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Playing the Odds:
A Multi-Level Framework for Addressing Probabilities for Intractable Conflict at Work

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Abstract

Research has identified a variety of individual-level and organizational-level variables associated with constructive versus destructive patterns of organizational conflict. However, this multitude of variables represents something of an embarrassment of riches. Currently, there is no unifying framework for understanding how individual attributes and competencies and organizational structures and processes work in concert to affect the probabilities for destructive, enduring conflicts. Understanding the genesis, maintenance and transformation of conflict attractors in organizations requires more than an understanding of the individual and contextual factors involved, and must include their inter-relationships, the timescales in which they unfold, and the mechanisms that affect transmission of conflict dynamics from one level to another. This monograph presents such a framework, offering a comprehensive approach for conceptualizing and assessing conflict competencies and structures at multiple levels of organizations.

Today, organizational scholars suggest that conflict brings little but pain to organizations (De Dreu, 2008). Here are a few facts:

- Managers spend 25-40% of their time dealing with workplace conflicts (Washington Business Journal, 2005).
- Sixty to eighty percent of difficulties in organizations stem from strained relationships between employees, not skill or motivation deficits (Dana, 2005; Kreisman, 2002).
- As many as 16% or one in six workers report that a recent conflict remains unresolved, having lasted longer than expected and/or is becoming increasingly intense (CPP Global, 2008).
- Prolonged conflict is associated with increased incidents of bullying and counterproductive work behaviors like theft and sabotage (Ayoko, Callan & Hartel, 2003).
- Fifty percent of employers in the United States report having been embroiled in a lawsuit by an employee (USA Today, 2001).
- Between 1970-1989, employment discrimination cases increased 2,166% (Mediate.com), and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) received more workplace discrimination complaints than ever in 2010 (EEOC.gov.org).
- Ninety percent of workplace harassment is never officially reported (Workplace Conflict: Facts and Figures, Mediate.com).
- Employees with managers who were incompetent, inconsiderate, secretive and uncommunicative were 60% more likely to suffer a heart attack (Nyberg, 2008).
- A study by Dr. Noreen Tehrani, who counseled victims of violence in Northern Ireland, found that soldiers returning from overseas combat and victims of workplace bullying exhibited similar psychological and physical symptoms – nightmares, extreme anxiety, and a variety of physical ailments (Williams, 2011).

Leaders and managers cannot prevent destructive conflicts from occurring at work. However, they can do a great deal to reduce the probabilities that these conflicts will escalate and persist, and increase the probabilities that their members will work to resolve them constructively. In other words, while occasional work conflicts cannot be stopped, the tendency for conflicts to evolve over time into stable destructive patterns that impair work environments can be mitigated and prevented.

While most conflicts arise and are resolved as natural, inevitable, and constructive social processes in the everyday operation of organizations, approximately 5% of more difficult conflicts enter into escalating spirals that become increasingly intractable (Coleman, 2011; Diehl & Goertz, 2001; Klein, Goertz, & Diehl, 2006). Whether due to pent-up grievances, contentious lawsuits, or personal betrayals, these 5% of conflicts become locked into destructive patterns of hostility and enmity with low probabilities of resolution and high costs and consequences (Coleman, 2003). Recently, such patterns have been conceptualized as conflict *attractors*, a term from applied mathematics, which essentially characterizes strong dynamics that attract people's thoughts, feelings and actions in a manner that resists change (Coleman, 2006; Svyantek & Brown, 2000; Vallacher, Coleman, Nowak, & Bui-Wrzosinska, 2010; Vallacher, et al., in press). While much is known about work conflict in general (see De Dreu & Gelfand, 2008; Tjosvold, 1993), very little is known about the formation, maintenance, and transformation of intractable conflict attractors in organizations.

Scholarship has identified a variety of individual-level and organizational-level variables associated with constructive versus destructive patterns of organizational conflict. At the individual-leader level, cooperative vs. competitive orientations (Tjosvold, 1991, 1998, 2008), higher levels of integrative, behavioral, and emotional complexity (see Kugler, Coleman, & Fuchs, 2009, Kang & Shaver, 2004; Pruitt & Lewis, 1975; Suedfeld & Tetlock, 1977; Zaccaro, 2000), tolerance for ambiguity (for example Teger, 1970), and broader temporal scope or consideration for future consequences (for example Cohen & Insko, 2008; Van Lange, Klapwijk & Van Munster, 2011; Wolf, et al., 2009) have all been associated with more constructive versus destructive patterns of disputing.

At the organizational level, factors such as the public versus private nature of the external environment (Grissom, 2010; Lincoln, 1978; Musallam, 2011), type of organization (e.g. Bartels, Pruyn, De Jong & Joustra, 2007; Harvey & Evans, 1994), cross-cutting structures (see Sawyer, Houlette, & Yeagley, 2006; Varshney, 2001), cultural complexity (e.g. Jehn, Chadwick & Thatcher, 1997; Pelled, Eisenhardt, & Xin, 1999; Sawyer, et al., 2006), task-reward interdependence structures (e.g. De Dreu & Van Vainen, 2001; Langfred, 2007; Tjosvold, 1986; Wageman, 1995), social structures (e.g. Nicholson & Goh, 1983; Nelson, 1989), decision-making structures (e.g. Amason, 1996; Schwenk, 1995), and the culture of conflict (Gelfand, Leslie, Keller & De Dreu, 2012) have been identified as influencing conflict dynamics.

However, this multitude of individual and organizational-level variables represents something of an embarrassment of riches. Currently, there is no unifying framework for understanding how these various individual attributes and competencies and organizational structures and processes work in concert to affect the probabilities for destructive, enduring conflicts. Understanding the genesis, maintenance and transformation of conflict attractors in organizations requires more than an understanding of the individual and contextual factors involved, and must include their inter-relationships, the timescales in which they unfold, and the mechanisms that affect transmission of conflict dynamics from one level to another. This monograph presents such a framework, offering a comprehensive approach for conceptualizing and assessing conflict competencies and structures at multiple levels of organizations.

Intractable Work Conflict

Most conflicts at work, although annoying, are benign, easily resolved, or even useful in terms of clarifying problems and preferences. These conflicts have relatively clear boundaries that delineate what they are and are not about, who they concern and who they do not, and when and where it is appropriate to engage in them. Thus, most conflicts can be addressed through standard methods of discussion, negotiation, mediation or other constructive forms of problem solving.

But when conflicts become destructive and persist, they can spread and become increasingly pervasive, affecting many aspects of life (Musallam, Coleman & Nowak, 2010; Rouhana & Bar-Tal, 1998; Zartman, 2005). Although the hostilities may appear most obvious at a given level (e.g., between two peers), they can begin to affect and be affected by elements at multiple levels (group affiliations, professional assignments, norms, policies, etc.) interacting in complex ways and leading to increased tension. Such conflicts begin to involve many more parties over time in various roles within the growing conflict system. They are also in flux; with the "hot" issues, the levels where they manifest, the critical parties involved, the nature of the relationships in the network, the degree of intensity of the conflict, and the level of attention attracted from bystanders all subject to change. This mercurial character often contributes to their resistance to resolution (Coleman, 2003).

Eventually, the different elements comprising these conflicts may start reinforcing one another through feedback loops, such as when a negative moment between disputants triggers other antagonistic thoughts, feelings and responses (see Coleman, 2011; Vallacher, et al., in press

for a full account). These connections between elements can become ever more complex and tightly-coupled, leading to increasingly unpredictable conflict dynamics (see Figure 1).

INSERT FIGURE 1

For example, Figure 1 displays a series of events that unfolded over five different temporal phases in a conflict between a musician's union and the management of the Detroit Symphony. Each event in turn triggered and reinforced other events, culminating in a state of high-tension, threats of violence and intractability.

At some point, these conflict "systems" may cross a threshold where they become *self-organizing* (Nowak & Vallacher, 1998). In other words, they become more and more driven by the self-perpetuating internal dynamics of the elements interacting within the system, and less and less affected by external forces (such as neutral bystanders or third parties). At this point they are characterized by what are known as *attractor dynamics*, strong patterns that resist change and to which the system returns after perturbation (Nowak & Vallacher, 1998). This is what we have referred to elsewhere as the essence of intractable conflict (Coleman, 2011; Vallacher, et al., in press). These types of conflicts are typically unresponsive to many and varied good-faith attempts to resolve them. This is the bad news. The good news is that because intractable conflicts are complex and multiply-determined, the potential exists for them to also be addressed or mitigated through multiple means. This is where multi-level theory can help.

A Multi-Level Framework for Addressing Intractable Work Conflict

Multi-level approaches to organizational theory, assessment and change have been proliferating for over a decade (i.e., Aguilera, Rupp, Williams & Ganapathi, 2007; Gittell & Weiss, 2003; Kozlowski & Klein, 2000; Ostroff & Bowen, 2000; Zohar & Luria, 2004). These approaches recognize the high-degrees of complexity and equifinality (that a given end state can be reached by various means) of work phenomena such as leadership (Avolio & Bass, 1995), safety (Zohar & Luria, 2005), performance measurement (De Haas & Kleingeld, 1999), and organizational performance (Ostroff & Bowen, 2000), to name a few. Recent research on organizational conflict management has also embraced this approach (Gelfand, et al, 2012; Gobeli, Koenig & Bechinger, 1998; Korsgaard, Jeong, Mahony, & Pitariu, 2007; Oetzel, Dhar & Kirschbaum, 2007), which pays particular attention to the mechanisms responsible for cross-

level effects. However, to date, no multi-level framework has addressed the more difficult protracted conflicts that can result in an organization's decline and eventual demise.

The multi-level framework presented here attempts to fill this gap by integrating research on both individual-level and organizational-level attributes conducive to constructive versus destructive conflict dynamics. In addition, it provides a general sense of the main mechanisms and processes responsible for cross-level transmission effects, and a brief summary of the methods of assessment available to track trends in conflict dynamics. Our primary objective here is to supplement learning and professional development of leaders in organizations, as well as to assist with organizational conflict-management initiatives aimed at preventing or mitigating destructive, long-term conflicts.

Individual-Level Leader Skills Assessment Framework

In *The Logic of Failure: Recognizing and Avoiding Error in Complex Systems*, German psychologist Deitrich Dörner (1996) suggests that many of the critical problems faced by leaders today "place high demands on a planner's capacities to gather information, integrate findings, and design effective actions" (p. 38; also see Kegan, 1995). The complex, dynamic nature of intractable organizational conflict dynamics are no exception, requiring that leaders continuously analyze the changing dynamics and accordingly plan, execute, evaluate, and reevaluate their interventions.

Coleman (2011) employed a hybrid of complexity science and psychology to propose a new conceptual model of intractable conflict built around the idea of attractors, the *Attractor Landscape Model* (ALM; see Vallacher, et al., 2010; Vallacher, et al., in press). In doing so, he outlined a set of basic competencies and skills associated with enhancing leadership capacities for working effectively with difficult, complex conflicts, including understanding nonlinear networks of causation and enhancing complex thinking, feeling, acting, and identification (Coleman, 2011; pp. 219-220).

Previously, scholars have identified a core set of processes and skills conducive to constructive conflict management and systemic thinking (see Figure 2). They include:

INSERT FIGURE 2

Cooperative Orientations: Cooperation and competition between people and between groups have been shown to have profoundly different consequences (see Deutsch, 1949a, 1949b, 1973, 2000; Johnson & Johnson, 1989, 2005; Tjosvold, 2003). Research has consistently shown

that competitive orientations: induce the use of tactics of coercion, threat, or deception; attempts to enhance the power differences between oneself and the other; results in poor communication, minimization of the awareness of similarities in values and increased sensitivity to opposed interests; foster suspicious and hostile attitudes; increase the importance, rigidity, and size of the issues in conflict. In contrast, cooperative orientations induce: a perceived similarity in beliefs and attitudes; a readiness to be helpful; openness in communication; trusting and friendly attitudes; sensitivity to common interests; a de-emphasis to opposed interests; an orientation to enhancing mutual power rather than power differences.

Past research in organizations has demonstrated the critical role of perceived cooperative interdependence in fostering constructive conflict dynamics between managers and their employees (Tjosvold, 1981; 1985a, 1985b, 2003, Tjosvold, Johnson & Johnson, 1984). A constructive process of conflict resolution is similar to an effective, cooperative problem solving process (conflict is perceived as a mutual problem to be solved by both parties) while a destructive process is similar to a win-lose competitive struggle. Many of the conflicts leaders face have the potential for satisfying, constructive outcomes for all. However, this potential is rarely realized because of the tendency to see most conflicts as win-lose. Solid cooperative orientations facilitate the constructive management of conflict and the ability to handle constructively the inevitable conflicts that occur during cooperation, which facilitates the survival and deepening of cooperative relations. When held by leaders, cooperative orientations have also been found to affect the conflict culture of their respective units (Gelfand, et al., 2012).

Resource Box:
Negotiation and Evaluation Survey (NES; Coleman & Lim, 2001). The authors provide a 360 assessment tool intended to be used as part of a training program in collaborative negotiation. Two measures (78 items in total) are provided to assess individual constructive conflict tendencies.

Leadership Conflict Behaviors Scale (Gelfand et al. 2012; adapted from the Dutch Test for Conflict Handling (DUTCH); De Dreu et al., 2001). Includes three dimensions: collaborative, dominating, and avoidant conflict management behaviors.

Integrative Complexity: Integrative complexity focuses on the structure of thought rather than on content, and is a descendant of Kelley's (1955) personal construct theory (Suedfeld, Tetlock, & Streufert, 1992). Originally formulated to explain individual differences in the complexity of the cognitive rules that individuals use to process and analyze information

(Harvey, Hunt, & Schroder, 1961; Tetlock, 1985), today it is defined in terms of two components: differentiation and integration (Schroder, Driver, & Streufert, 1967). *Differentiation* refers to the degree to which individuals are capable of perceiving different dimensions within a domain and the capacity to take different perspectives when considering that domain, which is a prerequisite for the second component of the construct. *Integration* refers to the capacity of individuals to develop conceptual connections among differentiated dimensions or perspectives (Suedfeld, et al., 1992). Situational variables such as age, stress, and feelings of accountability have also been found to affect the degree of integrative complexity people exhibit during decision-making processes (Lee, Herr, Kardes, & Kim, 1999).

A significant amount of research has been conducted on integrative complexity and conflict. Archival studies have been conducted on written documents by revolutionary leaders (Suedfeld & Rank, 1976), diplomatic communications during international crises (Levi & Tetlock, 1980), presidential speeches before and after elections (Tetlock, 1981), and Supreme Court opinions (Tetlock, Bernzweig, & Gallant, 1985). Other studies have examined the relationship between integrative complexity and crisis decision-making (Driver, 1965; Schroder, et al., 1967), bargaining and negotiation behavior (Streufert & Streufert, 1978), and attitude change (Streufert & Fromkin, 1972). Over all, higher complexity has been associated with positive outcomes, including the likelihood of reaching mutually beneficial compromise agreements (Pruitt & Lewis, 1975), successful diplomatic communications (Suedfeld & Tetlock, 1977), employing cooperative tactics during negotiations (Driver, 1965), and managerial effectiveness (Hooijberg & Quinn, 1992; Hunsaker, 2007). Additionally, research has found that leaders with higher levels of complexity are more likely to be successful in highly turbulent environments than leaders with lower levels of cognitive complexity, who are more effective in more stable and structured situations (Hunsaker, 2007).

Resource Box:
The Conceptual/Integrative Complexity Scoring Manual (Baker-Brown, et al., 1992). Provides a framework for assessing the integrative complexity of written statements.

Behavioral Complexity: Behavioral complexity is defined as the array of differentiated and even competing behaviors (Lawrence, Lenk, & Quinn, 2009) employed by leaders. According to Hooijberg and Quinn (1992), effective leaders must be able to conceive of, as well as perform, multiple and contradictory roles. Accordingly, a behaviorally complex leader is

someone who has the ability to "perform the multiple roles and behaviors that circumscribe the requisite variety implied by an organizational or environmental context" (Lawrence, et al., 2009, p. 526). Research has shown that those who are high in behavioral complexity are more likely to meet organizational demands (Hooijberg & Quinn, 1992), and are evaluated more highly for their effectiveness and for other performance measures (Bullis, 1992; Hart & Quinn, 1993; Hooijberg, 1996).

Most conflicts leaders face are mixed-motive with both competitive and cooperative elements (Deutsch, 1973). The ability to manage tensions between cooperative and competitive impulses and situations in a flexible way is critical, as cooperative and competitive elements are entwined in most conflicts and are difficult to separate (Coleman & Kugler, 2011; Lax & Sebenius, 1986). Prior research has shown that employing both types of behaviors – but emphasizing cooperative behaviors, which allow for more complexity despite the potential threats inherent to self-concerns in situations of conflict – is associated with more constructive dynamics (Kugler, Coleman & Fuchs, 2009).

Resource Box:
Managerial Behavioral Instrument (Lawrence, Lenk, & Quinn, 2009). A 36-item measure of *behavioral complexity*, with subscales for the collaborate, create, control, and compete quadrants of the model.

Emotional Complexity: Traditionally, psychological and organizational research examines the effects of either positive or negative emotions on human behavior (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohn, 2001; Fredrickson, 2001). Recently, scholars have been trying to avoid these dichotomies (Rathunde, 2000), and instead have studied the complexity of emotions. For example, the research conducted on marriage and divorce by Gottman, Murray, Swanson, Tyson, and Swanson (2002) found that couples needed to maintain a high ratio of positive to negative emotions in order to sustain their relationship. Similarly, Losada (1999) explored the complex dynamics of high performance teams, and was able to demonstrate that "high performing teams are capable of creating emotional spaces that are expansive and open possibilities for effective action, while avoiding getting stuck in restrictive emotional spaces that close possibilities for effective action" (p. 190).

However, very little research and attention has been paid to the range and differentiation of emotional experience (Kang and Shaver, 2004). Kang and Shaver (2004) explored the

psychological and behavioral significance of individual differences in emotional complexity, which they conceptualized in two correlated aspects: 1) the degree to which an individual has a broad range of emotional experiences, and 2) the individual's capacity to make subtle distinctions within emotion categories. They argued that emotional complexity will be a product of cognitive complexity, personality dispositions, and life experiences, that will lead individuals to empathize with the feelings of others, and have greater interpersonal adaptability. The results of their two studies supported all of the above hypotheses. Recently, Kugler et al. (2009) conducted a study investigating the relationship between emotional complexity and constructive conflict processes. Their results demonstrate that highly emotionally complex individuals tend to engage in more constructive conflict processes that have more positive outcomes.

Resource Box:
Range and Differentiation of Emotional Experience Scale (REEDS; Kang & Shaver, 2004). A 14-item self-report measure of emotional complexity, with subscales for *range* and *differentiation* of emotional experience.

Positive and Negative Emotions Scale (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). A self-report measure asking the participant to specify the extent to which they have felt each of 10 positive and 10 negative emotions during a specified period of time. Spencer-Rodgers, Peng, and Wang (2010) describe a method for adapting this scale to measure emotional complexity.

Tolerance for Ambiguity: Research suggests that managers with higher levels of tolerance for ambiguity are able to more productively cope with change in an organization (Judge, Thoresen, Pucik, & Welbourne, 1999). Among K-12 teachers, higher ambiguity tolerance is related to the use of more solution oriented conflict management styles (Nicotera, Smilowitz, & Pearson, 1990). Individuals with higher tolerance for ambiguity in a negotiation have also been found to facilitate more positive outcomes (Yurtsever, 2001), while individuals with low tolerance for ambiguity tend to prolong conflicts further (Teger, 1970).

Resource Box:
Tolerance for Ambiguity Scale (Herman, Stevens, Bird, Mendenhall & Oddou, 2010). A 12-item self-report measure of individual tolerance for ambiguity.

Temporal Scope and *Consideration for Future Consequences*: There is evidence that anticipation of repeated interaction promotes cooperation (Van Lange, Klapwijk & Van Munster, 2011), and consideration of future consequences increases intergroup cooperation (Cohen &

Insko, 2008). Individuals asked to consider how their behavior on a first trial in a turn-taking game will influence the outcome of the second trial showed less inter-individual competition (Wolf, et al., 2009). In addition, Zimbardo and Boyd (1999) found that individuals with a general future time perspective report less social conflict, and tend to score lower on a broad index of aggression.

In sum, previous research has found that:

1) Higher levels of cooperative orientations are associated with more perceived similarity in beliefs and attitudes; readiness to be helpful; openness in communication; trusting and friendly attitudes; sensitivity to common interests; de-emphasis to opposed interests; and an orientation to enhancing mutual power rather than power differences.
2) Higher levels of integrative, behavioral, and emotional complexity are associated with constructive conflict outcomes and tendencies.
3) Higher tolerance for ambiguity is associated with constructive conflict outcomes and tendencies.
4) Endorsement of greater time span thinking and consideration of future consequences are associated with constructive conflict outcomes and tendencies.

Therefore, we suggest that these individual-level leader competencies will tend to work in concert to foster and reinforce psychological orientations that are conducive to the effective management of complex, protracted conflict in organizations. Thus, higher levels of these competencies in leaders should be associated with leader behaviors, norms, policies and procedures that function to a) reduce probabilities of destructive conflict escalating and persisting and b) increase probabilities of constructive conflict processes being applied to address work disputes.

Resource Box:

Consideration of Future Consequences Scale (Strathman, Gelicher, Boninger, & Edwards, 1994). A 12-item self-report measure of an individual's consideration for future consequences of behaviors, and decisions.

Temporal Scope. We were not able to identify a specific measure of temporal scope in the literature. However, Fingerman and Perlmutter (1995) provide questions for assessing "future thinking" in participants. While not established as a reliable scale, the measure provides questions that may be useful in assessing the extent to which participant thinks about the future.

Development of the Organization Level Framework

Our objective now is to place the individual leader into context. Thus, we now consider the organizational-level factors that have been shown to affect organizational conflict dynamics. In addition to development of a model for assessment of individual leadership conflict competencies, we have developed an organization-level inventory/framework, the aims of which are two-fold. First, it offers a conceptual framework for leaders to assess the structure of their organization in terms of facilitating/inhibiting constructive and destructive conflict dynamics (increasing/decreasing probabilities). Second, it provides an inventory for leaders to conduct organization-level assessments, and to explore relevant outcomes in their organizations (e.g. conflict climate, innovation, morale, organization-commitment, and procedural justice).

The Burke-Litwin Causal Model of Organizational Performance and Change

The Burke-Litwin Causal Model of Organizational Performance and Change is a classic model that provides a systematic framework for both understanding an organization's structure and performance and how to foster change in the organization (Burke & Litwin, 1992; Burke, 2011). This model is commonly referenced by practitioners and researchers alike to identify and understand the various components that make up an organization. It provides a framework for how each component of the system influences the other components, which in turn aids in an understanding of how to plan and conduct broad systemic change. Burke and Litwin developed this model by drawing on their many years of experience as practitioners of organization development and change, and by synthesizing multiple empirical models and studies that provided support for the multiple factors and interrelationships among the factors presented in the model (Burke & Litwin, 1992).

The model proposes twelve organizational factors that are important for understanding an organization system. Figure 3 offers a diagram of the model. Each factor is shown in relation to the others, with arrows describing the relationships between the factors. Burke and Litwin propose that changes to one or multiple factors will inevitably result in subsequent changes across other factors in the system.

INSERT FIGURE 3

This dynamic model of organizations distinguishes between two categories of dynamics: transformational and transactional. The four uppermost factors in the model as shown in Figure 3 are *transformational* in nature (external environment, mission and strategy, leadership,

organizational culture, and individual and organizational performance), which develop and change as a function of an interaction with the environment and adoption of new attitudes and behaviors from the members of the organization. *Transactional* factors, the remaining factors (management practices, structure, policies and procedures, work unit climate, task requirements and individual skills/abilities, motivation, and individual needs and values) are those where change occurs at the level of interaction and reciprocity between organization members. Another way to understand the distinction between these two concepts is to consider transformational factors as those that best represent the *culture* of organization, while considering transactional factors as those that best represent the *climate* of the organization (Burke and Litwin, 1992). Burke (1994) states that it is necessary to have an organization model that allows researchers and practitioners to categorize organization phenomena, to enhance understandings of organization processes, and interpret organization data, while at the same time guiding organization development and change.

The Burke-Litwin model provides a useful heuristic for understanding organization conflict from the dynamical systems perspective. The model was developed out of an open systems perspective, which is in essence a dynamical approach. But it also offers a way to deconstruct the dynamics of an organization such that it increases understanding and offers opportunities to initiate change. A dynamic approach to conflict in organizations is not new, and when examining the traditional theories of conflict and conflict management in organizations, we can see that there has been tension between viewing organizations as complex social systems, while at the same time recognizing that reductionist theories and more focused approaches to conflict resolution provide more concrete insights into leveraging change.

We suggest that framing the complexity of conflict in organizations within the structural elements of the Burke-Litwin model provides both an inclusive and comprehensive approach to understanding the complexity of organizations, while at the same time offering a pragmatic perspective for comprehensive change (see Figure 4). Each factor in the Burke-Litwin model offers a leverage point for decreasing the probabilities that conflicts will escalate into a destructive pattern, while increasing the probabilities that they will be resolved in a more constructive manner. Below, we summarize current empirical findings, broken down by each of the twelve factors of the Burke-Litwin model, which offer support for the assertion that changes

at each of these levels will correspond to changes in probabilities of constructive versus destructive conflict outcomes.

INSERT FIGURE 4

External Environment: This refers to factors outside of the organization that can influence organizational performance, and includes forces such as economic conditions, customer behavior, government regulations, changing technologies, and politics and national culture (Burke, 1992; Burke, 2011). In terms of organizational conflict, the type of industry or field in which the organization is operating can play a significant role. Organizations operating in rapidly changing or volatile markets such as the technology sector are more vulnerable to dramatic shifts in environmental pressures, which can negatively impact relationships between organization members. Additionally, members of public and not-for-profit firms have very different environmental considerations than private firms, which can influence organizational conflict orientations.

Overall, research suggests that organizations that are better prepared for rapid changes in the environment have more cooperative outcomes. For example, there is some evidence to suggest that management teams operating in complex versus simple (in terms of the number of environmental factors to consider) and dynamic versus static (in terms of how often external considerations change) environments experience more uncertainty in decision making (Duncan, 1972). The presence of *slack* (a cushion of resources that an organization can use to adapt to changes in external pressures) may influence decision-makers to allocate greater support for cooperative solutions (Wayne & Rubinstein, 1992). Managers in not-for-profit organizations tend to have more constructive views of conflict and decision-making. These managers, as compared to managers in for-profit settings, face less competitive pressure (Boyne, 2002), tend to be motivated more by intrinsic rewards (Buelens & Van den Broeck, 2007), and view conflicts as opportunities for higher-quality decisions (Schwenk, 1990).

Resource Box:
Perceived Environmental Uncertainty scale (in Waldman, Ramírez, House & Puranam, 2001; adapted from Singh,1986). A four-item survey measure assessing organization members' perceptions regarding the stability of the environment in which the organization operates.

Leadership: Leadership provides an overall organizational direction for employees, through persuasion, influence, or serving as behavioral role models for employees (Burke, 2011). It involves vision, influence, rewarding people, and providing opportunities to learn new skills.

As leaders are highly visible in the organization, their behavior can model appropriate ways of dealing with conflict and can influence the organization's conflict culture. Gelfand et al., (2012) found that leaders' collaborative, avoidant, or dominating conflict behaviors were associated with corresponding conflict cultures in the organization. They theorize that leaders' personality traits might also shape these cultures. For example, avoidant conflict cultures are often encouraged by leaders who have a high need for closure, given their preference for predictability and consensus over diverse opinions or dissenting views (Kruglanski, Pierro, Mannetti, & De Grada, 2006; Kruglanski & Webster, 1996).

Likewise, when leadership styles are more consultative and employee-centered, they tend to have a more positive impact on satisfaction with supervisors as well as on work, solidarity, and reduced communication anxiety (Richmond, Wagner, & McCrosky, 1983). More collaborating styles of supervisory conflict management are also significantly correlated with longer tenure at work (Hendel, Fish & Galon, 2005). Having an achievement-oriented leader is related to both higher performance and higher morale among followers (Litwin & Stringer, 1968), while laissez-faire leadership is associated with higher levels of workplace stress, bullying at work, psychological distress, role conflict, role ambiguity, and conflicts with coworkers (Skogstad, 2007). Finally, conflict among leadership has been found to improve group decision quality but disrupts group affect (Amason, 1996), impacting organizational performance. For example, Voss, Cable, and Voss (2006) found that significant levels of disagreement between leaders over organizational identity decreased organizational performance.

Resource Box:
Leadership Conflict Behaviors Scale (Gelfand et al. 2012; adapted from the Dutch Test for Conflict Handling (DUTCH); De Dreu et al., 2001). Includes three dimensions: collaborative, dominating, and avoidant conflict management behaviors.

Mission and Strategy: The *mission* of an organization is its raison d'être, primary goals and ultimate purpose; the *strategy* describes how the mission will be accomplished (Burke, 1992; Burke, 2011). Vision, which falls more under the category of leadership and direction, is distinguished from mission in that it describes future aspirations of the organization – where it would like to be in the next three to five years. Mission describes the organization's current purpose. Conflict in organizations can stem from the initial structures and belief systems put in place at the very founding of the organization, or following a major restructuring. Understanding

an organization's history, especially the values and customs of the founder(s), is important to understanding the culture and how this ultimately influences workplace interactions and conflicts (Schein, 1983).

In fact, research has found that the level of complexity of an organization's mission and strategy can be related to employee perceptions of constructive versus destructive conflict dynamics in the organization. In an compelling study, Kugler and Brodbeck (2012) found that when organization statements describing vision and mission were low in integrative complexity (simple and concrete), employees perceived conflicts to be more competitive and not managed as cooperatively as compared to organizations with statements of high integrative complexity. This finding is consistent with previous studies at the interpersonal level linking low integrative complexity with destructive conflict dynamics, and represents an opportunity for those tasked with drafting such statements to make a significant impact on how conflict dynamics unfold in the organization.

Resource Box:
The Conceptual/Integrative Complexity Scoring Manual (Baker-Brown et al., 1992). Provides a framework for assessing the integrative complexity of written statements.

Organizational Culture: Organizational culture refers to the way a company does things. It embodies the explicit rules (i.e. codes and policies within an employee manual) as well as the implicit rules (i.e. informal conduct, values or principles are that are not discussed) that guide behavior in an organization (Burke, 1992; Burke, 2011). Conflicts are built into the structure of any organization (Burns, 1978; De Dreu & Gelfand, 2008), and an organization's cultural and structural mechanisms can serve to promote certain types of conflict management strategies in employees.

Research suggests that more goal-orientated cultures moderate the effects of task conflict on worker satisfaction and affective well-being. More specifically comparing public and private firms, a task-focused culture reduces the negative impact of task conflicts in private firms, while in public organizations, a more supportive organizational culture has this effect (Guerra, Martinez, Munduate, & Medina, 2005). Going further, there is evidence to suggest that more social interaction in an organization increases the likelihood that conflicts will have more innovative outcomes. In other words, a culture that encourages social interaction and trust-

building heightens constructive conflict and innovation (De Clercq, Thongpapanl, & Dimov, 2009). On the other hand, when there is a prevalent culture of intergroup conflict in an organization, the widespread perceptions of intergroup conflict among employees results in negative relationships across groups and low intragroup cohesiveness (Labianca, Brass & Gray, 1998). Finally, a recent study clarifies these findings by establishing that organizations can develop *conflict cultures* that are collaborative, dominating or avoidant in nature (Gelfand et al., 2012; also see the "Leadership" element above).

Resource Box:
Conflict Cultures Scale. In Gelfand et al. (2012). A 13-item measure of perceived conflict culture with collaborative, dominating, and avoidant subscales.

There are multiple general measures of organization culture in the literature. Jung et. al (2009) provide an overview of these measures, along with recommendations for choosing an instrument based on specific needs.

Management Practices: Management practices refer to the courses of action and behaviors that managers undertake daily (Burke, 2011). This includes defining roles and tasks, and setting objectives so that organizational resources can be used efficiently to execute the organization's strategy (Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Burns, 1978; Zaleznik, 1977). Poor management practices are more prevalent when product market competition is weak and/or when family-owned firms pass management control to the eldest sons (i.e. primogeniture; Bloom & Van Reenen, 2007). Conflict can arise in family businesses when family members set the rules, have ultimate power, lack formalized systems and structures to deal with conflict, and commingle family and business roles (Harvey & Evans, 1994).

Giacomantonio, Pierro, & Kruglanski (2011) found that perceived procedural fairness of management was important in promoting constructive conflict resolution, especially among those with a high need for cognitive closure. Information about management fairness is more likely to be taken into account by individuals with a high need for closure because it saves the energy and effort required to gather and accurately process other information related to the conflict. Equally important is the ability to manage emotions in the workplace, as this allows for awareness, acceptance and problem solving skills (Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 2000). Sherman (2009) found that the ability to manage emotions was negatively associated with conflict avoidance, possibly because individuals with a high ability to manage emotions are more

comfortable addressing conflict and problem-solving rather than avoiding it. Individuals high in ability to manage emotions are also more likely to collaborate with others. These findings suggest that emotional awareness and related skills training would help managers enhance collaboration and decrease conflict avoidance in their teams.

Finally, trust has been found to be a key factor in mediating management conflicts. In management teams with higher levels of intragroup trust, task conflict improves decision-making, while lower levels of trust can result in task conflicts escalating to relationship conflicts (Simons & Peterson, 2000). With regards to trust between managers and employees, when there is higher trust, managers demonstrate integrating conflict management styles, which in turn, encourage more positive work attitudes from employees (Chan, Huang & Ng, 2008). This facilitates the social exchange process – a norm of reciprocity where one extends help to others who have helped oneself (Gouldner, 1960).

Resource Box:
Leaders' Procedural Fairness Scale (Pierro, 2007). A 20-item scale based off the Niehoff and Moorman (1993) and Colquitt (2001) Organizational Justice Scales. It is designed to measure two major sub-dimensions of fairness: procedural (11 items) and interactional (9 items).

Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2002). A 141-item self-evaluation ability based test designed to measure four dimensions of emotional intelligence: perceiving emotions, using emotions to facilitate thought, understanding emotions, and managing emotions.

Structure: This refers to the arrangement of functions and employees into units and levels of responsibility, decision-making authority, communication and working relationships to ensure effective implementation of the organization's mission and strategy (Burke, 2011). Antecedents to manifest conflict can often emerge from an organization's structure. Centralization of authority tends to increase conflict, formalization tends to reduce conflict, and interdepartmental conditions (such as barriers to communication between departments and ambiguity regarding the jurisdiction of each department) increase conflict (Barclay, 1991). In schools, a lack of specialization, increased organization complexity, number of authority levels, and standardization is also associated with increases in conflict (Corwin, 1969).

The design of team structures in organizations can also affect levels of conflict. Erez, Lepine, & Elms (2002) found that teams which rotated leadership among its members experienced

less conflict than teams with appointed leaders. Furthermore, if conflict arose within such teams, team members were more likely to give constructive suggestions. With regards to the individual makeup of teams, there is evidence that crosscut diversity structures (where racial and job-function subgroup boundaries are crossed within teams) weaken within-group divisions, enhance information sharing and improve decision-making (Sawyer et al., 2006).

Social network structures can also influence the degree of organizational conflict. Research shows that low conflict organizations either have: 1) a higher number of strong intergroup ties than high-conflict organizations, 2) consistent, homogeneous groups connected by strong ties, 3) one dominant group that mediates all other groups, or 4) a hierarchy that links groups serially and provides order (Nelson, 1989). Increased team conflict is also associated with lower trust within teams, which in turn may influence team structure by reducing individual levels of autonomy and loosening task interdependencies between members in teams (Langfred, 2007). This combination leads to poorer performing self-managed teams.

Resource Box:
Nelson (1989) provides a comprehensive overview of how social networks, conflict levels, groups, and group ties are identified within the organization using a network analysis model.

Systems (Policies & Procedures): Systems are standardized policies and procedures designed to support and facilitate the work of organizational members. They include control systems for managing information, performance appraisals, goals, budgeting, rewards and personnel allocation (Burke, 2011). The design of organization systems can affect workplace conflict. For example, bureaucratic rules and procedures clearly outline departmental responsibilities. This provides structured and predictable ways to interact with other departments, especially for cross-departmental activities, which can mitigate potential conflicts.

However, having an overly bureaucratic system can result in frustration as employees feel they lack autonomy, leading to increased conflict between departments (Pinto, Pinto, & Prescott, 1983). Similarly, incentive systems that reward departments for their achieving their own goals versus wider organizational goals, may result in conflicts of interest as managers would be motivated to view their department's needs as more important than the rest of the organization (Barclay, 1991). Having systems that foster cooperation and allow for open-minded discussions can empower employees to view conflict as a means of probing problems, devising creative solutions,

strengthening relationships and learning from their experiences (Tjosvold, 2008). This is enhanced by increased team identity, which fosters cooperative conflict management when task interdependence is high, and has an overall positive effect on team performance (Somech, Desivilya, & Lidogoster, 2009).

Resource Box:

- *Task interdependence* (van der Vegt, van de Vliert, & Oosterhof, 2003). 5-item scale that measures the extent to which an individual team member needs resources from other team members to carry out their job.

Team identity (Henry, Arrow, & Carini, 1999). 12-item inventory that measures the collective level of team identification across all team members by aggregating the individual-level construct of team identification.

Work-Unit Climate: This is the collective perceptions, impressions, feelings and expectations of members in a work team, and includes perceived recognition of performance, involvement in decision-making processes, fair treatment and support within the work unit, and perceptions of how well the unit works with other units (Burke, 1992; Burke, 2011). Organization climate can be distinguished from organization culture, with climate being conceptualized as more at the surface of employees' daily interactions (Zohar & Luria, 2004). While an organization's culture influences conflict outcomes as part of the larger organization structure with more widespread effects, individual work units or teams can develop independent climates for constructive or destructive conflict outcomes. Teams with higher levels of cooperative conflict management styles have more conflict efficacy (i.e., greater confidence in their ability to overcome conflicts), resulting in higher team performance than teams with more competitive approaches (Alper, Tjosvold, & Law, 2000).

Research shows that team dynamics are most destructive when conflicts move beyond the task at hand and become personal in nature. For example, task conflicts (disagreements on how to achieve common goals) in management teams have positive effects on decision quality, consensus, affective acceptance in teams and subsequent organizational performance, while affective conflicts (conflicts perceived as a personal attack or criticism) have more negative effects (Amason, 1996). How conflicts are handled within the team once they emerge can also impact climate. Avoiding responses seem to have a positive effect on team performance because attention remains on the task (De Dreu & Van Vianen, 2001), but can also lead to perceptions of

injustice and team ineffectiveness (Chen & Tjosvold, 2002). Cooperative approaches to conflict positively impact perceptions of justice, which in turn promote team effectiveness (Chen & Tjosvold, 2002).

Demographic and functional diversity is another consideration in examining workplace conflicts. Groups with more individual demographic differences (e.g. race, gender, tenure) tend to have more relationship and emotional conflict while those with informational differences (e.g. educational background) tend to have more task-focused conflict (Jehn et al., 1997; Pelled, Eisenhardt, & Xin, 1999). Age diversity was generally negatively associated with conflict, and task conflict has been found to have more favorable effects on cognitive task performance than emotional conflict (Pelled et al., 1999). As for interdependence and group effectiveness, Wageman (1995) found that group performance was best when tasks and outcomes were either on a group or individual level. Hybrid groups (a mix between the two) had lower performance and member satisfaction. Overall, teams composed of individuals with similar values, high trust and mutual respect, and norms for handling conflict have the most constructive conflict profiles (Jehn & Mannix, 2001).

Resource Box:
Cooperative and Competitive Conflict Management scale. Based on two subscales by Alper et al., (2000), published in Hempel, Zhang, and Tjosvold (2009).

Conflict Efficacy scale. In Alper et al., (2000). Scale for measuring beliefs that team members could successfully manage conflict situations.

Task and Person Conflict scale; Integrative and *Distributive Conflict Behavior* scale (in Janssen, Van de Vliert, & Veenstra, 1999). Two reliable scales for evaluating a team's conflict dynamics after a project or other event.

Motivation: Motivation can be described as that which moves people – an individual's need for achievement, power or affiliation, which results in effort to reach goals, meet needs, and gain some degree of satisfaction (McClelland, 1961). It is closely related to task requirements, individual skills or abilities, and individual needs and values (Burke, 2011). Research shows that different conflict concerns evoke different resolution strategies. Gain/loss issues evoke concern for personal interests, which leads to avoidance strategies; right/wrong issues evoke concern for group order, which leads to confrontational strategies; and correct/incorrect issues evoke concern for group performance, which leads to the use of collaborative strategies (Ohbuchi & Suzuki,

2003). As correct/incorrect issues are related to task content and procedure, whereas gain/loss and right/wrong issues are more related to relational concerns, it might be practical to focus on correct/incorrect issues among other organizational conflicts so as to encourage collaborative behavior (Ohbuchi & Suzuki, 2003).

Employees' affective traits and moods also have effects on their motivations and behaviors during organizational conflict (Rhoades, Arnold, & Jay, 2001). For example, individuals with high positive affectivity or positive moods tend to show more concern for others and demonstrate collaborative conflict behaviors. However, individuals with high negative affectivity or negative moods tend to show higher concern for self and exhibit more competitive conflict behaviors. Nonetheless, the effects of affective disposition were mediated by employees' moods on the day of the conflict (Rhoades et al., 2001). These findings suggest that the undesirable effects of one's affective disposition can be counteracted by mood manipulations, such as inducing positive mood for those high in negative affectivity through the use of non-hostile humor (Baron, 1984), small gifts (Carnevale & Isen, 1986), reflecting on past successes (Smith & Lazarus, 1990), or giving positive feedback (Forgas, 1991).

Resource Box:
Affective disposition. Measured by the general version of the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988).

Task Requirements and Individual Skills / Abilities: This refers to job-person congruence: the degree to which the individual possess the skills and knowledge required to fulfill task requirements in their assigned roles and responsibilities (Burke, 1992; Burke, 2011). This factor is most relevant to conflict dynamics in terms of individual interpersonal and conflict management skills. While certain tasks may require specific technical skills, knowledge, or ability, most roles and tasks also require the ability for the person to work constructively with others to achieve mutual goals.

Constructive conflict resolution is a skill that requires taking on a cooperative, problem-solving orientation with the other party, being able to see the conflict from an outside perspective, integrating the interests and point of view of the other party, and from these approaches, finding solutions that are favorable to both parties (Deutsch, 1994). This approach is based on Deutsch's (1973) Theory of Cooperation and Competition and Dual Concern Theory (Pruitt & Rubin, 1986; also see De Dreu, Weingart, & Kwon (2000) for a meta-analysis of

research on both of these theories). Research suggests that cooperative and confirming approaches to conflict management have more constructive outcomes (Barker, Tjosvold & Andrews, 1988), and when conflicts are managed for mutual gain, there is stronger efficacy among team members that the conflict can be successfully resolved (Alper, et al., 2000).

Resource Box:
Constructive Conflict Resolution: Principles, Training and Research (Deutsch, 1994). A useful article with a section describing the "Skills Involved in Constructive Solutions to Conflict."

The Dutch Test for Conflict Handling (DUTCH; De Dreu, Evers, Beersma, Kluwer, & Nauta, 2001). A 20-item scale for measuring individual conflict handling style based on the Dual Concern Model.

Individual Needs and Values: Like the previous component, the individual needs and values component of the model inquires about congruence between the individual's needs and values and whether these are met by their role in the organization. This can include, for example, the need for security or achievement, and is related to the degree to which an individual's beliefs and values match the beliefs and values held by the organization (Burke, 1992; Burke, 2011). In some cases, the values of the organization are not congruent with organization reward structures such that individuals are faced with an "ethical ambivalence" (Jansen & Von Glinow, 1985). These inconsistencies can inadvertently lead to lying and deceit among organization members as they attempt to navigate this ambivalence (Grover, 1993).

These ideas fit closely with the concept of *organizational justice* and more specifically *distributive* justice and *procedural, informational,* and *interpersonal* justice, which involves perceptions of fairness of outcomes and processes in decision-making, respectively (Deutsch, 1975; Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001). Individuals will be more likely to see congruence between their needs and values and the organization in the context of organizational justice. Findings suggest that organization members are more likely to view a new procedure as fair when they are privy to the decision-making process, even when the decision is not in their favor (Bies & Shapiro, 1988). Organization environments can also set up employees take on different value orientations. There is some evidence that the norms and values communicated to team members can impact individual proself and prosocial social motives (Beersma, Conlon & Hollenbeck, 2008). High proself orientations can be troublesome for employee relations. When employees hold a high prosocial orientation, they more strongly associate distributive justice (but

not procedural justice) with being respected and their intention to stay with the organization (Lipponen, Olkkonen, & Myyry, 2004).

Resource Box:
Organizational Justice Measure (Colquitt et. al., 2001). A 20-item scale of organizational justice with subscales for procedural, distributive, interpersonal and informational justice.

Social Value Orientation. There are multiple methods for measuring social value orientation, the most common being the decomposed game (DG). Parks (1994) compares the predictive validity of the DG along with other measures, and provides a good resource conducting these assessments.

Individual and Organizational Performance: Individual and organizational performance is an indicator of effort and achievement (e.g. productivity, customer/employee satisfaction, profit). It can be seen as the result of the input into an organization or individual (Burke, 1992). Task and relationship conflict, which affects individual and organizational performance, are discussed here. Task conflict is positively associated with team innovation (De Dreu, 2006). However, the effects of task conflict on performance is dependent on dimensions such as emotionality of the group, potential for the conflict to be resolved, group norms about conflict, and the size and scope of the conflict (Jehn, 1997). Relationship conflict is detrimental to group performance and satisfaction as it distracts from tasks, reduces group functioning and may cause tension, hostility, and irritation among team members (Jehn, 1997). Groups with norms that accept task but not relationship conflict are most effective. The level of negative affect present during task conflicts is not so great as to trigger interpersonal animosity, but can instead enhance decision-making outcomes through constructive criticism or playing devil's advocate (Jehn, 1997).

Groups that improve or maintain top performance over time share three conflict resolution tendencies, they: focus on the content of interpersonal interactions rather than delivery style, explicitly discuss reasons behind any decisions reached in accepting and distributing work assignments, and assign work to members who have the relevant task expertise rather than assigning by volunteering, default, or convenience (Behfar, Peterson, Mannix, & Trochim, 2008). Enhanced team performance is correlated with low but increasing levels of process conflict, low levels of relationship conflict (which increased near project deadlines) and moderate levels of task conflict at the midpoint of group interaction. These findings suggest that the success of teams depends on the extent to which leaders can promote constructive debate

about tasks, especially at midpoints of projects, while minimizing the potential for relationship and process conflict (Jehn & Mannix, 2001).

Finally, perceived individual and group levels of conflict can affect performance and satisfaction. Group conflict asymmetry (the extent to which members have differing perceptions of conflict levels in a group) decreases group performance and creativity. Individual conflict asymmetry (a member perceiving different conflict levels from other group members) accounts for reported performance and satisfaction within a group, but this is mediated by social processes and a positive group atmosphere (Jehn, Rispens, & Thatcher, 2010).

Resource Box:
Individual conflict asymmetry measure (Jehn et al., 2010). Used a score based on the relational demography measure (Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989) to measure differences between conflict perceptions of an individual member and the group.

Group conflict asymmetry measure (Jehn et al., 2010). Assessed as the standard deviation among team members' conflict scores (Harrison & Klein, 2007; Roberson, Sturman, & Simons, 2007). The larger the score, the bigger the differences in conflict perceptions of group members.

Across-Level Mechanisms and Dynamics

Nested organizational structures imply that all micro phenomena (such as individual thoughts, feelings, and behaviors) are *embedded* in their broader contexts and are either directly or indirectly influenced by aspects of their context. Similarly, most macro phenomena (like dysfunctional organizational cultures) *emerge* through the interaction of lower-level elements (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000). Over time, certain patterns (at any level) may become *automatized*, thus influencing thoughts, feelings, and behaviors without the effect of either higher or lower level elements (Carver & Scheier, 2002).

These three forces may operate in tandem to influence phenomena at different stages of development of an organization (Carver & Scheier, 2002). For instance, a conflict network's intractability is more likely to be based on bottom-up emergent processes (individually or determined through social interactions) either early on in its development or when the system is undergoing radical change (such as after unforeseen or unprecedented crises). At these points, the system has weaker, more unstable norms and so individual-level sense making and lower-level social interactions are more likely to have a greater impact on the trajectory of events (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000). Over time, however, as hostilities and intractable attitudes become

legitimized and institutionalized by group leaders (as in statements of policy), intractability may begin to reside more prominently at higher levels in the system. When these attitudes become normative and part of the selection and socialization of new employees (through shared beliefs, myths, and ideologies), they begin rise to the level of "truths". Thus, at any point in the progression of a conflict culture in an organization, its primary source of intractability may be located at a higher (policies), lower (current attitudes and emotions), or automatic (unquestioned ideologies) level.

In addition, Kozlowski and Klein (2000) contend that phenomena at lower-levels tend to have more rapid dynamics than both higher-level and emergent phenomena. Thus, it tends to be easier to stimulate and view conflict transmission and change in lower-level elements. Bottom-up emergent processes require individual beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors to combine through social interaction, which requires a much longer time scale. Thus, although individual-level interventions such as conflict resolution trainings and peace education courses can affect individual transformation swiftly, they will require much more time to impact a systemic conflict culture or attractor, than, say, targeting a change in leadership or policy at higher levels.

Conclusion

While a large amount of theory and research has been devoted to understanding the genesis and maintenance of organization conflict, most of these efforts have not been able to incorporate the requisite level of complexity that is necessary for fully understanding organization conflict processes. It is understandable, for practical reasons, that complexity is often neglected in favor of simplicity in order to generate theory, produce research, and determine courses of action in practice. We have outlined an approach here for addressing the complexity of conflict in organizations at two levels. At the individual-leader level we propose that attributes such as higher levels of integrative, emotional, and behavioral complexity, along with a tolerance for ambiguity and ample consideration of future consequences are required in order for a leader to be able to understand and navigate an organization through complex conflict situations. At the same time, we are proposing a framework for the leader to examine the multiple factors contributing to the genesis and maintenance of organization conflict in a way that maintains an understanding of the complexity of the phenomena, while offering leverage points for constructive change. These leverage points are opportunities to shift the attractor dynamics of the organization away from destructive conflict attractor patterns toward more

constructive patterns. Nonetheless, the leader is also reminded in the framework that changes in one aspect of the organization will often have repercussions throughout other aspects of the organization, sometimes in surprising directions.

Although there is broad empirical support for this approach in the literature, there is much more work to be done. Future efforts must include empirical investigations into the inter-relationships of the leadership competencies we identified and their relative role in the leader's ability to navigate constructive conflict outcomes. Additionally, the Burke-Litwin model, upon which our framework is based, while well established among organization change practitioners, has not been tested with regards to addressing organizational-level conflict patterns. Future research is needed that takes this framework into the field, contributing to further refinements and improvements to the model. Our hope, in putting forth this proposal, is that researchers and practitioners alike will identify with, and find value in, this framework and will use it to further understanding of how to address complex conflict dynamics in organizations.

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Figure 1: A Feedback-loop Mapping of a Protracted Labor-Management Dispute at the Detroit Symphony

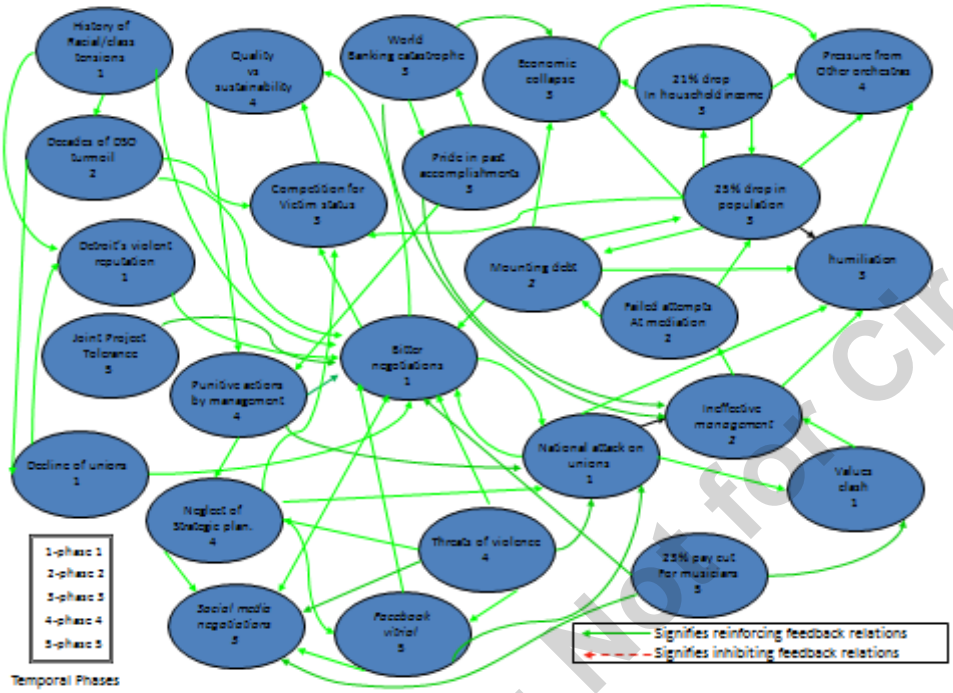

Figure 2: The 5% Individual-Level Conflict Competencies.

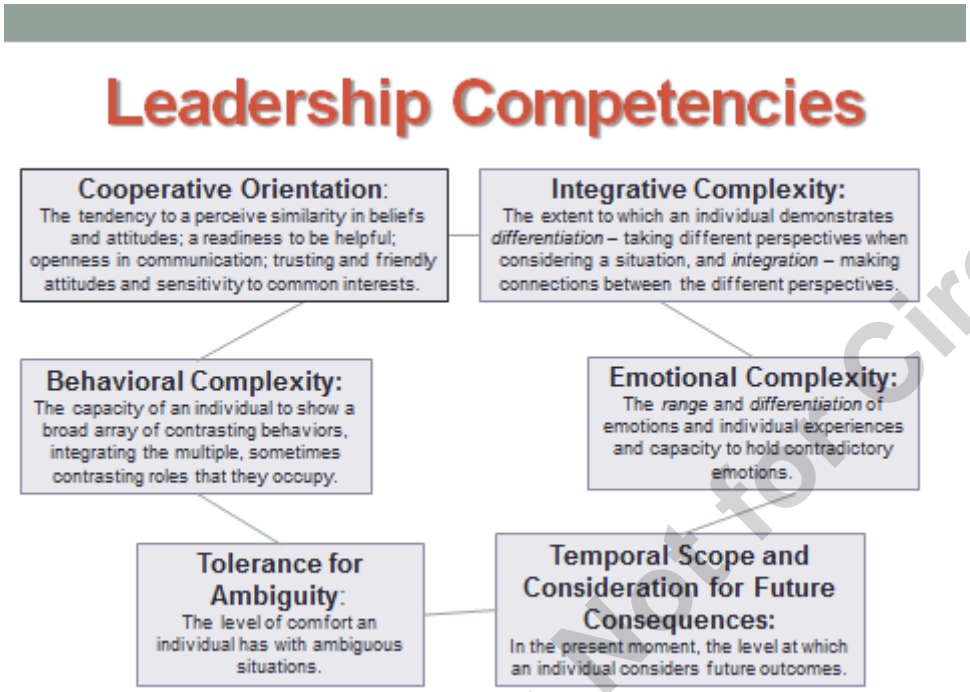

Figure 3: The Burke-Litwin Model of Organization Performance and Change

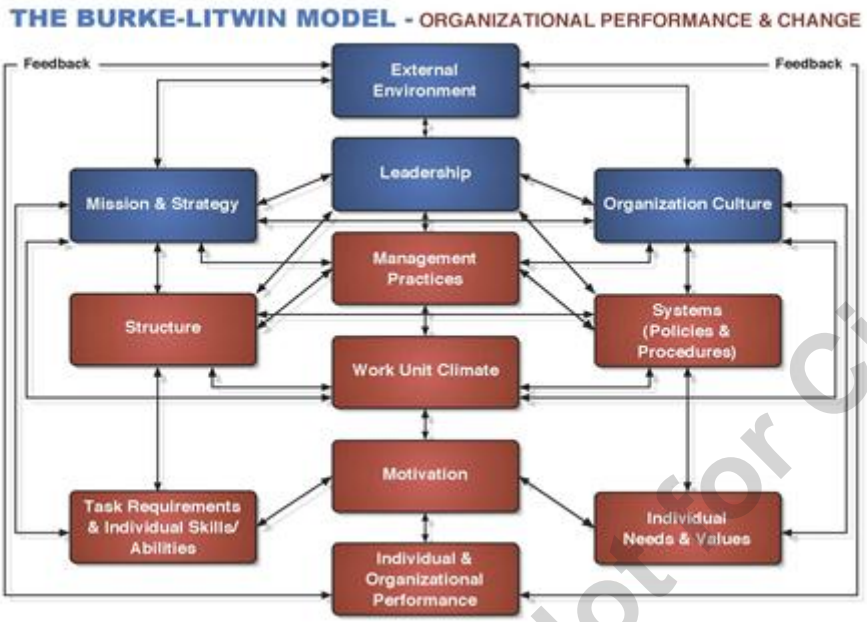

Figure 4: Empirical findings categorized by the Burke-Litwin model.