A Qualitative Study on How Washington State Mayors Transform Conflict

Darin Hand

Brandman University, dhand@brandman.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.brandman.edu/edd_dissertations

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.brandman.edu/edd_dissertations/8
A Qualitative Study on How Washington State Mayors Transform Conflict

A Dissertation by

Darin R. Hand

Brandman University
Irvine, California
School of Education

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

March 2016

Committee in charge:

Jeffrey Lee, Ed.D., Committee Chair
Patricia Clark-White, Ed.D.
Keith Larick, Ed.D.
The dissertation of Darin Hand is approved.

Jeffrey Lee, Chair, Ed.D.

Keith Larick, Ed.D.

Patricia Clark-White, Ed.D.

March 24, 2016
A Qualitative Study on How Washington State Mayors Transform Conflict

Copyright © 2016

by Darin R. Hand
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to acknowledge my wife, Melanie, who has been by my side for nearly 30 years, most of which was spent on active duty in the U.S. Navy. Oftentimes she waited patiently for me during numerous deployments, only to see me retire and pursue a doctoral degree. I would also like to acknowledge my mom, who saw me start but unfortunately did not see me finish. The rest of my family for their undying love, pride, and encouragement. I am truly blessed. I would be remiss if I did not thank my colleagues and coworkers, who allowed me the privilege to cry, pout, celebrate, and share with them this experience. MarJean, Lee, Michelle, and Mark, thank you! I would not have accomplished this dissertation without my extended family: Jennifer, Karen, Danielle, Rachel, Teresa, Lynn, and our devoted mentor Dr. Julie Hadden. You will all forever be in my heart. I want to thank Dr. Sam Bresler, a trusted confidant, mentor, and friend, who persuaded me to start the process and who was there every step of the way to see that I finished. Dr. Jeffrey Lee, my dissertation chair, who shared “Stephanie’s Ponytail” and taught me to have fun with the writing process. Dr. Patricia White and Dr. Keith Larick, the members of my committee, for their encouragement and steadfast confidence. Barbara Bockman, you have been a part of this journey since undergraduate school; I owe you so much! I have to acknowledge and thank Sarah Hogue for her help and encouragement through the coding process. Thanks to all of the mayors of Washington State who participated in my study, shared their experiences, their joys, and their frustrations; I hope this study gives you and the work you do for your citizens justice. Lastly, my sincere and humble thanks to the Brandman faculty who are there for their students each and every day.
ABSTRACT

A Qualitative Study on How Washington State Mayors Transform Conflict

by Darin R. Hand

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover and describe how exemplary Washington State mayors establish common ground and produce breakthrough results by utilizing the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors: collaboration, communication, emotional intelligence, ethics, processes, and problem solving. This study was conducted in collaboration with peer researchers studying other exemplary leaders representing a variety of industries. For this study, three methods of data collection (interviews, observations, and artifacts) were used to study the lived experiences of exemplary Washington State mayors and to present shared practices and patterns that demonstrate finding common ground and producing breakthrough results. The findings and literature support the use of these six behaviors to find common ground and transform conflict. Based on the findings of this study, several conclusions are presented regarding how exemplary municipal mayors in Washington State establish common ground and produce breakthrough results by utilizing the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors of collaboration, communication, emotional intelligence, ethics, problem solving, and process. Based on the research study and findings, it is recommended that further research be conducted in the development of common ground and conflict transformation by replicating this study for other municipal leaders such as city council members. A study should also be conducted to compare this study of exemplary Washington State mayors with other exemplary mayors from other states.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE .......................................................................................................................... vi

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION ......................................................................................... 1
Background ....................................................................................................................... 3
  Identifying Conflict ..................................................................................................... 5
  Transforming Conflict ............................................................................................... 7
Six Domains of Conflict Transformation Behaviors ...................................................... 8
  Collaboration ............................................................................................................. 9
  Communication ....................................................................................................... 10
  Emotional intelligence .............................................................................................. 11
  Ethics ....................................................................................................................... 12
  Problem solving ...................................................................................................... 13
  Process .................................................................................................................... 13
Statement of the Research Problem .................................................................................. 15
Purpose Statement ......................................................................................................... 16
Research Questions ....................................................................................................... 16
  Central Question ..................................................................................................... 16
  Subquestions .......................................................................................................... 17
Significance of the Problem ........................................................................................... 17
Definitions ..................................................................................................................... 20
Delimitations .................................................................................................................. 22
Organization of the Study .............................................................................................. 22

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ................................................................ 24
Review of the Literature ................................................................................................ 26
  Leadership ............................................................................................................... 27
    Transactional leadership ....................................................................................... 28
    Transformational leadership ............................................................................... 29
  Common Ground ..................................................................................................... 30
    Collaboration ........................................................................................................ 32
    Communication .................................................................................................... 34
    Emotional intelligence ........................................................................................... 35
    Ethics .................................................................................................................... 37
    Problem solving .................................................................................................. 39
    Processes .............................................................................................................. 41
      Decision making ................................................................................................. 42
      Governing ......................................................................................................... 42
  Conflict .................................................................................................................... 42
    Conflict management ........................................................................................... 46
    Conflict resolution ............................................................................................... 47
    Conflict transformation ......................................................................................... 47
Forms of City Government in Washington State ............................................................ 48
  Commission form of city government .................................................................. 48
  Council-manager form of government .................................................................. 49
  Mayor-council form of government ....................................................................... 50
CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

Purpose Statement............................................................................................................. 83

Research Questions........................................................................................................... 83
  Central Question ........................................................................................................... 83
  Subquestions ............................................................................................................... 84

Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures ......................................................... 84
  Interview Data Collection ........................................................................................... 84
  Observation Data Collection ....................................................................................... 85
  Artifact Data Collection .............................................................................................. 85

Demographic Data of Participating Washington State Mayors .................................. 85

Population ......................................................................................................................... 86
Sample............................................................................................................................... 87

Presentation and Analysis of Data .................................................................................... 88

Results for the Central Research Question ................................................................. 89
  Transform conflict through transparency (processes)........................................... 91
  Find common ground through collaboration with various stakeholders (collaboration) ........................................................................................................... 93
  Find common ground through building relationships (emotional intelligence) 94
  Transform conflict with city council members (problem solving) ....................... 95
  Transform conflict by building trust (ethics).......................................................... 96

Results for the Research Subquestions ....................................................................... 97

Major themes related to collaboration ........................................................................... 99
  Building support with team members by building cross-functional teams... 100
  Encouraging collaboration with other Washington cities ......................... 101
  Encouraging collaboration with state representatives.............................. 102
  Encouraging collaboration with tribal leaders ........................................ 103
  Soliciting ongoing stakeholder input when making difficult decisions........ 104

Major themes related to communication...................................................................... 105
  Building and communicating a vision .......................................................... 106
  Creating weekly, monthly, or quarterly meetings ......................................... 108
  Gathering information and metrics from various resources ....................... 109
  Engaging in active listening .......................................................................... 110
  Understanding the importance of transparency ........................................... 110

Major themes related to emotional intelligence......................................................... 111
  Being humble and empathetic to the needs of stakeholders ...................... 113
  Bridging cultural and emotional divides by building trust ...................... 113
  Building authentic connections with stakeholders .................................. 114
  Creating mutual respect with stakeholders ............................................. 115
  Recognizing the value of a sense of humor .............................................. 115

Major themes related to ethics .................................................................................... 116
  Create and maintain an ethical environment............................................. 118
  Demonstrate a moral and ethical code through transparent behavior........ 119
  Modeling ethical decision making through nonpartisanship .................... 120
  Recognizing and managing politically divisive situations ....................... 120
  Valuing the responsibility of the city as it pertains to the environment ...... 121

Major themes related to problem solving................................................................... 122
Considering best solutions to difficult problems despite a lack of resources ................................................................. 122
Creating and building momentum to solve a problem .................... 124
Solving problems through diverse committees ................................. 125
Recognizing the value of involving local business owners .................. 126
Understanding how county and state codes impact problem solving .... 127

Major themes related to processes ...................................................... 127
Improve processes and procedures appropriate to the size of their city ...... 129
Improving processes to ensure the safety of the community ............... 129
Restructuring departments to become more efficient ....................... 130
Understanding the relationship between the mayor and city council ...... 131

Summary ............................................................................................. 132

CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS ...... 134

Major Findings ..................................................................................... 136
Central Question ................................................................................ 136
Subquestions ..................................................................................... 137
Collaboration .................................................................................... 137
Communication ................................................................................. 137
Emotional intelligence ....................................................................... 138
Ethics ............................................................................................... 139
Problem solving ............................................................................... 139
Processes .......................................................................................... 140

Unexpected Findings ........................................................................ 141

Conclusions ....................................................................................... 141
Conclusion 1: In Order to be More Effective in Creating Common Ground During Conflict, Exemplary Washington State Mayors Foster a Variety of Opportunities for Collaboration With Stakeholders ................................................. 142
Conclusion 2: When Exemplary Washington State Mayors Communicate With Stakeholders Through Transparency and Open Dialogue, Conflict is Transformed and Breakthrough Results Occur ................................................................. 143
Conclusion 3: Exemplary Washington State Mayors Demonstrate Emotional Intelligence by Building Trusting and Authentic Relationships Through Mutual Respect With Stakeholders ................................................................. 144
Conclusion 4: Exemplary Washington State Mayors Demonstrate Ethical Behavior Through Transparency When Creating Common Ground and Transforming Conflict ....................................................................................... 145
Conclusion 5: Exemplary Mayors in Washington State Are Strategic in Problem Solving by Working Alongside Stakeholders During Conflict, Resulting in Positive and Lasting Solutions Being Developed ..................................................... 146
Conclusion 6: Exemplary Mayors in Washington State Improve Processes by Restructuring Departments and Building Positive Relationships With City Council to Find Common Ground and Transform Conflict ..................................................... 147

Implications for Action ...................................................................... 148
Implication for Action 1: Incentivize Participation in the Association of Washington Cities’ (AWC) Certificate of Municipal Leadership (CML) Program ................................................................. 149
Implication for Action 2: Develop Leadership Training and Development Programs Specifically Designed for City Hall Employees ....................................... 150
Implication for Action 3: Develop Training to Enhance Mayor-Council Relationships, Thereby Improving Municipality Governance ................................. 150
Implication for Action 4: Develop Comprehensive Training in the Six Conflict Transformation Domains With a Focus on Building Relationships, Transparent Behavior, and Active Listening ................................................................. 151
Recommendations for Further Research ........................................................................................................... 151
Concluding Remarks and Reflections .............................................................................................................. 154

REFERENCES ................................................................................................................................................... 156

APPENDICES ..................................................................................................................................................... 173
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Evidence From Coded Data ............................................................................. 76
Table 2. Qualifying Criteria for Exemplary Washington State Mayors ....................... 87
Table 3. Conflicts Identified by Exemplary Washington State Mayors ......................... 90
Table 4. Washington State Mayor Behaviors to Establish Common Ground and Produce Breakthrough Results ........................................................................ 92
Table 5. Data Collection Represented as Numerical Value for Each Domain ................. 99
Table 6. Washington State Mayors’ Use of Collaboration to Establish Common Ground and Produce Breakthrough Results ....................................................... 100
Table 7. Washington State Mayors’ Use of Communication to Establish Common Ground and Produce Breakthrough Results ....................................................... 107
Table 8. Washington State Mayors’ Use of Emotional Intelligence to Establish Common Ground and Produce Breakthrough Results .............................................. 112
Table 9. Washington State Mayors’ Use of Ethics to Establish Common Ground and Produce Breakthrough Results ........................................................................ 117
Table 10. Washington State Mayors’ Use of Problem Solving to Establish Common Ground and Produce Breakthrough Results ..................................................... 123
Table 11. Washington State Mayors’ Use of Processes to Establish Common Ground and Produce Breakthrough Results ................................................................. 128
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Number of major themes identified for each domain............................................ 97

Figure 2. Number of references per domain. .................................................................... 98
PREFACE

Following discussions and considerations regarding the opportunity to study common ground in multiple types of organizations, three staff researchers and 10 doctoral students discovered a common interest in development of the common ground principles, which resulted in the goal of this thematic study. The goal of the study was to discover and describe how exemplary leaders establish common ground and produce breakthrough results by utilizing the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors: collaboration, communication, emotional intelligence, ethics, problem solving, and process. The opportunity to work on this topic was intriguing as its goals are in alignment with the goals of this researcher’s current organization and field of study, and it also may positively impact the current perceived level of trust in city government through gaining an understanding of the specific domains of common ground and how those behaviors may be applied in the future.

Throughout the study, the term peer researchers is used to refer to the other researchers who conducted this thematic study. The researcher’s fellow doctoral students and peer researchers studied exemplary leaders in the following fields: Ambra Dodds-Main, K-12 superintendents in midsize California school districts; Alida Stanowicz, female business leaders in California; Karen J. Bolton, Washington State community college presidents; Chris Fuzie, municipal police chiefs; Tamarah Tilos, directors of mental health organizations in the United States; Monique Ouwinga, California college presidents in nonprofit independent colleges and universities; Jennifer Marzocca, Washington State nonprofit leaders; Denise LaRue, human resources executives in
midsize California school districts; and this researcher studied the lived experiences of exemplary mayors in Washington State.
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Publicly elected leaders understand that conflict is a part of the challenge of competing for the office and a significant aspect of the position they are sworn to uphold. It is the leaders’ responsibility to recognize conflict as a primal element of an organization and to understand how to lead conflictive situations toward positive, synergistic transformation. Ghosten (2012) suggested that “communication problems, personal relationships, and power struggles” can lead to conflict (p. 20). To help transform conflict, leaders need to communicate on a personal level. De Vries, Bakker-Pieper, and Oostenveld (2010) studied interpersonal communication and its importance to leadership styles. They cited a surprising number of studies that linked communication to charismatic-transformational leadership (de Vries et al., 2010). Building on this theory, Kecskes and Zhang (2009) suggested a common ground approach to successful communication. They identified two components of common ground as core common ground and emergent common ground. Core common ground is comprised of common, cultural, and formal sense, while emergent common ground is primarily prior or current experience relevant to the current situation (Kecskes & Zhang, 2009). Denning (2011) noted, “Leaders should exploit every opportunity to bring people together and get them to see their common goals and shared values” (p. 170).

Elected positions range from national to state and local governments. The National League of Cities (NLC, 2013) described the following local governments within a city. In a city manager form of government, the council sets the budget and makes policy. The council appoints a manager (sometimes from the council). In a mayor-council form of government, the mayor is elected separately from the council, while the
council is elected and maintains legislative powers (NLC, 2013). Accepting conflict as a potentially positive aspect of city management requires knowledge of the various forms of conflict that may occur within an organization. In some cities, conflict may stem from roles or responsibilities that interfere with one another; this is sometimes referred to as “task-oriented” conflict. The Association of Washington Cities’ (AWC, 2015) Mayor & Councilmember Handbook suggested, “Many conflicts in city governments are the result of confusion as to these roles and the consequent over-stepping of the boundaries between the respective roles” (p. 31). Beyond confusion related to overstepping of boundaries, other conflicts also exist.

Conflict can take many forms. Conflict may be interpersonal, when people do not view issues from the same perspective or when basic personality types clash. Other conflicts can be ideological, such as different cultural values or political beliefs, or might be inherent based on the structure of the organization. Conflict may stem from access or lack of access to resources such as goods, services, or income. When conflict becomes overly emotional and disruptive, it is referred to as “affective conflict,” while “cognitive conflict” occurs when there is a constructive debate resulting in new ways of looking at issues (Roberto, 2005, p. 20). In most cases, mayors understand that conflict is necessary by virtue of their office.

According to a recent report from the U.S. Conference of Mayors (2015), conflicts “have brought to the forefront serious social issues that must be addressed—issues of race, class, prejudice, poverty, and inequality that are often difficult for people to talk about” (p. 1). The U.S. Conference of Mayors highlighted many of the serious issues that mayors deal with daily. These issues oftentimes result in conflictive situations
with multiple stakeholders such as city council members, public officials, mayoral staff, and various department administrators, some of whom may be polarized by disagreements. These difficult situations can require collaboration between councilmembers and mayors, the communication of a vision for the city and its stakeholders, and an understanding of social and interpersonal relationships that can occur within all of these groups (sometimes referred to as emotional intelligence). At the same time, mayors need to exercise ethical behavior, solve problems within their cities, and do their best to improve on city processes. These six areas—collaboration, communication, emotional intelligence, ethics, problem solving, and processes—are recognized as some of the domains of conflict transformation behaviors. This study aimed to determine if, used together, they may establish and produce breakthrough results.

**Background**

Washington State mayors face similar challenges when compared to the mayors of the rest of the country. Many struggle with economic downturns, crime prevention, environmental challenges, transportation problems, and the numerous other factors involved in the business of city management. According to Gerber and Hopkins (2011), “The current economic recession is taking a heavy toll on already stretched city budgets, leaving many cities struggling to meet their service obligations in the wake of sharply declining revenues” (p. 326). Washington State mayors face these conflicts in their cities on a daily basis.

In municipal environments, finding common ground is a vital part of city management. Kecskes and Zhang (2009) recognized, “Cooperation and common ground
are considered particularly important for successful communication” (p. 332). Kecskes and Zhang went on to describe the dynamic model of meaning (DMM) and identify two components of common ground. They were core common ground, “composed of common sense, cultural sense, and formal sense . . . [and] mainly derives from the interlocutors’ shared knowledge of prior experience,” and emergent common ground (Kecskes & Zhang, 2009, p. 333). Emergent common ground “is composed of shared sense and current sense, and mainly derives from the interlocutors’ individual knowledge of prior and/or current experience that is pertinent to the current situation” (Kecskes & Zhang, 2009, p. 333). They pointed out that common ground is an intricate part of communication, stating, “The more common ground we activate, share and create, the better we are supposed to understand each other” (Kecskes & Zhang, 2009, p. 346). Cultivating common ground requires mayors to be innovators when facing key challenges.

Jacob (2014) described four key challenges facing local government innovators:

1. Balancing incremental improvement and “disruptive” or “transformative” approaches to innovation . . .
2. Putting city residents at the center in a bureaucratic environment . . .
3. Nurturing innovation in city departments . . . [and]
4. Developing and structuring innovation partnerships. (para. 4-7)

In her article in Observer News, “Amid Washington Gridlock, Cities Look to Tackle Big Issues on Their Own,” Jillian Jorgensen (2014) shared this from Jonathan Bowles, director of the Center for Urban Future:
From Rahm Emmanuel in Chicago to Eric Garcetti in L.A. and now Mayor de Blasio in New York, they’re trying to tackle these extremely large and difficult problems but with limited resources, and not a lot of help from Congress and Washington—so it definitely puts a premium on coming up with good ideas, doing things differently and often raising money in different ways. (para. 6)

Many of these challenges and difficult problems result in conflict, which could and should be transformed. The article by Jorgensen (2014) provided insight into conflicts experienced by mayors and the need to find common ground by transforming conflict. After researching the various types of challenges mayors face, three common conflicts emerged.

**Identifying Conflict**

Conflict can occur between the city mayor and the city council. The AWC’s (2015) *Mayor & Councilmember Handbook* stated that it is important to understand the roles of city council and city mayor or city manager. When councilmembers become involved in the day-to-day administration of city affairs, “this can be a source of conflict between the executive and legislative branches of city government” (AWC, 2015, p. 21).

In his dissertation, *The Emergence of Shared Leadership Between City Managers and Mayors in Council-Manager Governments: A Grounded Theory*, Dr. Dale Ricklefs (2013) commented on one staff member reflecting, “If you’re visible in the community, that means that you’re doing something in the community. And if you’re doing something in the community that means that at some point you may very well have a conflict” (p. 154). In March of 2014, Oak Harbor, Washington, Mayor Scott Dudley made a decision to have a 330-year-old Garry oak tree sawed down. According to
Stensland (2014), “The decision to fell the tree was made after an arborist from Tree Solutions assessed the risk of failure as ‘high’ in 2012, and then two giant limbs from the oak fell in May and June of 2013” (para. 13). Despite safety concerns for the community, there was significant public outcry. This stemmed partly from the fact that the tree was felled late at night with little public insight. Some councilmembers sided with their constituents regarding the decision, illustrating the conflict that can occur in this type of city management (Stensland, 2014).

Next, conflict can occur with various departments such as public works, transportation, housing, and most recently a movement to fold education under the guidance of the city. For Seattle, transportation has long been a conflictive issue for the city mayor. According to the Seattle Department of Transportation (n.d.), Mayor Ed Murray introduced a 10-year transportation plan to help meet future Seattle transportation needs. In this case, the city council voted unanimously to move the levy forward to the voters. This kind of support is not always the case, however. Many cities like Seattle have similar problems regarding transportation. But there are other conflicts that mayors may face. In August of 2015, Steven Girardi reported that St. Petersburg’s City Public Works administrator retired after the mayor cut many of his duties amid several controversial situations. According to Girardi (2015),

Council member Darden Rice said recent “missteps” with those three projects [may have] led to his decision. She said his roles require[d] [the] ultimate trust of the council, the mayor and the public, “and I sense that was eroding and he probably did, too.” (para. 13)

These two examples illustrate conflicts that occur between mayors and their departments.
Lastly, there are financial challenges. For example, the mayor may decide not to take full advantage of the budget authorized by the council. The council may authorize a certain position at a certain salary, and the mayor either may decide not to fill the position or may do so at half time and half salary. The mayor may cite financial emergencies, such as revenues falling short of projections, and may conclude that the city cannot afford someone filling this position full time. The council, on the other hand, may not agree that the conditions warrant such action or may determine that a different cost-saving measure is appropriate and should be instituted (AWC, 2015).

Stephanie Klein (2015) illustrated each of these types of conflict in a report about Seattle City Council members leaving their positions. She shared an interview with former Seattle Mayor Mike McGinn, who suggested,

“We know that we have these big highway projects that are way over-budget. . . . Crime is still going up. The rent is not affordable. And I think that if you’ve been on the council a long time, I think it’s going to be hard to go out on the campaign trail and say you’ve been doing a good job when these are well-known problems that appear to be getting worse without answers.” Despite a strong economy, McGinn said the city is in a time of real transition and voters are looking for answers to tough issues, like transit. (Klein, 2015, para. 3-4)

Where there is a need for and a realization of transition, there is an opportunity to transform conflict from a dysfunctional aspect into a positive attribute.

**Transforming Conflict**

Mayors need to transform conflict by recognizing its worth and positive attributes. Any organization, particularly those in a political arena, requires debate. Unfortunately,
debate can become dysfunctional. At this point it no longer helps the city, but rather it hinders and even prevents the community from moving forward. Roberto (2005) listed seven warning signs that debate is becoming dysfunctional:

1. Have people stopped asking questions intended to gain a better understanding of others’ views?

2. Has the group stopped searching for new information?

3. Have individuals stopped revising their proposals based on the feedback and critique offered by others?

4. Have people stopped asking for help with the interpretation of ambiguous data?

5. Have people begun to repeat the same arguments, only more stridently and loudly over time?

6. Have people stopped admitting concerns about their own proposals recently?

7. Have less outspoken individuals begun to withdraw from their discussions?

(p. 114)

These are essential questions a mayor may consider as he or she attempts to transform conflict and establish common ground within his or her city. This study examined six domains of conflict transformation behaviors and the impact these domains have on achieving common ground to achieve breakthrough results and transform conflict.

**Six Domains of Conflict Transformation Behaviors**

This study identified six domains of conflict transformation behaviors and explored if transformational leaders use these domains to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results. These six domains were ethics, process, emotional
intelligence, problem solving, collaboration, and communication. Significant research regarding these domains and their application in organizational leadership has shown wide variation, but these domains are not detailed as a collective group of factors working together to transform conflict, particularly in the area of Washington State city management. The following paragraphs discuss each of the six domains.

**Collaboration.** The first domain this study explored was collaboration. Page (2010) pointed out, “Collaborative governance and management intrigue practitioners and scholars alike. Addressing many of today’s complex public problems . . . [requires] agreement and cooperation among an array of government officials and non-governmental stakeholders” (p. 246). According to O’Leary and Gerard (2014), “A survey of local government managers found that 86 percent of respondents said that collaboration was one of their management and leadership strategies, and most were cautiously optimistic about its possibilities” (p. 31). Cross-cultural collaboration, whether focused on environmental planning and management or some other issue, often makes use of specific words and concepts to reflect the vision and philosophy underpinning the collaborative process. Robson, Sinclair, Davidson-Hunt, and Diduck (2013) discussed one such example from northwestern Ontario, Canada, where the term *common ground* has been adopted to front a land management initiative that looks to bring together Aboriginal and Euro-Canadian populations. Kenora is a former resource town in social and economic transition, where the municipal government . . . and local First Nations communities are striving to create new economic opportunities. (p. 1)
Collaboration is a key component in communicating a vision to stakeholders and constituents. As Page (2010) pointed out, “Formats affect power dynamics in collaborative processes by favoring some of the stakeholders’ tactical capabilities over others’—such as communicating ideas or persuading others” (p. 249).

**Communication.** The next domain in conflict transformation is *communication*. Ricklefs (2013) noted its importance by sharing the results of his interviews with mayors: “The interview data revealed leadership in community interaction, council management, strategic planning leadership, and political engagement with all levels of government and in the region. Each of these areas requires strong communication skills” (p. 301). His study noted that strong communication skills were essential for credible city managers. The literature also shows that communication skills are a critical element in interpersonal relationships and leadership. While communication can be defined in a number of ways, with each definition offering various forms of technical terms, this study used Martin and Nakayama’s (2008) definition of communication: “a symbolic process whereby meaning is shared and negotiated” (p. 34). When leaders consider communication within groups or organizations, they might provide additional descriptions of communication to include dynamic communication, receiver-oriented communication, and function-driven communication by motivating, disseminating information, expressing emotions, or controlling behavior. Each type of communication is significant because on any given day, a mayor communicates with the public, city council, and/or his or her staff members.

In their chapter in *Handbook of Conflict Management Research*, Peterson and Fergusun (2014) noted, “When group members freely share information versus hoarding information and other resources, they reveal their confidence that they will not be taken
advantage of by others in the group” (p. 194). Kecskes and Zhang’s (2009) article, “Activating, Seeking, and Creating Common Ground: A Socio-Cognitive Approach,” recognized,

Current pragmatic theories fail to describe common ground in its complexity because they usually retain a communication-as-transfer-between-minds view of language, and disregard the fact that disagreement and egocentrism of speaker-hearers are as fundamental parts of communication as agreement and cooperation. (p. 331)

**Emotional intelligence.** Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee (2002) defined emotional intelligence as “how leaders handle themselves and their relationships” (p. 6). They went on to discuss two competencies (personal and social), each with two domains. When the authors considered personal competence, they wrote about how leaders manage themselves through self-awareness and self-management. How leaders manage their relationships reflects their social competence, and social awareness and relationship management identify this (Goleman et al., 2002). Bradberry and Greaves (2009) described this as the “ability to recognize and understand emotions in yourself and others, and your ability to use this awareness to manage your behavior and relationships” (p. 17). According to Moua (2010), “Leaders must create an environment where diversity and culture flourish, and where conflicting values can be safely expressed and explored through dialogue” (p. 14).

An example of a Washington State city mayor exhibiting necessary emotional intelligence occurred in Pasco, Washington, after Antonio Zambrano-Montes was shot and killed by three Pasco city police officers. According to Schilling and Pihl (2015),
reporters for the *Tri-City Herald*, a $25 million claim against the city cited “allowing and fostering overt racial (animus) towards the Hispanic/Latino community within the Pasco Police Department” (para. 9). In the same report, Pasco Mayor Matt Watkins referenced the shooting and a need for a thorough investigation. In a sign of emotional intelligence, he was quoted as saying, “The council wants to understand all of the facts. . . . Our hearts do go out to all members of the community. We are members of this community, and we will be interested in the pursuit of truth and the process” (Schilling & Pihl, 2015, para. 17). As the mayor and city face challenges similar to those of Ferguson, Missouri, and New York City, there is a need to recognize the value of emotional intelligence in solving difficult problems.

**Ethics.** Reflecting the conflict transformation domain of *ethics*, Ciulla (2003) wrote, “In the center of many public debates about leadership today is the question, ‘What constitutes a good leader?’ We want our leaders to be effective and morally good” (p. xiii). White, Harvey, and Kemper (2007) suggested, Ethical leaders recognize that decision making that is authentically embedded in the organization may not always be agreed with but must be respected. At the point where you find your personal interests diverging from those of the organization, you have an important decision to reach. Do you stay and violate your own values, or do you move on to a new organization with which you are comfortable? (p. 99)

When considering ethics as a domain of conflict transformation, it is important to consider the power of context. As Howard and Korver (2008) pointed out, “Separating our acts from the stage on which we are acting can be difficult. The influence of
surroundings—people and place—can push us into doing things that to observers appear outright idiotic” (p. 46). These surroundings influence many processes that take place in the business of managing a city.

**Problem solving.** Washington State mayors need to have a clear ability to solve problems within their communities. Ricklefs (2013) contended, “Successful cities have mayors engaging the community in problem solving and creating partnerships” (p. 66). The Washington State *Mayor & Councilmember Handbook* (AWC, 2015) discussed problems that are likely to arise when there is no clear definition as to who has the ultimate authority to act. In some cities, the handbook stated, “the council and the city administration could draw their respective battle swords and charge; or, one or both sides could first analyze the issue, perhaps seeking counsel of the city attorney or the consultants at MRSC [Municipal Research and Services Center]” (AWC, 2015, p. 35). The handbook further recommended focusing on the role of public servant rather than on negativity and backbiting. Flexibility was also recognized as a key element in solving problems in Washington State cities (AWC, 2015). Other issues face mayors and those who want to adopt a style of innovation in their local governments, and each challenge requires collaboration between city managers, city mayors, city councilmembers, and the rest of the city stakeholders.

**Process.** According to Samuel (2006), “Some organizations have become so process-oriented that they fail to achieve business results” (p. 33). In *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation*, Lederach (2003) remarked, “In the New Sciences, process-structures are described as natural phenomena that are dynamic, adaptive and changing
while at the same time maintaining a functional and recognizable form and structure” (p. 40). Ricklefs (2013) suggested that by probing both the mayor and the city manager about the development of their shared and unique leadership roles, particularly in the areas of policy creation, policy implementation, and citizen involvement, the study provides new theory for public administration and leadership researchers trying to understand these relational processes within a complex environment. (p. 7)

His qualitative study identified the importance of processes that “develop meaning, structure, and relationship quality” that were a part of the relationship between elected mayors and appointed city managers (Ricklefs, 2013).

For mayors, these processes may be political, public (e.g., planning), or internal (e.g., staff related). Each process involves unique conflicts. Edmund (2010) noted, “This degree of conflict involves somewhat deeper contention, which results from a longer shared history between the parties or differing emotions or goals which the parties must process in common” (p. 37). A leader who exhibits empathy and an understanding of the different emotions of those whom he or she leads is said to have a sense of emotional intelligence.

One of the elements for assertively confronting conflict is establishing a connection with those who may have a different view. This can be accomplished by seeking and establishing an understanding of another’s perspective, which is the premise behind finding common ground. Common ground requires thoughtful dialogue instead of agitated debate. Debates without a search for common interests or common views can become dysfunctional and lead nowhere. This is due in part to the polarizing effects of
endless debate without compromise. Examples can be found in almost every facet of modern society, from religious extremists to elected officials who fail to recognize the importance of compromise in resolving conflict.

**Statement of the Research Problem**

Specific problems face Washington State cities, and mayors need help. These challenges stem from conflicts in race, prejudice, poverty, and inequality; these challenges require mayors to find common ground in conflict transformation. Repko (2008) defined common ground as “bringing out potential commonalities underlying the conflicting and theory-based insights so that these can be reconciled and ultimately integrated” (p. 272).

Washington State mayors must understand how to work with a diverse population to deal with a variety of issues. Some of these issues are economic development, transportation, and a changing demographic for many cities. When all of these challenges are considered, one can see that there is an urgent need for Washington State city mayors to understand the concepts and practices surrounding finding common ground for conflict transformation. In order to tackle these issues from a transformational perspective rather than a transactional or traditional method, mayors must consider transforming cities by looking for common ground among their constituents. Without finding common ground and leading a city through turbulent times, there are negative impacts on the city, its residents, and ultimately the future of cities as a whole. While there is a significant amount of research surrounding Washington State mayors, conflict transformation, and organizational leadership, there has been virtually no study specific to Washington State mayors and the specific effects of using common ground to establish
conflict resolution. One potential way to remedy this gap in the existing research is to study best practices among city mayors. According to Jacob (2014), “Louisville Mayor Greg Fischer talks all the time about breakthrough innovation as one of the core duties of local government, right alongside day-to-day work and continuous improvement” (para. 4). Certainly Mayor Fischer is not alone in seeking breakthrough innovation and discovering ways to improve the way he governs his city.

Clearly, a phenomenological study exploring the lived experiences of exemplary Washington State city mayors in establishing common ground to transform conflict and achieve breakthrough results was needed. This research may help strengthen mayor-community relationships and help in transforming city leadership and its effectiveness.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover and describe how exemplary Washington State mayors establish common ground and produce breakthrough results by utilizing the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors.

**Research Questions**

The thematic research team developed one overarching phenomenological research question and six additional subquestions aligned with the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors.

**Central Question**

What are the lived experiences of exemplary Washington State mayors in establishing common ground and producing breakthrough results by engaging in elements of the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors?
Subquestions

1. *Communication*—How do exemplary Washington State mayors use communication to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?

2. *Collaboration*—How do exemplary Washington State mayors use collaboration to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?

3. *Emotional intelligence*—What aspects of emotional intelligence do exemplary Washington State mayors use to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?

4. *Ethics*—How do exemplary Washington State mayors use ethics to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?

5. *Problem solving*—How do exemplary Washington State mayors use problem-solving strategies to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?

6. *Process*—What processes do exemplary Washington State mayors use to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?

**Significance of the Problem**

Although a review of literature revealed a significant amount of research surrounding conflict management, there was virtually nothing on Washington State city mayors and the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors, and specifically the impact these domains have on achieving common ground to achieve breakthrough results and transform conflict. The work of Morton (2013), Lane (2007), Ghosten (2012), and Ricklefs (2013) was closely related to this study. Morton (2013) examined how specific leadership traits and characteristics contributed to the career progress of six elected women in the California legislative system. Ricklefs (2013) conducted a study using a
grounded theory approach that offered insight into the emergence of shared leadership of
city managers and mayors in council management governments, while Ghosten (2012)
and Lane (2007) focused their studies on communication and conflict transformation.
Combined, their work points to an emerging need to study how mayors transform conflict
within their communities.

In an article in *Cityvision*, the author remarked, “It’s time for cities and their
legislators to have some old-fashioned face-to-face conversations about real impacts and
real consequences” (“CityScape: Building Bridges,” 2014, p. 28). This points to
behaviors that are required to find the common ground that is critically needed to get the
breakthrough results needed in communities. Kecskes and Zhang (2009) recognized,

Current pragmatic theories fail to describe common ground in its complexity
because they usually retain a communication-as-transfer-between-minds view of
language, and disregard the fact that disagreement and egocentrism of speaker-
hearers are as fundamental parts of communication as agreement and cooperation.

(p. 331)

Their study centered solely on common ground from a communication perspective and
not a leadership one, and they did not discuss the relationship between other conflict
transformation behaviors and common ground. This current study filled the gap by
focusing on Washington State mayors finding common ground as leaders and engaging in
the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors, specifically looking at the impact
these domains have on achieving common ground to achieve breakthrough results and
transform conflict. The study took a significant look at the leadership styles and
behaviors of Washington State mayors and built on previous works.
Communicating with constituents and stakeholders epitomizes one of the necessary traits of any effective leader and is vitally important to establishing common ground and transforming conflict. Washington State mayors have access to privileged information, and this can be an area that is difficult to navigate. Kouzakova, Ellemers, Harinck, and Scheepers (2012) pointed out the importance of conflict transformation and finding common ground. They explained, “Such interventions should help reduce the amount of self-involvement and enhance perceptions of common ground, which should both facilitate more constructive conflict resolution” (Kouzakova et al., 2012, p. 806). The aforementioned seven studies provided just a sample of the implications on finding common ground for transforming conflict and producing breakthrough results. Ricklefs (2013) recommended a study on the following:

Mayors who invite council members to meet with them regularly about issues important to council members develop business or government centered friendships. Building trusting relationships results in stronger policies, shared visions supported by council, and increased shared or complementary leadership among council and staff members. (p. 251)

This indicates that more information is needed, particularly regarding exemplary leaders (specifically Washington State mayors) and their shared experiences. Vestal (2011) also recommended further studies: “From this study, campus principals, policy makers, and researchers should realize that managerial knowledge surrounding conflict-management is a societal need” (p. 128).
Definitions

This section provides definitions of all terms that are relevant to the study. Often, there are theoretical definitions that give meaning in terms of the theories of a specific discipline in addition to operational definitions.

Collaboration. The ability to involve others, in a mutually beneficial and accountable manner, which allows for achievement or acceptance of agreed-upon goals (Hansen, 2009).

Common ground. Theoretical definition: An interplay of intentions of people from different sociocultural backgrounds, differences, and cultures while finding a foundation of common interest or comprehension (Horowitz, 2007; Jacobsen, 1999; Kecskes & Zhang, 2009; Moore, 2013; Snowe, 2013; Tan & Manca, 2013).

Operational definition: When all parties involved aspire to and are willing to work toward a new vision of the future together, one that meets everyone’s deep-seated concerns and values (Search for Common Ground, n.d.).

Communication. The transferring of meaning from sender to receiver, while overcoming noise and filters, so that the intended meaning is received by the intended recipient (Daft, 2012; Hellriegel & Slocum, 2004; Maxwell, 2010; Schermerhorn, Osborn, & Hunt, 2008; Stuart, 2012; Wyatt, 2014).

Conflict. Any cognitive (perceptual), emotional (feeling), and behavioral (action) dimension that differs from another cognitive (perceptual), emotional (feeling), and/or behavioral (action) dimension. This difference can be individual or collective (Kouzakova et al., 2012; Mayer, 2012).
Conflict transformation. According to Lederach (2003), conflict transformation is to envision and respond to the ebb and flow of social conflict as life-giving opportunities for creating constructive change processes that reduce violence, increase justice in direct interaction and social structures, and respond to real-life problems in human relationships (p. 14).

Emotional intelligence. The self-awareness of one’s own emotions and motivations, and the ability to understand the emotions of others in social settings, which allows for management of behavior and relationships (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009; Hellriegel & Slocum, 2004).

Ethics. Human beings making choices and conducting behavior in a morally responsible way, given the values and morals of the culture (Ciulla, 2003; Strike, Haller, & Soltis, 2005).

Problem solving. The act of choosing and implementing a solution to an identified problem or situation (Harvey, Bearley, & Corkrum, 1997).

Process. Theoretical definition: A method that includes a set of steps and activities that group members follow to perform tasks such as strategic planning or conflict resolution. The three levels of process include process design, process methods, and process tools (Hamme, 2015; Schwarz, 2002).

Operational definition: Any internal, external, or systemic pattern of behavior organized in a step-by-step order or action to achieve a goal, function, or end product (Hamme, 2015; Schwarz, 2002).

Tribe. For the purpose of this study, the term tribe refers to those Native American peoples residing in Washington State.
Delimitations

According to the Municipal Research and Services Center of Washington (MRSC, 2016), there are 227 cities in Washington State that have a mayor-council form of government. For the purpose of this study, 15 exemplary Washington State mayors were interviewed. The following are the criteria agreed on by the peer researchers to define those exemplary leaders:

- evidence of successful relationships with stakeholders;
- evidence of breaking through conflict to achieve organizational success;
- 5 or more years of experience in that profession or field;
- having written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings;
- recognition by their peers; and
- membership in associations or groups focused on their field.

This study described the shared experiences of exemplary mayors in the state of Washington. By identifying cities with an elected mayor-council form of government, a population size was identified. A target size of 52 cities from various regions in Washington State was identified by regional proximity. From there, a pool of respondents were identified to provide a final sample of 15 respondents.

Organization of the Study

The remainder of the study consists of four chapters, references, and appendices. Chapter II presents a review of literature and research pertinent to establishing common ground in conflict resolution between mayors and city stakeholders. Chapter III presents the research design and methodology for data collection. The results and analysis of the data collected are presented in Chapter IV. Finally, Chapter V provides a summary and
conclusions based on the findings and analysis and presents recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The goal of this phenomenological study was to discover and describe how Washington State mayors utilize the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors and the impact these domains have on achieving common ground to achieve breakthrough results and transform conflict. The central question to this study was, “What are the lived experiences of exemplary Washington State mayors in establishing common ground and producing breakthrough results by engaging in elements of the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors?” Tekniepe and Stream (2010) suggested that studying city managers is “important because of the fact that these individuals (once viewed as neutral forces with limited roles) are beginning to play an increasingly influential role in their organization’s success by bringing forward issues and information before their elected boards” (p. 413). A review of the literature demonstrated that there are significant studies relating to various variables within the scope of this study, but there is very little literature that combines these variables to explain how exemplary mayors in the state of Washington establish common ground and transform conflict.

Establishing common ground is one of the many ways to transform conflict. The literature shows that transformational leaders who establish common ground through various domains have a better chance of producing results than those who do not take the time to find a common ground with their stakeholders. Some of these domains include ethics in decision making, the use of emotional intelligence, a leader’s problem-solving skills, how organizational processes are perceived and decided on, how a leader collaborates with stakeholders, and how a leader communicates with them. These domains can play a particularly significant role when it comes to leaders who are elected
officials. Morton’s (2013) dissertation, *Leadership Traits and Characteristics of Elected California Women Political Leaders*, examined how specific leadership traits and characteristics contributed to the career progress of six elected women in the California legislative system, but her study only included one mayor.

Morton’s (2013) study included a participant who was the mayor of the City of Lake Elsinore, California, at the time. Morton described some of the lived experiences of Mayor Melissa Melendez: “When recalling her political experiences such as factors that contributed to success, skills, and characteristics . . . the body language and posture Melendez exhibited appeared to be consistent with the themes of responsibility, sociability, relationships, and self-confidence” (pp. 135-136). In her study, she remarked, “The participants emphasized the importance of communication, collaboration, and knowledge of how government works as being key skills to their success” (Morton, 2013, p. 90). Morton’s research on political leaders only included one city mayor, and the gap her study left was in applying those political experiences toward successfully transforming conflict rather than political achievements.

Elected officials are uniquely chosen for a particular office. This may add an additional political layer when it comes to establishing common ground to transform conflict. Regardless of whether the elected official is a national, state, or local-level official, many of the same rules apply. While there are a variety of elected officials, this study examined the population of Washington State mayors. Recent conflicts occurring under the leadership of city-level administrations have shown a need to add to the literature on how Washington State city mayors use six domains of conflict
transformation behaviors and the impact these domains have on achieving common ground to achieve breakthrough results and transform conflict.

Washington State has 227 mayors elected to lead their cities through both triumphant and turbulent times (MRSC, 2016). The following review of literature discusses the importance of establishing common ground by focusing on six domains, and then it ties those concepts with conflict resolution and transformation while concentrating on Washington State mayors. The primary focus is on large and small cities.

**Review of the Literature**

A review of the literature examined the background for shared behavioral traits of Washington State mayors who had to transform conflict within their constituencies. The review is organized in three parts. The first part includes definitions and historical backgrounds of leadership and establishing common ground theory. Further, the review discusses common ground theory as it relates to the six domains of conflict transformation through ethics, emotional intelligence, problem solving, processes, collaboration, and communication.

The second part discusses conflict through understanding theoretical contexts of conflict transformation, conflict resolution, and conflict management. The final part examines the distinctive and unique situations affecting elected officials in terms of establishing common ground and transforming conflict by utilizing the six domains. More specifically, it examines mayors in both large and small cities and specifically mayors in Washington State.
Leadership

This study focused on how Washington State mayors break through conflict by creating common ground. In order to fully understand how mayors accomplish this task, it is important to investigate what literature says about leadership best practices. Numerous definitions regarding leadership have evolved over the years, but Northouse (2016) identified four essential components: (a) process, (b) influence, (c) occurrence in groups, and (d) common goals. Based on these components, he defined leadership as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (Northhouse, 2016, p. 6).

These four components are essential elements to successes described by one noted mayor, Rudolph Giuliani (2002), who shared some of them in his book Leadership and related them to his leadership in New York City during the events centered on September 11, 2001. One noted author on the study of leadership is James MacGregor Burns. His work centered on the needs of the follower by distinguishing a separate relationship with those whom he described as transactional leaders and those he described as transformational leaders (Burns, 1978). Bass and Avolio (1998) added to the study by identifying four critical factors regarding transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration.

Bass, Jung, Avolio, and Berson (2003) also suggested that some might view leadership from a personality perspective or from the perspective of group processes. Rost (1998) built on these authors’ concepts by distinguishing leadership from management. He described the relationship of the leader as influential, while the relationship of management is authoritative. Rost went on to compare that relationship
between leaders and followers or between managers and subordinates as the case might be. Additionally, he stated that leaders work toward real changes intended to reflect mutual purposes. Conversely, managers produce and sell goods and/or services, which result from coordinated activities (Rost, 1998). This was the foundation for continued review of both transactional and transformational leadership. Thus, there was a need to understand both of these leadership styles for Washington State mayors.

**Transactional leadership.** One might assume that transactional leadership is not a preferred style for leading communities. On the contrary, as Crosby and Bryson (2005) suggested, “leaders must possess transactional skills for dealing with individuals and groups with conflicting agendas” (p. 194). Therefore, a better explanation might be attributed to Bass (1985), who described transactional leadership as a part of a single continuum ranging from laissez-faire to transactional to transformational (Northouse, 2016). Northouse (2016) explained that the transactional leader does not necessarily focus on the followers’ personal development or their individual needs but rather exchanges things of value. Two factors he attributed to transactional leadership were “contingent reward” and “management-by-exception” (Northouse, 2016, p. 171).

In the case of contingent reward, an exchange takes place as an agreement between leader and follower in terms of what must be done and the payoff (reward) for doing it. Management by exception, on the other hand, involves what Northouse (2016) described as “corrective criticism, negative feedback, and negative reinforcement” (p. 171). He explained that management by exception can take either active or passive forms of engagement. The results of querying literature on transactional versus transformational leadership showed that there appears to be a shift in focus from
transactional leadership to transformational leadership. Less detail is provided when it comes to transactional leadership styles, while extensive detail is provided when discussing transformational leadership.

This might lead one to believe that when looking for common ground and transforming conflict, transformational leadership is preferred. Therefore, understanding transformational leadership is important for those in a leadership role.

**Transformational leadership.** Transformational leadership has perhaps gained the most traction since first being described by Downton in 1973 (Bass, 1985). In a recent query, nearly 25,000 studies were found related to transformational leadership, with over 1,500 of them being dissertations. Northouse (2016) pointed out, “Transformational leadership emerged from and is rooted in the writings of Burns (1978) and Bass (1985)” (p. 190). He added, “The works of Bennis and Nanus (1985) and Kouzes and Posner (1987) are also representative of transformational leadership” (Northouse, 2016, p. 190). Wong, Wei, and Tjosvold (2014) contributed to literature on transformational leadership by showing that transformational leadership is a key component for government officials in areas surrounding collaboration and conflict management.

Bass et al. (2003) described transformational leaders as doing more with followers than just exchanges and agreements. They share the achievement of superior results through the “four I’s”: “idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration” (Bass et al., 2003, p. 208). According to Bass et al., when leaders exhibit idealized influence, they share risks and are admired and trusted. That type of inspiration results in team development and increased motivation; in
this manner, transformational leaders envision and communicate future states.

Transformational leaders also encourage creativity and promote new ideas and problem-solving techniques, thereby stimulating their followers intellectually. Lastly, they recognize individual differences and value diversity, thereby paying special attention to the needs of each individual. These are the kind of behaviors that are recognized as conducive to establishing common ground.

**Common Ground**

This study addressed the literature surrounding six domains identified with establishing common ground and linked that to Washington State mayors who have elevated their cities by breaking through conflict and transforming conflictive occurrences in their cities. Multiple authors have contended that finding common ground is an essential part of effective communication and ultimately leading an organization (Kecskes & Zhang, 2009; Moore, 2013; Snowe, 2013; Thomas & Beckel, 2007).

Kecskes (2008) identified two components of common ground. The first was core common ground, which is based on both a common and cultural sense; he described it as derived primarily from a shared knowledge or experience. Emergent common ground, on the other hand, is derived from prior and/or current experience relevant to a currently emerging situation (Kecskes, 2008). If one were to search for peer-reviewed documents under “common ground” in a scholarly database, the results would number in the tens of thousands; definitions and effectiveness of common ground theory vary. Jacobsen (1999) contended that “common ground thinking does not offer solutions to divisive issues . . . [but] it does provide a way for people with differences to work together” (p. 78). While his study was primarily dedicated to the education field, the
principles of appreciating diversity and bridging gaps in opposing views are relevant across many fields.

One might contend that communication and collaboration are intricate factors in establishing common ground (both are important facets of leadership roles). Kouzakova et al. (2012) related that, conversely, a “lack of perceived common ground has been found to reduce the tendency to engage in generally successful ‘problem solving’ negotiation strategies” (p. 799). It is important to note that establishing common ground for its own sake is not the answer either. One must be certain that there is contextual thought in the process of finding common ground. In her dissertation, *Assessing Common Ground in Conversation: The Effect of Linguistic and Physical Co-Presence on Early Planning*, Galati (2009) suggested, “Assessing whether some information is in common ground may, under some circumstances, also require consideration of how that information came to be part of common ground” (p. 9).

According to the Search for Common Ground (n.d.) organization, one of the five core principles in the organization’s pursuit of conflict transformation is that common ground is not compromise. Further review of common ground theory reveals the six domains of conflict transformation: ethics, emotional intelligence, problem solving, processes, collaboration, and communication (Search for Common Ground, n.d.). Schumaker, Krupp, and Howland (2013) considered that “strategic leaders must be adept at finding common ground and achieving buy-in among stakeholders who have disparate views and agendas” (p. 133).

Thomas and Beckel (2007) listed five common ground governing principles:

(a) There must be agreement that a problem exists and what goal(s) need to be reached to
alleviate the problem, (b) the problem must contain elements of historic custom to both parties, (c) consensus is more likely if fresh ideas are introduced to address the problem, (d) common ground works if the overarching authority acknowledges and protects the ideals of both parties, and (e) one should not attempt to dispute the issues if the previous four principles do not or cannot apply.

As part of the process of establishing common ground and transforming conflict, six domains were determined to provide a foundation. Those six domains—collaboration, communication, emotional intelligence, ethics, problem solving, and processes—were reviewed in the literature. It is important for Washington State mayors to have an understanding of each of the domains.

Collaboration. The first domain of conflict transformation behaviors in establishing common ground is collaboration. Gray (1989) defined collaborating as “Finding Common Ground for Multiparty Problems” (p. xvii). She described it as “a process for solving complex problems we face as a society” (Gray, 1989, p. xvii). In her book, four general designs for collaboration were described: “(1) appreciative planning, (2) collective strategies, (3) dialogues, and (4) negotiated settlements” (Gray, 1989, p. 178). According to Gray, appreciative planning helps increase awareness through conferences and gatherings. Collective strategies go further by “creating specific agreements to address the problem or to carry out the vision” (Gray, 1989, p. 178). Gray described dialogues as the preferred method of exchange, while negotiated sentiments “are intended to produce agreements that produce binding agreements or recommendations” (p. 180). These latter two are directly reflective of the two-way communication that Ansell and Gash (2007) suggested when they shared, “Collaboration
implies two-way communication and influence between agencies and stakeholders and also opportunities for stakeholders to talk with each other” (p. 546). O’Leary and Vij (2012) described collaborative managers as those who

- work both with autonomy and interdependence . . .
- have both common and diverse goals [with their networks] . . .
- work both with a fewer number and a greater variety of groups that are increasingly more diverse . . .
- need to be both participative and authoritative . . .
- see the forest and the trees . . . [and]
- need to balance advocacy and inquiry. (pp. 511-512)

According to Palguta (2013), “Effective government managers and leaders are increasingly turning to the power of collaboration to succeed in a time of increased demands and decreased resources” (p. 21). Addressing such public problems requires the collaboration of organizations from multiple sectors, including governmental organizations, not-for-profit organizations, businesses, and community groups. Finally, the behaviors or actions of the integrative leader, and the leader’s reputation and characteristics, are critical in catalyzing collaboration (Sun & Anderson, 2012).

Crosby and Bryson (2005) pointed out that “often public policy makers adopt policies, projects or programs and then require stakeholders to collaborate in implementing them” (p. 197). Warm (2011) suggested, “Collaboration necessitates actually combining creativity, expertise, knowledge, and other resources into a mutual endeavor” (p. 61). His work, “Local Government Collaboration for a New Decade: Risk, Trust, and Effectiveness,” provided recommendations for overcoming barriers that may
stem from society, structure, process, or leadership. He contended, “Collaboration in local government involves working across institutional boundaries to engage outside individuals and entities in a highly connected way that essentially reshapes the processes of decision making or service delivery” (Warm, 2011, p. 61). Warm further contended that there are four broad forces that make collaboration essential in local government: financial, competitive, practical, and political. In the meantime, he also suggested four significant barriers: structural, societal, process, and leadership.

**Communication.** Perhaps no greater strength is necessary for any elected official than the art of communication. This is the second domain of behaviors in establishing common ground. Covey (1989) described the four types of communication as reading, writing, speaking, and listening. He continued by reflecting that communication is “the most important skill in life” (Covey, 1989, p. 237). Covey’s value of communication was reflected in his fifth habit: “seek first to understand, then to be understood” (p. 235). In most cases, people are either speaking or preparing to provide a response rather than listening with empathy. Covey explained that empathetic listening means trying to understand the other person’s paradigm or worldview.

Two aspects that Covey related to communication were trust and cooperation. According to Covey (1989), when there are low levels of both trust and cooperation, communication is defensive. There is a sense of win/lose or lose/win, and therefore communication is ineffective. On the other hand, when communication is respectful, there tends to be a middle ground of trust and cooperation, and a sense of compromise can be achieved. The highest level of communication, however, occurs when there are
high levels of both trust and cooperation. At this level, communication is synergetic, and there is a sense of win/win (Covey, 1989).

The importance of communication from a leader’s perspective cannot be overemphasized. In 2010, de Vries et al. conducted an investigation into the relationship between communication styles and leadership styles. Their study provided additional support in understanding that transformational leadership is mainly communicative, while transactional leadership is less communicative (de Vries et al., 2010). Roper (2005) examined one of the concepts regarding the relationship between leadership and communication, symmetrical communication, as presented by J. E. Grunig in 1992. Roper recognized that the relationships between state, economy, and civil society are constantly challenged. Key attributes of symmetrical communication include listening, openness, feedback, participation, and relationship (Men, 2014).

Lane (2007) studied communication as it pertains to privileged information and “focuse[d] on an error that speakers make in that they fail to account for the addressees’ different perspective when they make implicit references to privileged information” (p. 131). The author found,

In a majority of these experiments, there was a baseline condition in which speakers were quite good at taking their addressees’ perspectives into account. It was only the conditions whereby speakers were so overwhelmed by the cognitive pressure to pay attention to privileged objects that they so often failed to take perspective differences into account. (Lane, 2007, p. 132)

**Emotional intelligence.** The third domain of conflict transformation behaviors that may contribute to establishing common ground is emotional intelligence. Goleman
et al. (2002) explained that how leaders handle themselves and their relationships is the primal leadership competency of emotional intelligence. Hellriegel and Slocum (2004) reflected in *Organizational Behavior* that emotional intelligence is “the capacity for recognizing one’s own and others’ emotions; including self-awareness, self-motivation, being empathetic, and having social skills” (p. 5).

Bradberry and Greaves (2009) explained that there are four emotional intelligence skills that leaders can recognize and improve on. They are self-awareness and self-management, which comprise a leader’s personal competence, and social awareness and relationship management, which comprise a leader’s social competence. Covey (1989) explained, “Self-awareness enables us to stand apart and examine even the way we ‘see’ ourselves—our self-paradigm” (p. 67).

When regarding self-management, the literature points out that having social competence is also important. The attributes in this regard are how aware people are of their social surroundings and how they manage relationships. Giuliani (2002) served as an example of a mayor exhibiting these behaviors in the following excerpt from *Leadership*. Mayor Giuliani reflected on the following post-9/11 decision:

On the Friday after September 11, Tom Von Essen approached me with a dilemma. He had lost 343 men, including many of the Fire Department’s leaders. He wanted to promote people to take the place of those who were gone, but he wasn’t sure it was the right time. On the one hand, he needed officers in place to run the department. On the other hand, promotions would send a signal to the survivors that we were assuming the people being replaced were gone. Many
were not ready to accept that. I agreed with him that we should go ahead, and
told him to think of the promotions as field commissions. (p. 361)

**Ethics.** Ethics is the fourth domain of conflict transformation behaviors in
establishing common ground. Sauser (2010) contended, “Ethics in local government has
to do with the behavior—specifically the moral behavior—of the elected officials, public
employees, and professional administrators who work to carry out the operations of the
government” (p. 53). Ciulla (2003) suggested, “The study of ethics is about what we
should do and what we should be. It’s about right, wrong, good, evil, and the
relationships of humans to each other and to other living things” (p. xi).

Howard and Korver (2008) stated, “A successful code helps you clarify for
yourself your ethical principles” (p. 73). In *Organizational Development: The Process of
Leading Organizational Change*, Anderson (2012) explained the following elements of
an organizational culture:

- Language, metaphor, and jargon . . .
- Communication . . .
- Artifacts . . .
- Stories, myths, and legends . . .
- Ceremonies . . .
- Values, ethics, and moral codes . . .
- Decision-making style. (pp. 262-263)

Anderson noted under “values, ethics, and moral codes” that
doing what is “right” may mean doing it quickly in one organization or doing an
exhaustive study of all possible options in another organization. Organizations
have espoused values, those that they explicitly articulate, and hidden underlying values, those that guide decision making. (p. 263)

He went on to state, under decision-making styles, that in addition to knowing “what information is needed,” leaders need to consider “who is consulted,” whether they are going to accept opinions freely, who is going to make the final decision, and how that decision is going to be communicated (Anderson, 2012, p. 263).

In addition to considering the fundamental elements of the organization, Northouse (2016) discussed five principles of ethical leadership, which ultimately relate to ethical decision making. Considering, for example, that ethical leaders respect others, one might ask, “Will the decision respect others?” That same philosophical approach can be applied by assuming that ethical leaders serve others and therefore ethical decisions should serve others. Ethical leaders are just, so their decisions should be just. Ethical leaders are honest and build communities, so their decisions again should come from the heart and help build the organization (Northouse, 2016). Unfortunately, as Kalshoven, Den Hartog, and De Hoogh (2011) pointed out, “We do not yet sufficiently understand why some people in a leadership situation choose to influence others through ethical behaviors manner while others choose less ethical behaviors” (p. 349).

Kalshoven et al.’s (2011) study tested how ethical leadership related to the “Big Five” personality traits, which include extroversion, emotional stability, consciousness, agreeableness, and openness to experience. While their study may not have concluded that there was a significant correlation between these five traits and ethical leadership, it did suggest “an especially important role for both conscientiousness and agreeableness,” and the researchers recommended “potential practical implications for selection by
identifying leader personality traits that are related to ethical leader behaviors” (Kalshoven et al., 2011, p. 363).

Gardner (2006) suggested that “ethics involves a stance that is inherently more distanced than face-to-face relationships embodied in tolerance, respect, and other examples of personal morality” (pp. 129-130). He remarked, “In the jargon of cognitive science, ethics involve an abstract attitude” (Gardner, 2006, p. 130).

**Problem solving.** The fifth domain of conflict transformation behaviors in finding common ground is solving problems. According to Warm (2011), “The key drivers of local government will be resource leveraging, community positioning, problem solving, and strategic leadership” (p. 62). Problem solving requires additional detail as one of the six domains of establishing common ground. Research has shown that there are two distinctive types of problems: adaptive problems and technical problems (Easterling & Millesen, 2012; Heifetz, 1998).

A technical problem might be a computer problem due to a virus or some other factor within the computer. In this case, a technician might fix it. An adaptive problem might be with the user in terms of understanding the software or computer system. This type of problem requires a behavioral change for the computer operator and may not be as easy to fix. As discussed previously, it typically falls on a transformational leader to help with an adaptive problem requiring behavioral change. Northouse (2016) contended that problem-solving skills “include being able to define significant problems, gather problem information, formulate new understandings about the problem, and generate prototype plans for problem solutions” (p. 48). He suggested that problem solving can be evaluated by the originality and quality of the solutions expressed by the leader.
Authors such as Easterling and Millesen (2012) contended that diversity is an essential component in adaptive problem solving. There is an understanding in their position that most challenges in the community are not technical but rather adaptive, “stemming from the interaction of many interrelated trends—demographic, economic, social, political, and technological—playing out at the local, national, and global levels” (Easterling & Millesen, 2012, p. 20).

Several authors have agreed that creativity is also essential to effective problem solving. According to Reiter-Palmon and Illies (2014), “Most authors agree that the core processes required for creative problem solving are problem identification and construction, identification of relevant information, generation of new ideas, and the evaluation of these ideas” (p. 57).

Carmelli, Sheaffer, Binyamin, Reiter-Palmon, and Shimoni (2013) conducted three surveys at different points in time to show the relationship between a climate that promotes psychological safety and a term they referred to as reflexivity as they apply to creative problem solving. Reflexivity is the reflection of tasks that have been accomplished and identification of ways to improve on them. Several authors have attributed four elements to creative problem solving: (a) problem identification and construction, (b) information search and encoding, (c) solution or alternatives generation, and (d) idea evaluation and selection (Carmelli et al., 2013).

In The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization, Peter Senge (1990) shared the importance of understanding problems in learning organizations. Managers, he wrote, typically view problems as if they are purely “economic,” “accounting,” or “personnel” (Senge, 1990, p. 383). Senge discussed the spirit of
openness when dealing with problems and the importance of open relationships in problem solving. Understanding the importance of creativity and openness is important to Washington State mayors as they deal with a variety of problems particular to their cities.

Processes. The final domain of conflict transformation behaviors to be considered in establishing common ground is the domain of processes. When considering the case of Washington State mayors, this domain may be further studied through the lenses of decision-making processes, administrative processes, and governing processes. Nalbandian, O’Neill, Wilkes, and Kaufman (2013) remarked that connecting engagement initiatives to traditional political values and governing processes is an important mark of successful community building. The authors identified three leadership challenges associated with “bridging the gap between what is administratively sustainable and what is politically acceptable” (Nalbandian et al., 2013, p. 569) in local government as (a) creating and reinforcing bridge-building roles and problem-oriented approaches, (b) synchronizing structures of authority with problems to be solved, and (c) incorporating engagement with traditional processes. The third challenge “addresses the issue of processes and the imperative of engaging parties with differing interests, authority, and motives” (Nalbandian et al., 2013, p. 571).

Warm (2011) contended, “A good process is the only way to navigate the wide range of expectations and needs that partners inevitably bring to the table” (p. 63). Kouzes and Posner (2012) suggested that when it comes to leadership, “it’s not the person we should be focusing on; it’s the process” (p. 124). They proposed the theory that high-performance organizations emphasize following the process and not the person.
The review of literature focused on two specific processes: decision making and administrative/governing.

**Decision making.** One might attribute many process elements to those identified in a decision-making process, which begins with identifying an issue and ends with an action, as proposed by Nutt (1984). Between these two elements are various phases that include formulation, concept development, detailing, evaluation, and implementation (Nutt, 1984). These stages are similar in scope to those steps identified by Lasswell (1963). Lasswell described decision making as a process that involves the (a) intelligence phase, (b) promoting or recommending phase, (c) prescribing phase, (d) invoking (establishing correspondence) phase, (e) application phase, (f) appraisal phase, and (g) terminating phase. Haq (2011) suggested, “Agile government processes focus on achieving speed with flexibility and responsiveness” (p. 323). Gomes and Streib (2014) recommended, “Everyone involved in government decisions should be well aware of the potential biases that are inevitably part of every decision-making process” (p. 41).

**Governing.** Nalbandian et al. (2013) identified three leadership challenges facing local governments. The first challenge of governing is the interaction between department heads in the political and administrative arena. The second is promoting collaborative work between city and county boundaries. The third challenge is to encourage citizen engagement (Nalbandian et al., 2013).

**Conflict**

Harvey and Drolet (2005) noted that managers “should accept conflict as a necessary and productive element in organizational growth” (p. 86). Conflict aids
organizational growth by allowing individuals with opposing views to engage in dialogue. It promotes a new way of looking at things. From a mayor’s perspective, accepting conflict as a potential positive part of city management allows stakeholders the freedom to express negative feelings while providing the mayor with a means to deal with and manage conflict to improve organizational performance. Once a mayor has an understanding of how conflict can occur, the case develops into conflict management.

Robinson (2010) described four ways that people deal with conflict. Some may be passive aggressive and do or say nothing directly but complain and act out in ways that are subversive to the organization. Others may avoid conflict altogether, believing that everything is satisfactory and not disrupting the status quo. Robinson described a third way people deal with conflict as adapting by changing their own opinion in order to avoid confrontation. He explained a fourth way of dealing with conflict by assertive confrontation through candid and objective communication (Robinson, 2010).

One way to promote effective and objective communication is through establishing common ground. From a national perspective, the United States is dealing with global tensions, economic uncertainty, environmental concerns, and both domestic and foreign challenges. Demographic shifts will also impact conflict transformation practices. In a sense, American cities have to deal with similar issues and find common ground within their own communities.

An example of a situation that required finding common ground occurred on December 20, 2014, when two police officers were killed in New York City. At the funeral for both men, police officers turned their back on Mayor Bill de Blasio. Associated Press (AP) reporters Jonathan Lemire and Mike Balsamo (2015) remarked,
Thousands of city police officers turned their backs Sunday as they watched Mayor Bill de Blasio eulogize an officer shot dead with his partner, repeating a stinging display of scorn for the mayor despite entreaties from the police commissioner not to do so. (para. 1)

Mayor de Blasio is not the only mayor to face these challenges.

It is important for Washington State mayors to have a thorough grasp of conflict, the various forms of conflict, and the differences between breaking through conflict, conflict management, conflict resolution, and conflict transformation. The review of literature showed that conflict is dynamic. That is to say conflict is characterized by constant change, activity, or progress. Harvey and Drolet (2005) remarked that “conflict occurs spontaneously, and a manager must know how to deal with it” (p. 85).

For the sake of this study, conflict was examined from a group or team perspective. Therefore, conflict can be thought of as relating to a task, relationship, or process (Ayoko & Callan, 2010). Greer, Jehn, and Mannix (2008) examined the relationship between task, relationship, and process conflict and found that process conflict that occurred early in a team’s existence affected other conflict types.

Literature also shows that conflict is necessary and can prove to be productive to organizational growth (Ayoko & Callan, 2010; Harvey & Drolet, 2005). Harvey and Drolet (2005) shared five types of conflict: (a) value conflict, (b) tangible conflict, (c) interpersonal conflict, (d) boundary conflict, and (e) perceptual conflict. Kouzes and Posner (2012) suggested that “we have to make it possible for people to argue with each other—up, down, in, out and sideways—if we are to realize the best from today’s diverse and talented workforce” (pp. 69-70).
Lederach (2003) suggested that conflict impacts people personally, relationally, structurally, and culturally. One particular form of conflict that Washington State mayors should be concerned with is political conflict. As Tekniepe and Stream (2010) pointed out, “Internal political struggles for control of the elected board played a major role in whether a city manager chose to remain in office or seek alternative employment” (p. 414). Additionally, Krebs and Pelissero (2010) contended that “the strict separation of power between the legislative [city council] and executive officials [city mayor] often produces greater policy conflict and gridlock” (p. 393).

Washington State city mayors face the same challenges as mayors of every other American city. Many of these are similar to the challenges faced by any organizational leader. These include economic downturns, internal and external political differences with stakeholders and within the organization, communicating a vision, performing ethically, and improving processes, among others. One difference between mayors and typical organizational leaders is that mayors are elected. All too often, mayors may be elected on pure charisma.

Ciulla (2003) pointed out,

Charisma distracts us from looking at the relationship between the leader and the led, and in particular the relationship of trust. The mistake is not so much that charisma is dangerous in the “wrong” leaders, but rather that it is a distorted perspective on leadership. (p. 206)

When mayors consider ethics, processes, and emotional intelligence, they incorporate a sense of social awareness. Bradberry and Greaves (2009) suggested,
Listening and observing are the most important elements of social awareness. To listen well and observe what is going on around us, we have to stop doing many things we like to do. We have to stop talking, stop the monologue that may be running through our minds. (p. 38)

**Conflict management.** Kilman and Thomas (1978) viewed conflict management as three major interrelated events: (a) perceiving/experiencing unacceptable conflict, (b) diagnosing the sources of the conflict, and (c) intervention. Harvey and Drolet (2005) considered conflict management to be reactive. Rahim (2002) recognized the difference between conflict management and conflict resolution: “Conflict resolution implies elimination or termination of conflict” (p. 207), while conflict management “involves designing effective macro-level strategies to minimize the dysfunctions of conflict” (p. 208). Conflict management is a basis for transforming conflict, and Boucher (2013) found that there is a relationship between conflict management styles and organizational climate.

Using a mixed-method design, Boucher (2013) examined conflict management styles of South Carolina elementary school principals and the relationship between their conflict management style and school climate. She found that “principals linked trust, listening, addressing conflict issues promptly and directly, and self-knowledge to effective conflict management practices” (Boucher, 2013, p. v). In her study, “The interviewed principals expressed an awareness of the importance of skills that characterize an integrating and collaborative manner of working with people” (Boucher, 2013, p. 73).
Conflict resolution. Greer et al. (2008) examined the relationship between task, relationship, and process conflict and found that process conflict that occurred early in teams affected other conflict types. Their research showed that if a team had high levels of unresolved process conflict, it was likely that there would be high levels of conflict in the other areas. However, when conflict was resolved early on, other conflicts were less likely to form over a period of time (Greer et al., 2008). According to Lederach (2003), conflict resolution asks the key question, “How do we end something not desired?” (p. 33).

The focus of conflict resolution is on content, not relationship, and the purpose is “to achieve an agreement and solution to the presenting problem creating the crises” (Lederach, 2003, p. 33). Lederach (2003) described conflict resolution as a “short-term release to pain, anxiety and difficulties” (p. 33).

Conflict transformation. Managing conflict centers on diagnoses and intervention, while conflict resolution is more apt to offer quick solutions but no real transformative change. In The Little Book of Conflict Transformation, Lederach (2003) shared that conflict transformation goes beyond resolution and management by going beyond resolving specific problems. He described transformation as “an approach [that] aspires to create constructive change processes through conflict” (Lederach, 2003, p. 12). He proposed the following definition:

Conflict transformation is to envision and respond to the ebb and flow of social conflict as life-giving opportunities for creating constructive change processes that reduce violence, increase justice in direct interaction and social structures, and respond to real-life problems in human relationships. (Lederach, 2003, p. 14)
According to Lederach (2003), “Transformation seeks to understand social conflict as it emerges from and produces changes in the personal, relational, structural and cultural dimensions of human experience” (p. 26). This coincides with Covey’s (1989) premise to “seek first to understand. . . . [A]lthough it’s risky and hard, seek first to understand, or diagnose before you prescribe, is a correct principle manifest in many areas of life” (p. 243).

Forms of City Government in Washington State

City government can take the form of either mayor-council or council-manager relationships. Washington State has 53 municipalities that have a council-manager governing body and 227 mayor-council governments. Although the focus of this study was on Washington State mayors, the review of literature focused on those cities that have a city manager.

Commission form of city government. According to the Municipal Research and Services Center of Washington (MRSC, 2016), only one city (Shelton) operates under a commission form. The National League of Cities (NLC, n.d.) stated,

Characteristics include:

- Voters elect individual commissioners to a small governing board
- Each commissioner is responsible for one specific aspect, such as fire, police, public works, health, finance
- One commissioner is designated as chairman or mayor, who presides over meetings
- The commission has both legislative and executive functions
The commission form of city government is the oldest form of government in the U.S., but exists today in less than 1% of cities. It typically occurs in cities with populations below 100,000, such as Sunrise, Florida and Fairview, Tennessee. (para. 6-7)

**Council-manager form of government.** In a council-manager form of government, the city council “is responsible for policymaking,” while “the city manager provides policy advice, directs the daily operations of city government, handles personnel functions (including the power to appoint and remove employees) and is responsible for preparing the city budget” (MRSC, 2016, para. 11). This particular form of government has been likened to a school board-superintendent relationship, and the NLC (n.d.) provided the following characteristics:

- City council oversees the general administration, makes policy, sets budget
- Council appoints a professional city manager to carry out day-to-day administrative operations
- Often the mayor is chosen from among the council on a rotating basis

This is the most common form of government. According to surveys by the International City/County Management Association (ICMA), this form of government has grown from 48% usage in 1996 to 55% usage in 2006. It is most popular in cities with populations over 10,000, mainly in the Southeast and Pacific coast areas. (para. 2-3)

Washington cities with this form of government include Tacoma (population 202,300), Vancouver (population 170,400), Bellevue (population 135,000), and Kirkland (population 83,460; MRSC, 2016).
**Mayor-council form of government.** According to the MRSC (2016), “The mayor-council form consists of an elected mayor (elected at-large), who serves as the city’s chief administrative officer, and a council (elected either at-large or from districts), which serves as the municipality’s legislative body” (para. 7).

The NLC (n.d.) listed these characteristics of a mayor-council form of government:

- Mayor is elected separately from the council, is often full-time and paid, with significant administrative and budgetary authority
- Depending on the municipal charter, the mayor could have weak or strong powers
- Council is elected and maintains legislative powers
- Some cities appoint a professional manager who maintains limited administrative authority

Occurring in 34% of cities surveyed by International City/County Management Association (ICMA), this is the second most common form of government. It is found mostly in older, larger cities, or in very small cities, and is most popular in the Mid-Atlantic and Midwest. (para. 4-5)

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to research exemplary Washington State mayors elected to leadership roles in this form of government.

**Reforms in City Government**

Wheeland, Palus, and Wood (2014) described and examined four reforms in municipality government: the model city charter, the council-manager plan, city management professionalism, and bureaucratic service delivery. From a historical
perspective, they explained that as cities grow, expand, and transition from one economy to another, municipal governments experience challenges in delivering services, regulating growth, and establishing policies. Their study concluded that (a) citizens have a greater freedom in participating in their municipal government design, (b) “the evolution of city management as a profession has led to public administrators becoming partners with elected officials and citizens in bringing about good government and governance” (Wheeland et al., 2014, p. 22S), and perhaps most related to this field of study, (c) “local government managers will need to use contemporary strategies such as CPM [Collaborative Public Management] to address wicked problems facing their communities” (p. 22S).

Finally, there continues to be a need for reform in local city government. Holmes (2003) compared the decision-making processes and organizational culture between the two types of local government. She found that there was no real significant difference in the culture or decision-making processes of mayor-council or council-manager forms of city government (Holmes, 2003).

In a review by the NLC (2013), the following 10 items were listed as “critical imperatives facing cities in 2014”:

1. Fragile Fiscal Health
2. Deteriorating Transportation Infrastructure
3. The Shrinking Middle Class
4. Inadequate Access to Higher Education
5. The Need for Affordable Housing
6. A Less-Than-Welcoming Return for Veterans
City government and conflict. As previously mentioned, political conflict can and often does occur in city government decision making. The potential for influence by various groups in public government meetings can be a factor in adding to conflictive relationships. Beck, Groenwold, and Western (2012) referred to this as “Intergroup Argumentation” (p. 587) and investigated how two or more opposing groups may try to influence a third group. They identified three activities that lead to potentially successful outcomes. The first involves reasoning activities, the second is seeking convergence (which by all accounts could be considered collaboration), and the third is orchestrating intrusions or interruptions. The authors compared city official and public argumentation mechanisms to those used by Wal-Mart officials during a public forum in Lawrence, Kansas. Their study showed differences in argumentation between groups based on position and roles. They provided the following anecdote in relation to city government and conflict: “City commissioners used agreement and disagreement-oriented messages, but the majority of these were with other city commissioners as opposed to directly confronting the opposing sides presented by the public or Wal-Mart officials” (Beck et al., 2012, p. 606).

Nelson and Nollenberger (2011) contended that high levels of cooperation coupled with low levels of conflict result in higher quality decision making in public policy.
**City government and collaboration.** Verheul and Schaap (2010) recognized, “As ‘standard bearers’, mayors play a role in the formation of local identity. In the current era of complexity and institutional fragmentation, people expect leaders to shape the shifting frameworks of individuals and draw connections between organizations” (p. 442). Citizens consider it the mayor’s responsibility to build a community from multiple identities. Hence, there is a need for city government to require a strong form of collaboration. Verheul and Schaap’s study of mayors in both England and The Netherlands demonstrated the need for mayors to surround themselves with “executive and non-executive councilors, deputies, political leaders, local bureaucrats, and officers as well as the leaders of civil society” (p. 444).

Zhang (2012), however, speculated that city managers can vary widely in their policymaking roles. He suggested that a stronger local governing body would be more willing to collaborate with a city manager. Zhang referred to this as the “collaboration model” (p. 359). Crosby and Bryson (2010) suggested *integrative leadership* and cross-section collaboration. They recommended bringing diverse groups and organizations together to remedy complex problems. They proposed, “Leaders will have more success at launching these collaborations when they take advantage of opportunities opened up by driving forces (including helping create or favorably altering them), while remaining attuned to constraining forces” (Crosby & Bryson, 2010, p. 218). They also recognized the importance for leaders to create shared meaning in order to communicate a vision for stakeholders.

**City government and communication.** Ricklefs’s (2013) study noted that expectations were clearly articulated and that when councilmembers, staff, or
management (mayor/city manager) needed clarification, they asked for it. The Beck et al. (2012) study directly correlated the importance of communication in establishing common ground and transforming conflict. The authors recommended messages that include convergence-seeking activities, agreement, and acknowledgement as well as objections or challenges to help with the communication process when it comes to intergroup arguments.

Nelson and Nollenberger’s (2011) study emphasized the importance of communication in transforming conflict. They reported that some respondents told stories about mayors withholding information from the city council and providing it to the media, thus straining the relationship between the council and the mayor. On the other hand, one councilmember shared that goal-setting processes are improved when the mayor and council talk with each other and not at each other (Nelson & Nollenberger, 2011).

**City government and emotional intelligence.** Nalbandian et al. (2013) contended that there are three leadership challenges faced by local governments:

- First, there is a need to create and reinforce roles and responsibilities to bridge the gap between administrators and the public while “avoiding political alignment and administrative compromise” (p. 569).
- Second, there is a need to synchronize city government with other structures to help solve problems while increasing networks and collaboration.
- Third, there is a need to integrate various forms of engagement to deal with various processes that occur in city government.
Griffin (2012) claimed that deliberative democracy “is essential for the legitimization of public policy and law” (p. 517). Santos (2012) defined deliberative democracy on the blog *The Centre for Deliberative Democracy and Global Governance* as “a field of political inquiry that is concerned with improving collective decision-making” (para. 1). Griffin (2012) suggested that emotional intelligence can “act as a tool by which citizens can challenge instances of injustice and domination in society” (p. 528) while not undermining the issues they face within their community. Vigoda-Gadot and Meisler (2010) argued that emotional intelligence is a key concept in building vigorous relationships with citizens, social groups, public officials, and other stakeholders.

**City government and ethics.** Verheul and Schaap (2010) suggested that followers can impact leaders ethically by allowing them to develop delusions of grandeur. They pointed out the importance of giving someone from outside the organization a position or function as an internal advisor to help prevent a Machiavellian approach to leadership, where a distorted image of virtue and reality leads to the mayor’s fall (Verheul & Schaap, 2010). Kolthoff, Erakovitch, and Lasthuizen (2010) compared community leaders in The Netherlands, Serbia, Montenegro, and the United States. The authors suggested that integrity, honesty, and trustworthiness are prerequisites for good examples of leadership. They remarked, “Ethical leadership is also thought to be positively associated with the followers’ willingness to report problems and deliver bad news to the leader, because an ethical leader is concerned for people, and makes fair decisions” (Kolthoff et al., 2010, p. 598). Sun and Anderson (2012) remarked that the dimension of transformational leadership in civic leadership “is exemplified when leaders
consider others’ needs above their own, share risk with others and are consistent in their underlying ethics” (p. 311).

**City government and problem solving.** According to Ricklefs (2013), city managers promote problem solving, develop consensus, and connect the council with the community. Furthermore, city managers should be more process oriented. In 1949, the All-America City Award was established by the National Civic League (n.d.) to recognize cities that provide innovative solutions to complex problems.

A 2010 article by McGrath and Seavey focused on community problem solving by the 2009 winners of the All-America City Award. Creating jobs and promoting economic development, promoting housing development and rent control, promoting health and opportunities for recreation, responding to demographic and cultural changes, and recognizing cultural diversity and inclusiveness, as well as consideration for youth, were all similar problems faced by city governments in 2015 (McGrath & Seavey, 2010).

**City government and processes.** Policymaking processes can be constrained by legal restrictions and the political or economic environment (Gerber & Hopkins, 2011). Nalbandian et al. (2013) discussed process at length when applied to city government and leadership challenges. They argued that there is a gap between what is “politically acceptable” and “administratively sustainable” (Nalbandian et al., 2013, p. 567).

An interesting study by Silvia and McGuire (2010) demonstrated significant differences in the leadership processes of public servants when interagency networks were compared with single-agency processes. Their study of 417 emergency managers showed that when leading a single agency, the focus was on task-oriented behaviors,
whereas when leading multiple agencies, the focus was on organization-oriented behaviors (Silvia & McGuire, 2010).

**Washington State Mayors**

The MRSC (2016) reported that there are 227 cities in Washington State that have elected mayors. Of these, 52 cities were identified by proximity as the focus of this study. The smallest city with a mayor-council government is the city of Knapp with a population of 50. The largest city in the state of Washington with a mayor-council government is the city of Seattle with a population of 662,400 (MRSC, 2016). In the state of Washington, municipal governments are classified according to their population at the time of organization or incorporation. A first-class city has a minimum population of 10,000, a second-class city has a population of 1,500 or more, and a town has a population of less than 1,500 (MRSC, 2016). Obviously the impact of the challenges in each classification may vary due to the size of the population; however, many challenges are similar: transportation, sewage, housing, and cultural diversity.

**Challenges of large-city mayors.** In an opinion piece in *The Seattle Times*, the Seattle city mayor cited Seattle as “the nation’s third-fastest growing city. Over the next 20 years, 120,000 more people are going to live here” (Murray, 2015, para. 1). He described Seattle as a progressive city with concerns about rising rents, quality education, mass transit, and transportation (Murray, 2015). Yet Molly Brown (2015), in an editorial in *GeekWire*, described Seattle as a “small town” (para. 11). She made a valid point that there is a problem with housing costs when a taxpayer who earns $50,000-$70,000 annually is unable to afford rent but earns too much to qualify for housing assistance (Brown, 2015).
Zhang (2012) noted, “Large cities may value political leadership more than small cities” (p. 364). Turnover can be another challenge for large cities. According to Kroman (2015),

Since [Seattle Mayor] Murray took office in January of 2014, 21 people have left the top floor of City Hall. In an office of 40, which includes his Office of Policy and Innovation (OPI), that is a 52 percent turnover rate in about 18 months.

(para. 2)

While transportation, turnover, housing, and growth may not be challenges that only large cities face, they are magnified by the size of the population.

Challenges of small-city mayors. Krebs and Pelissero’s (2010) study on institutional arrangements and decision making regarding urban managers and public policy found that city managers faced with strong mayors are less likely to propose policies. In their article, they defined a small city as having a population of less than 10,000 (Krebs & Pelissero, 2010). The review of literature and scope of this study defined small-city mayors as those governing a population of less than 10,000. While communication is not the sole challenge facing small-city mayors, it can be magnified by the small number of players in local government. According to an article in the October 2, 2015, edition of The Chronicle, in Tenino, Washington (a city of 1,730), the mayor was hampered by the city council’s no-confidence vote of 3-2 after their police chief was fired for allegedly working extra hours (“Commission Confirms Tenino,” 2015).

Summary

A review of the literature demonstrated that there are a significant number of studies relating to variables within this study’s scope but very little literature combining
these variables to show how exemplary mayors in the state of Washington establish common ground and transform conflict. Multiple authors have contended that finding common ground is an essential part of effective communication and ultimately leading an organization (Kecskes & Zhang, 2009; Moore, 2013; Snowe, 2013; Thomas & Beckel, 2007). As part of the process of establishing common ground and transforming conflict, the following six domains provided a foundation: collaboration, communication, emotional intelligence, ethics, problem solving, and processes.

The review of literature placed an emphasis on the importance of communication from a leader’s perspective. In 2010, de Vries et al. conducted an investigation into the relationship between communication styles and leadership styles. Their study showed that transformational leadership is mainly communicative, while transactional leadership is less communicative (de Vries et al., 2010).

This review of literature focused on how Washington State mayors break through conflict by creating common ground. In order to fully understand how mayors accomplish this task, it was important to investigate what literature says about leadership best practices. Numerous definitions of leadership have evolved over time, but Northouse (2016) identified four essential components: (a) process, (b) influence, (c) occurrence in groups, and (d) common goals. Based on these components, he defined leadership as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (Northouse, 2016, p. 6).

These four components are essential elements to successes as described by one noted mayor, Giuliani (2002), who shared some of them in his book Leadership and related them to his tenure in New York City during the events on and after September 11,
One noted author on the study of leadership is Burns (1978). His work centered on the needs of the follower by distinguishing a separate relationship with those whom he described as transactional leaders and those he described as transformational leaders (Burns, 1978). Bass (1985) added to Burns’s work by identifying four critical factors regarding transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass & Avolio, 1998).
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Chapter I provided an introduction to and background of the research. It provided the central research question and subquestions, the significance of the problem, definitions, and the organization of the study. In Chapter II, a review of literature focused on leadership, conflict transformation, and the six domains of common ground. It also highlighted gaps in the literature regarding Washington State mayors. This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of exemplary Washington State city mayors in establishing common ground to transform conflict and achieve breakthrough results. The research was designed to strengthen mayor-community relationships and help transform city leadership and its effectiveness. This chapter reviews the purpose statement and research questions identified in Chapter I. Additionally, the chapter details the research design, population, sample, instrumentation, and data collection. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and artifacts. The chapter provides interview questions, observation designs, and systematic procedures employed to retrieve artifacts. Additionally, this chapter includes limitations of the study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover and describe how exemplary Washington State mayors establish common ground and produce breakthrough results by utilizing the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors.
Research Questions

The thematic research team developed one overarching phenomenological research question and six additional subquestions aligned with the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors.

Central Question

What are the lived experiences of exemplary Washington State mayors in establishing common ground and producing breakthrough results by engaging in elements of the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors?

Subquestions

1. Communication—How do exemplary Washington State mayors use communication to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?
2. Collaboration—How do exemplary Washington State mayors use collaboration to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?
3. Emotional intelligence—What aspects of emotional intelligence do exemplary Washington State mayors use to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?
4. Ethics—How do exemplary Washington State mayors use ethics to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?
5. Problem solving—How do exemplary Washington State mayors use problem-solving strategies to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?
6. Process—What processes do exemplary Washington State mayors use to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?
Research Design

Roberts (2010) recommended that the methodology selection rest on four factors: the problem, the purpose, the theory, and the nature of the data. The first step in designing a research method requires a decision regarding whether the researcher will use a quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method (a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods) approach. Creswell (2014) defined quantitative research as “an approach for testing objective theories by examining the relationship among variables” (p. 4). On the other hand, he defined qualitative research as “an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2014, p. 4). With this in mind, a qualitative research method was selected for this study.

The thematic research team considered three options to approach this study. The options considered were a grounded theory approach, an ethnographic approach, and a phenomenological approach. Ultimately, a phenomenological approach to the qualitative design was selected as the most appropriate method for the following three reasons:

First, a grounded theory study “emerges from systematic comparative analysis and is grounded in fieldwork so as to explain what has been and is observed” (Creswell, 2014, p. 133). Grounded theory was not chosen because it is more aligned with looking at variables that are grounded and their meaning.

Second, in an ethnographic approach, Creswell (2014) pointed out that “the researcher studies the shared patterns of behaviors, language, and actions of an intact cultural group in a natural setting over a long period of time” (p. 14). This would not have been an appropriate study for Washington State mayors as they do not represent an
intact cultural group, settings and behaviors varied significantly, and there may not have been an opportunity to study the same mayor over a long period of time.

Third, the goal of a phenomenological research study is to describe a “lived experience” of a phenomenon. Creswell (2014) defined phenomenological research as “a design of inquiry coming from philosophy and psychology in which the researcher describes the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants” (p. 14). Patton (2002) stated, “Phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences” (p. 104). It is important to consider that this study was a thematic study to discover and describe how exemplary leaders establish common ground and produce breakthrough results by utilizing the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors. In this case, a phenomenological approach was chosen as the most appropriate because the purpose of this study surrounded the lived experiences described by various leaders, in this case Washington State mayors. Patton suggested that the phenomenon may be a job, a relationship, a program, or an organization. In this case, Washington State mayors being able to transform conflict to find common ground was not typical; therefore, doing this successfully and getting breakthrough results was the phenomenon studied.

Creswell (2014) pointed out, “The idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants or sites (or documents or visual materials) that will best help the researcher understand the problem and research question” (p. 189). The sampling design of this study was a single-stage sampling procedure. Creswell explained, “A single-stage sampling procedure is one in which the researcher has access to the names in the population and can sample the people (or other elements) directly”
The single-stage design included interviews with 15 exemplary leaders who demonstrated the following:

- evidence of successful relationships with stakeholders;
- evidence of breaking through conflict to achieve organizational success;
- 5 or more years of experience in that profession or field;
- having written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings;
- recognition by their peers; and
- membership in associations or groups focused on their field.

After considering Patton’s (2002) recommendation that “a random and statistically representative sample permits confident generalization from a sample to a larger population” (p. 230), a sample of 15 mayors was selected from the population of 227.

**Population**

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) defined a population as “a group of elements or cases, whether individuals, objects, or events that conform to specific criteria and to which we intend to generalize the results of the research” (p. 129). While the population consisted of all mayors, this study described the shared experiences of elected mayors in the state of Washington in a mayor-council form of government. A target population of 52 cities from various regions in Washington State (MRSC, 2016) was identified based on referrals of mayors as “exemplary” from peers and the Association of Washington Cities (AWC). The researcher attempted to locate a universal nature of their shared experience by discussing what was experienced and how each of the interviewed Washington State city mayors experienced it.


Sample

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), “The group of subjects or participants from whom the data are collected is referred to as the sample” (p. 129). The sampling process was conducted in two parts. First, criterion sampling was deployed. Patton (2002) suggested, “The logic and power of purposeful sampling derive from the emphasis on in-depth understanding” (p. 46). He explained that this can result in information-rich cases and that information-rich cases provide a great deal of data about the issues central to the study (Patton, 2002). The study included interviews with 15 exemplary leaders who demonstrated the following:

- evidence of successful relationships with stakeholders;
- evidence of breaking through conflict to achieve organizational success;
- 5 or more years of experience in that profession or field;
- having written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings;
- recognition by their peers; and
- membership in associations focused on their field.

An introduction letter (Appendix A) was sent to 52 Washington State mayors representing various communities. Each respondent who was willing to participate in the study was considered and eventually chosen based on the recommendations of peers and organizations like the AWC as having met the criteria established by the thematic research team. These 15 mayors were identified as the “best of the best.”

Instrumentation

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) explained that the validity of testing is often threatened by the instrumentation used in conducting a study. In quantitative research,
the instrument is valid if it measures what it is expected to measure. Patton (2002) suggested that the instrument be administered in a standard manner and may be in the form of “test items, survey questions or other measuring tools” (p. 14).

Patton (2002) and Creswell (2014) agreed that in qualitative research, the researcher is the key instrument. Creswell (2014) explained, “Qualitative researchers collect data themselves through examining documents, observing behavior, or interviewing participants” (p. 185). Patton (2002) pointed out that it is important that the researcher maintains objectivity and detachment in order to maintain credibility throughout the study. He further explained, “No credible research strategy advocates biased distortion of data to serve the researcher’s vested interests and prejudices” (Patton, 2002, p. 51).

In order to maintain credibility throughout the study, interview questions covering each of the six domains were developed through collaboration with nine peer researchers studying other exemplary leaders representing a variety of industries. Appendix B provides the scripted interview questions that were posed to each of the interview participants. These scripted questions were designed to gather qualitative data from each of the 15 respondents in each of the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors. A general question was asked regarding a particular domain, such as, “Can you share a story about a time when you used ‘collaboration’ as a leader in your organization to find common ground and achieve breakthrough results to reduce or avoid conflict?” Additional questions along with follow-up questions were scripted for each of the domains. Responses were recorded and transcribed by a confidential transcriptionist. A pilot-test interview was conducted prior to data collection in order to determine interview
content validity and reliability. Members of the pilot-test team included the researcher, a former mayor, and a subject matter expert in conducting qualitative research through interviews. Upon completion of pilot testing, an application for IRB Approval of Research Protocol was submitted to the Brandman University Institutional Review Board (BUIRB). Once BUIRB approval was received, potential participants were contacted through introduction letters.

Participants were provided with a brief introduction to the purpose of the study in the original introductory letter. This introduction was reviewed prior to the interviews commencing, and each participant was provided with a “Participant’s Bill of Rights” (Appendix C). Additionally, the BUIRB required that each participant be provided with an informed consent form prior to beginning any questioning (Appendix D). For the sake of time and preparation, each participant was provided with the interview questions ahead of time. All interviews were scheduled at a location and time that best suited the convenience of the participants.

Data Collection

Types of Data

Types of data in qualitative studies come primarily from fieldwork. During this time, the researcher spends time devoted to situations that are important to the study. These situations are typically analyzing documents, interviewing people, and observing activities and interactions (Patton, 2002). Data points for this study included interviews, observations, and artifacts to discover and describe how Washington State mayors established common ground and produced breakthrough results in their cities by
assessing whether and how they utilized the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors.

**Interviews.** According to Patton (2002), “The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person’s perspective. Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of [the interviewee] is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit” (p. 341). Interviews allowed participants to describe their experiences, which included their thoughts, feelings, images, or memories. Interviews “should allow full exploration of the subject at hand, including follow up questions” (Salkind, 2003, p. 209). With this information in mind, interview questions were designed by the thematic dissertation team to solicit answers to the following research subquestions:

1. **Communication**—How do exemplary Washington State mayors use communication to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?

2. **Collaboration**—How do exemplary Washington State mayors use collaboration to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?

3. **Emotional intelligence**—What aspects of emotional intelligence do exemplary Washington State mayors use to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?

4. **Ethics**—How do exemplary Washington State mayors use ethics to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?

5. **Problem solving**—How do exemplary Washington State mayors use problem-solving strategies to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?
6. Process—What processes do exemplary Washington State mayors use to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?

Patton (2002) contended, “The quality of the information obtained during an interview is largely dependent on the interviewer” (p. 341). Therefore, field testing was conducted with an expert in the field as well as an expert in collecting data to gather feedback and provide a neutral interview approach.

Observations. According to Salkind (2003),

Direct observation occurs when the researcher is actually in or directly adjacent to the environment being studied but is not actually a participant in the environment itself. For this method, the surroundings as well as the interaction of people are considered in order to confirm or disconfirm [a] stated hypothesis or alternatively, as a way to gain an understanding of the research setting and to help form [a] hypothesis. (p. 209)

As Patton (2002) pointed out, “There are limitations, however, to how much can be learned from what people say” (p. 21). Therefore, when possible, the researcher requested permission to observe town hall meetings, mayor-council meetings, and mayors’ speaking engagements. One of the concerns about the validity and reliability of observational data is whether the observer had an effect on what was being observed (Patton, 2002). In the case of speaking engagements open to the public and as a matter of public record, there was no need for consent and endorsement. However, in order to protect participants in both instances, reports were made with the condition that names, locations, and other identifying information were concealed so that those observed would be protected from harm or punitive action.
Artifacts. Salkind (2003) explained physical artifacts as “objects or elements that are open for your interpretation” (p. 209). Examples of artifacts for the purpose of this study were meeting minutes, media reports, and historical data. Creswell (2014) explained that the collection of artifacts can be unobtrusive and assessed at a time convenient for the researcher. Public documents such as newspapers and meeting minutes were collected and analyzed during the data collection time period. Only information available to the public and representative of research was analyzed.

Recruitment

An introduction letter (Appendix A) was sent to 52 Washington State mayors representing various communities who met the criteria. Each respondent who was willing to participate in the research was assigned a number based on the order in which the acceptance correspondence was received.

Sponsors

A subject matter expert in mayor-city council relationships who had a longstanding membership in the AWC agreed to sponsor the researcher and connected the researcher with several Washington State mayors who agreed to participate in the study. As described on the organization’s website, “AWC is a highly respected voice of cities and towns before the Legislature, Congress, government agencies and others” (AWC, n.d.a, para. 7). In addition, at the time of the study, the sponsor was a city council member with over 20 years of experience and was well respected within the community.

An additional sponsor was requested for his/her experience as a former mayor of a city with a population of over 20,000. The additional sponsor also provided
connections to present city mayors. Both sponsors were identified through their active membership in the AWC and other leadership organizations.

**Letters**

An introductory letter was sent to 52 mayors describing in detail the purpose, scope, and nature of the study and requesting their participation (Appendix A). Upon completion of the study, letters of thanks were sent to all respondents.

**Data Collection Procedures**

Patton (2002) explained that “the quality of qualitative data depends to a great extent on the methodological skill, sensitivity, and integrity of the researcher” (p. 5). One way to ensure credibility and emphasize objectivity is to minimize the bias of the researcher. As previously explained in describing the researcher as the instrument, Patton recommended emphasizing “rigorous and systematic data collection procedures, for example cross-checking and cross-validating sources during field work” (p. 545). This is further discussed when describing intercoder reliability.

**Interviews.** Interviews were conducted with 15 Washington State mayors to understand and document the lived experiences of exemplary Washington State mayors in using six domains of conflict transformation behaviors and the impact these domains have on achieving common ground. Interview questions were designed by the thematic dissertation team to solicit answers to research subquestions surrounding collaboration, communication, emotional intelligence, ethics, problem solving, and processes. Participants were provided with the following documents: (a) research participant’s bill of rights (Appendix C), (b) informed consent form (Appendix D), and (c) participant demographic questionnaire (Appendix E).
On the day of the interviews, the researcher met the respondents in a previously selected, comfortable location. The timing of the interviews was selected to accommodate the mayors’ busy schedules. Before the interviews began, the researcher reviewed some key information with the respondents. This included potential risks related to the research as well as benefits of participating in the study. The researcher also reinforced the idea that participation was voluntary and that respondents could terminate the interview at any time. Also, the researcher informed the respondents that their names would be replaced by pseudonyms and that the identities of all respondents would be kept confidential. Additionally, the researcher reviewed the informed consent form (see Appendix D) and made sure the respondents signed the form before the interviews began.

Interviews lasted 45 minutes and consisted of structured and open-ended questions. (See Appendix B for structured questions.) Once the interviews were finished, the researcher thanked the respondents for participating and informed the respondents that the final transcripts of their interviews would be sent to the mayors through e-mail for final review for accuracy. Patton (2002) recommended that researchers check back with the interviewees as soon as possible to uncover any areas of uncertainty.

Observations. When possible, direct observations were conducted of town hall meetings, mayor-council meetings, and mayors’ speaking engagements. Formal as well as informal requests were made to participants to observe them in a variety of situations. On the day of the observations, the researcher met with the participants in a previously selected location that allowed for public observation. The time of each observation was
based on the event the researcher was allowed to observe. Before the observations began, the researcher reviewed some key information with the participants. This included potential risks related to the research as well as benefits of participating in the study. The researcher also reinforced the idea that participation was voluntary and that participants could stop the observations at any time. Also, the researcher informed the participants that names would be replaced by pseudonyms and that the identities of all participants would be kept confidential. Additionally, the researcher reviewed the informed consent form (see Appendix D) and made sure the participants signed the form before the observations began. For observations taking place in public places, informed consent was not necessary.

Observations lasted the duration of the events, and field notes were kept. Once the observations were finished, the researcher thanked the participants and informed them that the field notes for the events would be sent through e-mail for final review for accuracy.

**Artifact collection.** Artifacts in the form of public documents such as newspapers and meeting minutes were collected from public archives and analyzed during the data collection time period. Only information available to the public and representative of the study was analyzed.

**Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed using Creswell’s (2014) three-step process. First, the data were organized and prepared for analysis. This involved transcribing interviews from tape recordings and scanning the material for commonalities. From this, field notes were typed, and the data were cataloged, sorted, and arranged into the six domains.
Consideration was given to different emphases depending on the mayor. Next, a general sense and an opportunity to reflect on the meaning of the interviews was associated with observations by generalizing ideas, tones, and impressions of both. Lastly, coding along with intercoder reliability provided the researcher with data based on texts transcribed from the interviews and collected from the artifacts. Some examples of the codes in this study were political factors, self-interest versus public interest, funded and nonfunded programs, and government agencies. The coded data were then coded and analyzed using NVivo to determine if there were common themes and shared experiences of Washington State mayors regarding the use of six domains of conflict transformation behaviors and the impact these domains have on achieving common ground.

**Reliability and Validity**

It is important that a measuring instrument is both reliable and valid. Reliability is the degree to which the instrument consistently measures something (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2002; Roberts, 2010). Validity ensures that the instrument measures what it is supposed to measure (Patton, 2002). Creswell (2014) explained that “validity does not carry the same connotations in qualitative research as it does in quantitative research; nor is it a companion of reliability” (p. 201).

**Data Triangulation**

Patton (2002) explained that “triangulation strengthens a study by combining methods” (p. 247). For this study, the researcher used three types of data (interviews, observations, and artifacts) to study the lived experiences of exemplary Washington State mayors. The purpose of this was to test for consistency and to find inconsistencies, which provided for a deeper insight into and understanding of the shared experiences of
exemplary leaders. It also aided in triangulating the data and adding trustworthiness to the findings. As Patton described, “By using a combination of observations, interviewing and document analysis, the fieldworker is able to use different data sources to validate and cross check findings” (p. 306). This is commonly referred to as triangulation. Patton described triangulation as akin to land surveying to get a better sense of one’s exact location based on one’s position as well as two landmarks. Specific examples of the combination of observations, interviews, and document analysis are provided in Table 1, which shows coded data from multiple sources.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evidence From Coded Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional intelligence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Intercoder Reliability

Codes were cross-checked to test for reliability. As Patton (2002) explained, “The second observer should be able to verify that (a) the categories make sense in view of the data which are available, and (b) the data have been appropriately arranged in the category system” (p. 466). Lombard, Snyder-Duch, and Bracken (2010) explained, “It is widely acknowledged that intercoder reliability is a critical component of content analysis, and that although it does not insure validity, when it is not established properly, the data and interpretation of the data cannot be considered valid” (para. 5). For the
purpose of this thematic study, another peer researcher was selected to check the coding and interpretation to ensure accuracy of themes from the coding. This was completed by having the peer researcher double code 10% of the data obtained by the primary researcher with a goal of 90% agreement in coded data to be considered the best and 80% agreement on the coded data to be acceptable. The following steps, based on the recommendations provided by Lombard et al., were used in assessing and reporting intercoder reliability:

1. Appropriate indices were selected based on characteristics of the variables.
2. A software application was used to calculate indices.
3. An appropriate acceptable level of reliability for indices was selected—in this case, 10% of the data obtained by the primary researcher.
4. Reliability was assessed informally with a small number of codes that were not part of the full sample, and the instrument was refined until an adequate level of agreement was reached.
5. A pilot test was conducted using a random sample of codes. Once reliability levels were determined to be adequate, the coders proceeded to the full sample.
6. Formal coding was conducted using the full sample.
7. Disagreements in coding were resolved by using a “majority decision” rule.
8. Intercoder reliability was established with a peer researcher.

**Criterion Validity**

Criterion or predictive validity establishes a measure that can be predicted to produce similar results. The thematic research team established a clear definition of
exemplary leaders. The following criteria were determined by the peer researchers to define exemplary leaders:

- evidence of successful relationships with stakeholders;
- evidence of breaking through conflict to achieve organizational success;
- 5 or more years of experience in that profession or field;
- having written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings;
- recognition by their peers; and
- membership in associations or groups focused on their field.

Each prospective participant was provided with a participant demographic questionnaire (Appendix E) to establish that the criteria were met.

**Content Validity**

Content validity was defined by Creswell (2014) as answering the question, “Do the items measure the content they were intended to measure?” (p. 160). Content validity was established through the construction of the participant interview questions by the thematic dissertation team (Appendix B). Interview questions and subquestions were designed to establish patterns based on the six domains of common ground: collaboration, communication, emotional intelligence, ethics, problem solving, and processes.

**Pilot Interview**

A pilot-test interview was conducted prior to data collection in order to determine interview content validity. Members of the pilot-test team included the researcher, a former mayor, and a subject matter expert in conducting qualitative research through interviews. Upon completion of pilot testing, an application for IRB Approval of
Research Protocol was submitted to the BUIRB. Upon receiving BUIRB approval, potential participants were contacted through introduction letters. A field test of interview questions was used to develop an understanding of the relationships of a city mayor.

Limitations

Roberts (2010) defined limitations as “particular features of your study that you know may negatively affect the results or your ability to generalize” (p. 162). According to Creswell (2014), “Generalization occurs when qualitative researchers study additional cases and generalize findings to the new cases” (p. 205). Patton (2002) added, “It is important to be open and clear about a study’s limitations, that is to anticipate and address criticisms” (p. 243). The following limitations are provided as full disclosure of potential weaknesses in the study: time, instrument, sample size, and geography.

Time

Time was a limiting factor for two reasons. First, approval to proceed with data collection came from the BUIRB at the beginning of the month of November 2015. This resulted in data collection occurring over the holidays in November and December. Second, due in part to the schedules of the participants in the study, the duration of interviews was limited to 2 hours. Patton (2002) noted,

No rule of thumb exists to tell a researcher precisely how to focus a study. The extent to which a research or evaluation study is broad or narrow depends on purpose, the resources available, the time available, and the interests of those involved. (p. 228)
Instrumentation

According to Patton (2002), “Interview data limitations include possible distorted responses due to personal bias, anger, anxiety, politics and simple lack of awareness” (p. 306). Another concern stemmed from the potential for the observer to have an effect on what was observed. In the case of public speaking engagements, the researcher conducted covert observations, collecting data on the mayors’ interactions and communication with the public. When afforded the opportunity to attend a mayor-council meeting, the observation was overt and all participants in the meeting were knowledgeable that the researcher was present to collect data on mayor-city council interactions. Being observed by an outsider may have influenced the behavior of those in the meeting.

Size

A limited number of mayors were examined in order to provide purposeful sampling to meet the criteria established by the thematic dissertation team. Patton (2002) described two sampling limitations that may arise in qualitative research: (a) limitations in the situations or observations that are sampled and (b) limitations based on the selectivity of the people sampled.

Geography

According to NETSTATE (2016),

Washington covers 71,303 square miles, making it the 18th largest of the 50 states. . . . [The state] is about 360 miles long and 240 miles wide. . . . [It is] divided into six geographic land areas; the Olympic Mountains, the Coast Range,
the Puget Sound Lowlands, the Cascade Mountains, the Columbia Plateau, and the Rocky Mountains. (para. 2, 5, 13)

The geography and associated transportation requirements limited the researcher in scheduling meetings and observations. This negatively impacted the study as the 15 mayors were chosen from the west side of the Cascade Range, and therefore Washington State mayors east of the Cascade Range were not interviewed.

Summary

As previously mentioned, this phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of exemplary Washington State city mayors in establishing common ground to transform conflict and achieve breakthrough results. This research was designed to identify and report on mayor-community relationships in order to help transform city leadership and its effectiveness. This chapter reviewed the purpose statement and research questions identified in Chapter I. Additionally, the chapter detailed the research design, population, sample, instrumentation, and data collection. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and artifacts. The chapter provided interview questions, observation designs, and systematic procedures employed to retrieve artifacts. Additionally, this chapter included limitations of the study. For the purpose of this thematic study, another peer researcher was selected to check the coding and interpretation to ensure accuracy of themes from the coding. This was completed by having the peer researcher double code 10% of the data obtained by the primary researcher with a goal of 90% agreement in coded data to be considered the best and 80% agreement on the coded data to be acceptable. The following limitations were provided
as full disclosure of potential weaknesses in the study: time, instrument, sample size, and
geography.
CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

This qualitative phenomenological study allowed the lives of the participants to be explored in order to determine what themes or patterns contributed to how exemplary mayors in Washington State find common ground and produce breakthrough results through six domains of conflict transformation behaviors. In this chapter, the purpose and research questions for this investigation are restated, along with a summary of the research methods, data collection procedures, population, sample and target sample, and demographic data. This is followed by a presentation and analysis of the data. A summary of the findings is offered at the end of the chapter.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover and describe how exemplary Washington State mayors establish common ground and produce breakthrough results by utilizing the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors.

Research Questions

The thematic research team developed one overarching phenomenological research question and six additional subquestions aligned with the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors.

Central Question

What are the lived experiences of exemplary Washington State mayors in establishing common ground and producing breakthrough results by engaging in elements of the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors?
Subquestions

1. **Communication**—How do exemplary Washington State mayors use communication to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?

2. **Collaboration**—How do exemplary Washington State mayors use collaboration to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?

3. **Emotional intelligence**—What aspects of emotional intelligence do exemplary Washington State mayors use to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?

4. **Ethics**—How do exemplary Washington State mayors use ethics to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?

5. **Problem solving**—How do exemplary Washington State mayors use problem-solving strategies to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?

6. **Process**—What processes do exemplary Washington State mayors use to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?

---

**Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures**

This was a qualitative, phenomenological study that utilized personal interviews with mayors in Washington State. The primary data collection was from scripted interview questions, observations, and a review of artifacts.

**Interview Data Collection**

Each participant was asked the same general script question and script subquestions for each of the six domains of collaboration, communication, emotional intelligence, ethics, problem solving, and process. Follow-up questions were asked as needed from the listed follow-up questions. All questions asked were from the script
questions in Appendix B. All responses were audio-recorded using a digital portable recording device, and notes were taken by the researcher. These audio-recorded statements were then transcribed and coded for emergent themes.

Conversations with the participants were audio-recorded with a recording device, and notes were taken during the interviews. The audio-recordings aided in the transcription of the interviews into a form compatible with data analysis software. The identities of the participants were kept confidential, and each participant was identified by a unique identifying number.

**Observation Data Collection**

Participants were observed during city council meetings and speaking engagements. A total of eight observations were conducted; in some cases a mayor was observed in one or more separate situations. The observation notes and recorded observations were then entered as documents and coded for emergent themes.

**Artifact Data Collection**

Supporting artifacts were obtained either directly from the participants or from city hall. Some artifacts were freely available through Internet searches, such as meeting agendas, reports, newsletters, press releases, public documents, vision and mission statements, professional goals, norms, and purpose statements. A total of 42 different artifacts were reviewed. These artifacts were entered as separate documents and coded for emergent themes.

**Demographic Data of Participating Washington State Mayors**

All participants met and exceeded the study criteria. Participants worked in city government from 5 to 20 years, with an average of 7 years in some form of city
government, whether it be as a councilmember or as a mayor. All of the participants had written/published or presented at conferences or association meetings, such as the Association of Washington Cities (AWC), Sound Cities Association (SCA), or Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC). Some of the participants were recommended by the director of education and training of AWC, while some were recommended by other AWC members for their experience and expertise. The AWC (n.d.a) “is a private, nonprofit, nonpartisan corporation that represents Washington’s cities and towns before the state legislature, the state executive branch and with regulatory agencies. Membership is voluntary. However, AWC consistently maintains 100% participation from Washington’s 281 cities and towns” (para. 1). All participants had been elected by their communities and were in a mayor-city council form of government.

All participants, mayors, and their cities were assigned an identification number to ensure confidentiality. Of the 15 participants, all were sitting mayors, although one had retired after the study was conducted. Table 2 details the qualifying criteria for exemplary Washington State mayors.

**Population**

While the population consisted of all mayors, this study described the shared experiences of elected mayors in the state of Washington in an elected mayor-council form of government. A target population of 52 cities from various regions in Washington State (MRSC, 2016) was identified based on proximity. The study attempted to locate a universal nature of the participants’ shared experience by discussing what was experienced and how each of the interviewed Washington State city mayors experienced it.
Table 2

*Qualifying Criteria for Exemplary Washington State Mayors*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Evidence of successful relationships with stakeholders</th>
<th>Evidence of resolving conflict to achieve organizational success</th>
<th>A minimum of 5 years of experience in the profession</th>
<th>Articles (A), papers (P), or materials written (W) or presented (PR) at conferences or association meetings</th>
<th>Recognition by their peers</th>
<th>Membership in professional associations in their field, such as the AWC (C) Certificate in Municipal Leadership (A) Advanced Certificate in Municipal Leadership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>W, PR</td>
<td>X^a</td>
<td>X (C) (A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 2</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>A, PR</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X (C) (A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 3</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>W, PR</td>
<td>X^a</td>
<td>X (C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 4</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>PR</td>
<td>X^a</td>
<td>X (C) (A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 5</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>PR</td>
<td>X^a</td>
<td>X (C) (A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 6</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>PR</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X (C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 7</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X (C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 8</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>PR</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 9</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>P, A, PR</td>
<td>X^b</td>
<td>X (C) (A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 10</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>A, PR</td>
<td>X^b</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 11</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>PR</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X (C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 12</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X (C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 13</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>A, PR</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 14</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>PR</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 15</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X^b</td>
<td>A, PR</td>
<td>X^b</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

^aRecommended by the director of education, Association of Washington Cities (AWC), an organization that represents Washington cities and towns. ^bRecommended by other members of the AWC.

**Sample**

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), “The group of subjects or participants from whom the data are collected is referred to as the *sample*” (p. 129). The
sampling process was conducted in two parts. First, criterion sampling was deployed. Patton (2002) suggested, “The logic and power of purposeful sampling derive from the emphasis on in-depth understanding” (p. 46). He explained that this can result in information-rich cases and that information-rich cases provide a great deal of data about the issues central to the study (Patton, 2002). The study included interviews with 15 exemplary leaders who demonstrated the following:

- evidence of successful relationships with stakeholders;
- evidence of breaking through conflict to achieve organizational success;
- 5 or more years of experience in that profession or field;
- having written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings;
- recognition by their peers; and
- membership in associations focused on their field.

An introduction letter (Appendix A) was sent to 52 Washington State mayors representing various communities. Each respondent willing to participate in the study was considered and eventually chosen based on the criteria established by the thematic research team.

**Presentation and Analysis of Data**

The findings presented in this chapter were derived using anecdotal accounts of lived experiences in response to scripted questions posed during personal interviews and triangulation of those accounts with data from artifacts and observations. The findings in this chapter are reported based on the relationship to the central research question and research subquestions.
Results for the Central Research Question

The central research question for this study was, “What are the lived experiences of exemplary Washington State mayors in establishing common ground and producing breakthrough results by engaging in elements of the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors?” All participants were asked the same general interview question, which asked them to share about a time when they were faced with a conflict and they established common ground with stakeholders to break through the conflict. After conducting interviews with the 15 mayors, all reported having been involved in situations where they felt they established common ground and produced breakthrough results by engaging in elements of the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors.

All respondents noted that conflict was a natural part of their jobs, emerged daily, and occurred over things such as hiring practices, workplace behaviors, issues with business owners, and budget cuts or increases. Some conflicts were between tribal elders, some were between city council members, some were between business owners, and some were interdepartmental. Conflict also arose because of citywide issues such as a lack of resources, enforcement of city codes, determining growth rate, and ensuring the safety of the citizens. Table 3 shows the topics of conflict and a brief summary of the conflict topics as described by respondents.

Once all interviews were transcribed and coded, several major behavioral themes emerged about how mayors used the conflict transformation behaviors in an effort to find common ground. These were not found to be additional themes but incorporated the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors (collaboration, communication, emotional...
intelligence, ethics, problem solving, and processes) in ways that prevented them from being separated into their individual domains.

Table 3

Conflicts Identified by Exemplary Washington State Mayors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic of conflict</th>
<th>Direction of conflict</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Internal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict with local tribes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict with local business owners</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interdepartmental conflicts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflictive views with tribes on environmental resources</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflictive views on the use of fireworks</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict with city council</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City growth vs. no city growth conflict</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutual fire and emergency services</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict with city council</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflictive issues with the how to fund and run the fire department</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library services</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflictive issue with new library and some of the city council members</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interdepartmental conflict</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation and parking</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict with illegalizing fireworks</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation conflicts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict with the new local sewage treatment plant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The theoretical definition of common ground as provided by the peer research team was an interplay of intentions of people from different sociocultural backgrounds, differences, and cultures while finding a foundation of common interest or comprehension (Horowitz, 2007; Jacobsen, 1999; Kecskes & Zhang, 2009; Moore, 2013; Snowe, 2013; Tan & Manca, 2013). The operational definition for common ground as defined by the peer research team was when all parties involved aspire to and are willing
to work toward a new vision of the future together, one that meets everyone’s deep-seated concerns and values (Search for Common Ground, n.d.).

After transcribing, coding, and analyzing the responses, five major predominant themes were identified in the responses, which directly related to how the respondents applied strategies while working to find or create common ground with stakeholders. In the course of the interviews, all of the respondents talked about transparency to transform conflict, creating an environment for common ground by building relationships, and collaborating with stakeholders. Additionally, respondents associated these major themes with five of the six domains. Table 4 presents the major themes along with an example quotation for each theme and is followed by a further discussion of each theme.

**Transform conflict through transparency (processes).** All respondents discussed the value of transparency when implementing processes regarding making important decisions. Through the course of each interview, transparency emerged as a primary resource for transforming conflict. With transparency, one respondent remarked, “They [the stakeholders] don’t feel like they’ve been blindsided by us by withholding information and not sharing enough or not prepping them enough to make a legitimate vote or take a position.”

A majority of the respondents developed “coffees with the mayor” or other open-door meetings to communicate with their citizens. These meetings did not include agenda items, nor were there any expectations for problem solving to occur at the meetings. This interview comment was substantiated by artifacts such as the following post on one city’s Facebook page:
### Table 4

*Washington State Mayor Behaviors to Establish Common Ground and Produce Breakthrough Results*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major theme</th>
<th>Example quotation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transform conflict by being transparent in decision-making processes. (Processes; (n = 80))</td>
<td>“Having the courage to bite the bullet and go out and tell the bad news. The bad news is absolutely important, sometimes more important than the good news.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find common ground through collaboration with local cities and tribes to transform conflict. (Collaboration; (n = 76))</td>
<td>“They’re hurting, we’re hurting. Let’s get through this. So tribal board members were with us through everything.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find common ground through building relationships with business owners to ensure economic growth. (Emotional intelligence; (n = 50))</td>
<td>“I also want to make certain we reinvest in our downtown. I want to work more closely with downtown business, to see what we can do to freshen up the downtown.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transform conflict through building relationships with city council members despite opposing views. (Problem solving; (n = 94))</td>
<td>“First of all, you have to do your research and make sure that the position that you are taking is a rational and realistic position, and then I reason that when you resonate with, in this case, the council.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transform conflict by building trust through honesty, integrity, and mutual respect. (Ethics; (n = 105))</td>
<td>“Emotional intelligence is a tool . . . it’s how you read a room, but you use it to break log jams. . . . So you can see someone get positional, and you’ve got to draw them out, and you’ve got to start rebuilding that trust to draw them out.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* \(n\) = number of references from 15 interviews, eight observations, and 42 artifacts.

Bring your interests, comments, concerns and praises to chat with the Mayor over a cup of coffee. Whether you are a business owner, community member, or just a curious neighbor, she would love to see you there. All Coffee Hours are informal and open to the public. . . . [T]he mayor wants to make . . . [herself] available to you.

The meetings were designed to provide an avenue for citizens and stakeholders to directly interact with the mayor. Although many of these meetings had contentious items
for discussion, the avenue for open dialogue provided an opportunity to allow the conflict to be recognized as a valuable opportunity to improve a variety of situations affecting the city and its citizens. One mayor made a point to say,

People feel very comfortable stopping me in the grocery store, and I find that I want people to do that. I think we’ve accomplished the level where people feel the mayor is a real person, the mayor can talk about any subject, the mayor will get back to you if you have a question.

This is an example of comments frequently shared by all 15 respondents and displays how transparency with stakeholders can help with decision-making processes.

**Find common ground through collaboration with various stakeholders (collaboration).** Washington State has a unique situation when it comes to understanding the variety of stakeholders. One unique relationship is the relationship with Washington State tribes. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures (2015), there were 29 federally recognized tribes in Washington State at the time of the study. Nearly every respondent recognized the value of establishing common ground with local tribes. One respondent had to spend 2 years reestablishing broken relationships with tribal elders that had resulted from the previous administration. The interviews were substantiated by such artifacts as a newspaper article where the mayor was quoted:

This unity has been a defining experience. “The pain forges a bond as governments and citizens,” “They’re hurting, we’re hurting. Let’s get through this. So tribal board members were with us through everything—we faced the press together, went to vigils together.”
This finding was also supported by observing some of the respondents interacting with tribes and through their body language and voice inflection when discussing their stories regarding the value of collaboration to find common ground.

Other stakeholders recognized as important in establishing common ground through collaboration were surrounding cities and communities. In nearly every interview, respondents mentioned the importance of collaborating with other mayors in order to solve problems such as providing services such as fire and rescue, resolving transportation problems, and being good stewards of their resources.

**Find common ground through building relationships (emotional intelligence).** In addition to collaborating with stakeholders, respondents discussed the importance of emotional intelligence as it relates to building and cultivating positive relationships. Respondents discussed the various relationships necessary in order to ensure safety and economic growth for their communities. These relationships not only exceed the boundaries of local communities and tribal areas but extend to the state capital of Olympia and the state representatives in Washington, DC. As with many cities throughout the nation, the issues of public safety, homelessness, transportation, and economic development require Washington State cities and representatives to work together to find common ground despite political partisanship. This was an important aspect in building the relationships. As one mayor remarked, “I am really big on regional partnerships and relationships. I think you have to have formal relationships with your government official.”

Every respondent discussed the relationship with the city council at length. The average size of the city council for each respondent was seven members. Each city
council member represented a portion of the city, and each was elected in his or her own
right as a representative of the citizens. One mayor explained the relationship this way:

In a government agency such as this, the mayor is a visionary. I mean you have
ideas of what “better” looks like, and you need to communicate that and sell that.
In our case, seven voting councilmembers that control the budget. You have to
make sure that you are keeping with what the people want for what you do.

The importance of a positive relationship between the city council and exemplary
Washington State mayors was shared by all 15 (100%) of the respondents.

Transform conflict with city council members (problem solving). City council
members were a large part of the conversation regarding both finding common ground
and transforming conflict when solving problems. All 15 respondents discussed the
importance of recognizing and transforming conflict as a part of the relationship with city
council. The theme of understanding the relationship between the council and the mayor
is discussed in detail under the transformational behavior of problem solving. In some
instances, respondents remarked that some councilmembers may enjoy conflict for the
sake of conflict. For example, when a city was dealing with a new library and trying to
find compromise, the city mayor said, “it was very contentious, and it was for the most
part, most of them [the meetings] was very unproductive.” In this particular case, as in
others, the mayor coordinated a visit with the city council to the potential site to see the
property and the vision for what the new library would look like. This is not an
uncommon technique among exemplary mayors. In another example, the mayor escorted
city council members downtown with a tape measure to visualize the effect of expanding
sidewalks to 13 feet.
All 15 (100%) of the respondents discussed the importance of gathering information and having metrics available to help transform conflict with city council members. Nearly every respondent recognized the process of voting on policy decisions, but as one mayor shared,

Managing expectations and make certain that the council had the information they needed to make their decisions. . . . They were going to make value judgments, some of which I may disagree with, but I would make certain that we were implementing the law correctly.

All 15 (100%) of the respondents reiterated that as voting members on policy decisions, it was imperative to remain nonpartisan and to not decide from a political view but one that would be of the most benefit to the city.

**Transform conflict by building trust (ethics).** One respondent stated, “We need to hear what the citizens’ priorities are, not tell them what our priorities are.” This was a recurring theme for exemplary mayors. As indicated by the respondents, the aforementioned conflict transformations and ability to find common ground cannot occur without building trust and having a strong code of ethics. A level of trust allows the exemplary mayors to continue in office. “I think the reelection just this last year just proved the connection that I have with our residents, and that is we are here for them and it’s not just all my ideas,” said one respondent. That comment was validated by one city’s webpage, which included the statement, “Our city has a firm belief that our municipal government will be a model of success—committed to a pragmatic vision for those who choose to create a great life here,” which corroborated the importance of trust. This was also observed in four of the eight observations, which included city council
meetings and television interviews. In all of these observations, the mayors made it a point to exhibit trustworthy behaviors by being open and candid in their responses in interviews and dialogue during city council meetings. This aligns with transparency discussed as an ethical behavior in 14 of the 15 interviews.

**Results for the Research Subquestions**

During the course of coding, 28 themes emerged regarding the individual six domains of conflict transformation behaviors (collaboration, communication, emotional intelligence, ethics, problem solving, and process). These themes were associated with how exemplary Washington State mayors used the six conflict transformation behaviors in an effort to find common ground. Figure 1 displays the domains of collaboration, communication, emotional intelligence, ethics, problem solving, and processes with the number of major themes identified for each domain.

![Themes Per Domain](image)

*Figure 1. Number of major themes identified for each domain.*
During the course of coding, 1,011 references emerged from the 28 themes regarding the individual six domains of conflict transformation behaviors (collaboration, communication, emotional intelligence, ethics, problem solving, and process). Figure 2 displays the domains of collaboration, communication, emotional intelligence, ethics, problem solving, and processes with the number of references identified for each domain.

![References per Domain](image)

*Figure 2. Number of references per domain.*

Of the six conflict transformation domains, processes represented the highest percentage of references with 22%, and communication represented the second highest with 20%. Collaboration and problem solving had references that represented 17% and 16% of the total responses, respectively. Ethics and emotional intelligence were close with 13% and 12% of the references per domain, respectively.
Data collection included 15 interviews, eight observations, and 42 artifacts. Table 5 represents the data as a numerical value for sources in each domain.

Table 5

*Data Collection Represented as Numerical Value for Each Domain*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Finding</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Observations</th>
<th>Artifact examinations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional intelligence</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem solving</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following sections present the major themes and findings specific to each of the six domains.

**Major themes related to collaboration.** Collaboration was defined by the peer research team as the ability to involve others, in a mutually beneficial and accountable manner, which allows for achievement or acceptance of agreed-upon goals (Hansen, 2009). Washington State mayors recognized as exemplary mentioned the importance of collaborating with local tribes, other cities, and state representatives. Collaboration was discussed as vital to finding common ground and transforming conflict. Eighty sources provided 167 references reflecting the views of exemplary mayors in Washington State regarding collaboration. Table 6 presents the five themes, along with sample quotations related to each theme.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major theme</th>
<th>Example quotations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Building support with team members by building cross-functional teams \(n = 26\) | • You kind of had to be a jack of all trades because when somebody comes into town hall or calls town hall, they start saying their issue to the first person that answers the phone, and they may not get to the right department, or they may accidentally ask for the wrong person.”  
• “So we put together a team and had one representative from every department to create a new review and goal-setting process, and that took the better part of the year to get in place and then get the system up and running, and this year will be the first time utilizing that new system.” |
| Encouraging collaboration with other Washington cities by sharing best practices \(n = 52\) | • “They came to the first summit. I had about 30 people in the county in the room, and they were all the way from— they came up from Olympia.”                                                                                   |
| Encouraging collaboration with state representatives by cultivating and maintaining positive relationships despite opposing views \(n = 33\) | • “I am really big on regional partnerships and relationships. I think you have to have formal relationships with your government official type meetings. . . . I really believe relationships carry the day.”                               |
| Encouraging collaboration with tribal leaders by recognizing them as a cooperative governing jurisdiction equally committed to their people and their environment \(n = 24\) | • “The pain forges a bond as governments and citizens,” he says. “They’re hurting, we’re hurting. Let’s get through this. So tribal board members were with us through everything.”                                        |
| Soliciting ongoing stakeholder input when making difficult decisions \(n = 18\) | • “We need to hear what the citizens’ priorities are, not tell them what our priorities are; we will require that city staff stop defending when we are asked a question. Instead, let’s ask the citizen[s] what would they do.” |

*Note. \(n\) = number of references from 15 interviews, eight observations, and 42 artifacts.*

**Building support with team members by building cross-functional teams.** From an internal perspective, exemplary mayors in Washington State influenced collaboration within their cities by building cross-functional teams. While this may be time
consuming, it was shared as helpful in becoming more efficient. One respondent reflected,

We put together a team and had one representative from every department to create a new review and goal-setting process, and that took the better part of the year to get in place. . . . This year will be the first time utilizing that new system and process, but it will be meaningful.

Another shared, “We put together kind of this team . . . philosophy in the last couple years, and we have just preached teamwork, teamwork, teamwork. We’ve . . . and what we’ve brought them in and the managers of all levels.”

One example came from a city’s webpage, which advocated the results of building cross-functional teams to improve customer service. Each department head had made a commitment to work toward this goal:

- We want to be a city known for excellence in customer service.
- A city that finds solutions to everyday challenges facing our citizens.
- A city where we go beyond commonly accepted boundaries of service, innovation and performance; where we are constantly pushing the envelope when it comes to the way we do business.

**Encouraging collaboration with other Washington cities.** Associations such as the SCA, PSRC, and the AWC provide avenues for exemplary mayors in Washington State to collaborate with each other. Collaboration with other Washington cities emerged as a theme with 52 references from 26 sources. All 15 respondents were members of one or more of these associations. Three of the 15 members were in positions of leadership in the organizations. Collaboration between cities can have a significant impact on finding
common ground and transforming conflict. It can also result in positive results, as shared in a newspaper article that discussed the designation of an industrial area: “The industrial area straddling the two cities a Manufacturing Industrial Corridor. The designation will allow both cities to obtain additional funds to invest in roads, utilities and technology infrastructure in the area.” As one respondent succinctly put it, “You need to be able to be out there and working at the county level, the state level. . . . You need to be at the Puget Sound Regional Council.”

Another respondent shared,

I’ve had other cities ask me this ’cause we’ve overcome some things with our surrounding cities. . . . In fact, I had a call over the holidays where the mayor and a councilmember from one particular city called and said, “Hey, we’ve heard you guys resolved this.”

Artifacts from the AWC, PSRC, and SCA along with observations from meetings supported the interview responses regarding collaboration with other Washington cities.

**Encouraging collaboration with state representatives.** Collaboration went beyond city borders to the state and federal levels. Exemplary mayors in Washington understood that as nonpartisan leaders in their cities, there was a need to collaborate with state representatives regardless of their political affiliation. Thirty-three references from 17 sources discussed collaboration at the state level, and not just from the mayor’s office but from the city council as well. As one respondent remarked, “I’m trying to get councilmembers that were in the past not very engaged regionally, let alone at the state, to be engaged at the state.” Results of meetings in the state capital can result in aiding
budget requests and identifying and improving transportation needs. As one letter from a group of Washington State mayors relayed,

As the Senate and House work together to craft a compromise budget, cities implore lawmakers to put the safety of their communities, their public and their youth first, and share a meaningful portion of marijuana tax revenues with cities. Strong cities make a great state. But strong cities need the state’s investment.

One respondent said that he/she had been to Olympia with city council members twice in 1 week. Four of the respondents mentioned that while it was important to build a relationship with state and federal representatives, it did not come without some level of risk. As one put it, “You know, as mayor, a lot of our conflict is either, you know, you said there’s some internal, there is localized stuff, but this really reached a fairly significant scale when a senator is calling.”

**Encouraging collaboration with tribal leaders.** Washington State has 29 federally recognized tribes. Eight of the 15 respondents had a story to share regarding the importance of collaborating with tribal leaders. Ultimately, 24 references emerged regarding collaboration with tribal leaders. A positive collaborative relationship between the city and the local tribe can influence economic growth and development and also encourage environmental protection. As one respondent shared, “For me that was a giant lesson in collaboration . . . city, the PUD [Planned Urban Development], the department of ecology, department of health, the [tribe].” In some cases, the tribal trust land is within the city limits, which of course can cause conflictive issues. In addition to environmental issues, exemplary mayors in Washington State have to work with local
tribes when it comes to difficult decisions like allowing fireworks. One mayor explained that it starts with attitude:

Well, first of all . . . it’s just attitude. . . . You can’t go into any of these [meetings] with those “I’m better than you are” attitude. You also have to try and figure out what the goals are with the party that you are going to be working with . . . why it’s important to them.

Not recognizing the importance of collaborating with the local tribe can have a negative impact, which takes time to repair, as shared by one respondent:

Well, our public works director took the contract—it was due, the contract with them, and he rewrote it, and instead of a dollar a year, he said it’s going to cost $15k a month, and he sent that to the chair on the tribal council, who read it, tore it up, called fish and wildlife, and said, “We’ve been doing this since the ’70s, and can we not continue,” and fish and wildlife said, “Well of course you can continue.” He never spoke to anyone in this city again, and it took me my first 2 years in office to get an appointment with him.

Fostering positive relationships with tribal elders was a reoccurring theme for exemplary mayors in Washington State.

**Soliciting ongoing stakeholder input when making difficult decisions.**

Exemplary mayors in Washington State recognized the value of engaging with stakeholders when making difficult decisions. Eleven of the 15 respondents discussed the importance of soliciting stakeholder input. In all, 30 references representing 14 sources provided the theme for ongoing stakeholder input. Three artifacts such as this one supported the 11 interviews:
We need to hear what the citizens’ priorities are, not tell them what our priorities are; we will require that city staff stop defending when we are asked a question. Instead, let’s ask the citizen[s] what would they do. We will drop the defensiveness and stop fighting and never allow the first answer to be no. We have decided that the way we have historically done business is dead.

One of the ways exemplary mayors in Washington State encouraged stakeholders to be participants was through a “coffee hour” or tabletop discussion. Each of the 11 respondents provided this opportunity or a form of it. All 15 respondents provided opportunities for stakeholders to comment at the city council meetings, but the coffee hour and tabletop discussions provided an avenue for open, nonconfrontational dialogue. The goal of the meetings was described as not to necessarily provide an “answer” but to allow citizens to be heard in a safe environment.

**Major themes related to communication.** Communication was defined by the peer research team as the transferring of meaning from sender to receiver, while overcoming noise and filters, so that the intended meaning is received by the intended recipient (Daft, 2012; Hellriegel & Slocum, 2004; Maxwell, 2010; Schermerhorn et al., 2008; Stuart, 2012; Wyatt, 2014). All 15 respondents discussed the importance of communication as it pertains to finding common ground and transforming conflict. A total of 206 references emerged from 89 sources collected from the 15 interviews, eight observations, and 42 artifacts. From these, five themes emerged: (a) building and communicating a vision through creative and new ideas not previously imagined; (b) creating weekly, monthly, or quarterly meetings with citizens and department heads, which are safe, open, and informal to decrease anxiety; (c) gathering information and
metrics from various resources well in advance to making important decisions;
(d) recognizing and overcoming personal filters in order to engage in active listening; and
(e) understanding the importance of transparency with every stakeholder despite opposing views. Table 7 presents the five themes, along with sample quotations related to each theme.

*Building and communicating a vision.* Eleven of the 15 respondents reflected on building and communicating a vision through creative and new ideas not previously imagined. Eight of the 11 respondents had vision statements on their cities’ webpages, and three were observed articulating their vision to the public. Exemplary mayors articulate a vision despite controversial topics. One respondent shared,

I ran a campaign that was a little alarming to some folks in the community because I was raising these questions . . . on police and fire issues. Of course I was primarily taking on the police issues, saying this was out of balance and this was unsustainable.

All agreed that it took more than just campaigning to build the vision. It required constant communication of the vision. Exemplary mayors understand that building and communicating a vision requires creativity. For one respondent, it meant driving councilmembers and other stakeholders through the downtown area and actually measuring city sidewalks in order to visualize what a three-foot increase would look like.

Exemplary mayors build on their vision from various levels of the organization and involve their stakeholders. As one respondent shared,
Table 7

*Washington State Mayors’ Use of Communication to Establish Common Ground and Produce Breakthrough Results*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major theme</th>
<th>Example quotations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Building and communicating a vision through creative and new ideas not previously imagined <em>(n = 35)</em></td>
<td>“So for my job interview, I have to establish essentially a vision for what ideas I’m going to bring to the people who I interview, which happens in my case to be the voting public of the city of {}, and so you pretty much air what your vision is and what your goal is during that process.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating weekly, monthly, or quarterly meetings with citizens and department heads that are safe, open, and informal to decrease anxiety <em>(n = 30)</em></td>
<td>“Before it gets out on our agenda, we have a department head meeting every 2 weeks, the Wednesdays . . . and a week from that Thursday is our city council meeting, so that gives us time to meet with all the department heads and go over that proposed agenda for that following meeting.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Gathering information and metrics from various resources well in advance to making important decisions *(n = 39)* | “I can almost guarantee you that, and maybe the case is that the group you’re in front of does not necessarily reflect the sentiments of the majority of the entire community.”  
“So I’ll always want benchmark data. What I’ve got is a data set from a broader community.”  
“I think it is absolutely incumbent on a mayor or leader to make clear those choice[s] with the information being behind those choices before a community wants to do that.” |
| Recognizing and overcoming personal filters in order to engage in active listening *(n = 20)* | “What I learned was first, explain, present something and then listen.”  
“And you might not agree, but you’ve got to listen because every once in a while he’s got a real gem out there, and you don’t want to miss it.”  
“It can be easy at council meeting especially when they are just going on and on . . . it can be easy to check out, but it’s important to keep doing that active listening.” |
| Understanding the importance of transparency with every stakeholder despite opposing views *(n = 80)* | “The point that they need to take some action they don’t feel like they’ve been blindsided by us by withholding information and not sharing enough or not prepping them enough to make a legitimate vote or take a position.” |

*Note.* *n* = number of references from 15 interviews, eight observations, and 42 artifacts.
One of the things that I like the most in essence is that it doesn’t matter whose
great idea it is; it only matters that it’s a great idea. And it doesn’t matter who
accomplishes it, and the goal is to get it accomplished.

Exemplary mayors verbally or visually paint a picture. Five of the 15 respondents shared
examples where they visually painted a picture of a new area downtown. For one, it was
a boardwalk; for two others, it was the widening of sidewalks. Another helped
stakeholders visualize a new library, while another showed how Wi-Fi in public parks
could increase business exposure.

Creating weekly, monthly, or quarterly meetings. Fifteen of the respondents
(100%) participated in city council meetings usually held weekly. All 15 of the
respondents also held weekly staff meetings. In addition to these types of meetings, 10 of
the 15 respondents also held weekly or monthly meetings with citizens. These meetings
were informal and in a safe environment. One observation focused on a unique meeting
in the form of a “mock” city council meeting. This particular mayor encouraged “a
citizens’ academy.” One of the graduates was observed sharing, “I look at the city and
employees much differently. We got to meet the people behind the machinery and
offices. From the citizens side, we see why things are done; from the city side, we build
relationships.”

Another webpage encouraged, “Bring your interests, comments, concerns and
praises to chat with the Mayor over a cup of coffee. Whether you are a business owner,
community member, or just a curious neighbor, (the mayor) would love to see you there.”

Interviews and observations were supported by artifacts such as a newspaper
article that relayed that the mayor “hosted the first meeting of an Inclusion Task Force, a
group of leaders from the city’s diverse communities who came together to promote inclusion and build trust.” The effort was explained as a part of a “comprehensive effort to give a voice to the city’s various and growing racial, immigrant, ethnic, and non-English-speaking communities.”

Gathering information and metrics from various resources. Exemplary mayors in Washington State gather information and metrics from various resources. Twelve respondents of the 15 interviewed, two artifacts, and one observation supported this theme. In a state of the city address in 2015, one of the mayors focused a majority of the speech on information gathered from various resources that discussed the expansion of the city populace and the results it had on the economy and traffic as well as the impact on tribal relations. Respondents shared the importance of having up-to-date and accurate information when finding common ground with city council and transforming conflict in governing their cities. An example from one of the interviews follows: “We’ve worked really hard to really respect the role of the councilmembers and to be able to provide them as timely as we can with information and data so that they’re not blindsided.”

Having the right information can also be helpful when making decisions regarding applications for business owners. According to the respondents, this can help whether deciding on approving businesses to sell marijuana or to provide legislature to shape cab services within a city. As one respondent remarked,

[When] you’re trying to convince somebody that we need to do something, you’ve got to have all your data; you’ve got to be able to back it up; you can’t just say, “We think we need this,” because they are not going to buy it.
**Engaging in active listening.** Exemplary Washington State mayors recognize and overcome personal filters in order to engage in active listening. Eleven of the 15 respondents discussed the importance of listening. As one said, “I say if elected officials listen more first to each other and then set up a system so that discussion can be had . . . the legislature would function much better because they wouldn’t be taken—they would be less personal.” Another recognized listening as relative to emotional intelligence: “You [have to] know what’s the appropriate time to be listening and following what the public seems to want to do versus when I have to stand up and even if they’re yelling and screaming at me.”

Engaging in active listening also allowed the respondents to manage public expectations. As discussed in previous themes, exemplary mayors established safe places for the public to voice their concerns either through a “coffee” or a “tabletop” discussion. These themes and the artifacts, interviews, and observations from them supported the data in this particular theme.

**Understanding the importance of transparency.** Explaining the importance of being transparent was substantiated by 80 references emerging from 25 different sources. Fourteen of the 15 respondents discussed transparency at length. Artifacts that reflected transparency included the mayors’ webpages and providing minutes and videos of city council meetings on the cities’ webpages. Observations of city council meetings supported this finding, as did interviews. One respondent remarked, “I take pride in the significant changes we have made to city government in the last 4 years to become more transparent, more efficient, and more accountable to all.”
of our citizens and businesses alike. There are still many things I would like to see us improve upon, and working with our city council.

Transparency also related to the respondents’ thoughts on emotional intelligence and ethics as conflict transformation behaviors. One shared, “Just being forthright and honest . . . it might be bad news; I might say, ‘Look, our roads have failed in historic downtown.’” Another stated, “Well to me, and it may be it leads to the ethics one too . . . it’s a matter of being plainspoken and not beating around the bush and when you have a tough trek.”

**Major themes related to emotional intelligence.** Emotional intelligence was defined by the peer research team as the self-awareness of one’s own emotions and motivations, and the ability to understand the emotions of others in social settings, which allows for management of behavior and relationships (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009; Hellriegel & Slocum, 2004). The conflict transformation behavior of emotional intelligence was discussed with all 15 respondents.

One hundred twenty references emerged from 68 sources collected from the 15 interviews, eight observations, and 42 artifacts. From these, five themes emerged: (a) being humble and empathetic to the needs of stakeholders despite personal egos, (b) bridging cultural and emotional divides by building trust with stakeholders, (c) building authentic connections with stakeholders by being a good listener, (d) creating a mutual respect with stakeholders by building positive relationships, and (e) recognizing the value of a sense of humor when faced with personal insults. As one respondent relayed,
You need to make certain that you are sharing in what’s going on. You need to avoid the finger pointing; you need to avoid the divisive attitude that we seem to breed in politics; you need to realize that it’s not about politics, it’s about governance . . . and so the EQ [emotional intelligence] is important.

Table 8 presents the five themes along with sample quotations related to each theme.

**Table 8**

*Washington State Mayors’ Use of Emotional Intelligence to Establish Common Ground and Produce Breakthrough Results*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major theme</th>
<th>Example quotations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being humble and empathetic to the needs of stakeholders despite personal egos (n = 11)</td>
<td>• “I think of things like discernment or humility; I think humility is a huge component to leadership.”&lt;br&gt;• “QTIP . . . quit taking it personally.”&lt;br&gt;• “So I try my best to be humble and to honor the role that we have.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridging cultural and emotional divides by building trust with stakeholders (n = 49)</td>
<td>• “We have decided that the way we have historically done business is dead. We will continue to develop more public-private partnerships.”&lt;br&gt;• “[We] support diversity and inclusiveness in our community.”&lt;br&gt;• “I think trying to find commonalities is kind of a newer thing . . . 20 years or so. . . . People older than us are more in that adversarial, and adversarial starts with ‘I don’t trust you.’”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building authentic connections with stakeholders by being a good listener (n = 15)</td>
<td>• “It’s about message that we respect the ideas of all levels of the organization . . . right up from the top of the organization to the bottom.”&lt;br&gt;• “You [have to] know what’s the appropriate time to be listening and following what the public seems to want to do versus when I have to stand up and even if they’re yelling and screaming at me.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating a mutual respect with stakeholders by building positive relationships (n = 36)</td>
<td>• “We need to hear what the citizens’ priorities are, not tell them what our priorities are.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizing the value of a sense of humor when faced with personal insults (n = 8)</td>
<td>• “The thing that I have to keep telling myself is what I mentioned to you: My mentor that is gone now, unfortunately, used to always continually say to me that it’s not brain surgery.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* n = number of references from 15 interviews, eight observations, and 42 artifacts.
**Being humble and empathetic to the needs of stakeholders.** Five of the 15 exemplary mayors in Washington State had a firm grasp on the importance of emotional intelligence as one of the domains for conflict transformation. This was supported by their discussion about the need to be humble and empathetic. One respondent shared, “I think humility is a huge component to leadership. . . . I think the humility to recognize that I don’t have all the answers and it’s incumbent upon me to reach out and pull together a good team of people.”

One of the respondents had an acronym that he/she used to remind him/herself about the importance of empathy and humility. “QTIP” was provided to remind the respondent to “quit taking it personally.” Humility and empathy were also noted as essential in helping to heal a community or an organization. As one respondent added, I think the empathy that we’ve tried to practice here is when citizens and people bring up problems, whether it’s a business owner, a citizen off the streets, someone from the faith community, social organization, whatever it might be . . . we try and really respond with empathy towards what the core need of that is.

**Bridging cultural and emotional divides by building trust.** This theme emerged from 11 of the 15 respondents. Six artifacts and three observations supported the theme that came from 49 references provided by 24 sources. City webpages made it a point to advocate building trust by reaching out to ethnic populations and to encourage support of diversity and inclusiveness in their communities. As discussed previously, the coffee hours and tabletop discussions provided an avenue for exemplary Washington State mayors to exercise emotional intelligence as a domain for finding common ground and
transforming conflict within their communities. From these opportunities, committees such as the one hosted by one respondent emerged:

[An] Inclusion Task Force, a group of leaders from the city’s diverse communities who came together to promote inclusion and build trust. The effort was part of . . . [a] comprehensive effort to give a voice to the city’s various and growing racial, immigrant, ethnic, and non-English-speaking communities.

These efforts did not just extend to the city but started within city hall, by “changing the ‘culture’ inside City Hall,” as evidenced by one of the artifacts. This not only affected the employees of city hall, but the importance of building trust extended to city council members as well. This is discussed in further detail in a later theme.

**Building authentic connections with stakeholders.** Exemplary mayors in Washington State build authentic connections with stakeholders by being good listeners. Active listening was recognized by seven of the 15 respondents as a component of finding common ground and transforming conflict. Five artifacts and one observation supported this theme. As one respondent put it, “Understand, because if you listen then . . . you can tailor it so there is common themes. . . . Instead of avoiding conflict, it’s finding commonality.” Another added the importance of listening to those within the organization, not just the citizens or the city council: “It’s about message that we respect the ideas of all levels of the organization . . . right up from the top of the organization to the bottom.”

This approach for building authentic connections with stakeholders (business owners, city council members, citizens, and city employees) helped generate new ideas to help solve a variety of problems impacting the cities. Some of these problems included
dealing with homelessness, reducing violence, improving health and safety, and also improving transportation despite budget constraints.

*Creating mutual respect with stakeholders.* Trust and listening led to another emerging theme in creating mutual respect with stakeholders. Ten of the 15 respondents discussed creating mutual respect with stakeholders by building positive relationships. This theme was supported as a component of emotional intelligence by two observations and six artifacts. As one artifact from a city’s webpage noted,

> We have the attention of those looking to locate their business in our city, as well as those looking to move their families here. The next few years will bring much change to our downtown, as well as to other areas within the city.

Understanding that stakeholders included city employees, another artifact added, “To help achieve this goal, especially with increasing workloads due to staff cuts, we felt it was important to make sure that we support a workplace culture where employees feel appreciated, inspired and motivated to provide quality service.”

Coffee hours and tabletop talks also added to creating mutual respect with stakeholders. One respondent shared,

> We set a pact right here at this table, and I was able to focus his [stakeholder’s] energies on something that is very important to him and asked him to work on that, and now we have a foundation of . . . for moving forward into a different type of relationship.

*Recognizing the value of a sense of humor.* Although only discussed by six of the 15 respondents, it was important to recognize the value of a sense of humor for exemplary Washington State mayors. As one respondent pointed out, “The thing that I
have to keep telling myself is . . . it’s not brain surgery.” One observation involved an exemplary mayor exhibiting self-deprecating humor during a state-of-the-city speech. The shared sense of humor between the six respondents and their common recognition of themselves as “human” emerged as a relevant theme to demonstrate emotional intelligence as a domain for conflict transformation. One respondent joked, “We have a sense of humor; it’s usually our attorney that gets picked on.”

**Major themes related to ethics.** Ethics was defined by the peer research team as human beings making choices and conducting behavior in a morally responsible way, given the values and morals of the culture (Ciulla, 2003; Strike et al., 2005).

A total of 134 references to ethics were coded from 63 sources, which included 15 interview responses, eight observations, and review of 42 artifacts. Five themes emerged: (a) create and maintain an ethical environment through ongoing ethical training, (b) modeling ethical behavior through transparency, (c) modeling ethical decision making through nonpartisanship, (d) recognizing and managing politically divisive situations by incorporating various views, and (e) valuing the responsibility of the city as it pertains to the environment. As one respondent remarked,

I just can’t fathom that’s what keeps me anchored and cored, that ethical perspective, because I just don’t see how someone keeps their sanity or keeps their compass and course in this kind of work unless you’re at least grounded in the sense of what is politics about.

Of the six domains surrounding conflict transformation and establishing common ground, ethics proved to be the most difficult to codify. Exemplary mayors who were interviewed understood and discussed the importance of a strong ethical code; 15 of the
15 (100%) mayors interviewed discussed their ethical behavior. However, it was difficult to triangulate their responses through observations and artifacts. Ultimately, the data were triangulated from three artifacts and one observation showing that exemplary mayors in Washington State have a strong moral and ethical code. Table 9 presents the five themes along with sample quotations related to each theme.

Table 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major theme</th>
<th>Example quotations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Create and maintain an ethical environment through ongoing ethical training  | • “Over the past 4 years since I took office, probably the biggest thing we have been able to do to even eliminate any kind of let’s call it ethical decision or ethical choice or ethical compromise would be.”  
  (n = 13)                                                                 | • “I was fortunate enough to go through professional mediation training, and they paid for that, so I am a certified mediator, but what I learned from that is that there is a process to that you take steps to work through conflict.” |
| Demonstrate a moral and ethical code through transparent behavior (n = 45)   | • “I take pride in the significant changes we have made to city government in the last 4 years to become more transparent, more efficient, and more accountable to all of our citizens and businesses alike.” |
| Modeling ethical decision making through nonpartisanship (n = 22)           | • “And yet our role in local office is nonpartisan in terms of its perception, so it’s an issue that usually stays an arm’s length away, but I went to a mayor’s climate protection.”  
  (n = 22)                                                                   | • “But I guess I was specifically thinking more of the collaboration that then I was faced with internally with how, as a nonpartisan mayor.” |
| Recognizing and managing politically divisive situations by incorporating  | • “We created a network of community liaisons, representing diverse community groups, to serve as a link between their members and the city. With their help we have been very successful in connecting different ethnic groups with the programs and services we offer.”  
  various views (n = 29)                                                      |                                                                                                                                                     |
| Valuing the responsibility of the city as it pertains to the environment    | • “You know, personally I feel very passionate and strong about . . . the warnings and concerns about climate change and environmental issues.”  
  (n = 14)                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                     |

*Note. n = number of references from 15 interviews, eight observations, and 42 artifacts.*
Create and maintain an ethical environment. Exemplary mayors in Washington State need to create and maintain an ethical environment through ongoing ethical training. One respondent shared an artifact in the form of a document he had prepared as a training tool for one of the leadership organizations to which he belonged. That artifact along with three others and six respondents supported the emergence of this theme.

According to the Municipal Research and Services Center of Washington (MRSC, 2015),

> While state law prohibits municipal officers from engaging in certain conflicts of interest and unethical behavior, some local governments adopt their own ethics codes that include additional restrictions. These policies cannot conflict with state law, but they can supplement it. (para. 2)

One artifact in the form of a code of ethics provided an example:

> The purpose of the Code of Ethics is stated in MMC 2.52.010:

(This City) hereby adopts the code of ethics for municipal officers codified at Chapter 42.23 RCW, inclusive of any future amendments thereof. It is the city’s specific intent that the ethical standards set forth at Chapter 42.23 RCW shall govern the conduct of municipal officers within the city. Except as expressly provided in this chapter, the city disclaims any intent to impose substantive standards of conduct that are more stringent than or otherwise different from those set forth in Chapter 42.23 RCW with respect to the subject matter of said chapter. (Ord. 019/2013 § 1 (Exh. A); Ord. 003/2010 § 1 (Exh. A))

The importance of training was also emphasized by this artifact, which proposed “cultural-competency training for elected leaders and city personnel to raise more awareness organization-wide.” One respondent remarked,
When I came to this office, I was really intent on having my directors develop that same type of skill so that we kind of have a book club. . . . We talk, we went through crucial conversations, we went through crucial accountability, those books with them, because I thought it would help them in their role.

Training was another important theme for exemplary Washington State mayors.

*Demonstrate a moral and ethical code through transparent behavior.* Fourteen of the 15 exemplary mayors who were interviewed discussed transparency through a moral and ethical lens. While transparency was also a theme in communication, it was shared as an ethical behavior as well. When asked about his/her transparency, one respondent replied, “Well to me, and it may be it leads to the ethics one too . . . it’s a matter of being plainspoken and not beating around the bush and when you have a tough trek.”

Exemplary mayors recognize this theme as a part of their guiding principles. It requires a mayor to show restraint in difficult times, especially when passionate about a particular project or issue. As one respondent described,

What was critical . . . when some people in the community and my staff got wind that “Hey, the mayor [is] going to make this a priority.” The first wave of people that get involve are the real enthusiasts or real strong environmental types that want to go off to the races and go marching down the road 100mph, and you know, I felt myself constantly putting the brakes on, saying, “Whoa, whoa, whoa, hold up.”
Transparency, therefore, helps an exemplary mayor model ethical behavior despite difficult moral and ethical decisions. Exemplary mayors were transparent by being open, honest, and candid with their stakeholders, holding themselves to a high ethical code.

*Modeling ethical decision making through nonpartisanship.* Nine of the 15 respondents discussed the importance of recognizing nonpartisanship as a method to modeling ethical decision making. As one respondent shared, “Our role in local office is nonpartisan in terms of its perception.” This was shared as an important attribute when dealing with conflict and finding common ground. When it comes to leading the community and recognizing ethical decision making, it is important to remember that the mayor is nonpartisan, particularly when finding common ground and transforming conflict. As one respondent reflected,

> I’m the guy on the fence; I’m the guy that tries to bring people together, but I know that you two will never come to the same party, but if you can come to me individually and we can move things forward, great.

Another respondent noted,

> We’re nonpartisan for the most part, and that allows us to get things done and not have to be beholden to a party or, you know, a certain line of thinking. And mayors do have a responsibility for getting a great deal done, and because of that nonpartisanship, we can get things done.

*Recognizing and managing politically divisive situations.* Unfortunately, maintaining a nonpartisan behavior can be challenging in any form of government. Therefore, exemplary mayors have to recognize and manage politically divisive situations. Twenty-nine references from 10 sources supported this theme. A respondent
provided the following sentiment when it came to recognizing and managing politically divisive situations: “Some people say government is run like a business. Well yeah, to some degree, but a government in many ways [is] not anything like a business—a government in some ways are more like a family.”

While one respondent looked at governing the city as a family, not all mayors were as altruistic. Recognizing and managing politically divisive situations also requires a sense of honest reflection. As one respondent said,

I guess as a self-appointed evangelist with the virtues of politics that one of the things that is really disruptive and corrosive to our political life these days . . . this sort of sense that politics is a dirty, nasty, necessary evil and sort of a dirty business.

**Valuing the responsibility of the city as it pertains to the environment.** Six of the 15 respondents reflected on their responsibility as a city leader to be environmentally conscious. One respondent discussed the responsibility of being environmentally friendly. He reflected on the city “having two urban centers, high-quality services, environmental stewardship, and so the employees know, okay, those and that customer services, employees know those are the priorities: good customer service, environmentally friendly.”

Other respondents understood the importance the environment has when recognizing the relationship with the local tribes. All respondents who discussed tribal collaboration spoke of the environment. As one respondent shared, “They [the tribes] talk about the environment, and they talk about land. I have just as strong a feeling, and we share that in common, and if that is always in the forefront, then it gets me a lot
farther.” When it came to budget discussions, one respondent made it a point to say, “Public safety, clean and green, fire and business, infrastructure, stuff like that. . . . I call it budgeting my priorities.”

**Major themes related to problem solving.** Problem solving was defined by the peer research team as the act of choosing and implementing a solution to an identified problem or situation (Harvey et al., 1997). Five themes emerged from 165 references representing 72 sources. Some of the problems facing cities include homelessness, violence, welcoming diversity, and traffic congestion. All of these require solutions that are impacted by budget and resource constraints. The five themes related to problem solving follow: (a) considering best solutions to difficult problems despite a lack of resources, (b) creating and building momentum to solve a problem, (c) recognize the value of using a diverse committee to help with problem solving, (d) recognizing the value of involving local business owners in solving problems with economic development, and (e) understanding how county and state codes impact problem solving. Table 10 presents the five themes along with sample quotations related to each theme.

**Considering best solutions to difficult problems despite a lack of resources.** One of the four artifacts in the form of a newspaper article that supported the 11 respondents’ interviews explained, “The primary role of city government is to make certain that our resources are managed responsibly; that we are insuring a safe community and preserving the infrastructure and services to the benefit of the business and citizens.” Another article supported this theme by stating,

Despite the gained efficiencies and cuts in personnel and budgets, we continue to face a financial deficit in future years. The cost of providing city services
continues to increase each year at a pace that exceeds our income. It’s critical that we develop a sustainable fiscal strategy for the city.

Table 10

Washington State Mayors’ Use of Problem Solving to Establish Common Ground and Produce Breakthrough Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major theme</th>
<th>Example quotations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Considering best solutions to difficult problems despite a lack of resources (n = 42) | • “Something I’ve talked a lot about is fiscal responsibility and management of the resources of which carry out all of these services the people expect.”  
  • “Budget is very difficult for people to understand.” |
| Creating and building momentum to solve a problem (n = 9)                  | • “You need to be able to be out there and working at the county level, the state level . . . you need to be at the Puget Sound Regional Council.” |
| Recognize the value of using a diverse committee to help with problem solving (n = 25) | • “I’ll have a couple members of the city council, myself, city administrator, police chief, police staff, we might have librarian, and whomever.”  
  • “We have committees for finance, public works, public safety, and several others, but those are the three main committees that we have, so it affects if it even touches any of those departments it goes through that committee before and they recommend it to the full council or not.” |
| Recognizing the value of involving local business owners in solving problems with economic development (n = 50) | • “So that’s what I would tell them. I would also say problem solving . . . you know, on a local level involves a lot of collaboration locally with businesses, citizens, neighborhood groups, the faith community.”  
  • “I’d been mayor for I don’t know—within the first year I wanted to get a sense of what was needed in the business community and what things maybe town hall could do to support businesses.” |
| Understanding how county and state codes impact problem solving (n = 37) | • “I would share with the council or the public in a public hearing that in addition to the requirements of our town code that the developer has agreed to add this and this because he heard from neighbors that it was important to add this trail or this open space or whatever. . . . That worked a lot.” |

Note. n = number of references from 15 interviews, eight observations, and 42 artifacts.
Exemplary mayors in Washington State shared frustrations such as this: “I’m trying to save the police ’cause at this road we are going down, I’m going to lay off seven officers because we can’t afford them if we don’t get this house in order.” One of the ways exemplary mayors in Washington State dealt with these challenges and solved problems by finding common ground and transforming conflict was by trying to stay ahead. All respondents shared similar sentiments to this one:

I find myself after 5 or 6 years that I am reacting to everything like it’s a crisis and emergency, and it’s a very expensive one, and it’s far more expensive because I haven’t stayed on top of it and maintained it. Does that make sense?

One respondent offered this as a suggestion to stay on top of problems by rewarding new and inventive ideas: “We do ‘dare to soar’ awards. . . . Employees at any level of the organization that save the city money through inventive ideas of their own we bring in front of council and give them a dare to soar award.”

Creating and building momentum to solve a problem. Although there were only four respondents and one observation to substantiate this theme of creating and solving a problem, this should be discussed as a potential theme for exemplary Washington State mayors. As one respondent put it,

There is sort of a peer pressure that operates even with adults in organizations. You get enough people on sort of on board an effort, it has its own momentum, and then the skeptics get a less inclined momentum to push against the flow or stream and try to go, “Well everyone seems to want to do that.”

This was supported by an observation during the respondent’s state-of-the-city address.
Another respondent recognized the importance of moving quickly:

You don’t have excuses anymore, you know, we need to be able to move quickly to meet the needs of our citizenry, and we can’t do that if it takes 2 weeks to send memos all the way up the chain. . . . You can’t do it.

All four respondents recognized the impact of empowerment when trying to create and build momentum. As one relayed, “I need to empower people at the front ends of the organization to do things and/or to come quickly up to the level to get the approvals they need.”

**Solving problems through diverse committees.** Nine of the 15 exemplary mayors interviewed discussed using committees made of a diverse representation to help solve problems. Thirteen sources provided 25 references for this theme. One respondent recognized the importance of hiring people with different points of view as a tool for finding common ground and transforming conflict:

I hire people with different points of view and different styles because, you know, there is always a blind spot, so if you have enough people, you can cover your blind spots, and that means there is going to be conflict.

Another “opened up city hall and made every committee open.” That same respondent remarked, “What happened was people who never had a voice in this town realized, ‘Oh, I can participate and I can do this.’”

Four artifacts supported the value of having a diverse committee to solve problems. One such committee was an inclusiveness task force to open up dialogue within the city to value. One of the initiatives that resulted was an “all-inclusive playground [that] offers special amenities to encourage physical activity for children of
all abilities and ages—those with special needs, diverse interests and abilities, and physical or mental challenges.” This was just one example of the value of a diverse committee to solve problems. Other examples included help with homelessness, promoting environmental friendliness, and dealing with transportation problems.

*Recognizing the value of involving local business owners.* Seven of the 15 respondents spoke candidly about involving local business owners during the course of their interviews. Although not specifically mentioned during the course of the interviews, two additional respondents were mentioned in articles, and one was observed mentioning the importance of business owners during the state-of-the-city address. As one respondent illustrated, “There is probably between 50k and 60k on any given day coming to the city to do their commerce, their retail, their jobs, whatever the case may be.” It would stand to reason that exemplary mayors in Washington State recognize the value of involving local business owners in solving problems within the city. For all respondents, this required a focus on the downtown infrastructure and ensuring that businesses wanted to come to their cities.

One artifact supported this theme with a direct invitation to business owners to bring their business and their families to the city. However, involving local business owners is not always easy. Sometimes the business may be one that is controversial, such as an adult bookstore or a recreational marijuana store. The respondents were divided on the latter, primarily leaving it to the citizens and city council to vote as to whether a recreational marijuana store would be allowed in the city limits. Those that did have them had substantial codes and other means to protect their citizens.
Understanding how county and state codes impact problem solving. Ten of the 15 respondents mentioned the importance of understanding how county and state codes impact problem solving. This theme was further supported by four artifacts. But it is not just about understanding the codes, it is also about articulating those codes to the stakeholders. Three of the respondents were facing conflict regarding fireworks in their cities. As one noted, making fireworks illegal could impact revenue for both tribes and business owners:

Working with them to explain how, you know, we understand the revenue generator for them. But [there was] frustration that our citizens were expressing. If we could work together on that and they actually were agreeable to changing their discharge times to coincide with our noise ordinance . . . it really made a big difference for our residents and the number of complaints that we received that year.

All respondents recognized the importance of working with the city council. In the case of those respondents specifically discussing state and county codes, they had this to add to help with the process: “We decided to have our legal [department] work with council in writing an ordinance so that we wouldn’t have unintended consequences by the citizens themselves bringing it forward.” This was particularly true when zoning codes had a potential impact on city growth and management.

Major themes related to processes. The peer research team defined processes as methods that include a set of steps and activities that group members follow to perform tasks such as strategic planning or conflict resolution. Four themes emerged from the conflict transformation domain of processes: (a) developing processes and procedures
appropriate to the size of their city, (b) developing processes that ensure the safety of the community, (c) restructuring departments to become more efficient, and (d) understanding the relationship between the mayor and city council as a process for government. Table 11 presents the major themes that emerged from 219 references representing 90 sources.

Table 11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major theme</th>
<th>Example quotations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Improving processes and procedures appropriate to the size of their city ($n = 36$) | • “They said you’re a city of 65k now. We’ve grown rapidly; we were 23k when I came on to the city council in 2002; we’re now 65k. I mean, we’re the second largest city in the county.”
  • “Very few cities our size have a youth center, but our main argument for doing it was school is not always a good experience for kids, so if it’s a bad experience for kids, they’re not going to be participating in after-school activities, and we’ve got the data to back that up.” |
| Improving processes that ensure the safety of the community ($n = 69$)      | • “You know, I am the spokesperson for the city . . . people turn to me. One of the things my fire chief has really insisted on is that I get emergency management training.”
  • “I think that really developed in me an empathy for what individuals were dealing with, neighborhoods were dealing with right through the whole foreclosure crisis.” |
| Restructuring departments to become more efficient ($n = 20$)               | • “We started by evaluating the leadership style and competence of our management team, from top to bottom. This resulted in some reorganizations, consolidation of divisions, and a few changes in key management positions.”
  • “We convinced folks that we need to restructure the department.” |
| Understanding the relationship between the mayor and city council as a process for government ($n = 94$) | • “There was no collaboration before I got here between council, staff, and the mayor . . . and particularly between the mayor and the council, and so when I landed, I’m all about collaboration because when you collaborate, you get things done better, smarter, faster.”
  • “I’m meeting with council members. It’s trying to make certain they feel as comfortable as I can make them with who I am . . . it’s listening to them.” |

*Note. n = number of references from 15 interviews, eight observations, and 42 artifacts.*
**Improve processes and procedures appropriate to the size of their city.** Fourteen of the 15 respondents discussed the populations of their cities when improving processes and procedures. The smallest population size in the study was 1,900, and the largest was 98,470. The median population was 22,000. One respondent put it this way:

Well, one of the things that is part of being an elected official and I guess the first thing you have to be able to decipher is there are two types of mayor. That is what you call a strong mayor form of government like the city of . . . is which means I’m the CEO . . . I’m elected by the people . . . I’m the boss of the organization, I’m responsible for these 700 employees.

Population size not only impacted the conflict that occurred within the organizational structure of city hall but extended to the conflicitive relationships with stakeholders such as business owners and city council members. In an observed state-of-the-city address, the mayor mentioned the increase in population size from 5,000 to over 12,000 in the last 10 years. This increase resulted in challenges in traffic and infrastructure in the city.

**Improving processes to ensure the safety of the community.** All 15 respondents discussed the importance of developing processes that ensured their citizens were safe. Of primary concern were fire and police services. Safe communities were also illustrated through concern regarding illegal drugs impacting the city, dealing with homelessness, and providing emergency services. An example is presented in this artifact from a newspaper article:

Well over half of our budget goes to Public Safety. When there has been an accident or fire, or a loved one can’t breathe, the public understandably wants us
there as soon as possible. Last year, in addition to fire and other calls for service, Fire and Emergency Services responded to more than 10,500 aid calls.

Half of the respondents discussed contracting services or sharing services between cities. The latter was discussed by five of the 15 respondents as a significant part of finding common ground and conflict transformation. Examples of these services extended beyond fire and other emergency response to providing jail services. One of the unique situations faced by Washington State is the legalization of marijuana and its impact on public safety. The respondents were split on allowing the sale of marijuana in their cities. One respondent said,

I talk about marijuana because our city allows it, but we, at the time they were talking about having it permitted, we went through our entire city limits to see where we felt it could be utilized—not be within 1,000 feet of a school, or a park, or a library where there are kids.

Other respondents shared that their cities did not allow marijuana stores.

Restructuring departments to become more efficient. Twenty references provided data to support the need for mayors to restructure departments for efficiency. One participant shared, “I came in as mayor . . . [and said] ‘We are going to get this organizational structure realigned and organized in a good way.’” This was supported through 11 sources such as the following artifact from a publicized interview: “We started by evaluating the leadership style and competence of our management team, from top to bottom. This resulted in some re-organizations, consolidation of divisions and a few changes in key management positions.”
All 15 respondents recognized the value in providing a more efficient form of government because of budgetary constraints. Those who restructured their departments understood the value of having good team members. As stated by one respondent, “Going back to when we restructured the city, it was also making it pretty clear that we wanted to bring on people that were real good team players.”

**Understanding the relationship between the mayor and city council.** All 15 respondents shared the importance of fostering a positive relationship with city council members to find common ground and transform conflict in governing their cities. From the 15 interviews, eight observations, and 42 artifacts, 23 sources provided 94 references pertaining to the relationship between the city council and the mayor. It is important to note that all 15 mayors were specifically chosen from 52 cities with a council/elected mayor form of government. In this form of government, the council adopts the city budget and establishes laws. The council is primarily the legislature for the city. It is the mayor’s responsibility to help execute the budget and to represent the citizens. As one respondent shared, “As mayor, my role would be making sure council is aware of my concerns and advocating the positions I feel are important; directing staff to put together the budget, policies, and contracts; and bringing those forward to the council.”

Of the eight observations, five were city council meetings. These provided the supporting data that corresponded with the interviews and artifacts regarding this theme. The important theme that emerged in cultivating the relationship between city council and mayor was trust.
Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover and describe how exemplary Washington State mayors establish common ground and produce breakthrough results by utilizing the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors. This chapter presented the data summarizing the major themes for the research questions. The data were derived from interviews with 15 exemplary mayors in Washington State, eight observations, and the review of 42 artifacts. The data were coded and synthesized, which yielded several emergent themes across the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors. The analysis identified the lived experiences of the mayors and the specific behaviors used to transform conflict.

The central research question—“What are the lived experiences of exemplary Washington State mayors in establishing common ground and producing breakthrough results by engaging in elements of the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors?”—yielded five main themes: (a) transform conflict by being transparent in decision-making processes; (b) find common ground through collaboration with local cities and tribes to transform conflict; (c) find common ground through building relationships with business owners to ensure economic growth; (d) transform conflict through building relationships with city council members despite opposing views; and (e) transform conflict by building trust through honesty, integrity, and mutual respect.

The six research subquestions centering on the domains of conflict transformation each yielded four to five themes covering a variety of shared behaviors of those mayors in Washington State acknowledged as “exemplary.” These themes reflected that exemplary mayors engage and communicate with stakeholders through committee meetings and
open discussion. They understand problem solving and processes that are relative to the size of their city. They genuinely care about the safety of their citizens, and they uphold a strong ethical and moral code through transparency.

Chapter V presents a final summary of the study, including major findings, unexpected findings, and conclusions. The chapter includes implications for action, recommendations for further research, and concluding remarks and reflections.
CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover and describe how exemplary Washington State mayors establish common ground and produce breakthrough results by utilizing the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors. The six domains studied were collaboration, communication, emotional intelligence, ethics, problem solving, and process. The research questions that guided this study included the central research question and six subquestions, one for each of the six domains. The central research question was, “What are the lived experiences of exemplary Washington State mayors in establishing common ground and producing breakthrough results by engaging in elements of the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors?” The research subquestions were as follows:

1. *Communication*—How do exemplary Washington State mayors use communication to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?

2. *Collaboration*—How do exemplary Washington State mayors use collaboration to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?

3. *Emotional intelligence*—What aspects of emotional intelligence do exemplary Washington State mayors use to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?

4. *Ethics*—How do exemplary Washington State mayors use ethics to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?

5. *Problem solving*—How do exemplary Washington State mayors use problem-solving strategies to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?
6. Process—What processes do exemplary Washington State mayors use to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?

The research method used in this study was a qualitative, phenomenological study that utilized personal interviews via scripted questions with mayors in Washington. Artifacts were also collected and observations made to triangulate the anecdotal information. The data were transcribed and then entered into NVivo and analyzed for emerging themes. The target population for this study was exemplary mayors, specifically in the state of Washington. The population was 227 elected mayors from mayor-council governments. From this, the target population was identified as 52 Washington State mayors who exhibited the definition of “exemplary leaders,” as identified by the thematic research team.

The sample obtained was 15 mayors of cities with populations ranging from 1,900 to 98,470. Time in city government ranged from 5 to 20 years. To be considered an exemplary leader, the leader had to have displayed or demonstrated at least five of the following criteria:

1. evidence of successful relationships with stakeholders;
2. evidence of breaking through conflict to achieve organizational success;
3. 5 or more years of experience in that profession or field;
4. having written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings;
5. recognition by their peers; and
6. membership in associations or groups focused on their field.
Major Findings

The central purpose of this study was to discover and describe how exemplary Washington State mayors established common ground and produced breakthrough results by utilizing the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors. A summary of the key findings discovered and presented in Chapter IV is presented with respect to the central research question and research subquestions.

Central Question

The central research question was, “What are the lived experiences of exemplary Washington State mayors in establishing common ground and producing breakthrough results by engaging in elements of the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors?”

The major findings revealed five principal behaviors displayed by all of the exemplary Washington State mayors.

1. Exemplary mayors in Washington State transform conflict by cultivating and maintaining a climate of transparency with all stakeholders.

2. Exemplary mayors in Washington State find common ground with internal and external stakeholders by embracing diversity internally and externally to city hall.

3. Exemplary mayors in Washington State transform conflict by fostering positive relationships with internal and external stakeholders such as local tribal leaders, city council members, and local business owners.

4. Exemplary mayors in Washington State establish common ground by understanding their role as the city leader as one that is politically nonpartisan.

5. Exemplary mayors in Washington State exhibit humility and build trusting relationships with internal and external stakeholders through mutual respect.
Subquestions

To help discover and describe how exemplary Washington State mayors established common ground and produced breakthrough results by engaging in elements of the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors, a question was asked for each of the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors: collaboration, communication, emotional intelligence, ethics, problem solving, and process. The resulting behaviors as determined in Chapter IV are as follows.

**Collaboration.** The data reflected that exemplary Washington State mayors collaborate with surrounding cities to help solve problems ranging from transportation and safety issues to dealing with homelessness and the environment. They collaborate with state and county officials to have a better understanding of local codes and ordinances and to foster relationships at the state and county level; this information helps them better communicate decisions with their stakeholders. Exemplary Washington State mayors collaborate with local business owners to help establish a vision for a more inviting and welcoming downtown area. They understand the importance of continued economic development while managing the growth of their city. They also collaborate with their city council by fostering a relationship built on trust, honesty, and respect. They are actively engaged at city council meetings but also look for opportunities to work with city council members outside of those meetings. Lastly, exemplary mayors in Washington State foster a climate of collaboration within their organization by developing and sometimes restructuring their departments in city hall.

**Communication.** Exemplary mayors in Washington State use communication as a common behavior to find common ground and transform conflict. They communicate
openly and honestly. They are transparent in their decision-making processes and use a variety of communication channels to present a vision for their city. Some of these channels include webpages, social media, and mission and vision statements on the homepage of the city’s website. Exemplary mayors in Washington State hold open forums with the public, inviting them to a “coffee hour” or “tabletop discussion.” They are good listeners, recognizing the importance of putting their own emotions and desire to speak on hold while they allow stakeholders to share their concerns and frustrations. They recognize that at any moment a citizen may walk up to them in a local market, on the street, or anywhere else the mayor may be and begin a dialogue. They welcome this opportunity and listen without prejudice. Lastly, exemplary Washington State mayors gather information and data to help them communicate with stakeholders. All of these behaviors profoundly shaped the communication behavior of exemplary Washington State mayors.

**Emotional intelligence.** One of the primary attributes that exemplary mayors in Washington State exhibit is the ability to be socially aware while at the same time having a clear sense of self-awareness. They recognize the foundation of their own beliefs and how they may be perceived either positively or negatively. Although not all exemplary mayors spoke about a sense of humor, enough did to consider it as an additional emotional intelligence behavior. Exemplary Washington State mayors understand the value of emotional intelligence to cultivate relationships with a diverse group of stakeholders. Cultivating and building relationships with stakeholders proved to be a common theme for all 15 exemplary mayors interviewed. The importance of emotional intelligence in doing this was emphasized. They manage expectations of stakeholders by
actively listening and modeling behavior that exhibits a genuine concern for their city and their organization.

**Ethics.** Cultivating and maintaining an ethical climate is paramount for exemplary mayors in Washington State. Each discussed his or her own moral compass and recognized that many of his or her decisions were supported by a code of ethics. Exemplary mayors help communicate ethical behavior through ongoing training, and many have the city code of ethics readily available on their webpage. They model ethical behavior through transparent and honest communication. Transparency was shared as an important element in maintaining a moral compass to navigate and lead their city by. Exemplary mayors “walk the walk” by modeling ethical behavior at all times, particularly when approached with a gift or when a campaign contributor has expectations that cannot or should not be realized. Additionally, Washington State mayors considered exemplary recognize the importance of maintaining a nonpartisan approach to politically divisive issues, whether it be economic, such as managing city growth, or dealing with highly sensitive social issues such as homelessness or crime.

**Problem solving.** Exemplary Washington State mayors use diverse task forces and committees to help with solving problems. They gather and examine data from a variety of sources before contemplating or making a final decision. Exemplary mayors seek to find common ground and transform conflict to help solve city problems by soliciting input from stakeholders through a variety of means, such as town hall meetings, coffees, or engagement in everyday situations. They engage with city council members at city council meetings and in other venues such as walking together downtown to paint a picture of the possible future. They try to work with, not against, their city council
members to discuss and solve problems affecting their city and their stakeholders by sharing a vision through open dialogue. Exemplary mayors also incentivize problem solving by recognizing and rewarding those who come up with new and innovative ideas. They welcome new ideas not just from departments within city hall but from all stakeholders in their community, whether they are business owners, city council members, or citizens. This is an important component for exemplary mayors who, like all mayors, experience a shortage of resources.

**Processes.** While the emergent themes in this particular domain were not attributed to any specific process models, exemplary mayors worked with their city council to establish and improve processes that were congruent with the size of their city. The smallest population studied was 1,900, while the largest was over 98,000. Understanding city dynamics as they pertained to the size and (in some situations) location of their city is a critical component in establishing processes. Exemplary mayors in Washington State also improved processes by restructuring internal departments, oftentimes realigning the departments despite reluctance to change. All exemplary mayors recognized the importance of customer service and recognized that the citizens as well as the visitors were the primary customers of their city services. Exemplary Washington State mayors seek to improve those services by incorporating various processes in order to mitigate resource shortfalls. Whether it be restructuring departments or making simple improvements in tracking requests, exemplary mayors look toward consistent process improvements.
Unexpected Findings

The researcher found unexpected results during the course of this study. The following concepts and data emerged but were not anticipated in preparation for the study. This section reports on them as they relate to the research questions, and these may need further research to validate or confirm the data/findings.

One such surprising result was the importance of transparency to 100% of those exemplary mayors interviewed. This was supported by the fact that each respondent was open and candid in telling his or her stories. One respondent actually gave the researcher the mayor’s personal approved budget document for the entire city, a hardbound document that appeared to have taken a lot of time (and money) to produce. Another unexpected finding was the impact that collaboration with tribal leaders had on Washington cities. Exemplary mayors seek to foster and maintain a strong relationship with local tribes. More than one respondent discussed situations where predecessors had lost tribal trust, and that loss of trust negatively impacted finding common ground and transforming conflict.

The researcher was surprised that evidence that was more conclusive was not discussed in more detail during the domain of ethics. Lastly, the exemplary mayors who expressed the importance of a sense of humor surprised the researcher.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, several conclusions were drawn regarding how exemplary municipal mayors in Washington State establish common ground and produce breakthrough results by utilizing the six domains of conflict transformation
behaviors of collaboration, communication, emotional intelligence, ethics, problem solving, and process.

**Conclusion 1: In Order to be More Effective in Creating Common Ground During Conflict, Exemplary Washington State Mayors Foster a Variety of Opportunities for Collaboration With Stakeholders**

Exemplary mayors in Washington State consistently and overwhelmingly collaborate with internal and external stakeholders to find common ground and transform conflict. A summary of the key findings supporting this conclusion indicates the following:

1. All 15 (100%) of the exemplary mayors interviewed collaborated with other cities, city council, and in most cases local tribal elders.
2. All 15 (100%) of the exemplary mayors interviewed understood the importance of fostering collaborative efforts within their organizations.
3. All 15 (100%) of the exemplary mayors interviewed modeled collaborative efforts by considering different perspectives of stakeholders and opposing political views.

Based on the above evidence, all exemplary Washington State mayors utilize collaboration as a critical step in finding common ground and transforming conflict. Those mayors who do not collaborate find it difficult to find common ground and are less likely to transform conflict. This was supported by Page (2010), who found, “Collaborative governance and management intrigue practitioners and scholars alike. Addressing many of today’s complex public problems . . . [requires] agreement and cooperation among an array of government officials and non-governmental stakeholders” (p. 246). It is therefore concluded that Washington State mayors need to encourage,
develop, and master collaboration skills. Furthermore, specific efforts must be made to build relationships with internal and external stakeholders.

**Conclusion 2: When Exemplary Washington State Mayors Communicate With Stakeholders Through Transparency and Open Dialogue, Conflict is Transformed and Breakthrough Results Occur**

Exemplary mayors in Washington State consistently and overwhelmingly discussed communication as an essential conflict transformation behavior. A summary of the key findings supporting this conclusion indicates the following:

1. All 15 (100%) of the exemplary mayors interviewed presented or communicated a vision for their cities at city council meetings and state-of-the-city addresses.
2. All 15 (100%) of the exemplary mayors interviewed understood the importance of listening to internal and external stakeholders without prejudice or filters.
3. All 15 (100%) of the exemplary mayors interviewed indicated transparency as a key component for effective communication.
4. Exemplary mayors in Washington State provided enhanced communication efforts by providing avenues for open dialogue with internal and external stakeholders.

Peterson and Ferguson (2014) noted, “When group members freely share information versus hoarding information and other resources, they reveal their confidence that they will not be taken advantage of by others in the group” (p. 194). Based on the above evidence, all exemplary Washington State mayors utilize communication and active listening as critical components in finding common ground and transforming conflict. Mayors who do not have strong communication skills and who do not engage in active listening are less likely to establish common ground and will have more difficulty
in transforming conflict. It is therefore concluded that Washington State mayors need to encourage, develop, and master communication skills.

**Conclusion 3: Exemplary Washington State Mayors Demonstrate Emotional Intelligence by Building Trusting and Authentic Relationships Through Mutual Respect With Stakeholders**

Exemplary mayors in Washington State use a high level of emotional intelligence to find common ground and transform conflict. A summary of the key findings supporting this conclusion indicates the following:

1. All 15 (100%) of the exemplary mayors interviewed presented a high degree of emotional intelligence by building trusting relationships with internal and external stakeholders.

2. Exemplary mayors in Washington State built authentic relationships with internal and external stakeholders through social awareness and social management.

3. Exemplary mayors in Washington State built authentic relationships with internal and external stakeholders through self-awareness and self-management.

4. Exemplary mayors in Washington State provided enhanced emotional intelligence efforts by developing and nurturing mutual respect with internal and external stakeholders.

Based on the above evidence, all exemplary Washington State mayors utilize emotional intelligence as a critical step in finding common ground and transforming conflict. Mayors who do not have social or self-awareness skills will be less likely to have the skills necessary to find common ground. Additionally, without these emotional
intelligence behaviors, mayors will be less likely to exhibit the behaviors necessary to transform conflict. Bradberry and Greaves (2009) suggested,

Listening and observing are the most important elements of social awareness. To listen well and observe what is going on around us, we have to stop doing many things we like to do. We have to stop talking, stop the monologue that may be running through our minds. (p. 38)

It is therefore concluded that Washington State mayors need to assess and develop the emotional intelligence skills of social/self-awareness and social/self-management.

Conclusion 4: Exemplary Washington State Mayors Demonstrate Ethical Behavior Through Transparency When Creating Common Ground and Transforming Conflict

Exemplary mayors in Washington State exhibit a strong code of ethics as evidenced by their transparency. This behavior is an important factor to find common ground and transform conflict. A summary of the key findings supporting this conclusion indicates the following:

1. All 15 (100%) of the exemplary mayors interviewed presented or communicated a moral compass for municipal governance.

2. Exemplary Washington State mayors modeled ethical behavior and established city codes of ethics with the help of an ethics committee.

3. Exemplary mayors indicated training as a key component to help with ethical decision making.

4. All 15 (100%) of the exemplary mayors interviewed related examples of transparency toward their ethical behavior.
Based on the above evidence, all exemplary Washington State mayors utilize ethics as a foundation in finding common ground and transforming conflict. Mayors who do not have a strong moral compass or exhibit transparent behavior will be less likely to be able to transform conflict. Without a strong ethical code, they will also be less likely to find common ground. This was supported by Sauser (2010), who stated, “Ethics in local government has to do with the behavior—specifically the moral behavior—of the elected officials, public employees, and professional administrators who work to carry out the operations of the government” (p. 53). It is therefore concluded that Washington State mayors need to develop ethical skills and maintain a level of transparency that builds ethical relationships with internal and external stakeholders.

**Conclusion 5: Exemplary Mayors in Washington State Are Strategic in Problem Solving by Working Alongside Stakeholders During Conflict, Resulting in Positive and Lasting Solutions Being Developed**

Exemplary mayors in Washington State solve problems through collaboration and relationship building. A summary of the key findings supporting this conclusion indicates the following:

1. All 15 (100%) of the exemplary mayors interviewed recognized the importance of involving internal and external stakeholders to help develop solutions to problems that affected their cities.

2. All 15 (100%) of the exemplary mayors interviewed understood the importance of building and maintaining relationships with internal and external stakeholders to find common ground and transform conflict when solving problems.
3. Exemplary mayors in Washington State created and built momentum to help solve problems.

4. Exemplary mayors in Washington State used diverse committees or task forces made up of internal and external stakeholders to help provide solutions to problems affecting their cities.

   Based on the above evidence, all exemplary Washington State mayors solve problems through finding common ground and transforming conflict. Mayors who do not develop good problem-solving skills are less likely to have the same skills needed to find common ground and transform conflict. Warm (2011) supported the conclusion that Washington State mayors need to encourage, develop, and monitor problem-solving skills by stating, “The key drivers of local government will be resource leveraging, community positioning, problem solving, and strategic leadership” (p. 62).

**Conclusion 6: Exemplary Mayors in Washington State Improve Processes by Restructuring Departments and Building Positive Relationships With City Council to Find Common Ground and Transform Conflict**

   Exemplary mayors in Washington State improve processes to support their vision and to find common ground and transform conflict. A summary of the key findings supporting this conclusion indicates the following:

1. All 15 (100%) of the exemplary mayors interviewed looked for process improvements that were relative to the size of their cities’ populations.

2. All 15 (100%) of the exemplary mayors interviewed improved processes and procedures that focused on the safety of their communities.
3. All 15 (100%) of the exemplary mayors interviewed fostered and cultivated a positive relationship with city council as a process toward city governance.

4. Exemplary mayors in Washington State indicated a need to restructure departments in order to enhance efficiency and improve processes.

   Based on the above evidence, all exemplary Washington State mayors improve processes that promote finding common ground and transforming conflict. Mayors who do not continually seek process improvements will be less likely to engage in conflict transformation processes. They will also be less likely to develop processes that find common ground. As Nalbandian et al. (2013) pointed out, “Connecting engagement initiatives to traditional political values and governing processes is an important mark of successful community building” (p. 567). It is therefore concluded that Washington State mayors need to encourage, develop, and master skills essential in developing processes. Furthermore, specific efforts must be made to build and develop processes that specifically include city council members.

**Implications for Action**

Referring to this study, the following implications are provided for incumbent mayors as well as those potential future mayors who may be looking for a career in serving their communities. These implications are designed to answer the question, “So what?” Based on this study, the implications for practice or for decision making are provided for Washington State mayors to improve what they might do to improve themselves personally as municipal leaders. They are also provided for tangible improvements for city council members, communities, local business owners, and other organizations or institutions. It is this researcher’s hope that these implications for
improvement provide essential steps to improve the governance of cities in Washington State.

Implication for Action 1: Incentivize Participation in the Association of Washington Cities’ (AWC) Certificate of Municipal Leadership (CML) Program

Incentives should be provided for mayors to participate in the AWC’s CML program. This certification and the Advanced Certificate of Municipal Leadership (ACML) program identify Washington State mayors for accomplishing training in four core areas:

- roles, responsibilities, and legal requirements;
- public sector resource management;
- community planning and development; and
- effective local leadership.

Of the 15 exemplary mayors in Washington State who were interviewed, 12 had earned the CML, and the three who had not were working on it. Five of the exemplary Washington State mayors had earned the ACML. This award identifies those exemplary mayors who continue to strive for excellence by attending CML workshops, participating in National League of Cities (NLC) conferences, and attending non-AWC workshops. Additionally, mayors who receive this certificate must have completed at least 6 months of community service within the last 5 years. Examples of community service include the following:

- Board or committee positions with AWC or NLC
- Board or committee chair positions with community organizations
- Service on statewide commissions, committees, councils and task forces
Leadership on projects such as fundraising efforts, campaigns and major events (AWC, n.d.b, para. 4)

Implication for Action 2: Develop Leadership Training and Development Programs Specifically Designed for City Hall Employees

Leadership training programs specifically designed for city hall employees should be developed. Many successful organizations develop training and professional development programs that develop leaders within their organizations. Exemplary mayors should develop a prioritization of preparatory leadership training and development that exemplifies and incorporates the six conflict transformation behaviors. These leadership development programs can range from one-to-one leadership training to leadership training for small groups and teams, up to middle management and upper management positions. Many successful organizations incorporate programs to develop future leaders. It should not be any different in municipal leadership positions. Exemplary mayors can use this type of training to build relationships with city employees as well as city council members.

Implication for Action 3: Develop Training to Enhance Mayor-Council Relationships, Thereby Improving Municipality Governance

Training and workshops should be developed and appropriately funded as a mayor-council collaborative effort to enhance mayor-council relationships. All 15 (100%) of the respondents recognized the importance of fostering and cultivating a positive relationship with city council. However, none of the exemplary mayors shared specific training or workshops that helped foster that climate. Most of the respondents learned once they came into office or had already had experience as city council
members, which aided the relationship. Exemplary mayors who fund training and workshops specifically designed to enhance mayor-council relationships will cultivate a culture of finding common ground through collaboration and conflict transformation.

**Implication for Action 4: Develop Comprehensive Training in the Six Conflict Transformation Domains With a Focus on Building Relationships, Transparent Behavior, and Active Listening**

Training in the six conflict transformation behaviors should be developed and appropriately funded for employees within city hall. All 15 (100%) of the exemplary mayors interviewed discussed their organizations from an internal stakeholder perspective. Exemplary mayors should invest in their organizations’ customer service by funding and developing training in the six conflict transformation behaviors. The particular focus should be on building relationships, transparent behavior modeling, and active listening as these themes were apparent in more than one of the six domains.

The actions, if implemented, could transform current and future mayors into exemplary mayors with exceptional governing talents. The research showed that the application of the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors facilitated finding common ground and transforming conflict. These behaviors significantly led to breakthrough results within the cities studied and the surrounding communities.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

Based on the research study and findings, it is recommended that further research be conducted in the development of common ground and conflict transformation, as follows:
1. Extend the research to those additional cities within Washington State on the eastern side of the Cascade Range. The current research focused on exemplary mayors in Washington State on the western side of the Cascade Range through a sample size of 15. Further research in the same six domains of conflict transformation should include a wider geographic area and should be inclusive of additional mayors within the state of Washington.

2. Study appointed mayors and city managers in Washington State who exhibit the same exemplary criteria defined by the thematic research team. The current study centered solely on elected mayors in a mayor-council form of city government in Washington State. Washington State is organized into three forms of government: mayor-council, council-manager, and commission. This study researched those municipal leaders in a mayor-council form of government. In addition to this form of government, there are 53 municipalities with council-manager and one municipality with a commission form of governance. A study of these additional municipality leaders would triangulate the data on conflict transformation behaviors.

3. Conduct a comparative study of exemplary Washington State mayors with other state mayors meeting the same criteria to further validate the results of this study. This study focused on how exemplary mayors in Washington State used communication, collaboration, emotional intelligence, ethics, problem solving, and process to find common ground and transform conflict. A comparative analysis of the results of each study would provide commonalities across all states. This knowledge could then be shared with organizations such as the NLC and other municipal leader advisory groups.
4. Conduct a similar study on city council members meeting the same exemplary criteria established by the thematic research team. All 15 (100%) of the exemplary mayors interviewed in Washington State discussed their relationship with city council members. Studying exemplary city council members meeting similar criteria would determine their use of the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors—communication, collaboration, emotional intelligence, ethics, problem solving, and processes—to find common ground and transform conflict. This would further triangulate the study of exemplary leaders.

5. Conduct a separate study on the importance of transparency as a conflict transformation and ethical leadership behavior. Transparency stood out with all 15 (100%) of the respondents as nearly a conflict transformation skill relating to ethical behavior. Additional research into the leadership behavior of transparency would add to the body of work on transformational and ethical behaviors.

6. Conduct a comparative study to correlate the findings of this study with city economic development. Further research would correlate or discount the effect of the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors on the economic development of those cities with exemplary mayors who exhibited communication, collaboration, emotional intelligence, ethics, problem solving, and processes.

7. Conduct a comparative study to compare and contrast this study with the other thematic research findings. A comparative study would compare and contrast the major themes of collaboration, communication, emotional intelligence, ethics, problem solving, and processes as presented by the thematic research team.
Concluding Remarks and Reflections

As an individual who spent nearly 30 years in the U.S. Navy and had ultimately achieved the highest enlisted rank in the Navy, I thought I had a pretty good grasp on leadership and, particularly, conflict. This academic process and the research I conducted showed me that there is always something to learn. The military that I grew up in was quite a bit different from the military of today. Examples are that women were not allowed on ships, and “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” was still the policy. Those times have changed. This research illustrates that times also must change in the governance of municipalities. We do not need to look any further than the 6:00 news to see conflict occur on the streets of our cities, homelessness in our communities, and catastrophic environmental impacts (both natural and man-made).

During my last 4 years in the Navy, I had reached a position that afforded me the opportunity to interact with local mayors and city council members. I particularly noticed the impact within the city during the transition between the mayors. Expectations that had led to the new mayor’s election were unrealized. Eventually, the relationship between the city and the mayor eroded when one mayor left office and another took over. This experience was the impetus for this study. An example of this is that in one city, within the first 3 months, the city mayor had fired the police chief and the fire department chief, leading many to wonder what the mayor’s vision and priorities were.

So what? My hope is that this research provides insight into how exemplary mayors govern their cities. Additionally, as one who may consider a run for office one day, what might I glean from those exemplary leaders who excel in their positions of authority? I am hopeful that the study of leadership in government continues from local
municipalities to national governance and that this study provides a foundation for others in the field to continue the research.
REFERENCES


doi:10.1093/jopart/mum032


doi:10.1016/j.emj.2009.07.001


communication? The relations of leaders’ communication styles with leadership


Change (transformation) in government organizations (pp. 53-70). Charlotte, NC: Information Age.


Seattle Department of Transportation. (n.d.). The transportation levy to move Seattle.


American Review of Public Administration, 44(4S), 11S-28S.
doi:10.1177/0275074014526299


APPENDIX A

Introduction Letter

Darin Hand
753 Old Wilson Pl.
Oak Harbor, WA 98277
darin.hand@comcast.net
360-929-5556

Date

Dear Mayor:

I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Department at Brandman University, and am conducting a study on how Washington State Mayors transform conflict within their communities. I am asking your assistance in the study by participating in an interview, group discussion, and observations which will take from 45 to 60 minutes, and will be set up at a time convenient for you. If you agree to participate in an interview; have an observer present; etc., you may be assured that it will be completely confidential.

No names will be attached to any notes or records from the interview. All information will remain in locked files accessible only to the researchers. No employer, supervisor, agency or anyone not directly associated with the study will have access to the information. You will be free to stop the interview, discussion, or observation and withdraw from the study at any time. Further, you may be assured that the researchers are not in any way affiliated with your administration, or any employing agency, the applicable to your city.

The research director, Dr. Jeffrey Lee, or myself is available at 360-929-5556, to answer any questions you may have. Your participation would be greatly valued.

Sincerely,
APPENDIX B

Script and Script Questions (CGRT Developed)

Collaboration

1. Can you share a story about a time when you used “collaboration” as a leader in your organization to find common ground and achieve breakthrough results to reduce or avoid conflict?

2. As a leader in the organization, what was the most important aspect of “collaboration” that helped you in finding common ground?

3. What recommendations would you make to other leaders in order to effectively use communication to help them find common ground and achieve breakthrough results?

Communication

1. Can you share a story about a time when you used “communication” as a leader in your organization, to find common ground and achieve breakthrough results to reduce or avoid conflict?

2. As a leader in the organization, what was the most important aspect of “communication” that helped you in finding common ground?

3. What recommendations would you make to other leaders in order to effectively use communication to help them find common ground and achieve breakthrough results?
Ethics

1. Can you share a story about a time when you used “ethics” as a leader in your organization, to find common ground and achieve breakthrough results to reduce or avoid conflict?

2. As a leader in the organization, what was the most important aspect of “ethics” that helped you in finding common ground?

3. What recommendations would you make to other leaders in order to effectively use ethics to help them find common ground and achieve breakthrough results?

Emotional Intelligence

1. Can you share a story about a time when you used “emotional intelligence” as a leader in your organization to find common ground and achieve breakthrough results to reduce or avoid conflict?

2. As a leader in the organization, what was the most important aspect of “emotional intelligence” that helped you in finding common ground?

3. What recommendations would you make to other leaders in order to effectively use “emotional intelligence” to help them find common ground and achieve breakthrough results?

Problem Solving

1. Can you share a story about a time when you used “problem solving” as a leader in your organization to find common ground and achieve breakthrough results to reduce or avoid conflict?

2. As the organizational leader, what was the most important aspect of “problem solving” that helped you in finding common ground?
3. What recommendations would you make to other leaders in order to effectively use problem solving to help them find common ground and achieve breakthrough results?

**Process**

1. Can you share a story about a time when you used “process” as a leader in your organization to find common ground and achieve breakthrough results to reduce or avoid conflict?

2. As a leader in the organization, what was the most important aspect of “process” that helped you in finding common ground?

3. What recommendations would you make to other leaders in order to effectively use process to help them find common ground and achieve breakthrough results?
APPENDIX C

Participant’s Bill of Rights

Any person who is requested to consent to participate as a subject in an experiment, or who is requested to consent on behalf of another, has the following rights:

1. To be told what the study is attempting to discover

2. To be told what will happen in the study and whether any of the procedures, drugs or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.

3. To be told about the risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that may happen to him/her.

4. To be told if he/she can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefits might be.

5. To be told what other choices he/she has and how they may be better or worse than being in the study.

6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study.

7. To be told what sort of medical treatment is available if any complications arise.

8. To refuse to participate at all before or after the study I started without any adverse effects.

9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.

10. To be free of pressures when considering whether he/she wishes to agree to be in the study.

If at any time you have questions regarding a research study, you should ask the researchers to answer them. You also may contact the Brandman University Institutional Review Board.
Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. The Brandman University Institutional Review Board may be contacted either by telephoning the Office of Academic Affairs at (949) 341-9937 or by writing the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA, 92618

Brandman University IRB  Adopted  November 2013
APPENDIX D

Informed Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

INFORMATION ABOUT: A qualitative study to discover and describe common ground strategies used by exemplar leaders to proactively transform and resolve conflict as they attempt to shape the future.

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY
16355 LAGUNA CANYON ROAD
IRVINE, CA 92618

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Darin R. Hand

PURPOSE OF STUDY: The purpose of this phenomenological study is to discover and describe how the lived experiences of the exemplar Washington State Mayors, through their own stories, in their own contexts and environments established common ground, and produced breakthrough results to reduce or avoid conflict by utilizing the 6 domains of conflict transformation behaviors. Through the combined efforts of the peer researchers in this thematic study, the outcomes may yield new and exciting information that can be duplicated by future researchers and ultimately generalized to the larger population.

This study will fill in the gap in the research regarding the use of the 6 common ground domains. While there is a substantial amount of literature regarding common ground, the 6 domains of Common Ground (ethics, emotional intelligence, communication, collaboration, process and problem-solving), law enforcement, and conflict independently, there is a gap in the literature about how these different domains may be being used by exemplar leaders to find breakthrough results. A very significant gap in the literature exists about how exemplar Washington State Mayors would use the six domains of common ground to achieve breakthrough results and reduce or eliminate conflict.

By participating in this study I agree to participate in a private one-on-one interview. The one-on-one interview will last between 30 – 60 minutes and will be conducted in person and audio recorded. Completion of the one-on-one interview will take place December through February,
I understand that:

________ a) There are minimal risks associated with participating in this research. I understand that the Investigator will protect my confidentiality by keeping the identifying codes and research materials in a locked safe that is available only to the researcher. I understand the audio recordings WILL NOT be used by the researcher beyond the use as stated in initial scope of this research.

________ b) The possible benefit of this study to me is that my input may help add to the research regarding the use of common ground strategies by Washington State Mayors. The findings will be available to me at the conclusion of the study and will provide the results of the available data and summary and recommendations. I understand that I will not be compensated for my participation.

________ c) Any questions I have concerning my participation in this study will be answered by Darin Hand. He can be reached by e-mail at dhand@mail.brandman.edu.

________ d) My participation in this research study is voluntary. I may decide to not participate in the study and I can withdraw at any time. I can also decide not to answer particular questions during the interview if I so choose. I understand that I may refuse to participate or may withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the Investigator may stop the study at any time.

________ e) No information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and that all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed, I will be so informed and my consent re-obtained. I understand that if I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, at 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641.

________ f) I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the “Research Participant’s Bill of Rights.” I have read the above and understand it and hereby consent to the procedure(s) set forth.

Participant Signature ________________________________ Date Signed ____________________

Researcher Signature ________________________________ Date Signed ____________________

Darin R. Hand, M.S.
Participant Demographic Information

Please answer the following questions:

1. What is your current position in the organization?
   _______________________________________

2. How long have you been serving in a leadership role within your organization?
   _______________________________________

3. How long have you been in higher education?
   _______________________________________

4. Please indicate which best describes your age category:
   21-25_____ 65+_________
   26-40_____ 75+_________
   41-65_____  

5. Please indicate your highest area of educational attainment and in what area of study:
   High School: __________ Area(s) of Study: _________________________________
   Bachelors: ___________ Area(s) of Study: _________________________________
   Masters: ______________ Area(s) of Study: _________________________________
   Doctorate: _____________ Area(s) of Study: _________________________________

6. How many different cities you worked in?
   _______________________________________

182
## APPENDIX F

### Synthesis Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leaders</th>
<th>Conflict Transformation</th>
<th>Common Ground</th>
<th>Collaboration</th>
<th>Communication</th>
<th>Ethics</th>
<th>Emotional Intelligence</th>
<th>Problem Solving</th>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Mayors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leaders</td>
<td>Conflict Transformation</td>
<td>Common Ground</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Ethics</td>
<td>Emotional Intelligence</td>
<td>Problem Solving</td>
<td>Process</td>
<td>Mayors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

184
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leaders</th>
<th>Conflict Transformation</th>
<th>Common Ground</th>
<th>Collaboration</th>
<th>Communication</th>
<th>Ethics</th>
<th>Emotional Intelligence</th>
<th>Problem Solving</th>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Mayors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

185
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leaders</th>
<th>Conflict Transformation</th>
<th>Common Ground</th>
<th>Collaboration</th>
<th>Communication</th>
<th>Ethics</th>
<th>Emotional Intelligence</th>
<th>Problem Solving</th>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Mayors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leaders</td>
<td>Conflict</td>
<td>Transformation</td>
<td>Common Ground</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Ethics</td>
<td>Emotional Intelligence</td>
<td>Problem Solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

187


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leaders</th>
<th>Conflict Transformation</th>
<th>Common Ground</th>
<th>Collaboration</th>
<th>Communication</th>
<th>Ethics</th>
<th>Emotional Intelligence</th>
<th>Problem Solving</th>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Mayors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leaders</td>
<td>Conflict Transformation</td>
<td>Common Ground</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Ethics</td>
<td>Emotional Intelligence</td>
<td>Problem Solving</td>
<td>Process</td>
<td>Mayors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaders</td>
<td>Conflict Transformation</td>
<td>Common Ground</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Ethics</td>
<td>Emotional Intelligence</td>
<td>Problem Solving</td>
<td>Process</td>
<td>Mayors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

192
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>元件</th>
<th>Leaders</th>
<th>Conflict Transformation</th>
<th>Common Ground</th>
<th>Collaboration</th>
<th>Communication</th>
<th>Ethics</th>
<th>Emotional Intelligence</th>
<th>Problem Solving</th>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Mayors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leaders</td>
<td>Conflict Transformation</td>
<td>Common Ground</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Ethics</td>
<td>Emotional Intelligence</td>
<td>Problem Solving</td>
<td>Process</td>
<td>Mayors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>