized the concern for students saying that the overt conflict “involves students and the treatment of students ... is a much more serious issue ... and something that I think almost anybody on this campus wouldn’t be able to tolerate and keep quiet ... I think they would feel obligated to make it a public ... discussion.” The perception of inequality described by deans was present in the cases of overt conflict and not mentioned in the cases of covert conflict. It appears that while the perception of self interest is common to covert and overt conflicts, perceived inequity is an important cognitive process in overt conflict and not in covert conflict.

Cognitive Processes Related to Assessment of Congruence

Deans referenced the *assessment of the congruence with departmental norms and culture* as a difference between overt and covert conflicts. The search for congruent behavior was more prevalent in covert conflicts than it was in overt conflicts. All of the examples given by the deans were related to covert conflicts. A dean stated, “The person understood that it was a hardship on the department ... and made herself available.” In another covert conflict, the dean referenced the culture as “wanting to pull back a little bit [from conflict situations] and try to avoid it.” A third dean summarized the role of departmental culture in a covert situation: “As university departments go, we’re relatively conflict free. ... most of us have been here long enough that we know each other’s hot buttons, and we don’t push them ... a 12 hour teaching load keeps you busy enough to stay out of trouble ... it’s a small department and we all *have* to work together.”

Overall, deans described how faculty *assessed the congruence between their behavior and the norms and culture of departments* in cases of covert conflict. This assessment was absent in overt conflict. The role played by *institutional mission and vision* was not evident in either overt or covert conflicts, indicating that faculty took cues for acceptable behavior at the departmental level, most closely related to their work.

In Chapter 5, I discuss the implications of these findings and analysis. I summarize and discuss these findings. I then present implications related to theory including a revised conceptual framework. The implications related to practice follows. I conclude with limitations and directions for further research.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This research has examined the role of cognitive processes used by faculty while engaged in covert and overt interpersonal conflicts with other faculty members. The research question is: *What roles do cognitive processes play in covert and overt interpersonal conflicts between faculty members at private, liberal arts colleges?* In order to answer this question, I described the cognitive processes used by faculty in each type of conflict from the perspectives of the individual reaction, the social interaction, and the organizational influence. I then compared the uses of the cognitive processes to identify similarities and differences between covert and overt conflicts.

I organize this chapter in five sections: summary, discussion, implications, limitations, and directions for future research. In the initial section, I provide a summary of the cognitive processes identified in the three perspectives followed by an explication of the differences in role between overt and covert conflicts. I then discuss how these results relate to an expanded understanding of faculty-to-faculty conflict and provide implications of my findings for theory and for practice. Finally, I identify four limitations of my research, followed by suggestions for furthering research in the area of interpersonal conflict within the academy.

Summary

I identified the roles of nine cognitive processes used by faculty members engaged in overt and covert interpersonal conflicts. These processes included cognitive

dissonance, social inference, and prediction of outcomes from the perspective of individual reactions; an assessment of status, perception of self interest, evaluation of fairness, and perception of inequity from the perspective of social interaction; and an assessment of the congruence between the individual and departmental norms and culture followed by a similar awareness of congruence with institutional mission and values from the organizational influence perspective.

In addition to the nine cognitive processes involved in faculty conflicts, I identified three basic antecedent conditions that affect individual reactions to other faculty in conflict situations. These conditions were the presence of a change from the usual order, a strong emotion involved in the change situation, and the personality traits of the faculty participating in the conflict. The basic conditions seemed to moderate the cognitive processes used in covert and overt conflicts.

I found differences in the faculty members' use of cognitive processes between overt and covert conflicts. Overt conflicts stemmed from cognitive dissonance among faculty and were sparked by social inferences regarding the intent of the faculty involved. The inference connoted intent to force a perspective or action on the other faculty member. Faculty were no longer able to predict the outcomes of the disagreement. Self interest and a sense of fairness were present in overt conflicts and the expression of these equity-related cognitive processes was moderated by the milieu of the department. Distress based on perceived inequity was expressed by faculty in most overt conflicts, especially when the perceived inequity involved the effect on students. Faculty focused their cognitive assessment of congruence with organizational norms and culture mainly at the department level and in negative behavioral terms. It was as if the faculty in overt

conflicts used the environmental aspects as justification for participating in overt conflicts.

Cognitive dissonance also played a basic role in conflicts that remained covert, yet the cognitive process of social inference, as an igniter of overt conflict, was not present. Faculty remained able to predict outcomes of covert disagreements resulting from cognitive dissonance. This prediction may have been a key factor in retaining conflicts at the covert level. As in overt conflicts, the perception of self interest and the evaluation of fairness were aspects of every covert conflict, yet the perception of inequity was not expressed by faculty in covert conflicts. The faculties' assessment of congruence with departmental norms and culture and institutional mission and vision has a positive influence on the conflict situation, as if to suggest that the covert state is the preferred institutional value for expressions of faculty disagreements.

Discussion

Interpersonal conflict is a disagreement or dispute between two or more individuals that occurs within a context. My research examined faculty members as the individuals involved in disagreements within the academic departments of liberal arts colleges. While the social meaning of conflict has changed over time, the current organizational behaviorist approach values conflict as a state to be encouraged in order to avoid "a harmonious, peaceful, tranquil, and cooperative group becoming static, apathetic, and nonresponsive to needs for change and innovation" (Robbins, 2000, p.169). My research explicated the role played by cognitive processes of faculty involved in conflicts, rather than aiming to discover how to avoid or address conflicts. Many

theories are labeled phase theories of conflict (Walton, 1969; Pondy, 1967; Filley, 1975; Rummel, 1976; Robbins, 2000). While expressing differences, they present a similar process of conflict situations evolving through a series of stages from covert to overt conflict and resulting in resolution, settlement, or suppression. These theories suggested a number of cognitive processes such as cognitive dissonance (Pondy, 1967; Robbins, 2000), social inference (Filley, 1975), personalization or self interest (Filley, 1975; Cupach & Canary, 1997), prediction of outcomes (Rummel, 1976), and assessment of cultural norms (Filley, 1975).

Theories representing individual reactions, social interactions, and organizational influences provided additional cognitive processes, along with more descriptive theoretical understanding of the processes themselves. A key concept of attribution theory is the immediate area surrounding individuals called their *life space* (Heider, 1958). In describing his notion of life space, Heider provided a context for examining interpersonal conflicts using processes of motivation and perception. Today's notion of creating learning communities for effective teaching could be seen as an extension of Heider's life space.

Jones (1971) and Ross (1977) added to attribution theory a rich description of cognitive processes including causal judgment, social inference, and prediction of outcomes. A concept in attribution theory is the notion of attribution bias. Several researchers have extended the study of attribution bias to areas that relate indirectly to interpersonal conflicts among faculty. These studies of roommates (Sillars, 1980); parents, children, and close friends (Sillars & Scott, 1983); and married couples (Fincham, 1990) represent individuals with long-term and relatively close associations

with others. While one would expect greater congruence in attributing intent to behaviors with familiar, long-term, close interactions, this was not the case. These findings assist in understanding the how cultures of incivility can become established among faculty in departments, schools, and colleges. The findings also suggested approaches for interacting with the diversity of learning styles of faculty colleagues.

The social exchange theories (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1974; Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978; Roloff, 1981) presented another perspective for identifying the role of cognitive processes used by faculty engaged in conflicts. Research on the various types of exchanges support the concept that reciprocal exchanges are considered fairer than negotiated exchanges, because negotiations appear to more competitive and less based on the good faith efforts of colleagues. While negotiated exchanges may appear more structurally fair, individuals ascribed greater fairness to the interpersonal aspects of a reciprocal exchange with colleagues (Molm, Collett, & Schaefer, 2006). These findings emphasized the role of cognitive processes for estimating fairness in interpersonal relationships and ascribing a greater degree of fairness to collegial relationships built on individual trust, rather than rules or procedures. The interpersonal communication process of a reciprocal agreement requires greater cognitive engagement between faculty members as opposed to the externally-facilitated solution of a negotiated exchange.

In addition to the process of judging fairness, equity theory adds the perception of self interest and inequity as observable cognitive processes in a conflict situation. Later research in equity theory (King & Miles, 2004; Nauman, Minsky, & Sturman, 2002; Campbell, et al., 2004) added the concept of equity sensitivity to the cognitive process of self interest. Equity sensitivity suggests that individuals have different valences for

rewards based on their inputs. This concept may link back to the antecedent condition of personality traits and the cognitive process of assessment of social inference, discussed with attribution theory. Faculty members' assessment of equity can influence many aspects of the professorial role including their goals for acknowledgement and achievement within the academy, their interactions with students in the teaching and learning process, and their relationships with colleagues.

Interactional theory suggested the necessity of a fit between the expertise of the individual and the needs of the situation or organization, in order to create a peaceful and productive situation. People actively influence situations, and individuals choose situations for interaction that are compatible with their strengths or interests. They perform optimally in these self-selected environments (Emmons & Diener, 1986). The effects of the assessment of self interest and fairness described in equity theory can be moderated by the organizational culture of community. Austin (1991) and Holton (1998) provide a context for an emphasis on congruence between faculty members' personal aspirations and the needs and values of the academy.

The effects of interpersonal conflict within the academy are seen as an escalating clash of cultures (Austin, 1991; Crews & West, 2006; Twale & De Luca, 2008; Cassell, 2011). As the demographics of the professoriate and the expectation of faculty work change, there is a change in the familiar mechanisms related to the intellectual pursuits of faculty work. These changes bring about the potential for conflict as depicted in the *context* and *antecedent conditions* phase of my conceptual framework. Academic administrators within the academy need a keen attention to the role played by cognitive processes as faculty move through the various forms of covert and overt conflict in

reaction the changing environment (Harrison & Brodeth, 1999; Tjosvold & Su, 2006; Steele, 2008).

Implications Related to Theory

This research has implications related to theory through the development of a conceptual framework that changes the perspective of the derived conceptual framework, generated by this research, from one of conflict as a situation to one of conflict as a conceptual process. My original framework is based on the theoretical view of conflict as a situation within a broad context. Covert conflict resides within this context and is considered part of the residual background. Conflict has antecedent conditions and becomes overt based on a spark labeled “cognition with personalization.” All actions of conflict are then described in behavioral terms. My research posits a revised conceptual framework that views conflict as individual cognitive processes set within the context of social interactions with organizational influences. Covert conflict continues to be part of the background and, like overt conflict, is described in cognitive terms related to individual reactions, social interactions, and organizational influences.

Figure 2 presents an expanded view of the phases of conflict that precede both covert and overt conflict behaviors. This expanded view shows that cognitive dissonance, assessment of status, perception of self interest, and evaluation of fairness play a role

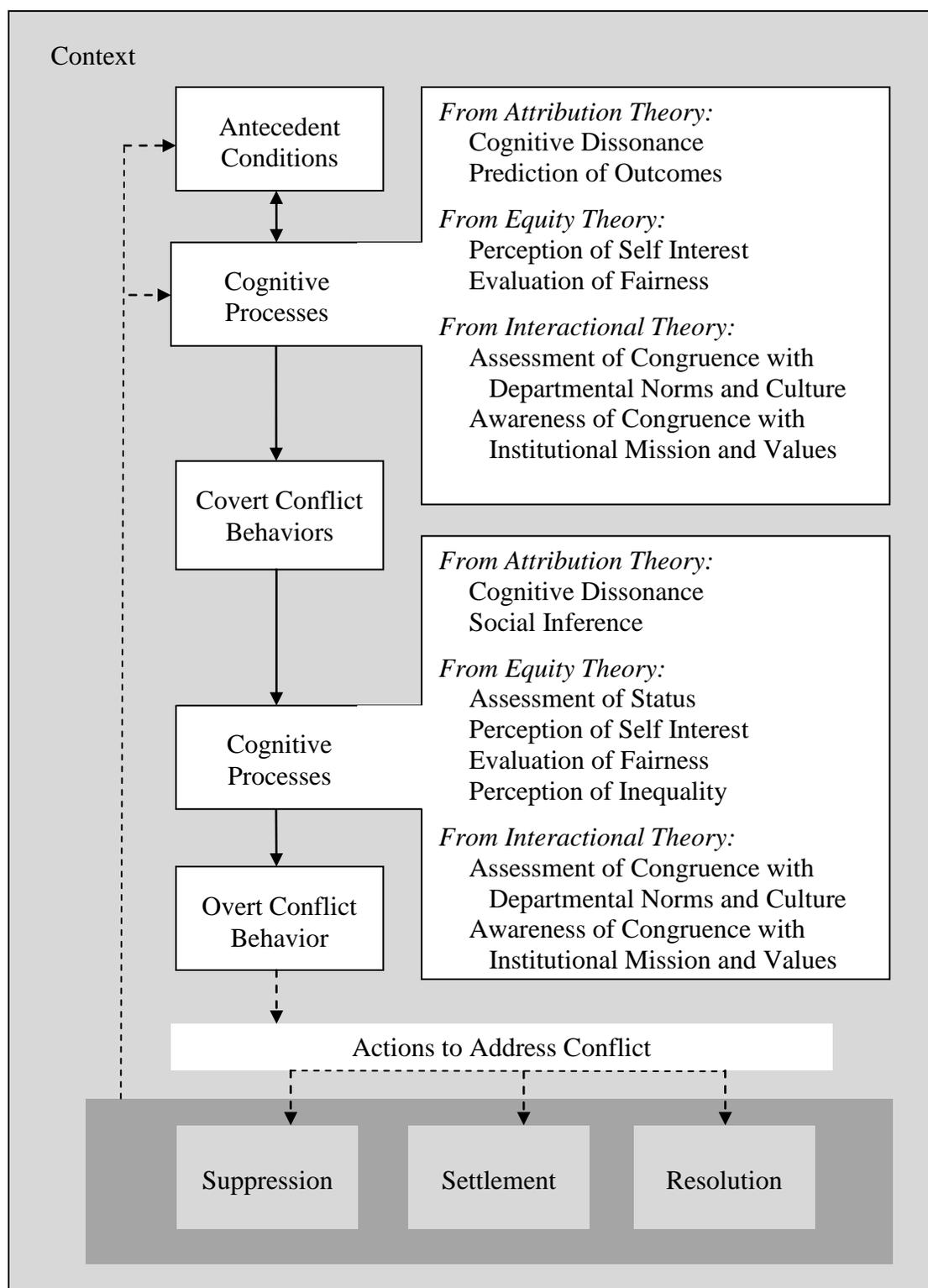


Figure 2: The Role of Cognitive Processes within Covert and Overt Conflicts

leading to covert and overt conflicts. Predicting the probable outcomes of a conflict serves to maintain a covert position, while the leap to a social inference is associated with overt conflict. While the roles played by the cognitive processes associated with status, self interest, and fairness are similar in covert and overt situations, the perception of an inequitable situation, not unexpectedly, leads to overt conflict. Finally, if there is sense of congruence within the faculty's perspectives and the norms, culture, mission, and values of the college, the conflict remains covert. A lack of such congruence sparks overt conflicts.

Implications Related to Practice

I identified the roles of cognitive processes used when faculty engaged in overt and covert conflicts. These processes, along with their manifestations in overt and covert conflicts, suggested three implications related to practice: civility among faculty, academic leadership, and effectiveness of teaching and learning.

Civility among faculty is respectful consideration of others, especially in situations where perspectives diverge. My data indicated an inherent presence of cognitive dissonance preceding all conflicts, along with social inferences regarding the motivations of colleagues, when the conflict became public. When faculty engaged in disagreements they considered the status of others within the department, their personal stake in the disagreement, and whether they were getting fair rewards for their efforts. The departmental structures of the academy place faculty in close proximity to each other and promote the emergence of diverse subcultures, with their corresponding norms of

behavior. This study suggested that faculty take into account these norms and moderate their behaviors to comply with or disregard these norms.

Given the length of the tenured status of most faculty members in my study, the individual characteristics became well known to others and social interaction patterns emerged. These patterns were characterized as respectful, supportive, and collegial or disrespectful, caustic, and combative. This research provided a mechanism to understand the underlying cognitive processes involved in creating these departmental, and eventual institutional, cultures. Addressing cases of incivility and creating a culture of civility begins with understanding the role played by individual faculty members.

An essential role of *academic leaders*, whether in role of department chairpersons or deans, is that of creating and maintaining an environment that supports the dynamism of teaching and learning in a respectful, healthy manner. Understanding the cognitive processes involved in covert and overt conflicts forms a basis for leadership.

This research presented a framework for appreciating the nuances of individual reactions within a context of social interactions with other faculty members. The framework of understanding the perspectives and motivations of the involved parties could assist leaders in resolving disputes and promoting dialog, in fostering change and engaging stakeholders, in nurturing careers and developing a sense of community. This study provided a perspective for academic leaders that views conflict as a natural phenomenon within the dynamic activity of teaching and learning, is rooted in understanding individual faculty members, and accounts for their interactions within the norms and culture of an organization.

Effective teaching and learning involves a commitment to development of the whole person with an appreciation of unique giftedness. Faculty are the key participants in this dynamic process; they model the life of inquiry and openness to alternatives. The nobility of the faculty calling needs to be supported by a dynamic and caring community of learners. This research presents an approach to interpersonal conflict that is based on understanding the persons involved, taking time to think through their perspectives, motivations, interests, and emotions. As faculty demonstrate respect for each other, they model respect for their students, creating a cycle of authentic, lifelong learning.

Limitations

This study's limitations are based on the exploratory nature of qualitative research. I identify and discuss four major limitations of this research, including third party reporting, a retrospective design, the lack of triangulation, and a limited sample size. In the next section, I present approaches to address these limitations.

I obtained cases of faculty-to-faculty conflicts by interviewing the dean rather than the actual faculty members engaged in the conflict. The perspective of the dean introduced a bias similar to the attribution bias seen in a faculty member's recounting of a situation. While I instructed the deans to provide cases that were current and that they felt comfortable communicating to me, I did not check the facts of the cases beyond the deans' reporting. The interviews included opinions and biases of the deans regarding the conflict situations. My questions asked the deans to analyze the faculty interactions in a way that elicited opinions and hypotheses from the deans. At times, the data show

personal bias by deans beyond my questions. This bias is seen in the elaboration of extraneous details and direct acknowledgment of bias by the dean.

I asked deans to describe two recent cases of conflict: one that became overt and one that remained covert. By using a retrospective design for data collection, I added the factor of reporter memory that may have distorted the accuracy of the conflict situations. The effects of memory may have skewed the data to emphasize aspects of the conflict that were memorable or distinctive about the individuals involved. These conflicts may represent extreme cases of conflict, rather than more common occurrences of disagreements. I attempted to minimize the memory lag of the retrospective questioning, by providing time to think of the conflict situation prior to the interview, by asking for rich description of the situation, and by repeated questions to verify the accuracy of the reflections.

The combination of retrospective design and third party reporting made it impossible for me to verify the accuracy and intensity of the data. The individual conditions related to attribution theory (change, strong emotion, and personality trait) need to be considered also when considering the dean's involvement in the conflict situation. The deans represented a diversity of emotion and personality traits while describing the changes that brought about the conflict situations. As discussed in attribution theory, the deans displayed biases just as did the faculty members involved in conflicts. I could not verify the bias expressed by school deans.

The 32 cases of faculty-to-faculty conflict are elicited from a sample of 16 school deans representing five private, liberal arts institutions — a small sample size. I attempted to minimize this limitation by using a multi-site design with geographic

diversity. The conflict cases represented faculty from the multiple disciplines found in arts, sciences, and professional schools. According to the deans, most of the faculty members involved were tenured, with a long history at the college. The diversity of faculty within the United States higher education system was not represented in my study. Since I limited data collection to a specific sector of higher education, I am not able to generalize beyond the small, private, liberal arts college community.

Directions for Future Research

Further research on faculty-to-faculty conflict could be very fruitful in furthering understanding of the role of cognitive processes in faculty interactions. A case study methodology could examine conflict situations by observing and interviewing faculty involved directly in the situation. A case study provides opportunities for direct reporting by the involved faculty members, minimizing reporter bias, and enabling a richer data set with multiple perspectives. A method of minimizing the effect of memory would be to conduct a case study while a conflict is occurring. This could be done if the researcher had access to faculty during a wide-spread, conflict situation such as a vote for unionization or a process of school closure. An application of case study methodology providing department-level data, rather than individual-level data, is to compare departments that have multiple conflicts with those that are relatively conflict free. The concerns of a limited sample size are not addressed in this approach.

Future research could examine the roles of each of the nine cognitive processes that I identify in an experimental manner with controlled laboratory studies. These experiments could replicate, within the context of a conflicting situation, the studies used

originally to explicate the cognitive processes. For example, cognitive dissonance and the related social inference could be studied from a series of scenarios, pictures, or dramas followed by specific questions to gauge reactions. The perception of self interest and assessment of fairness related to equity theory could be examined with progressive case studies. The antecedent conditions of distress and strong emotions could be measured physically. The effect on conflict of departmental norms and culture could be studied using a Q-sort methodology, as frequently used in studies of the organizational perspective. The influence of institutional mission and values could be examined closer by comparing institutions with strong emphases on mission to those of more diffuse expressions of mission. This comparison could encompass the actual diversity of faculty perspectives leading to cognitive dissonance, sensitivity toward outward expression of difference, acceptance of self interest, and expectation of fairness.

I used individual reaction, social interaction, and organizational influence to represent multiple perspectives for understanding conflict. Further research could study the efficacy of using various lenses to understand complex phenomena such as conflict. Other theories could be used as mechanisms for comparing data between and within perspectives. For example, the influence of individual reactions on conflict could use Freudian or Jungian psychology, while social interaction could be view through the lens of game theory. Additional cognitive processes may surface with the use of other theories and perspectives.

The concern remains regarding the limited sample size and the resulting inapplicability to many sectors within the academy. I suggest a line of research that uses a national data set on the study of faculty in order to better understand faculty-to-faculty

conflict. A quantitative study could examine the questions that relate to the roles of conceptual processes expressed by faculty in my research. The Higher Education Research Institution (HERI) data set of higher education faculty (Cooperative Institutional Research Program, 2010-2011) includes items related to the cognitive processes involved in conflict situations. For example, several items refer to the congruence with institutional mission and values while other items represent the elements of fairness based on the equity theory perspective. The cognitive processes represented in individual reactions, including cognitive dissonance and social inference, are not included in the national data set; thus, there is a necessity for further research to study faculty responses in specific conflict situations. The disciplinary differences are well represented in the data set, yet additional focused research, such as mine, could contribute to understudied groups such as graduate faculty and adjunct faculty.

Conclusion

I began this study suggesting that the uniqueness of the academy, as distinct from other highly-specialized organizations, lies in how the actors approach interpersonal disagreements. I selected a subset of the academy — the private, liberal arts college. While the art of theater and literature captured my original interest in this topic, the titles from the academy continue to tell the story. *Mending the Cracks in the Ivory Tower* (Holton, 1998) has given way to *Rethinking Faculty Work* (Gappa, et al., 2007), *Faculty Incivility* (Twale & De Luca, 2008), and *The Innovative University: Changing the DNA of Higher Education from the Inside Out* (Christensen & Eyring, 2011). The approach has changed from repairing to rethinking.

If the faculty are the key actors in this dance of intellects, one must seek to understand how they work together to create the unique environment of inquiry leading to learning and discovery. The work of the academy is centered on cognitive development of basic knowledge, of application of knowledge, of synthesis of new approaches. Who better to rethink the vitality of the academy than faculty? By understanding how faculty think — the role of cognitive processes — in conflict situations, one can deduce how faculty can contribute to the future of learning and discovery in areas where the conflict is beyond the interpersonal interactions of colleagues. My intent is to contribute to developing an appreciation for differences, as represented in conflict situations, in order to create a milieu of mutual respect around a common mission — the essence of excellent teaching, research, and academic administration.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

<i>Purpose</i>	<i>Text</i>
Introduction and consent	<p>Hello. My name is Linka Holey. I contacted you by email and you agreed to be interviewed at this time. I sent you the Consent Form by a previous email.</p> <p>Have you read the Consent Form? If Yes: Do you consent to being included in this study? If No: I will read the form. Then ask: Do you consent to being included in this study?</p> <p>Do you consent to being audio taped? (Turn on tape.) Please repeat your permissions for the tape.</p> <p>Do you consent to being included in this study? Do you consent to being audio taped?</p> <p>Do you have questions about this research that I have not addressed previously?</p>
Definitions	<p>As we know, the potential for conflict between individuals exists within any organization and is frequently identified as “latent or covert conflict”.</p> <p>Then there are the more commonly identified situations of conflict where individuals are actively engaged in a disagreement or disturbance. I refer to this state as “overt conflict”. Universities, such as ours, are no exception.</p>
Instructions for Case Descriptions	<p>Please consider your experiences as an academic administrator in the past <u>three years</u> and identify two representative cases of conflict where you had to mediate a disagreement between two faculty members.</p> <p>These cases should be ones that you remember well and can discuss at length with me.</p> <p>Please do not identify any persons at your institution in these cases. We will discuss them as “Faculty Member A” and “Faculty Member B” in “Situation 1” and “Faculty Member A” and “Faculty Member B” in “Situation 2”. You can decide which labels to use.</p>

I will give you a few minutes to reflect on the two situations.
Let me know when you are ready to continue.

Questions for Case 1:
Overt Conflict

Situation 1: Overt Conflict

First let's discuss a situation involving faculty members where a disagreement ended in outright conflict.

1. What was the nature of the disagreement?
2. Describe the circumstances surrounding the interaction.
3. What indications were present that suggest the situation would become an overt disagreement?

Questions for Case 2:
Covert Conflict

Situation 2: Covert Conflict

Now let's move on to a situation with faculty members that had a potential for an overt disagreement, but the disagreement did not result in outright conflict. The conflict remained below the surface.

1. What was the nature of the disagreement?
2. Describe the circumstances surrounding the interaction.
3. What indications were present that suggest the situation would not become an overt disagreement?

Prompts to use if areas
not mentioned in initial
case descriptions

Previous experiences and interactions between faculty ...

Accusation of cause or intending to cause ...

(Used in Situation 1 and
Situation 2 descriptions
with coding sheet)

Motivations expressed ...

Role of perception and misperception ...

Personality traits ...

Presence of self interest ...

Position within the department ...

Role of concept of fairness ...

Culture of department, school, institution ...

Usual faculty interaction in similar situations ...

Role of institutional mission and values ...

Summary

What differences, if any, do you see in these two situations?
Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you for your time and thoughtful attention.

Coding Sheet for Prompts

Prompts to use with each case (if not mentioned in answers to the initial questions).

Case 1 – Overt Prompts

Case 2 – Covert Prompts

	Previous experiences and interactions between faculty <i>(attribution theory – cognitive dissonance)</i>	
	Accusation of cause or intending to cause ... <i>(attribution theory – social inference)</i>	
	Motivations expressed <i>(equity theory – evaluation of fairness)</i>	
	Role of perception and misperception <i>(equity theory – perceptions of self interest and inequality)</i>	
	Personality traits of parties <i>(antecedent conditions)</i>	
	Presence of self interest <i>(equity theory – perception of self interest)</i>	
	Contribution of position within the department <i>(equity theory - assessment of status)</i>	
	Role of concept of fairness <i>(equity theory – evaluation of fairness)</i>	
	Perception of conflict in culture of department, school, institution? <i>(interactional theory – assessment of congruence with departmental norms and culture)</i>	
	Usual faculty interaction in similar situations <i>(attribution theory – prediction of outcomes)</i>	
	Role of institutional mission and values <i>(interactional theory – awareness of congruence with institutional mission and values)</i>	

APPENDIX B: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

**Research Exempt from IRB Committee Review
Category 2:****SURVEYS/INTERVIEWS, STANDARD EDUCATION TESTS & OBSERVATIONS
OF PUBLIC BEHAVIOR**

Route this form to: See instructions below.	U Wide Form: UM 1571 Rev: 2/15/08
-------------------------------------------------------	------------------------------------------------

IRB Use Only
1003E79475 Rcvd 03/17/10

Submission Instructions:E-mail a copy of this application and any other materials required to the Research Subjects' Protections Programs Office: RSPPeRev@umn.edu*Electronically submitted protocols must be sent from a University of MN e-mail account. Original signatures are not required. U of M x.500 IDs have been deemed by the University of Minnesota to constitute a legal signature.**Academic Advisors and Co-Investigators should be carbon copied (Cc) on the submission e-mail.*For help with this form and to download additional appendices: see <http://www.research.umn.edu/irb/download/> or call 612-626-5654**1.1 Project Title** (Project title must match grant title. If different, also provide grant title):

From Covert to Overt Interpersonal Conflict: An Exploration of the Cognitive Processes Used by Faculty in Liberal Arts Colleges

1.2 Principal Investigator (PI)

<i>Exemption Granted *category 2* 03/26/10 willi173</i>

Name (Last name, First name MI): Holey, Linka M	Highest Earned Degree: MSN
Mailing Address: 8192 Groveland Road Mounds View, MN 55112	Phone Number: 763.786.7142
	Pager or Cell Phone Number: 612.987.4663
	Fax: 612.728.5121
U of M Employee/Student ID: 757224	Email: lholey@smumn.edu
U of M x.500 ID (ex. smith001): hole0003	University Department (if applicable): not applicable
Occupational Position: <input type="checkbox"/> Faculty <input type="checkbox"/> Staff <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Student <input type="checkbox"/> Fairview Researcher <input type="checkbox"/> Gillette Researcher <input type="checkbox"/> Other:	
Human Subjects Training (one of these must be checked--refer to training links at the end of this section): <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> CITI , <input type="checkbox"/> Investigator 101, <input type="checkbox"/> NIII training (EXCEPT for 5/8/06 to 2/29/08), <input type="checkbox"/> UMR/RCR (between 1994-2003) <input type="checkbox"/> Other - Indicate training received, when and from which institution:	IRB Training (Required if Data Contains PII): <input type="checkbox"/> IRB Training
As Principal Investigator of this study, I assure the IRB that the following statements are true: The information provided in this form is correct. I will seek and obtain prior written approval from the IRB for any substantive modifications in the proposal, including changes in procedures, co-investigators, funding agencies, etc. I will promptly report any unexpected or otherwise significant adverse events or unanticipated problems or incidents that may occur in the course of this study. I will report in writing any significant new findings which develop during the course of this study which may affect the risks and benefits to participation. I will not begin my research until I have received written notification of final IRB approval. I will comply with all IRB requests to report on the status of the study. I will maintain records of this research according to IRB guidelines. The grant that I have submitted to my funding agency which is submitted with this IRB submission accurately and completely reflects what is contained in this application. If these conditions are not met, I understand that approval of this research could be suspended or terminated.	
hole0003	3/17/10
x.500 of PI	Date

Training Links:FIRST (Fostering Integrity in Research, Scholarship and Training): <http://eflegacy.research.umn.edu/first/humansubjects.htm>HIPAA: <http://www.research.umn.edu/first/AdditionalCourses.htm>

- "UM/RCR" includes all human subjects protection training offered in-person or online at the University of Minnesota from 1994-2003.

APPENDIX C: CODING STRUCTURE WITH DEFINITIONS

<i>Theme/Subtheme</i>	<i>Definition</i>
SIT - Situation	Description of the setting
ANT - Antecedent Condition	Description of the elements and issues
CH - change	Out of the ordinary happenings
PT – personality trait	Feature of person’s enduring characteristics
EM – strong emotion	Presence of positive or negative interactions
ATT – Attribution Theory	How one understands others to determine how to behave in socially acceptable manner
CD – cognitive dissonance	Thinking express of dissimilar perspectives
SI – social inference	Assumption of intentions of others
PO – prediction of outcomes	Probable behavior resulting from situation
EQU – Equity Theory	How one determines what is fair in a world of multiple inequities
ST - status	Determination of social positioning
SE – self interest	Identifying “what is in it for me?”
PR – assess of fairness	Identifying “is the reward in proportion to cost?”
DI – distress inequality	Identifying “was I treated fairly?” – with emotion
INT – Interactional Theory	How one weights personal will against structures and cultures of environment
OC –department culture	Identifying congruence with departmental level
MV – mission and vision	Identifying congruence with institutional level