Transforming Conflict: A Grounded Theory Study of Six Behavior Domains of Leaders in Five Different Fields

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Transforming Conflict: A Grounded Theory Study of Six Behavior Domains of Leaders in Five Different Fields

A Dissertation by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

Transforming Conflict: A Grounded Theory Study of Six Behavior Domains of Leaders in Five Different Fields

by Scott Dick

Purpose: The purpose of this grounded theory research consisting of five collective phenomenological studies was to generate a theory that explains how exemplar leaders from five different fields use six domains of conflict transformation behaviors to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results. The six domains of behavior are communication, collaboration, ethics, emotional intelligence, problem solving, and process.

Methodology: The sample was composed of 75 exemplar leaders from five different professional fields and included an analysis of over 1,300 pages of interview transcripts as the main data source for the study.

Findings: The results found that exemplar leaders establish, build, or repair relationships with traditional oppositional stakeholders as a method of inoculating against, mitigating, or resolving conflict. Communication was also identified as the primary domain for engaging stakeholders in collaboration, process, and problem solving. Exemplar leaders’ communication efforts were influenced by their emotional intelligence skill set, ethical behavior, and enforcement of a positive ethical climate. The greater the number of activities combined and the higher the quality interactions between the activities from the six domains of behavior created the conditions such that a leader had a greater opportunity for successfully transforming conflict, achieving common ground, and producing breakthrough results.
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PREFACE

Following discussions and considerations regarding the opportunity to study common ground in multiple types of organizations, three staff researchers and 10 doctoral students came together as the Common Ground Research Team (CGRT) and discovered a common interest in development of the common ground principles, which resulted in the goal of the thematic studies. Specifically, the goal of the studies was to discover and describe how exemplar leaders transform conflict, 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 prospect of contributing to the literature on leadership, specifically regarding conflict transformation and establishing common ground among those in conflict, was aligned with my interests and goals for the future.

Throughout the study, the term peer researchers is used to refer to the other researchers who conducted these thematic studies. My fellow doctoral students and peer researchers studied exemplar leaders in the following fields: Ambra Dodds-Main, K-12 superintendents in mid-size California school districts; Karen J. Bolton, Washington State Community College presidents; Darin Hand, Washington State mayors; Denise LaRue, human resources executives in mid-size California school districts; and Christopher Fuzie studied the lived experiences of municipal police chiefs in Northern California.
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The story of the human race is war. Except for brief and precarious interludes there has never been peace in the world; and long before history began murderous strife was universal and unending.

—Winston Churchill (Dimijian, 2010, p. 293)

Human conflict existed well before written records were kept. Archeologists have found prehistoric references to the Celtic gods of war: Belatucadrus and Rudianus. The Romans regarded conflict worthy of having at least two deities devoted to warfare: Mars and Bellona (Adkins & Adkins, 1998). Organized and culturally sanctioned conflict is even older than the Celts and Romans. In 2008, archeologists in Lebanon excavated a 4,000-year-old Canaanite soldier buried with his spear (Zaatari, 2008).

Conflict transcends cultures, ethnic groups, and political boundaries. Unlike animals that fight over territory associated with food and mating, only humans fight for cultural reasons such as religion, honor, beliefs, or values (Jones, 2012). Arguments escalate into fights, fights into war. The nature of conflicts has not changed over the millennia, just the tools. Conflict deserves its reputation for the horrible consequences of war and the suffering it brings to humanity. However, not all conflict escalates into war, and not all conflict ends without some positive results.

Conflict is recognized as the crucible of innovation and has led to some of mankind’s greatest achievements such as “democracy, the rule of law, a propensity to help others, and to abhor injustice” (Bowles, 2012, p. 876). The deadliest conflicts known in history occurred in the 20th century (Ashcroft, 2014). The negative effect of mishandled conflict has led to researchers’ looking for ways to transform conflict to a
more productive state. That research and the deaths of millions of people led to the establishment of organizations dedicated to resolving conflict.

The League of Nations was created to address the carnage of World War I (WWI), the “War to end all Wars,” and it failed as an organization. After World War II (WWII) and the slaughter of millions more combatants and noncombatants, the concept was resurrected and led to the establishment of the United Nations (UN). While not successful at ending all violent conflicts, the UN has had some success at mitigating some of the terrible repercussions of local, regional, and interstate violent conflict while simultaneously offering the opportunity for aggrieved parties to air their complaints.

While international bodies have cooperated to tamp down large-scale international conflict, nations, states, and cities continue to experience the problems associated with making policy and the political process. At times it seems violence is not far away, but not all group conflict involves violence.

In the organized sphere of politics and commerce nonviolent conflict is ubiquitous and seems inevitable since there are never enough assets to please everyone (Lawson, 1997). Leaders use different methods to cope with conflict. Leaders can avoid conflict (risking catastrophic results), or they can manage or transform conflict (Vestal, 2011). The nature of many of today’s problems needs leaders who will seek new ways to resolve contentious and serious issues. Studying the behaviors of leaders who successfully transform conflict to reach common ground may produce a theory or set of theories that will help to achieve breakthrough results.
Background

Origins of Conflict

According to Dimijian (2010), “War is a narcotic that can give a social group a common high, and a common purpose” (p. 294). Humans are social animals who organize into groups. Once these in-groups are formed, any other group has the possibility to become an “out-group” and any out-group has the potential to become the enemy (Dimijian, 2010; Jones, 2012; Zaal, Van Laar, Stähl, Ellemers, & Derks, 2011). Intergroup as well as intragroup conflict does not necessarily lead to violence. However, once a group has been declared to be the other, then any common and negative label may be attached to that group. Individuals perceived to be included in one of those out-groups—with labels such as militant troublemakers, feminists, or unpopular religious sects—may incur hostility simply by appearing to fit into that class or stereotype (Kincannon, 2014). The current backlash toward American Muslims and the attacks on individuals who look to be immigrants demonstrate the point that perception by itself can be enough to withhold cooperative action and to initiate hostile action against an out-group either through words or deeds.

Dimijian (2010) asks if “group selection” (p. 293) as posited by Darwin can account for what seems to be inherent hostility between groups. This inherent hostility may explain why conflict is so prevalent even when groups are not confronted by life or death decisions or situations. Groups do not have to be in close proximity to have conflict.

International Conflict Across Political Boundaries

Throughout history, large-scale invasions of other nations, cultures, and societies have been well documented. The destruction of Belgian forts by the Germans in 1914
and the destruction of French forts by the Germans in France in 1940 began two wars over power, privilege, and territorial expansion (Natkiel, 1988; Tuchman, 1962). Even the recent hostile takeover of public lands by an armed antigovernment mob in Oregon represents an aggrieved out-group infused with the perception of unaddressed conflict attacking an overwhelmingly powerful in-group.

Even when leaders were positive their nations’ boundaries were secure, their cities, towns, and villages were looted, sacked, and destroyed. These events demonstrate the futility of ignoring or attempting to mitigate conflict by avoiding it, creating walls, fortresses, or political boundaries (Beitzel, 2015; Bowles, 2012). When the perception of danger or competition is strong enough, groups will attack other groups with little provocation or cause (Schiller, 2012).

The Role of Ideology, Values, Beliefs, and Conflict Resolution Inertia

Groups fight over the allocation of resources, ideology, religion, beliefs, and symbols, both important and meaningless. Today these groups have names such as the United States, Russia, Democrats, Republicans, cities, unions, management, religious orders, neighborhoods, and business competitors. Ideology is another way people separate themselves into groups. Lawson (1997) provided a working definition of ideology as “a comprehensive set of beliefs and attitudes about social and economic institutions and processes” (p. 61). Implicit in that idea is that one ideology is superior to another, and in some cases, unacceptable ideologies must be erased from the body politic (Dimijian, 2010). During the 20th century, countries faced life or death struggles over the label attached to their political systems. Countries labeled as fascist, capitalist, or communist fought wars among and between each as a way to eliminate certain ideologies from power. Conflict regularly occurs between these in- and out-groups and even among
subgroups formed within them (B. Anderson, Swanson, & Imperati, 2014; Ashcroft, 2014; Garcia, 2014; Kincannon, 2014).

Leaders deal with conflict in numerous ways. Some typical conflict management strategies are avoidance, bargaining, negotiation, adjudication, and the role-player approach (Ty, 2011; Weeks, 1994). Conflict is avoided to save embarrassment or disapproval for either of the conflict partners. This avoidance robs the conflict participants of learning and growth opportunities (Kincannon, 2014; Reimer, 2013). Those in conflict often hide their thoughts and fears to avoid appearing weak or vulnerable (Schwarz, 2002). These responses to conflict have not been shown to reliably transform conflict and create common ground. Conflict resolution strategies include compromise, authoritative command, human relations intervention, and third-party interventions such as arbitration and mediation (Harvey & Drolet, 2004). Not all conflict resolution strategies resolve the conflict.

Unresolved conflict also results in increased frustration, the perception of apathy on either side, or misinterpreted negative intention by one or more of the conflict partners (Weeks, 1994). These unsettled perceptions all exacerbate the existing conflict and contribute to worsening and continuing conflict in the future (Aula & Siira, 2010; Schwarz, 2002; Weeks, 1994).

Leaders Incapable of Finding Common Ground

When conflicts arise, group members expect the leaders of the group to resolve the crisis or at least suggest remedies (Schaefer, 2010; Sinek, 2014; Vestal, 2011; Wood & Bell, 2008). On one hand, leaders are too often neither prepared nor willing to manage and resolve conflict. This reticence results in the erosion of trust, financial loss, employee turnover, discontent, and forfeiture of innovation. On the other hand, leaders
who successfully transform conflict and find common ground build trust, create strong
teams, find ways for antagonists to work together, and solve issues important to society
both large and small (Harvey & Drolet, 2004; Kincannon, 2014; Schaefer, 2010;
Schwarz, 2002; Tjosvold & Lin, 2013). Since there are so many examples of unresolved
conflict, hostility toward out-groups, labor-management struggles, and political gridlock,
more research is needed into conflict transformation and finding common ground.

**Leaders Need New Strategies to Develop Common Ground**

The Common Ground Research Team (CGRT) has defined common ground as
“an interplay of intentions of people from different sociocultural backgrounds,
differences, and cultures while finding a foundation of common interest or
comprehension.” Jacobsen (1999) proposed that the advantage of common ground is not
that it offers a packet of solutions but a way for conflict partners to work together.
Creating bridges between these groups requires leaders to transform the conflict to create
common ground. The power of common ground thinking is that no apparent solutions to
difficult problems are immediately obvious, but the strength of this type of thinking is
that novel solutions may come from adopting the mindset (Jacobsen, 1999).
Transforming conflict to achieve common ground requires new methods, techniques, and
strategies, but the ultimate outcome is a result of shared experiences between conflict
partners—regardless of the nature of the conflict (Ty, 2011; Weeks, 1994).

The CGRT conducted five phenomenological studies to isolate the lived
experiences of exemplar leaders in five different fields to identify leader behaviors that
transformed conflict, created common ground, and produced breakthrough results. The
behaviors studied were collaboration, communication, emotional intelligence (EI), ethics,
problem solving, and process.
Six Domains of Conflict Transformation Behaviors

Collaboration

For this study, collaboration was defined by the peer researchers as “the ability to involve others, in a mutually beneficial and accountable manner, which allows for achievement or acceptance of agreed upon goals.” Individuals who come together to collaborate follow no preset rules or formulas, but they depend on some kind of format or norms for behavior (Garcia, 2014). Collaborative groups depend on “trust, role expectations, information exchange, persuasion, and negotiation” to increase the chances of finding creative solutions to agreed-upon problems (Politi & Street, 2011, p. 579).

During the information exchange, shared mutual knowledge is critical for understanding the role of collaboration among stakeholders (Cramton, 2002; Hilliard & Cook, 2016). There is also the assumption that a collaborative group or team will produce better outcomes than an individual acting alone (Garcia, 2014). Garcia (2014) stated, “Collaboration enhances the ability of groups from diverse backgrounds (professions, cultures, socioeconomic levels, and ideologies) to work collectively toward finding creative solutions to social problems” (p. 3). According to Young (2015) collaboration is a way of “working together to achieve a common goal or a purpose” (p. 60). Knapp et al. (2015) stated, “Collaboration among different parties with different skill sets is important in transforming conflict because working together may “generate novel solutions to complex problems” (p. 1).

Communication

For this study the CGRT defined communication 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.” Distorting or interrupting otherwise successful
communications is a result of a number of inhibitors including ineffective communication skills and conflict pollutants (Harvey & Drolet, 2004; Weeks, 1994). Avoiding poor communication skill reduces outside sources of conflict (Weeks, 1994).

Conflicts often involve numerous individuals and groups and maintaining open communications with the parties is important (Aula & Siira, 2010; Politi & Street, 2011; Weeks, 1994). It is not possible to separate the dual roles of leadership as composed of a process of communication and social interaction with all members of the organization including superiors, peers, and subordinates (Tourish, 2014).

**Emotional Intelligence**

For this study, EI 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.” McCleskey (2014) further refined the concept of EI as “the ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional meanings, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote both better emotion and thought” (p. 85).

**Ethics**

The peer researchers defined ethics as “human beings making choices and conducting behavior in a morally responsible way, given the values and morals of the culture.” Ethics is an action an individual takes or does not take in response to a stimulus according to his or her moral code (Kaya & BaşKaya, 2016; Schwepker, 2013). Hannah, Avoli, and Walumbw (2011) described modern organizations as “morally complex environments that impose significant ethical demands and challenges on organizational actors” (p. 555). Action is what is important in ethics; it is not what one feels, but what
action(s) an individual takes when under threat. The value of ethical solutions in transforming conflict is that those solutions are defensible, durable and contribute to the betterment of society (Aula & Siira, 2010). Therefore, ethical acts lay the groundwork for the long-term success of agreed-upon solutions derived between or among conflict partners (Korver & Howard, 2008).

**Process**

Process was defined by the peer-research team “as a method that includes a set of steps and activities that group members follow to perform tasks such as strategic planning or conflict resolution.” There is difficulty in describing and evaluating a process or processes, because process can be explicit and tangible as well as abstract (Patton, 2015).

Organizations may use clearly defined and articulated steps in a process, such as in manufacturing a particular product, while a service organization may use heuristics to establish the methods used to serve the organization’s stakeholders and customers (Green, 2016; Rattiner, 2011). Moreover, the word *process* is often used to describe the outcome of some action taken without using a standard procedure in shaping the result and only recognized after-the-fact as the result of a process (Oueslati, 2014; Rattiner, 2011). Process is defined much like problem solving in that “process . . . begins when an individual invokes any goal-directed sequence of cognitive operations” (Vernon, Hocking, & Tyler, 2016, p. 231).

**Problem Solving**

The CGRT defined problem solving as “the act of choosing and implementing a solution to an identified problem or situation.” Awareness that a goal is thwarted or suppressed may be the first indication a problem exists or may exist. Mere recognition that a set of intentions or specific goals have not been achieved does not necessarily
identify, clarify, or define the parameters of a situation that may appear to be a problem (Madrid, Patterson, & Leiva, 2015; Moreau & Engeset, 2016). However, once an issue has been defined as a problem, the problem-solving process begins. Research has found that it matters little whether the problem is engaged by one person or engaged by groups with expert knowledge. The approach of close attention, parameter discovery, detailed analysis, and continued push to solutions are indicators of solid problem-solving processes (Algozzine et al., 2016).

**Research Problem**

A great deal of research has been done on conflict management and conflict resolution, but not much is known about conflict transformation or ways to reach common ground. Collaboration, communication, ethics, EI, process, and problem solving have also been studied extensively as separate fields. However, more research needs to be done on how these variables can be used by leaders to transform conflict. While traditional forms of conflict resolution, such as arbitration and mediation, may successfully be utilized to manage a conflict, these types of resolution have not been shown to do much to enhance the relationship between the conflict partners to promote lasting conflict transformation (Schwarz, 2002; J. D. Smith, 2013; Ty, 2011).

Ultimately, the responsibility for transforming conflict rests with designated leaders who exist on each side of an issue. Whether the leader is a police chief, mayor, community college president, school superintendent, or human resources professional, they all face the same types of conflict, be it personal, organizational, or political (Allen, 2014; Dart, 2007; Jones, 2012; Reimer, 2013). Without the requisite skills in transforming conflict, leaders face unemployment (his or her own), organizational failure,
unhappy stakeholders, angry constituents, and in some cases, threats and/or acts of violence (Joseph, 2014; J. D. Smith, 2013). Consensus is not enough. In the United States and Great Britain, the mere act of reaching consensus when dealing with important issues has often in the past been held in contempt as a failure of leadership or leadership by committee (Toye, 2013).

For elected officials, such as mayors, conflict is inherent in the relationship between those elected to serve and their constituents. Mayors are at the center of public policy and are confronted with too few resources to ensure that all in the community receive the public assets they want or need. Mayors need access to methods or techniques to reduce conflict and assist elected officials and constituents to find common ground and change the way constituents relate to the city and its lack of resources (Hand, 2016).

Police chiefs are confronted by the same types of limits on resources. It is virtually impossible for police chiefs to ensure that crime is extinguished and that all officers in the department act ethically and beyond reproach. Police chiefs are public servants and often need new tactics and techniques to reduce conflict in their organizations and find common ground with outside stakeholders to reduce the negative impacts of such conflict on police officers and the community (Fuzie, 2016).

Community college presidents face uncertain budgets and declining enrollments, which reduces their capability to deliver educational resources without conflict. These leaders have to work with various groups of stakeholders to resolve issues that negatively affect the institution, and having access to techniques to help transform conflict and achieve common ground would help (Bolten, 2016).
School superintendents and school human resource professionals must deal with various groups of stakeholders who may disagree with school policy or distribution of resources, creating conflict inside and outside the organization. Such leaders need new ideas and techniques to transform conflict and achieve common ground with diverse sets of stakeholders, some who have been traditional enemies of school districts and their established policies (Dodds, 2016; LaRue, 2016).

Traditional forms of dealing with conflict, such as conflict avoidance, conflict management, and conflict resolution, fail to transform conflict and therefore may not create common ground and achieve breakthrough results (Reimer, 2013; Ty, 2011). There are multiple domains of behaviors leaders employ when dealing with conflict (Allen, 2014). Five phenomenological studies have been conducted to explore how the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors—communication, collaboration, EI, ethics, problem solving and process—have been utilized to transform conflict by leaders in various fields. What is needed now is an examination of these studies to develop a theory to explain how exemplar leaders from five different fields use these behavioral domains to transform conflict, create common ground, and achieve breakthrough results.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this grounded theory research consisting of five collective phenomenological studies was to generate a theory that explains how exemplar leaders from five fields use six domains of conflict transformation behaviors to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results.
The Research Question

What theories emerge from a systematic comparative analysis of five studies to explain how exemplar leaders from various professions use the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors to transform conflict and achieve common ground?

Significance of the Problem

Human conflict transcends all records, archeological and written. Currently there are 27 violent conflicts around the globe that endanger U.S. interests, pose a serious threat to international institutions, and result in death and the destruction of the local communities involved (“Global Conflict Tracker,” 2016). Violent and nonviolent conflict remains a staple of 21st century living.

Conflict exists on a regular basis between nations, trading partners, nongovernmental organizations, diplomatic entities, the military, businesses, neighbors, and families (Allen, 2014). Moreover, nonviolent conflict has become enmeshed in the everyday lives of the citizens of the world. There are thousands of entities that exist to provide the mechanisms for remediating conflict among conflict partners (London School of Economics and Political Science, 2015).

Yet, in the United States, conflict between individuals, groups, organizations, businesses, and other entities has not slowed. Lawsuits are a direct symbol of conflict and fairly portray the depth of the problem. Fifteen million new lawsuits were filed in the United States in 2012 alone (Nicholson, 2012). All age groups, young and old, are affected by conflict. Conflict at work costs people their jobs and companies millions of dollars (Allen, 2014; Mandelbaum & Friedman, 2011). Conflict at school can take the form of bullying or differences of opinion on how schools should be run and what
subjects should be taught (Masewicz, 2010). Differences of attitude on how resources should be allocated turn neighbor against neighbor in cities, towns, and villages across the United States and lead to gridlock such that critical improvements are delayed or denied (Mandelbaum & Friedman, 2011).

Conflict transformation is a different way of thinking about conflict (Lederach, 2003a; Ty, 2011). Conflict transformation not only embraces the idea of solving the immediate conflict but also of improving the relationship between the conflict partners. The endgame is more than traditional conflict management; it supports both the resolution of the immediate problem and strives to create enduring positive change as the desired ultimate outcomes of the conflict resolution process (Lederach, 2003a; Lederach & Appleby, 2010; Ty, 2011).

The components of conflict transformation are missing from the normal behaviors of humans involved in conflict (Weeks, 1994). Conflict partners need repeatable and trainable behaviors that change relationships and reduce conflict over the long term. Findings from this study will provide a theory or set of theories that will help others to learn from the work of exemplar leaders in five different fields and use the components of conflict transformation to reach common ground. The results of this study can be used by universities that prepare leaders of all types in all professions to design coursework and learning experiences that will help them to be more effective in transforming conflict in their organizations. These results can also be used by human resource departments in a variety of organizations to train employees on effective strategies and behaviors that will promote effective transformation of conflict. The Society of Human Resource
Management may find these results helpful in developing conflict workshops for their members.

**Theoretical Framework**

Conflict transformation theory rests on the idea that conflict is not simply dispensed through conventional techniques found in conflict resolution. Rather, conflict is transformed through changing the relationships of the conflict partners through the use of one or more domains of behavior exhibited by one of the conflict partners (Lederach, 2003b). More information is needed to determine how leaders engage in one or all of the six domains of behavior during the conflict transformation process either at once or over a period of time. Understanding the qualities of the six domains is important to understanding how conflict is transformed, and how common ground is created and breakthrough results achieved.

**Definitions**

**Theoretical Definitions**

**Grounded theory.** Grounded theory (GT) is a type of qualitative methodology used extensively in the social sciences, nursing, and other research fields. There are various techniques used in GT research and researchers gravitate toward GT because of its adaptability and the generalizability of the results of GT studies (Charmaz, 2014; Docan-Morgan, 2010; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Patton (2015) simplified the various descriptions and characterizations of GT by other researchers by phrasing the definition of GT as a question, “What theory, grounded in fieldwork, emerges from systematic comparative analysis so as to explain what has been observed?” (p. 109). GT does demand close-in repetitive comparison of research data, creative thinking, and making connections between the data and the phenomenon observed, and this process leads the
researcher to developing a theory that is grounded in the data (Charmaz, 2014; Corley, 2015; Docan-Morgan, 2010; Holtslander, 2015; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

**Symbolic interactionism.** “Symbolic Interactionism views interpretation and action as reciprocal processes, each affecting the other” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 262). Charmaz (2014) found that Symbolic Interactionism (SI) was from the very first transported into GT by its inventor Anselm Strauss since he “brought the logic and assumptions of SI to GT” (p. 261). More importantly, “SI sees people as active beings engaged in practical activities in their worlds and emphasizes how people accomplish these activities” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 262).

**Research synthesis.** Research synthesis is a method of qualitative inquiry in which multiple and related studies are analyzed together in the attempt to create new meanings and greater generalizability from existing qualitative studies (Patton, 2015). Stall-Meadows and Hyle (2010) reported, “This research was designed to bridge the singularity of practical case studies with the generalizability of a meta-analysis” (p. 413). Often used in quantitative research, the meta-analysis combines the statistical summaries of related studies (Patton, 2015). Qualitative researchers have created convincing arguments that the equivalent of a meta-analysis using qualitative research is also valuable and important (Cooper, Chenail, & Fleming, 2012; Major & Savin-Baden, 2011; Stall-Meadows & Hyle, 2010).

**Conflict transformation.** The result of 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.
**Operational Definitions**

The CGRT worked collaboratively to identify and refine the definitions used and agreed upon in the five phenomenological studies. This researcher, as part of the CGRT, adopted these definitions.

**Conflict.** Conflict is defined “as any cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimension that differs from another cognitive, emotional, and/or behavioral dimension. This difference can be individual or collective.”

**Collaboration.** Collaboration is “the ability to involve others, in a mutually beneficial and accountable manner, which allows for achievement or acceptance of agreed-upon goals (Hansen, 2014).”

**Communication.** Communication is “the transferring of meaning from sender to receiver, while overcoming noise and filters, so that the intended recipient receives the intended meaning.”

**Emotional intelligence.** EI is “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.”

**Ethics.** Ethics is defined as “human beings making choices and conducting behavior in a morally responsible way given the values and morals of the culture.”

**Exemplar.** Someone set apart from peers in a superior manner, suitable for use as an example to model behavior, principles, or intentions.

**Problem solving.** Problem solving is “the act of choosing and implementing a solution to an identified problem or situation.”

**Process.** Process is “the internal, external, or systemic pattern of behavior organized in a step-by-step order or action to achieve a goal, function, or an end product.”
Delimitations

This study was delimited to the sample of exemplar leaders identified by the peer researchers in their respective fields of interest. The following were the criteria agreed on by the peer researchers to define those exemplar leaders:

1. Evidence of successful relationships with stakeholders;
2. Evidence of breaking through conflict to achieve organizational success;
3. Five 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;
6. Membership in associations or groups focused on their field;

In the five phenomenological studies conducted by the peer researchers of the CGRT, there were 75 individuals who participated in those studies.

Organization of the Study

The remaining portion of this research study is organized into four chapters. Chapter II consists of a literature review relevant to the variables contained in this study and additional information about conflict transformation, common ground, and the six domains of behaviors exemplar leaders use to transform conflict. Chapter III outlines the design, methodology, description of the population, sample, type of data, and analysis of that data. Chapter IV discusses the findings, analysis, and results. Chapter V presents a more detailed look at the findings, the conclusions, implications for action, recommendations for further research, and the theories.
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

In the 21st century, conflict is as prevalent as it has always been, and the new millennium has experienced its share of nonviolent conflict among organizations, businesses, and individuals. Conflict resolution strategies of the past are insufficient in changing the relationship between and among conflict partners. Leaders of today need new strategies developed by understanding how exemplar leaders create common ground, transform conflict, and create breakthrough results. Conflict transformation does not simply eliminate conflict; conflict transformation changes the relationship between conflict partners (Lederach, 2003b; Weeks, 1994). It is with conflict transformation and the new relationships formed between the conflict partners that future conflict may be avoided or handled in a way to maintain the new positive relationship between the past disputants.

This chapter reviews the relevant literature that places the nature of conflict, current conflict resolution techniques, the results of unresolved conflict, and conflict transformation into perspective for leaders today and in the future. This research is relevant for today’s leader searching for methods to transform conflict and achieve common ground. Three main areas are reviewed. The first is the literature related to conflict, resolving conflict, and the results of unresolved conflict. The second is the literature related to the six domains of behavior that may work together or separately to transform conflict. The third is a summary of the literature and its influence on the remaining aspects of this study.
Origins of Conflict

Humans are social animals who organize into groups. Once these in-groups are formed, any other group has the possibility to become an “out-group” and any out-group has the potential to become the enemy (Dimijian, 2010; Jones, 2012; Zaal et al., 2011). Intergroup as well as intragroup conflict does not necessarily lead to violence. However, once a group has been declared to be the other, then any common and negative label may be attached to that group. Individuals perceived to be included in one of those out-groups, such as those perceived by some as militant troublemakers or unpopular religious sects, generate hostility simply by seeming to fit into that class or stereotype (Kincannon, 2014).

The current backlash toward American Muslims and the attacks on individuals who look to be immigrants demonstrates the point that perception by itself is enough for some individuals to withhold cooperative action and to initiate hostile action against an out-group either through words or deeds. Dimijian (2010) asked if “group selection” (p. 293), as posited by Darwin can account for what seems to be inherent hostility between groups. This inherent hostility may explain why conflict is often present even when groups are not confronted by life or death decisions or situations. Groups fight over the allocation of resources, ideologies, religion, beliefs, and symbols, both important and meaningless. Today these groups have often formed around ideology and have names such as the United States, Russia, and political parties. Other groups form for business, political, and other purposes and are called cities, unions, management, religious orders, neighborhoods, and business competitors.
Ideology is another way people separate themselves into groups. Lawson (1997) provided a working definition of ideology as “a comprehensive set of beliefs and attitudes about social and economic institutions and processes” (p. 92). Implicit in that idea for many is that one ideology is superior to another, and in some cases, unacceptable ideologies should be erased from the body politic. Organizations are also affected by ideology.

Organizations are not immune from conflict caused by human behavior even when members are engaged in similar activities. The changing nature of the workplace with demands to change, adapt, and perform have altered the way employees work (Houser, Levy, Padgitt, Peart, & Xiao, 2014). Moreover, conflict is expected in today’s organizations as employees and middle managers struggle with work-related disagreements on tasks, processes, communications, and methods (Regueig, 2014).

As teams in organizations coalesce, groups form as a function of the social processes of humans engaged in work (Regueig, 2014). Managers now must be able to evolve with the workplace and its ever-changing landscape of technology and personnel. They must also meet the modern demands of collaboration, cooperation, and adaptation along with the social forces that create those groups (Dimijian, 2010; Vestal, 2011). Vestal (2011) reported that “fifty-four percent of employees think managers could handle disputes better by addressing underlying tensions before things go wrong” (p. 2). However, managers self-reported that they were better at resolving disputes than the perception of their own employees. Conflict regularly occurs between in- and out-groups and even among subgroups formed within those groups in organizations, institutions, and
general places of employment (Amos, 2011; B. Anderson et al., 2014; Ashcroft, 2014; Garcia, 2014; Kincannon, 2014; Vestal, 2011).

**Conflict Resolution**

Leaders, managers, and supervisors are all looked upon to resolve conflict as a responsibility attached to their function in any organization (Allen, 2014). The 21st century has created organizations with little hierarchy, flexible structures, mobile teams, and displaced workforces (Kunisch, Menz, & Ambos, 2015). This dispersion of employees with its elastic task assignments makes resolving conflict difficult (E. J. Murray, 2013). Still, leaders and individuals are expected to mitigate or resolve conflict. Leaders may dispense with conflict in numerous ways. Some typical conflict coping strategies are avoidance, negotiation, mediation, arbitration, authoritative command, and human relations intervention (Harvey & Drolet, 2004; Schwarz, 2002; Ty, 2011; Weeks, 1994).

**Avoidance**

Avoidance is the reluctance on the part of leaders to engage conflict partners and work to resolve the issues. This reluctance by a leader to engage the conflictants does nothing to minimize the harmful effects of conflict, and allowing conflict to remain unattended may exacerbate it (Reimer, 2013). In some cases, avoiding immediate intervention in a conflict may have value. Leaders often need time to gather information and consult stakeholders before engaging the conflict partners (Combs, Harris, & Edmonson, 2015). While it may appear a leader is avoiding conflict, he or she may be taking the time to think about the issue while not rushing to judgment or inappropriately making suggestions or delivering snap solutions (Ariawan, 2016).
However, most conflict requires some form of direct intervention. Leaders may hope that unresolved conflict will go away, but more often than not, unresolved conflict remains (Allen, 2014; Kaufman, 2013; Schwarz, 2002). Sometimes leaders attempt negotiation to resolve disagreements.

**Negotiation**

Negotiation is a process where parties to a conflict air their grievances, articulate their positions relevant to the grievance, and express the underlying “rationale for their positions” (Owen, 2007, p. 65). Negotiation generally occurs in three stages. The first is when the conflictants meet to discuss the positions of each side. The second involves the actual exchanging of information regarding those positions that are generally composed of acceptable and unacceptable conditions for resolution. The third is the creation of the steps necessary to reach consensus, if possible (Owen, 2007; Schwarz, 2002).

Some conflict can be resolved through negotiation. However, the negotiation may result in compromises that in the end leave one party to the conflict dissatisfied. This may result in short-term peace, but without transforming the conflict and the relationships between the conflict partners, the issue may remain unsettled or begin again at some time in the future (Allen, 2014; Kaufman, 2013; Schwarz, 2002). In some cases compromise and consensus may not be possible leaving both sides dissatisfied and in the future may require third-party intervention. Formal third-party interventions include mediation and arbitration.

**Mediation**

Many courts routinely require mediation as the first step in proceeding to a lawsuit. Mediation is defined as “an informal process in which a neutral third party with no power to impose a resolution helps the disputing parties try to reach a mutually
acceptable settlement” (Bush & Folger, 2005, p. 2). Judges have expanded mediation into divorce, custody, labor, employment, housing, small claims, and general commercial activity (Bush & Folger, 2005; DeWitt, 2011). Mediation takes place outside the courtroom with mediators acting as facilitators and attempting to arrange an agreement between the disputing parties. If the parties, through a mediator, successfully negotiate an agreement, the court certifies the agreement as an enforceable contract and the original lawsuit is dismissed.

Courts have increased the instances where a judge will order mediation before a lawsuit comes to trial (Bush & Folger, 2005). Mediation often results in neither side receiving what each side might perceive as justice, and it is common that mediation does not resolve the conflict nor transform the relationship between the conflict partners (Jameson, 2007). In some cases, once mediation has failed, the conflictants have the option to sue and/or ask for arbitration.

**Arbitration**

Arbitration in America is a practice dating back to the 15th century when guilds formed groups to provide local experts to adjudicate merchant disputes outside of the existing court system (Oldham & Kim, 2013). Arbitrators were selected for their expertise in specific areas of commerce and law.

Generally, arbitration was seen as faster and cheaper than taking a case to court. For over a century U.S. courts were hostile to the process pushing many parties into court regardless of the outcome of the arbitration (Oldham & Kim, 2013). It was not until the early 20th century that law was established to accept and enforce arbitration agreements in federal courts. In some commercial contracts, arbitration is mandatory and courts have ruled in many cases that commercial clients cannot sue if there is an arbitration
agreement in place (Aragaki, 2011; Resnik, 2015). Courts are beginning to examine commercial arbitration agreements more closely. Customers often have no recourse against deceptive practices made possible by embedded arbitration clauses buried in large contracts (Jameson, Bodtker, & Linker, 2010).

Arbitration is different from mediation in that an intervener makes a decision regarding the conflict either as a binding or nonbinding order. Arbitration is a quasi-judicial proceeding with formal processes such as discovery and depositions. Arbitration interveners are selected based on those who are perceived as outside the conflict cycle and neutral to the resolution results. In the case of arbitration, the arbitrator makes a final decision based on the evidence regardless of whether either or both sides agree (Aragaki, 2011; Resnik, 2015).

If arbitration fails, the conflict often moves to litigation and the courtroom (Kasik & Kumcagiz, 2014). Even with a completed arbitration cycle, there is always the option for dissatisfied parties to an arbitrated agreement to take the matter to court (H. F. Murray, 2016). Nevertheless, with mediation and arbitration available to conflictants to settle differences, 15 million new lawsuits were filed in the United States in 2012 in an attempt to have conflicts resolved through adjudication (Nicholson, 2012). These responses to conflict have not been shown to reliably transform conflict and create common ground.

**Authoritative Command**

Schwarz (2002) described this as the “unilateral control model (UCM)” (p. 73). The person employing the UCM maintains four core assumptions:

1. “I understand the situation while those who see it differently, don’t.”

2. “I am right and those who disagree are wrong.”
3. “I have pure motives; those who disagree have questionable motives.”

4. “My feelings are justified.” (Schwarz, 2002, p. 73)

Using UCM to resolve conflict often makes it worse as there is little input other stakeholders may contribute to solve the conflict (Schwarz, 2002).

In other cases, leaders resort to giving directives to conflictants to eliminate the conflict. Authoritative command involves a designated leader with the authority to require adherence to a course of action developed by either mutual agreement or unilateral control (Levy, 2010). This happens frequently in military and quasi-military organizations that have a distinct chain of command, such as police and fire departments. At varying points in the hierarchy, designated leaders often have the responsibility to maintain order and discipline and use authoritative command to resolve disputes in the organization (Gelfand, de Dreu, Keller, & Leslie, 2013). Little can be done with disputes that occur outside of the organization. Often the command directive to resolve the presenting conflict does little to transform the relationship between the conflict partners.

**Human Relations Interventions**

Human relations interventions often involve designated members of an organization acting as mediators or facilitators to help the conflict partners resolve whatever issues exist that create the conflict. The nature of the conflict often drives the intervention method. Conflict in organizations may take on many forms, such as interpersonal conflict between employees, labor-management conflict, workplace processes conflict or a deficiency of task-related information (Gelfand et al., 2013). Human relations personnel may intervene and attempt to resolve the underlying issues.

However, human relations personnel may be limited to solutions in line with the organization’s existing procedures and processes, not necessarily what the conflict
participants need the most (Schwarz, 2002). Most often the results are unsatisfactory for both sides, because the solutions are directed toward human relations rules and not toward changing the relationships between the conflict partners (Harvey & Drolet, 2004; Ty, 2011).

**Unresolved Conflict**

There are multiple reasons why conflict may remain unresolved. The first is the responsible leader may not possess the tools necessary to successfully mitigate or eliminate the conflict. The second is the organization may not have developed a positive conflict culture and avoids conflict at all costs (Gelfand et al., 2013). The third is the organization’s senior management and higher level leadership are impervious to negative feedback to eliminate any potential conflict (Hamrin, Johansson, & Jahn, 2016). The fourth is those in conflict often hide their thoughts and fears to avoid appearing weak or vulnerable (Hanley, 2010). Conflict partners avoid conflict to save embarrassment or disapproval from either side. This avoidance robs the conflict participants of learning and growth opportunities (Schwarz, 2002).

Unresolved conflict also results in increased frustration, the perception of apathy on either side, or misinterpreted negative intention by one or more of the conflict partners (Kincannon, 2014; Reimer, 2013). These unresolved perceptions all exacerbate the existing conflict, almost guaranteeing worsening and continuing conflict in the future (Aula & Siira, 2010; Weeks, 1994). When conflicts arise, group members expect the leaders of the group to resolve the crisis or at least suggest remedies (Schaefer, 2010; Sinek, 2014; Vestal, 2011; Wood & Bell, 2008). On the one hand, leaders are too often neither prepared nor willing to manage and resolve conflict. As the conflict progresses,
the relationship between conflictants continues to erode. As this erosion takes place, the conflictants spend less time communicating when communication is most needed (Lederach, 2003a). Conflict partners erect barriers that make it more difficult to express perceptions or emotions, creating a wider gap between both sides, making communication more difficult. As the conflict progresses, either side may experience frustration as well as a growing sense of urgency if no solution appears to be on the horizon (Lederach, 2003b). This reticence results in the erosion of trust, financial loss, employee turnover, discontent, and forfeiture of innovation.

On the other hand, leaders who successfully transform conflict and find common ground build trust, create strong teams, find ways for antagonists to work together, and solve issues important to society both large and small (Harvey & Drolet, 2004; Kincannon, 2014; Radford, 2013; Schiller, 2012; Werther, 2010). Many leaders use various strategies and techniques to resolve or manage conflict. However, given the many examples of unresolved conflict—hostility toward out-groups, labor-management struggles, and political gridlock—it is apparent more research is needed into conflict transformation and finding common ground.

Theoretical Background

Common Ground

The CGRT collectively defined common ground as “interplay of intentions of people from different sociocultural backgrounds, differences, and cultures while finding a foundation of common interest or comprehension.” Jacobsen (1999) proposed that the advantage of common ground is not that it offers a packet of solutions, but fostering common ground thinking is a way for conflict partners to work together. Creating bridges between these groups requires leaders to transform the conflict to create common
ground. Jacobsen (1999) described common ground thinking as “does not offer solutions to divisive issues—but that is its strength” (p. 98).

Liu (2014) stated, “Common ground is a set of meanings that are mutually known, believed, presupposed, or taken for granted by the participants of a joint activity” (p. 96). Transforming conflict leads to finding or developing common ground by way of open dialog, transparency, focused communication, ethical basis, commitment, and certain structural pathways followed by the conflict partners (Allen, 2014; Jameson et al., 2010). Another way of describing common ground is to use the term mutual knowledge (Cramton, 2002). Mutual knowledge is information shared between the communication partners and that they know they share. First-time communicators often go through a process of information exchange to determine where each of the partners fits on the knowledge dimension of the topic under discussion (Cramton, 2002).

The more accurate the assessment of this shared common knowledge is, the more likely subsequent communication will be better understood (Cramton, 2002). This is critical for transforming conflict because understanding the difference between needs and desires helps one to focus on mutually important factors in the dispute (Lederach, 2003b; Weeks, 1994). This common or mutual knowledge is composed of specific bits of information that are shared between the communication partners and is the foundation for understanding communication in the future that is related to the topic. These bits of information are tailored by the speaker depending on the relationship the information seeker has with the speaker (Hilliard & Cook, 2016). It is in this way conflict partners can accurately establish the parameters of any conflict and begin to work together to transform that conflict, which at the minimum needs to be based on correct information.
Still, transforming conflict is no easy task. Transforming conflict to achieve common
ground requires new methods, techniques, and strategies, but the ultimate outcome is a
result of shared experiences between conflict partners—regardless of the nature of the
conflict (Ty, 2011; Weeks, 1994).

**Conflict Transformation**

Currently, most literature on conflict transformation is either directed toward
violent conflict, peace building, and changing the relationship among and between
combatants on the battlefield or toward transformative dispute resolution (TDR). One
can argue the goals are the same: not only to resolve the conflict but also to change the
relationship between the conflict partners and achieve long-term positive results
(Lederach, 2003b, 2008). Conflict transformation theory hinges on the idea that conflict
is not simply dispensed through conventional techniques found in the different methods
of conflict resolution. Rather, conflict is transformed through changing the relationships
of the conflict partners through the use of one or more domains of behavior exhibited by
one of the conflict partners (Ty, 2011; Weeks, 1994).

The transformation of conflict has to be distinguished from conflict settlements by
three degrees of change (Lederach, 2003b). The first degree of change is related to the
conflict but not the conflict partners. There might be a cessation in the conflict but no
change in the relationship between the conflict partners (Allen, 2014; Lederach, 2003b;
Ty, 2011). The second degree of change involves the level and types of interaction
among the conflict partners. The communication may change and be perceived as more
positive, but the central beliefs of the conflict partners regarding the nature of the conflict
are not altered. The third degree of change results in a fundamental alteration of the
relationship between the conflicting parties, one that results in long-term resolution of the
conflict and a new understanding of both sides of the conflict (Allen, 2014; Jameson et al., 2010; Lederach, 2003b; Seu & Cameron, 2013).

Conflict transformation resembles transformational leadership in that the leader dispenses with lock-step methods and gains results that not only alleviate the conflict but also pave the way for understanding, transparency, fair play, constructive change, better communication, and the establishment of common ground (Lederach, 2003b; Reimer, 2013; M. A. Smith, 2013). Leaders do not transform conflict by accident. More information is needed to determine how they engage in one or all of the six domains of behavior during the conflict transformation process, either at one time or over a period of time. Understanding the behaviors and strategies of the six domains is important to appreciating how conflict is transformed and how common ground is created and breakthrough results achieved.

**Six Domains of Conflict Transformation Behavior**

**Collaboration**

For this study, collaboration was defined by the peer researchers as “the ability to involve others, in a mutually beneficial and accountable manner, which allows for achievement or acceptance of agreed-upon goals.” Individuals who come together to collaborate follow no preset rules or formulas, but they depend on some kind of format or norms for behavior (Garcia, 2014). Collaborative groups depend on “trust, role expectations, information exchange, persuasion, and negotiation” to increase the chances of finding creative solutions to agreed-upon problems (Politi & Street, 2011, p. 579).

During the information exchange, shared mutual knowledge is critical for understanding the role of collaboration among stakeholders (Cramton, 2002; Hilliard & Cook, 2016). There is also the assumption that a collaborative group or team will
produce better outcomes than an individual acting alone (Garcia, 2014). According to Garcia (2014), “Collaboration is a developmental process that enhances the ability of groups from diverse backgrounds (professions, cultures, socioeconomic levels, and ideologies) who work collectively toward finding creative solutions to social problems” (p. 3). According to Young (2015) collaboration is a way of “working together to achieve a common goal or a purpose” (p. 60)—a requirement for conflict transformation just as it is for transformational leadership (Dick & Thondhlana, 2013). Collaboration among different parties with different skill sets is important in transforming conflict because working together may “generate novel solutions to complex problems” (Knapp et al., 2015, p. 1). Collaboration is impeded when the group composition is homogenous, uninformed on the issues, or includes an improperly selected group of stakeholders. Collaboration is most effective when the participants have been carefully selected to represent important stakeholders during the collaborative period and the level of mutual knowledge is appropriate for the task at hand (Algozzine et al., 2016; Cramton, 2002).

In the military, collaboration is seen as an important part of military leadership. While outside viewers may perceive the military as a lock-step, top-down driven organization, most designated leaders understand the necessity of working with various stakeholders who possess essential and esoteric knowledge with which the designated leader is unfamiliar.

Moreover, designated military leaders are expected and encouraged to collaborate and cooperate with other designated leaders both inside and outside the leader’s chain-of-command. The degree of cooperation and collaboration often portends the success or failure of a military unit on and off the battlefield (Algozzine et al., 2016; Garcia, 2014).
Additionally, collaboration is affected by the environment in which the organization functions. Often this operating environment delineates the success or failure of resolving conflict because the parameters of a conflict fluctuate and frequently depend on the emotions of those in conflict at any point in time (Hudson, 2016).

In addition, collaboration requires identifying and selecting the right stakeholders to solve the right problem or to resolve the right conflict. Choosing the right stakeholders means those who have insight or expertise into a problem or conflict, even if those stakeholders may not support or agree with the designated leader. Understanding the characteristics and patterns of relationships is important for determining the success or failure of collaboration (Eliason, 2014; Garcia, 2014).

Collaborators must also agree on the eventual outcomes of the collaboration early in the process. This enables the parties to collaborate on resolving the issues as agreed upon by the collaborators. This agreement diminishes the negative effects of the premature formation of solutions to problems yet to be identified and agreed upon by the collaboration partners. Without such an agreement, the partners may solve problems that do not exist or fail to solve problems that do exist (Majchrzak, Jarvenpaa, & Bagherzadeh, 2014).

**Communication**

For this study, the CGRT defined communication 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.” Distorting or interrupting otherwise successful communications is the result of a number of inhibitors including ineffective communication skills and conflict pollutants (Harvey & Drolet, 2004; Weeks, 1994). Avoiding poor communication skill reduces outside sources of conflict (Weeks, 1994).
Conflict pollutants and ineffective communications include poor feedback skills (both sending and receiving), poor listening skills, cultural differences, harsh speech, stereotyping, and unfiltered responses fueled by negative emotions all contribute to conflict (Harvey & Drolet, 2004; Weeks, 1994). Conflicts often involve numerous individuals and groups, and maintaining open communications with the parties is important (Aula & Siira, 2010; Politi & Street, 2011; Weeks, 1994). Leaders also need to communicate with, and incorporate the correct stakeholders to solve the right problems (Politi & Street, 2011).

Moreover, communication between leaders and stakeholders takes on a much larger role in organizations, greater than the exchange of meaning between two individuals outside of the organizational context (Garcia, 2014; Hanson & Stultz, 2015; Majchrzak et al., 2014). It is not possible to separate the dual roles of leadership as composed of a process of communication and social interaction with all members of the organization including superiors, peers, and subordinates (Tourish, 2014).

Research on manager and leader workload shows that designated leaders devote up to 90% of their time communicating in the workplace. Thus “communicative leadership” implies that these leaders are not just talking, but need to be “good communicators” (Johansson, Miller, & Hamrin, 2014, p. 149). Moreover, the product of the communicational interchange best transmits meaning that advances the influence of the leader on individuals, groups, and other stakeholders. A significant indicator of how an organization performs is related to what the leader says (Brandts, Cooper, & Weber, 2015).
Leaders who send more relevant messages more often were found to be more effective in certain situations. This process of interaction and communication builds on the idea that leadership occurs outside of the normal understandings of communication as a simple linear process from messenger to receiver (Hamrin et al., 2016). Instead, communicative leadership practices are conceived of as continual and active information exchange of mutual knowledge shared between the leader and the led (Johansson et al., 2014). This discursive leadership consists not of top-down directives or orders but is constructed from the ebb and flow of communications between leaders and the remaining members of the organizations at all levels (Tourish, 2014). It has been shown that leaders who actively engage subordinates on a regular basis through listening and information exchange have more favorable interactions and support from those employees (Zagenczyk, Purvis, Shoss, Scott, & Cruz, 2015). Employees who are not regularly included in those listening and information exchange sessions have negative perceptions regarding their treatment by the supervisor.

Once an employee develops the perception of less favorable treatment from the supervisor, he or she may no longer support the supervisor and engage strictly in a more formal “economic exchange relationship” (Zagenczyk et al., 2015, p. 107). Formal economic exchange relationships between the supervisor and the employee lead to less support for the supervisor and less incentive for the employee to do more than the required assigned tasks resulting in lower job satisfaction and innovation (Zagenczyk et al., 2015). Leaders also need to engage all stakeholders, especially coworkers and employees before making a decision. This dialogue contributes to the well being of each group as their feedback seems to be critical to improving the decision or action (Hamrin
et al., 2016). Enlisting the opinions and feedback from subordinates is a method shown to improve decision making and increase coworkers’ respect (Heath & Heath, 2013; Johansson et al., 2014).

Leaders are viewed as competent or incompetent communicators based on the leader’s ability to effectively and appropriately deliver messages that are relevant to the situation. This ability of the leader to tailor his or her communications to fit the situation enhances the reputation of the leader as well as the employees’ perception of the organization’s internal reputation (Men, 2014). The perception of an organization as having designated leaders with effective communications skills enhances an organization’s internal reputation. Internal reputation is key to attracting, developing, and keeping talented employees, increased worker satisfaction, and improved citizenship behaviors. A positive internal reputation, as perceived by members of the organization, reinforces loyalty and motivation and generates better work performance as well as increases organizational effectiveness.

Members of the organization are perceived by outside stakeholders as insiders with knowledge that can positively or negatively influence the perceptions and attitudes of those stakeholders with interests in the organization (Houser et al., 2014; Men, 2014). This awareness of reputation becomes important in times of turbulence and conflict and has the effect of minimizing or exacerbating collective social judgments of the organization, which, in turn, influence the organization either positively or negatively. Part of communicative leadership is the perception of the acceptance by leaders or designated leaders of negative feedback from employees or members of the organization with lower status. The ability or inability of leaders to accept negative feedback weighs
heavily on whether the leader is perceived to be an effective communicator or leader (Tourish, 2014).

On the one hand, too much positive feedback may create the impression in the mind of a leader that his or her leadership skills are beyond reproach or that the leader is on the right track. The absence of negative feedback might be misunderstood by the leader as a support for a path or process proposed by the leader. Silence is a form of communication that may be misunderstood by a designated leader. Silence by subordinates can have damaging effects and is seen as a form of self-protection (Madrid, Patterson, & Leiva, 2015; Tourish, 2014).

On the other hand, a communicative leader who seeks out negative feedback and creates the conditions for “dissent, difference and the facilitation of alternative viewpoints” may likely reduce social, organizational, or economic harm (Tourish, 2014, p. 80). Other qualities important for communicative leaders include likeability, approachability, respect for employees, transparency, and authentic concern for an employee’s well being (Kegan & Lahey, 2001; Tourish, 2014).

Transparency is defined as collaboration, cooperation, and collective decision making supported by the absence of unstated motives and full disclosure of all relevant information (Farrell, 2016). Transparency is closely tied to ethics, but lack of transparent communications may be experienced by some employees as a lack of trust in those employees by management or their supervisors (Farrell, 2016). Rumors and speculation flourish where transparency is lacking. Leaving employees to ruminate over incomplete or inaccurate information generated by the grapevine leads to lower job satisfaction and decreased motivation (Farrell, 2016; Men, 2014). Transparency, approachability, and
likeability are not only products of effective communication but are often a direct result of a leader’s understanding and use of the tenets of emotional intelligence (EI; Callahan, 2016).

**Emotional Intelligence**

For this study, EI 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.” McCleskey (2014) further refined the concept of EI as “the ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional meanings, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote both better emotion and thought” (p. 85).

EI is also “a set of inter-related abilities for identifying, understanding, applying, and regulating emotions” (Zeidner & Kloda, 2013, p. 278). Strong EI helps leaders maintain focus and not become distracted as the other conflict participants or partners engage in disruptive or unhelpful behavior (Chan, Sit, & Lau, 2014; Goleman, 2005). The ability to monitor oneself and the others involved in a clash is critical to managing emotionally charged conflict. The ability to *read the room* is also helpful to maintain or shift the focus from one conflict point to another as necessary to prevent stalling or impeding conflict transformation (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009; Goleman, 2005; Zeidner & Kloda, 2013).

Sadri (2012) wrote that EI occurs at four levels. The first level is the capability to understand emotions in others including the ability to determine “what those expressions mean” (Sadri, 2012, p. 536). The second level is the ability to measure simultaneous and differing emotions and then regulate subsequent behavior. The third level denotes the
ability to recognize contradictory emotions and to comprehend how changes in emotion affect relationships. The fourth is the capability to control emotion, successfully managing emotions in oneself and in others (Sadri, 2012).

The ability of a leader to manage his or her own emotions as well as respond to the emotions of subordinates, supervisors, and other stakeholders is regarded as an important leadership skill (Barbuto, Gottfredson, & Searle, 2014; Goleman, 2005; Hutchinson & Hurley, 2013). The impact of employing EI in the workplace by supervisors has been linked to improved problem solving, employee satisfaction, reduced conflict, and lower employee turnover (Barbuto et al., 2014; Hutchinson & Hurley, 2013; Sadri, 2012).

**Self-awareness.** According to D. Anderson (2016), “Self-awareness is the ability to perceive one’s own emotions and how they affect oneself and others” (p. 178). Leaders with what are regarded as strong EI skills are perceived by others in the organization as more in tune within the context of the organization’s mission, goals, and desired outcomes. In the workplace, value is placed on the ability of a leader to remain grounded and calm when confronted with stressful situations. It is important that a leader listens, thinks, and reacts appropriately (Dabke, 2016). Employees value a leader who self-regulates in times of stress and does not overreact or make unfounded accusations against a group when one person might be at fault (Sadri, 2012).

A leader needs to be familiar with his or her own moods and the impact those moods have on others. A supervisor must realize that one is always under scrutiny by subordinates, peers, and superiors and maintaining control over expressions, language, and behavior is critical not only for everyone working in the proximity of the individual
but also for the organization (Combs et al., 2015). This positive self-management of a leader’s own responses to negative stimuli further increases his or her reputation in the workplace as an effective leader concerned not only with the interests of the organization but also with employees’ well-being. The leader’s reputation as an effective leader creates a positive work environment. This creates the conditions in which employees or subordinates are able to construct effective relationships with those leaders. These effective relationships mitigate organizational uncertainty, role vagueness, imprecise task instructions, or lack of information (Dabke, 2016).

**Self-management.** Self-management is the ability to monitor and control “one’s internal states, impulses and resources” (Sadri, 2012, p. 537). The inability of employees and subordinates to predict their leader’s behavior and reaction to negative information or other adverse stimuli helps to create conditions such that subordinates may become less hesitant to deliver negative information without the fear of retribution or sanction (Hutchinson & Hurley, 2013). A leader’s calmness and patience with bad news ensures that any employee can approach the leader with concerns without sanction or abuse. Approachability is important to employees when one might have concerns about safety, manufacturing processes, risk management, or other issues relevant to the organization’s ability to accomplish assigned tasks in a safe and economical manner. This lack of hesitation may assist in the more rapid engagement of problem-solving processes previously established in the organization (Barbuto et al., 2014; Hutchinson & Hurley, 2013).

**Social awareness.** Leaders who are aware of the impact of negative stimuli on those individuals surrounding them are more likely to mitigate their own behavior if they
have an effective grasp of the EI skill set (Barbuto et al., 2014; Dabke, 2016; Sadri, 2012). This skill set includes monitoring one’s own feelings and accurately identifying the general mood and emotions of others in close proximity. This ability to read the room is important when communicating instructions, dealing with myriad stakeholders, addressing conflict, engaging superiors, counseling subordinates, and working with teams. It is also important to a leader’s ability to perceive issues before they become problems or conflicts (Dabke, 2016; Hutchinson & Hurley, 2013; Monzani, Ripoll, & Peirò, 2015; Sadri, 2012).

**Relationship management.** Leaders with strong EI act in predictable ways with behaviors that are measured, temperate, and appropriate for the situation (Walter, Cole, & Humphrey, 2011). The emotionally intelligent leader acts in a way that is in tune with subordinates’ emotions and balances the needs of the organization with the needs of those subordinates (Dabke, 2016). This ability fosters positive relationships between the leader and the led and between leaders and other stakeholders. It is the very ability of leaders to incorporate the capability of being in tune with other stakeholders’ emotions that aids in making a more accurate assessment of any given situation. This ability may also positively influence the emotions and behaviors of other individuals regardless of their status in the organization (Hutchinson & Hurley, 2013).

**Ethics**

The peer researchers defined ethics as “human beings making choices and conducting behavior in a morally responsible way, given the values and morals of the culture.” Ethics is an action an individual takes or does not take in response to a stimulus according to his or her moral code (Kaya & Ba$Kaya, 2016; Schwepker, 2013). Hannah et al. (2011) decribed modern organizations as “morally complex environments that
impose significant ethical demands and challenges on organizational actors” (p. 555). Action is what is important in ethics; it is not what one feels, but what action(s) an individual takes when under threat. Moreover, ethics is based in “shared values and ideology” and is recognizable by committing commonly defensible acts of doing “right” (Hannah et al., 2011, p. 555). The value of ethical solutions in transforming conflict is that those solutions are defensible, durable, and contribute to the betterment of society (Aula & Siira, 2010). Therefore, ethical acts lay the groundwork for the long-term success of agreed-upon solutions derived from between or among conflict partners (Korver & Howard, 2008).

Taking or not taking an action represents moral courage when the individual is responding to a situation that presents risks to the individual involved in the situation. Moral courage can be measured by actions not taken or taken when a leader is faced with an uncomfortable situation. Often the act of moral courage is unpopular or may go against the established organizational culture. These actions may either change the unethical practice or result in serious repercussion for the individual from the action taken (Hannah et al., 2011). Researchers have seen a disconnect between articulated ethical judgments and actual ethical behavior. Moral courage is what propels an organizational actor to behave in ways consistent with his or her moral code (Hannah et al., 2011). This moral code inhibits an individual from taking unethical actions as well as promotes defined ethical behavior.

Accordingly, an individual’s propensity to display moral courage and ethical behavior is supported and encouraged by an organization’s ethical climate (Duane, Dunford, Alge, & Jackson, 2015; Kaya & Başkaya, 2016). This climate is created and
maintained by the leaders of the organization and their expectations of its members and whether ethical behavior is valued and expected of those same members (Demirtas & Akdogan, 2015). Members’ perceptions of an organization’s ethical climate is based on whether unethical behaviours are punished and ethical behavior rewarded (Duane et al., 2015; Schwepker, 2013; Zehir, Mürzedilî, Altındağ, Şehitoğlu, & Zehir, 2014).

An ethical climate is not built overnight but is constructed over the long term (Schwepker, 2013). The climate is maintained by the socialization of newcomers that involves a clear discussion of norms, expectations, training, and modeling of ethical behavior by senior managers and executives (Demirtas & Akdogan, 2015; Duane et al., 2015). An organization with a strong ethical climate supports its members to do the right thing on a consistent and constant basis (Duane et al., 2015; Humphries & Woods, 2016; Manroop, 2015). This positive climate is essential to creating a positive image of the organization by its members. When individuals view the organization as having a positive climate, they develop a corresponding positive regard for the organization. This corresponding positive regard tends to increase employee satisfaction as well as build improvements in problem solving, increased creativity, reduced absenteeism, and other factors affecting job performance and job satisfaction (Demirtas & Akdogan, 2015; Duane et al., 2015; Schwepker, 2013).

An organization that builds an ethical climate supports employees’ overall positive view of the organization. When an organization is perceived by its members as having an overall positive climate, this perception helps to reduce conflict, worker-management clashes, and other factors that affect the success of individuals in the workplace (Duane et al., 2015). An ethical leader shares credit for success while
accepting blame for mistakes. A leader’s openness to admitting mistakes while acknowledging the contributions of others builds the perception of honesty and integrity (Demirtas & Akdogan, 2015).

Transparency is another factor in an organization’s ethical climate and leader behaviors (Hannah et al., 2011). Transparency is sharing information that good or bad is relative to the business of the organization. Farrell (2016) defined transparency as the lack of hidden agendas and conditions, accompanied by the availability of full information required for collaboration, cooperation and collective decision making supported by the absence of hidden agendas and full disclosure of all available information required for collaboration, cooperation, and collective decision making. (p. 445)

Employees are concerned with the way decisions are made, the parameters of those decisions, the tasks involved, and the timeframe to implement those decisions. The lack of full and complete information interchange between management and staff or leader and follower creates the perception of a lack of trust that management may have for the employees (Farrell, 2016). This perception of a lack of trust further erodes the relationship between management and labor. Leaders must be open and approachable to how information is gathered and decisions constructed (Schwarz, 2002). Moreover, full and complete disclosure can reduce negative information that travels as rumors or innuendo—reducing employee speculation and doubt. Cohesion is a factor in employee satisfaction, and transparency contributes to employee perceptions of inclusiveness and teamwork (Houser et al., 2014). Approachability and transparency encourage workers to contribute their expertise on issues under discussion by approaching management with
their concerns. Not all decisions, such as specific personnel actions or proprietary information related to the business, are a matter for the public. Transparency does improve decision making in organizations and leaders, and employees may contribute to those improved processes by being open and candid (Farrell, 2016; Heath & Heath, 2013). Transparency is one factor in developing and maintaining an ethical climate and leaders and employees fare better when the topic is discussed in the organization as a matter of principle (Houser et al., 2014). Overall, creating and maintaining an ethical climate is key to improving the overall well-being of employees with the corresponding result of the improvement in the long-term robustness of an organization.

**Process**

Process was defined by the peer-research team “as a method that includes a set of steps and activities that group members follow to perform tasks such as strategic planning or conflict resolution” (Patton, 2015). There is difficulty in describing and evaluating a process or processes because process can be both explicit and tangible as well as abstract.

Organizations may use clearly defined and articulated steps in a process, such as in manufacturing a particular product, while a service organization may use heuristics to establish the methods used to serve the organization’s stakeholders and customers (Green, 2016; Rattiner, 2011). Moreover, the word *process* is often used to describe the outcome of some action taken without using a standard procedure in shaping the result and only recognized after-the-fact as the result of a process (Oueslati, 2014; Rattiner, 2011). Process is defined much like problem solving in that “process . . . begins when an individual invokes any goal-directed sequence of cognitive operations” (Vernon et al., 2016, p. 231).
Individuals often engage certain processes without conscious thought, sometimes leading to a perceived successful conclusion and/or leading to the perception of failure (Algozzine et al., 2016; Schwarz, 2002). It is simple to inquire about the sequence of goal-oriented cognition employed by an individual or group of individuals and how that sequence was developed or used to resolve a negative or positive issue requiring action (Patton, 2015). A leader may invoke a predetermined process to resolve a conflict. This process might be the result of trial and error limited to the experiences of the leader. The process also involves working to correctly identify the parameters of the conflict.

The leader then might engage stakeholders who are perceived as having insight into the conflict or special knowledge about the nature and origin of the conflict. The leader would then meet with those stakeholders to gather information, suggestions, and other input to craft possible solutions for the conflict. She might also then bring the disputants together and act as a mediator or to bring in a third-party mediator. Depending on the nature of the conflict, the leader has choices and opportunities to select the appropriate process to resolve conflict. Nevertheless, process involves cycles of effort that are observable in groups even if the steps of the process are ad hoc, informal, or formal. These cycles repeat themselves until the final goal is reached and the cycle of effort concludes (Algozzine et al., 2016; Aula & Siira, 2010; Moreau & Engeset, 2016; Vernon et al., 2016).

**Problem Solving**

The CGRT defined problem solving as “the act of choosing and implementing a solution to an identified problem or situation.” Awareness that a goal is thwarted or suppressed may be the first indication a problem exists or may exist. Mere recognition that a set of intentions or specific goals have not been achieved does not necessarily
identify, clarify, or define the parameters of a situation that may appear to be a problem (Madrid et al., 2015; Moreau & Engeset, 2016). However, once an issue has been defined as a problem, the problem-solving process begins. Research has found that it matters little whether the problem is engaged by one person or engaged by groups with expert knowledge. The approach of close attention, parameter discovery, detailed analysis, and continued push to solutions are indicators of solid problem-solving processes (Algozzine et al., 2016).

Moreau and Engeset (2016) suggested that problem solving involves three steps that are connected. The first is recognizing a problem exists at all. The second is the mechanisms involved in solving the identified problem. The third is determination of the ultimate goal or the solution to the problem. Other researchers have constructed the case that the level and quality of information known and the preciseness of those factors that will support the desired end assist to define the problem (Algozzine et al., 2016; Vernon et al., 2016). This clarifies the second step, in that there are certain mechanisms involved in solving problems. Inherent in the second step is the accurate determination of the exact nature and identification of the problem. Identifying the problem with precision leads to more effective collaboration, tighter stakeholder selection, more focused research, and a narrower band of the range of possible solutions (Garcia, 2014; Madrid et al., 2015; Moreau & Engeset, 2016). The more precisely the problem can be described and defined leads to the possibility the problem will be solved more quickly and more creatively (Moreau & Engeset, 2016). The problem cycle can be summarized as follows:

1. Recognition a problem exists.
2. Definition of the nature and parameters of that problem.
3. Researching possible solutions with the right group of stakeholders.

4. Identifying and clarifying the desired outcome or end state (Algozzine et al., 2016; Garcia, 2014; Kadkhoda & Jahani, 2012).

Another identifying feature of problem solving is the process requires multiple iterations. Rarely do individuals or teams hit on the right-sized solutions on the first try (Algozzine et al., 2016). Once the problem cycle is exhausted and possible solutions identified, any potential solution must be implemented and evaluated to determine if the solution solves the problem. This process is iterative and often requires shaping, enlarging, or contracting different parameters of the proposed and/or implemented solution. Often when a determination is made that a solution fits the problem, solves the problem, or will solve the problem, that determination is based on the perspectives and interpretations of stakeholders and observers (Moreau & Engeset, 2016). That does not guarantee that any proposed solution will adequately solve the problem. Also, disagreements among and between different stakeholders can create new impediments to implementing the correct solution to a common problem (Garcia, 2014). Resolving those disagreements may lead once more to the problem-solving cycle and be oriented in the direction of eventual conflict transformation.

Designated leaders who perform the role of police chiefs are forced to deal with conflict of all types, from organizational and personal to violence, among the community’s citizens. Presidents of educational institutions deal with conflict involving policies, procedures, personnel, and stakeholders. Elected officials, such as mayors of large cities, are forced to create policy with limited resources. The lack of resources available to satisfy all stakeholders creates inherent conflict partners with built-in conflict
waiting to occur. Those conflict partners may include personnel lobbying for increased financial benefits, conflicting political party ideological differences, and other more serious issues facing the community such as crumbling infrastructure or untenable crime rates.

Leaders of nonprofit organizations face many of the same challenges that for-profit businesses face, but with the added complication of supervising paid and voluntary staff—often with volunteers as the majority of the workforce. Other leaders are forced to confront conflict that results from misperception, misinformation, and lack of defined processes, strategic vision, incomplete or unclear policies, and poorly articulated goals.

It is the goal of this research to produce a theory or set of theories on how exemplar leaders, no matter their field, use the six domains of behavior of collaboration, communication, EI, ethics, process, and problem solving to transform conflict to achieve common ground.

**Summary**

Conflict among humans has been around as long as humans have walked upright. Since the beginnings of human civilization, there has been conflict between nations, organizations, and groups. As long as there has been conflict, there have also been peacemakers who sought to prevent, resolve, and lessen the impact of conflict in all of its forms. Universities and other institutions of higher learning have devoted considerable resources to studying conflict and how to end it, but conflict continues to exist. This study attempts to fill the gap in conflict transformation and common ground theory by examining the lived experiences of exemplar leaders in different fields who transform conflict to create common ground and achieve break-through results.
The remainder of this dissertation contains Chapters III, IV, and V. Chapter III describes in detail the research purpose, research questions, and the methodology used to examine the data produced by the CGRT in their phenomenological studies. Chapter IV contains the data collection, data analysis, and findings of the study. Chapter V contains the summary, conclusions, implications, and recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Overview

This chapter describes the methodology, population, sample size, limitations, and other aspects of this study. Included is a review of the methodology used to answer the research question and formulate the theories found in Chapter V.

The decision to select grounded theory (GT) as the operational method by which the researcher conducted the study was in part based on this researcher’s philosophical perspective, the purpose of the research, and the research question. This chapter includes an explanation of why GT was the best fit for this study as well as clarifies the rationale for using the GT methodology for data analysis and formulating theory. This chapter also includes a discussion on the research design, instrumentation, validity, reliability, limitations, types of data, procedure used for the data analysis, descriptions of the population, sample, and instrumentation.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this grounded theory research consisting of five collective phenomenological studies was to generate a theory that explains how exemplar leaders from five fields use six domains of conflict transformation behaviors to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results.

Research Question

What theories emerge from a systematic comparative analysis of five studies to explain how exemplar leaders from various professions use the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors to transform conflict and achieve common ground?
Research Design

The Common Ground Research Team (CGRT) was formed in 2014 to investigate how, if, and when designated leaders use specifically identifiable behaviors as part of their professional duties to transform conflict. The team was comprised of 10 Brandman University doctoral candidates, five of whom conducted phenomenological studies of exemplar leaders specifically to determine how those leaders used the six domains of behavior to transform conflict to achieve common ground. The 10th member of the team was this researcher tasked with conducting a systematic comparative analysis of the existing studies completed by the CGRT. Throughout the study, the term CGRT is used to refer to the peer researchers who conducted these thematic studies. The team members, are listed as follows, along with the types of exemplar leaders and their fields:

2. Ambra Dodds-Main, K-12 superintendents in midsize California school districts.
3. Chris Fuzie, municipal police chiefs in Northern California.
5. Denise LaRue, human resource executives in mid-size California school districts.

This study was conducted after the initial five studies were completed, and the GT methodology was used to analyze all data from the five previous studies. The individual studies were conducted by the CGRT peer researchers during the academic years 2014, 2015, and 2016 and explored the work of dissimilar individuals operating as solo exemplar leaders arranged by location, professional field, type of association, or business structure. The purpose of this grounded theory research was to generate a theory that
explains how exemplar leaders from five fields use six domains of conflict transformation behaviors to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results.

The peer researchers from the CGRT used the phenomenological method to describe the lived experiences of the subjects selected for each of the studies. The five studies produced by the CGRT all contained the same sample selection criteria decided by the CGRT in advance. Each study was delimited to a group of 15 participants based on specific standards. The criteria were designed to ensure that the sample groups consisted of exemplar leaders. The following criteria were used:

1. Evidence of successful relationships with stakeholders.
2. Evidence of breaking through conflict to achieve organizational success.
3. Have 5 or more years of experience in the profession.
4. Written or published or presented at conferences or association meeting.
5. Recognized by their peers.
6. Membership in associations of groups focused on their fields.

The phenomena resulting from the CGRT research have been isolated, described, and published. However, the CGRT has five related but not convergent phenomenological results. The research necessary to identify commonalities, similar interpretations, and understanding of the behaviors from a social context was missing. No coherent theory or set of theories was easily identifiable from a reading of the five dissertations.

More research was required and conducting a research synthesis of the existing studies from CGRT was appropriate to find some type of common approach for exemplar leaders to use to transform conflict, to create common ground, and to achieve
breakthrough results. The research question was, What theories emerge from a systematic comparative analysis of five studies to explain how exemplar leaders from various professions use the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors to transform conflict and achieve common ground?

The intent of this research was to combine the efforts of the student researchers and use the results of the five phenomenological studies to perform a research synthesis or meta-analysis to generate a theory or set of theories that explains how exemplar leaders use six domains of behavior to transform conflict and achieve common ground. Any theory or set of theories must also answer the research question and fulfill the research purpose.

**Grounded Theory**

McMillan (2010) described, “The intent of a grounded theory study is very specific: to discover or generate a theory that explains central phenomena derived from the data” (p. 346). Other methodologists also describe GT as a type of methodology that results in a theory or set of theories emanating from the data; the theory is “grounded” in the data (Charmaz, 2014, p. 1; Rich, 2012; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

While some researchers might differ with the exact procedures of data comparison or the specific techniques comprising GT methodology, they agree that the theory or theories found within are developed from the data (Charmaz, 2014; Patton, 2015; Ralph, Birks, & Chapman, 2015). It is also generally accepted among those researchers that developing theory is the result of multiple examinations and cross comparisons of all of the available data. Charmaz (2014) wrote that there is no one or specific “recipe” for techniques that comprise GT methodology (p. 16). The methodology does, however, require careful coding, interpretation, and placement of the
data relative to the subjects’ behavior (Charmaz, 2014; Docan-Morgan, 2010; Gringeri, Barusch, & Cambron, 2013; Holtslander, 2015).

GT emerged as the most appropriate method for this study for the following reasons. The first was that GT uses the inductive method to develop theory embedded in the data (Charmaz, 2014; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The second was that the GT method specifies that the researcher conduct constant comparisons between data sets to develop the theory or set of theories (Charmaz, 2014; Patton, 2015). The third was that the GT methodology meets the goal of the CGRT by providing the researcher the techniques to create a unifying set of theories developed from the data observed in the CGRT studies. No other methodology provides this outcome. It was clear that the most appropriate method for this research synthesis was GT.

The goal of this study was to uncover a theory or set of theories that might be grounded in the data found in the five studies from the CGRT. A research synthesis of qualitative studies can be used to identify unified concepts among related case studies, and the process includes coding and memoing (Charmaz, 2014; Holtslander, 2015). This research synthesis, a type of meta-analysis, was “designed to bridge the singularity of practical case studies with the generalizability of a meta-analysis” (Stall-Meadows & Hyle, 2010, p. 413). The theories that follow sprang from using GT techniques and procedures to analyze verbatim transcripts from 75 interviews and other data the peer researchers provided.

Population

The population for any research is the collection of individuals who are the focus of any scientific investigation (Patton, 2015). The researchers examined the lived
experiences of exemplar leaders from differing fields in various locations in California and Washington State. The population for this study was composed of 75 exemplar leaders who as a matter of position might encounter conflict and who had the responsibility for resolving such conflict.

**Sample**

It was impossible to investigate the behavior of every exemplar leader working in California and Washington State, so the sample was reduced to a size agreed upon among the peer researchers and subsequently solicited and interviewed by members of the CGRT. The individuals contained in the sample were petitioned through letters, e-mail, telephone, and direct outreach by the researchers after introduction by sponsors. The CGRT intended to research conflict transformation behaviors by leaders in different fields, and there were no two groups of leaders in the same field. The studies, sample, and number of subjects are included in Table 1.

Table 1

*Sample*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Field and location</th>
<th># of subjects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
<td>Municipal police departments—California</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendents</td>
<td>K-12 education—California school districts</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidents</td>
<td>Community colleges—Washington State</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayors</td>
<td>Large and medium cities—Washington State</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executives</td>
<td>Human resources mid-size school districts—CA</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>75</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Total number of participants, by profession and location.
Instrumentation

Researcher as an instrument of the study. Charmaz (2014) stated, “Qualitative research of all sorts relies on those who conduct it” (p. 27). Both ontological and epistemological reasoning firmly place the researcher in the position of evaluating what data to use, from where they originate and how to use them (Handberg, Thorne, Midtgaard, Nielsen, & Lomborg, 2015; Kotarba, 2014).

Primary data source. This researcher used secondary sources as the primary data for this research. This researcher relied on the peer researchers’ interpretation of the interviews, observations, and artifacts and their meaning making. This researcher did not have the opportunity to be present during the interviews and so relied on the results as presented. However, the members of CGRT were available to answer questions about their research and to provide assistance where necessary to answer questions about the findings; however, the coding, interpretation, and analysis of the data were the responsibility of this researcher.

Validity and Reliability

Validity

The intent of any instrument is to measure the topic under consideration and not to measure something else. The main question concerning the validity of an instrument is whether it measures the intended variable under study (McMillan, 2010; Patton, 2015). If the instrument does not accurately measure what it is intended to measure, the instrument is determined to be invalid. This factor applies to any other test as well. The researcher, who was the instrument for this study, must qualify, measure, code, and interpret the correct data. If done correctly, the results are generally accepted as valid (Patton, 2015).
Criterion validity. The validity of an instrument is indicated by any measure that will produce similar results each time it is used (Patten, 2014). Criterion validity must be considered at both the CGRT level and this research study.

Criterion validity established for this study. The data used were the data gathered by the researchers and found in the five studies. Criterion validity was developed previously. The data were collected from the peer researchers and limited to those transcripts compiled by the members of the CGRT.

Content validity. Content validity is a concept that defines validity as an instrument that measures what it is supposed to measure (Patten, 2014). That means an instrument provides a consistent and similar answer to a particular question, regardless of how many times the question is asked or of whom the question is asked (Patten, 2014). Content validity must be considered for both the CGRT and this study.

Content validity established by the CGRT. The five researchers worked together to script the interview questions used in the CGRT research. Each study used the same initial questions to formulate the initial responses and the resulting follow-up questions. The interview questions were developed by the CGRT team to create the possibility for open-ended answers that would describe an exemplar leader’s experience in transforming conflict.

The members of the CGRT then conducted a pilot test to determine question content validity and reliability. The pilot test included the researcher, a test subject, and a subject matter expert. Following the pilot test, each researcher finalized the scripted questions and developed language for his or her particular field of study.
Content validity established for this study. The peer researchers had previously established content validity for their research. Content validity was established for this study, because the data collected were from the peer researchers’ data. This study was limited to archival data, and no interviews were conducted.

Reliability

Does the instrument involved in the research “yield consistent results” (Patten, 2014, p. 83)? This is the main question regarding reliability. The researcher must be able to consistently apply the same standard of thought, analysis, coding techniques, and effort to the data found in the research (Patton, 2015). In some cases, where there are a large number of data points, reliability may suffer if the researcher does not keep reliability in mind while conducting the research (Charmaz, 2014).

Internal reliability of data. Internal reliability of the data rests on the overall reliability of the case studies completed by the CGRT. They were successful at measuring the six domains of behaviors across professions and at disparate locations. Those five phenomenological studies provided adequate input for this GT examination. Patten (2014) found that data that had met the required reliability and validity tests for the studies selected for a particular research synthesis determined that internal data reliability was generally not a concern. This researcher also recoded the entire batch of transcripts before examining the existing themes to determine whether there was internal reliability of the data.

Intercoder reliability. Lombard wrote in 2004 and again in 2010 that “intcoder reliability is the widely used term for the extent to which independent coders evaluate a characteristic of a message or artifact and reach the same conclusion” (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2010, p. 2).
**Intercoder reliability established by the CGRT.** The peer researchers had another member of the CGRT recode 10% of the data to validate the respective codes found. This was simple blind coding of transcripts that had already been coded to determine whether the subsequent codes were analogous to those found by the researcher.

**Intercoder reliability established for this study.** This researcher blind coded over 100 pages of transcripts before examining the codes developed by the CGRT. This means this researcher developed new codes from data grounded in the transcripts and then checked with a different member of the CGRT to determine whether the resulting codes were meaningfully the same and therefore also reliable. This is a technique used to determine external reliability. For this study, the following steps for intercoder reliability were employed:

1. An entire set of transcripts was coded and organized into categories that conformed to the same dimensions found within the CGRT results.
2. The new codes were compared with existing codes to determine whether they were similar to related dimensions and categories already identified.
3. A member of the CGRT was asked to review the new codes and compare and contrast them with the existing codes to determine whether the codes were meaningfully the same or very similar.
4. The results showed significant similarities among the initial coding from this study and results of the CGRT peer researchers.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

The primary data collected for this study were the archival data from the five studies conducted by the CGRT. The lived experiences of the sample subjects were
coded, tabulated, and displayed by the individual researchers. The members of the CGRT provided the anonymous and transcribed interviews conducted by the researchers in the CGRT.

**Types of Data**

There were two main types of data available for this research. The first was the data available in the Chapter IV and Chapter V of the five phenomenological studies. The second was the transcripts of all 75 interviews conducted with the subjects. These anonymous interview transcripts provided an original source of material that was used to create the codes, identify significant activities, answer questions about the results, provide specific quotes by the subjects that were meaningful to the research, and provide reliability checks relevant to the outcome of the research.

**Data Collection Procedures**

There were three steps involved in data collection. The first step was to accumulate the published CGRT study results. This ensured that the set of completed CGRT studies was available as necessary. The second step was to collect from the members of the CGRT the redacted and anonymous transcripts of their interviews. The third was to create a central location for the peer researchers of the CGRT to upload their data.

Before the members of the CGRT uploaded their data, data release forms from the members of the CGRT were submitted to the Brandman University Institutional Review Board (BUIRB) for review. The release forms were submitted along with an abstract of the study, purpose of the research, IRB application, and the research questions. Approval and permission to proceed was received (see Appendix A) following review of the
relevant documents submitted to the IRB in November of 2016 (see Data Release Form, Appendix B).

The archival data, consisting of over 1,300 pages of interview transcripts, were delivered via upload into a secure cloud storage folder and consisted of Microsoft Word documents. The names and locations were redacted as appropriate. All identifiable features of the transcripts were removed and subjects were identified with only a code word or number. The data sets were not merged, but uploaded into NVIVO for coding and the individual transcripts were labeled with alpha numeric codes. No intermediaries, such as Brandman University archive staff or library personnel, accessed, stored, or reviewed the archived data. All interview transcripts were passed directly from the original researcher, a member of the CGRT, to a password-protected cloud storage site, which was used to collect and collate the transcripts.

Each member of the CGRT was contacted and provided a secure Google drive. The peer researchers then uploaded their data sets into the Google drive. The transcribed interviews provided the bulk of the data files provided by the CGRT as the sources for this study. The CGRT provided the data listed in Table 2.

Table 2

*Data Types Provided by the CGRT*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Peer researcher</th>
<th>Interview transcript pages</th>
<th>Major themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bolton</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dodds, A</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hand, D.</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fuzie, C.</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LaRue</td>
<td>563</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,372</strong></td>
<td><strong>153</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The CGRT themes and interview transcripts provided the archival data.
Data Analysis

GT methodology involves constructing a theory or set of theories found within and developed from the data (Charmaz, 2014; Docan-Morgan, 2010; Patton, 2015; Ralph et al., 2015; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The GT method specifies the researcher conduct constant comparisons between data sets to develop the theory or theories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). It is also generally accepted among those researchers that developing theory is the result of multiple examinations and cross-comparisons of all of the available data.

In the case of this study the themes developed by the CGRT and published in their studies were not reviewed prior to coding the transcripts. This allowed the researcher the opportunity to independently create codes that were distinct from the themes already published by the CGRT. This step minimized bias and allowed a fresh view of the data.

The following was the procedure for coding:

1. The transcripts were analyzed page-by-page from all five studies.
2. As activities began to emerge from the transcripts, the resultant codes were categorized and modified as appropriate as the analysis progressed.
3. From the beginning, memos were kept to assemble ideas, concepts, and information linking the activities among the studies.
4. Once the activities began to form within the six domains of behavior, they were cross-checked with the existing CGRT themes to provide support for the language of the codes as they developed.

This detailed process entailed an extremely high level of precision and required drawing activities out of the CGRT transcripts from the existing studies, tallying the frequency of like activities, and then reorganizing parent/child codes for deeper
understanding of existing activities. This analysis included cross-checking and organizing the activities found within the transcripts. The process included narrowing the number of activities by organizing like activities and identifying the domains in which they belonged. Existing memos were cross-checked with new activities identified in subsequent transcript analysis, and new memos were created to identify links and ask questions of the data.

According to Charmaz (2014) there are no “recipe” techniques that comprise GT methodology (p. 16); however, the methodology requires careful and multiple coding iterations, interpretation, and placement of the data relative to the subjects’ behavior. The multiple examinations and cross-comparison of the data contained in all five studies were intended to reveal possible relationships across the six domains of behavior and shared by the exemplar leaders.

**Coding**

Codes are words or phrases taken from the data; extracted by either paraphrasing or quoting research subjects’ statements made to investigators. The resulting codes are then organized into categories for further examination (Charmaz, 2014; Docan-Morgan, 2010; Rich, 2012; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Charmaz (2014) described GT coding as “the pivotal link between collecting data and developing an emergent theory to explain these data” (p. 113). Generally, researchers have many terms for codes, such as open, axial, word-by-word, line-by-line, focused, or theoretical coding (Charmaz, 2014; Rich, 2012; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

**Open coding.** Strauss and Corbin (1998) defined open coding as “the analytic process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in data” (p. 101). Initial coding begins the process of aligning data with an
overarching term or theme used to organize related codes found in the data. These codes are constructed from comparing and contrasting words and phrases found in the data. These bits of data have similarities in meaning and from these similarities the codes begin to emerge.

Charmaz (2014) described this process as “to see actions in each segment of data rather than applying pre-existing categories to the data” (p. 116). These emerging themes are important for the next phase of coding and data analysis.

**Axial coding.** Axial coding is defined as “the process of relating categories to their subcategories, termed ‘axial’ because coding occurs around the axis of a category, linking categories at the level of properties and dimensions” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 123). The next phase involves comparing and contrasting each of the codes found among the transcripts from the five studies with the purpose of unifying, modifying, strengthening, or simplifying the existing codes found in the data. According to Charmaz (2014), “Axial coding specifies the properties and dimensions of a category” (p. 147).

Those codes were then cross-checked or clarified by continued sampling from the interview transcripts to ensure the codes meant what they were supposed to mean. The following was the method for axial coding:

1. The open codes were examined again using the transcripts of all five studies.
2. The raw data were reexamined when necessary to reinforce or modify an existing open code (if needed).
3. Those subsequent axial codes resulted in lists of significant activities drawn from the data from the five studies.
This detailed procedure required an extremely high level of precision and required drawing activities out of the CGRT existing transcripts, tallying the frequency of like activities, and then reorganizing parent/child codes for deeper understanding of the meaning of the activities and their relationship to the existing codes.

As part of the data analysis, those codes were refined and some codes were discarded and other codes also added or refined later. This type of coding made it possible to continually compare and contrast codes with each extant code to determine whether that code was supported across all five studies.

The additional information from the differing types of professions or fields allowed this researcher to create codes that directly supported each of the variables. It made it possible to refine those codes into fewer but more substantial codes (Charmaz, 2014; Docan-Morgan, 2010; Olshansky, 2015; Rich, 2012). It was out of these codes, bolstered by the continuous analysis of the transcripts, that significant activities related to the six domains of behavior began to emerge from the data. This extensive set of data from the 75 different subjects from five different fields was combined together to create the significant activities used to identify the set of theories. The theories emerged from the combination of a final analysis with an extensive analysis of the memos written at every point during that analysis.

**Memoing.** Memoing is viewed by qualitative researchers as a part of the GT process that will assist the researcher in the creative thinking necessary to uncover any extant theories embedded in the data (Charmaz, 2014). The intent of memoing is for the researcher to record thoughts, ideas, or additional steps that might be taken to further the
research. There are no limits to what a researcher may memo, and it is the process that is more important than the actual product (Charmaz, 2014).

This researcher used memoing to create a written record of the ideas and links between the data provided by the peer researchers of the CGRT and the information found in this analysis. These memos were not included as part of the research results but were used as a method to support this researcher’s ability to analyze a large data set. The memos served both as a container for tangible results noticed in the data and also where speculation, questions, and consequences of those actions were written when they occurred.

Exposure to the data, whether the verbatim transcriptions or the results found in the CGRT studies, created links to other ideas about the data. These links were recorded as memos along with additional explanatory notes to ensure that initial and subsequent ideas about how the data fit together were not lost or forgotten. Memoing began from the very beginning as a way to link all of the data in a coherent way.

Memos were key to describing the earliest threads of agreement among the codes and the researcher’s thoughts on how the data fit together, whether the data were sufficient, and early ideas on theory or any other idea the researcher had regarding the process or the product of the study (Charmaz, 2014; Milliken & Schreiber, 2012; Stall-Meadows & Hyle, 2010). The products of the coding and memoing along with the transcripts from the five studies collectively formed the basis for discovering the theories or set of theories that emerged from the data.

Theory Development

GT methodologists do not agree on the central steps of forming theory from the data collected by researchers (Charmaz, 2014; Docan-Morgan, 2010; Holtslander, 2015;
Strauss & Corbin, 1998). However, there is general consensus that it is clear that a
general pattern forms when constructing theory. This pattern consists of a sequence of
steps that must be covered or considered, without strict adherence to a predetermined list
of activities (Charmaz, 2014). This researcher settled on a sequence of steps to develop
theory grounded in the data. The following are the steps:

1. Informal analysis and memoing of existing activities as they emerged. This was the
first step of the process to create a list of potential codes.

2. A complete analysis of the entire set of verbatim transcripts to reduce any potential
bias by relying solely on the themes developed by the CGRT. This created an
opportunity to review the data without predisposition toward existing codes already
constructed by the CGRT.

3. Additional memoing and diagramming the relationship between codes and themes.

Writing memos allowed the researcher a method to record any thoughts or questions
outside of the dissertation.

4. Analyzing the data for actions relating to renaming existing codes. This step allowed
the researcher the opportunity to identify additional activities by questioning the data
and other information recorded as memos.

5. Additional memoing and diagramming the relationship between codes. Diagramming
is an acceptable method of identifying and recording tangible relationships between
codes and activities. The diagrams provided visual cues to those relationships. The
diagrams were easily altered to remove or reinforce existing codes or activities.

6. Memoing and examining the data for meaningful and recurrent codes. Memos
provided the written links and explanations for associating elements of the data
together. This process helped to identify synonyms describing the same codes that were then collapsed into single codes.

7. Memoing and examining the data for conceptual relationships. This helped to clarify the relationships found in the data and recorded in memos. Memos are a container for ideas and thoughts not normally found in formal research papers.

8. Creating categories of codes and themes. This process involved searching for similarities between codes, refining the lists of codes and then determining whether there were potentially related themes identifiable in the CGRT results.

9. Creating theoretical models that subsumed less significant categories. Models provided an opportunity to explore and experiment with collapsing related categories into more meaningful categories that helped to focus important ideas.

10. Review of the existing themes developed by the CGRT and any potential relationship between codes and themes, and codes and activities. This step ensured a review was conducted to confirm the activities emerging from the data were a reliable and valid representation of the research published by the CGRT.

11. Diagramming theoretical concepts that established connections—asked questions of the data and examined the possibility of relationships between the behavior domains. This step allowed the researcher the creative license to explore aspects of the data not previously explained by the research published by the CGRT. Important in theory development is a continual examination of the data related to hypothetical questions, such as Why does an exemplar leader want to improve relationships or what happens if an exemplar leader ignores stakeholder feedback? The researcher then had to
provide the answer to those questions and use the hypothetical responses as a basis for understanding the process for transforming conflict.

12. Diagramming and creating a model of the resulting theory grounded in the data.

Creating a model of the potential theory or theories that emerge from the data compelled the researcher to understand the connections between various components of the data. Without understanding the connections, it remained virtually impossible to visualize and create a figure that explained the theory or set of theories.

13. Developing the set of theories that best explained the behavior of the exemplar leaders who transformed conflict to achieve common ground. This process was the necessary and last step in GT methodology and fulfilled the purpose of the research question.

**Limitations**

Research limitations are an acknowledgement of the confines and limited attributes of certain aspects of any study in question (Charmaz, 2014; Patton, 2015). For the purposes of this study, there are multiple limitations. The first is the researcher as an instrument of the study. The second was size of the sample, and the third the use of secondary sources of data that included self-reported data from the subjects.

**Researcher as instrument of the study.** It is impossible for a researcher conducting qualitative research to pack away his or her bias, subjectivism, worldview, and previous intellectual development (Charmaz, 2014; Holtslander, 2015). It is an inherent responsibility of the researcher to spend time in reflection acknowledging those biases and factors that may affect the outcome of the study (Charmaz, 2014; Docan-Morgan, 2010; McMillan, 2010; Patton, 2015). Once thought as an inhibiting factor in qualitative research, acceptance and acknowledgement of researchers’ personalities and
development are now accepted as not only important to qualitative research but also to the outcomes of that research (Patton, 2015).

This researcher studied leadership in the 1980s and for almost 40 years has acted as a designated leader in various organizations, including 20 years in the U.S. military. There was a continuing awareness that there was the possibility that the researcher’s experiences with resolving conflict while acting as a designated leader in both a military and civilian environment might influence the perceptions, coding, and analyses of the data.

**Sample size.** Sample size was the most significant limitation. The sample size was limited to the 75 carefully selected participants from the five studies. However, the participants were selected based on the criteria developed previously and used to select the participants in the five studies. The criteria used resulted in the selection of exemplar leaders and is a good example of leaders in the professions they represent. However, the small sample makes it almost impossible to generalize to a much larger field of leaders in different professions.

**Secondary sources.** The research was limited to the use of secondary sources collected by the CGRT, and those transcripts included self-reported information. This limited the research to access to material that was recorded and transcribed. However, the five researchers from the CGRT were able to triangulate the data results and to mitigate the self-reported data. Cross-checking the analysis from this study with the results of the CGRT also reduced the impact of that particular aspect of the information. Processing self-reported data required vigilance by the researcher. The researcher had to remember while analyzing the interviews that the information provided may not have
been completely accurate because of faulty recollection of the details of the events described by the participating subjects.

Summary

This chapter of the dissertation reviewed the purpose statement, research questions, data collected, population, sample, limitations, and methodology used in the study. The studies included in this research were the product of the CGRT research including interview transcripts and the published dissertations. The CGRT decided in advance to finish the research plan with a final GT research synthesis study making use of the findings contained in the phenomenological studies and limited to those studies.

The data analysis of the five studies required open coding, axial coding, memoing, and final expression of a set of theories that emerged from the data. The remainder of the dissertation contains Chapters IV and V. Chapter IV contains the findings of the study. Chapter V contains the summary, conclusions, theories, implications, and recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

This qualitative grounded theory study created the opportunity to analyze archival data created by the Common Ground Research Team (CGRT). This research resulted in identifying the activities exemplar leaders engage in when transforming conflict to create common ground and to achieve breakthrough results. Chapter IV begins with a review of the purpose of this research, the research question, a brief explanation of the research methods, and data collection procedures. Included in this chapter are the population and sample as well as a narrative of the data analysis and a summary of the key findings.

Five phenomenological studies were conducted to explore how the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors—communication, collaboration, emotional intelligence (EI), ethics, problem solving, and process—were used to transform conflict by leaders in various fields. What follows is an examination and analysis of the data collected in those studies. The data were then used to develop a theory to explain how exemplar leaders from five different fields use these behavioral domains to transform conflict, create common ground, and achieve breakthrough results.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this grounded theory research consisting of five collective phenomenological studies was to generate a theory that explains how exemplar leaders from five fields use six domains of conflict transformation behaviors to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results.
Research Question

What theories emerge from a systematic comparative analysis of five studies to explain how exemplar leaders from various professions use the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors to transform conflict and achieve common ground?

Research Method and Data Collection Procedures

The CGRT was formed in 2014 to investigate how, if, and when designated leaders use specifically identifiable behaviors as part of their professional duties to transform conflict. This research continued with conducting a systematic comparative analysis of those existing studies completed by the CGRT. The original team was comprised of nine Brandman University doctoral candidates, five of whom conducted phenomenological studies of exemplar leaders in time to be analyzed for this study. They specifically conducted research to determine how exemplar leaders used the six domains of behavior to transform conflict to achieve common ground. Throughout the study, the term CGRT is used to refer to the peer researchers who conducted these thematic studies. The five members of the team whose work was analyzed in this study are listed along with the types of exemplar leaders and their professions:

2. Ambra Dodds-Main, K-12 superintendents in midsize California school districts.
3. Chris Fuzie, municipal police chiefs in Northern California.
5. Denise LaRue, human resources executives in mid-size California school districts.

This study was conducted after the initial five studies were completed and used grounded theory (GT) methodology to analyze the data from those studies. They were
conducted by the CGRT peer researchers during the academic years 2014, 2015, and 2016, and explored the work of dissimilar individuals operating as solo exemplar leaders arranged by location, professional field, type of association, or business structure.

The intent of this research was to combine the efforts of the student researchers and use the results of the five phenomenological studies to perform a research synthesis or meta-analysis to generate a theory or set of theories that explains how exemplar leaders use six domains of behavior to transform conflict and achieve common ground. Any theory or set of theories must also answer the research question and fulfill the research purpose.

**Archival Data Collection**

For this research, each member of the CGRT was contacted and asked to provide his or her transcribed and redacted interviews with each of the participants of the five research projects. A shared Google drive was created and each peer researcher uploaded the anonymous transcripts to the drive. Those transcripts were imported into Nvivo and the font size was increased for easier readability during coding.

The completed dissertations from each member of the CGRT were downloaded from ProQuest and separated into individual chapters. The results from each Chapter IV and the verbatim transcripts were imported into Nvivo for preliminary analysis. The transcripts were Microsoft (MS) Word documents. MS Word is a type of word processing software available for personal computers. Once those products were imported, open coding began according to GT methodology.

**Grounded Theory**

Methodologists describe GT as a type of methodology that results in a theory or set of theories emanating from the data; the theory is “grounded” in the data (Charmaz,
According to McMillan (2010), “The intent of a grounded theory study is very specific: to discover or generate a theory that explains central phenomena derived from the data” (p. 346).

While some researchers might differ with the exact procedures of data comparison or the specific techniques comprising GT methodology, they agree that the theory or theories found within are developed from the data (Charmaz, 2014; Docan-Morgan, 2010; McMillan, 2010; Patton, 2015; Ralph et al., 2015). It is also generally accepted among those researchers that developing theory is the result of multiple examinations and cross-comparisons of all of the available data.

The multiple examinations, cross-comparisons, and analysis of the data contained in the five studies revealed relationships in the six domains of behavior identified in the studies as shared by the exemplar leaders. The intent was to identify patterns of behavior exhibited by the subjects so that the researcher may uncover and then describe the behavior in terms of the development of a theory or theories of transforming conflict to achieve common ground.

This research synthesis, a type of meta-analysis, was “designed to bridge the singularity of practical case studies with the generalizability of a meta-analysis” (Stall-Meadows & Hyle, 2010, p. 413). The theories that follow sprang from using GT techniques and procedures to analyze 1,372 pages of verbatim transcripts from 75 interviews.

**Population**

The population for any research is the collection of individuals who are the focus of any scientific investigation (Patton, 2015). The CGRT peer researchers examined the lived experiences of exemplar leaders from differing fields in various locations in
California and Washington State. The population for this study was composed of 75 exemplar leaders who as a matter of position encountered conflict and who had the responsibility for resolving such conflict.

**Sample**

It was impossible to investigate the behavior of every exemplar leader working in California and Washington State, so the sample was reduced to a size agreed upon among the peer researchers and subsequently solicited and interviewed by members of the CGRT. The individuals contained in the sample were solicited through letters, e-mail, telephone, and direct outreach by the researchers after introduction by sponsors. The CGRT intended to research conflict transformation behaviors by leaders in different fields, and there were no two groups of leaders in the same field. The studies, sample, and number of subjects are included in Table 1 (repeated here for ease of reference).

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Field and location</th>
<th># of subjects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
<td>Municipal police departments—California</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendents</td>
<td>K-12 education—California school districts</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidents</td>
<td>Community colleges—Washington State</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayors</td>
<td>Large and medium cities—Washington State</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executives</td>
<td>Human resources mid-size school districts—CA</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>75</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Total number of participants, by profession and location.

The participants were screened to ensure they met the minimum elements of the selection criteria, and those standards used by the CGRT to define exemplar leaders included the following:
• Evidence of successful relationships with stakeholders.

• Evidence of resolving conflict to achieve organizational success.

• A minimum of 5 years’ experience in the profession.

• Articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings.

• Recognition from their peers.

• Membership in professional associations in their field.

**Presentation and Analysis of Data**

This researcher employed multiple methods to examine the archival data consisting of expressed remarks made by each participant in the original research. Only those lived experiences and explanations were included in the multiple iterations of coding. While each Chapter IV of the individual studies was available, the codes and the activities were developed without coding the findings in those chapters. The findings that follow created the foundation for a theory that fulfills the research purpose and the research question.

**Results for the Research Question**

Initially this researcher open coded the data into emerging activities as described verbatim in the transcripts by the respondents in the sample. Once all but eight transcripts were coded, those existing codes were refined as a process of comparing those codes with the memos written during the process of coding. Each code was then re-examined in the context of the information found across the transcripts, and the code was refined to more accurately describe the action that took place while the exemplar leaders were transforming conflict. The language of the resulting codes was designed to
explicate the activity as that activity developed around an existing category of action. In GT, codes are described in terms of either activities or processes. Since process is one of the behavior domains under examination in this study, the word activity was used as a method of organizing the codes (although process is implied in each of the activities).

As the codes were refined during the third stage of data analysis and memoing, 27 activities emerged as central to exemplar leaders’ employing the six domains of behaviors to transform conflict, achieve common ground, and create breakthrough results. Those behaviors are collaboration, communication, EI, ethics, problem solving, and process. Figure 1 displays the number of activities developed within the six domains.

![Number of Activities Per Behavior Domain](image)

*Figure 1. Significant activities identified in each domain of behavior.*

As the codes were refined during axial coding and memoing, 27 major activities emerged with unequal numbers of activities assigned to each behavior. Collaboration and communication both had six major activities, ethics five, EI and problem solving four, and process two. The sources and references supporting those activities were mostly proportional with the exception of process, which had the fewest references (100).
Problem solving contained four major activities as well as EI, and both problem solving and EI had almost equal references (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2.** Number of responses related to domains and the percentage for each category.

**Collaboration—CGRT Results**

The CGRT developed 25 themes across the five professions in the collaboration domain of behavior. The members of the CGRT found similarities in the answers given by the subjects they interviewed. The themes are listed in Table 3.
Table 3

*Collaboration Themes Developed by the CGRT*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Profession</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collaborating with peers</td>
<td>College presidents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborating with executive teams on a regular basis</td>
<td>College presidents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborating with the board of trustees to reduce conflict</td>
<td>College presidents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fostering an environment where collaboration is paramount</td>
<td>College presidents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing the primacy of relationship building to the success of finding common ground</td>
<td>HRO professionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intentionally involving all stakeholders in the decision-making process</td>
<td>HRO professionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutionalizing a collaborative organizational culture by incorporating an interest-based approach</td>
<td>HRO professionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transforming conflict by creating a cultural environment where common ground could occur</td>
<td>HRO professionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Including all stakeholder groups affected by the transpiring situation</td>
<td>K12 superintendents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building consistent and ongoing relationships with individual stakeholder groups at all times, regardless of current conflict level</td>
<td>K12 superintendents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing common ground prior to moving forward with decision-making</td>
<td>K12 superintendents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding that conflict was a natural part of collaboration and that how it was handled could make or break the process</td>
<td>K12 superintendents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purposefully bringing stakeholders together to focus on specific areas of organizational interest</td>
<td>K12 superintendents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making sure stakeholders understood their role in the collaboration process prior to any activity taking place</td>
<td>K12 superintendents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief should be involving stakeholders</td>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding the different perceptions of the stakeholders involved</td>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Become involved with stakeholder groups/activities</td>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being visible in the organization and the community</td>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempting to come to consensus with stakeholder</td>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing and/or reinforcing expectations</td>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building support with team members by building cross-functional teams</td>
<td>Mayors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging collaboration with other Washington cities by sharing best practices</td>
<td>Mayors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Collectively across professions, subjects reported that a major intent of collaboration activities was to engage all stakeholders with regular communications to enlist them in collaborative activities. The point of the communications as communicated by the research subjects was to build relationships between exemplar leaders and stakeholders identified by the leaders. Those stakeholders included peers, executive team members, board of trustee members, and other organized groups such as union associates, state personnel, and Native American elected officials representing nearby federally recognized political entities.

Leaders also reported that a key feature of the interactions was to create a collaborative culture with those stakeholders identified as important to the process of conflict transformation. Leaders worked to involve stakeholders in the decision-making process as part of the culture of collaboration and the communication practice. Part of the collaborations’ intent as reported by the subjects was also to create a mutual language related to the conflict area before conflict arose. Subjects reported engaging stakeholders who might present roadblocks or those who held significant oppositional positions to current conflict issues as a major focus of their collaborative efforts. The effort was made by many of the subjects as reported by the CGRT to engage the stakeholders who

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Profession</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging collaboration with state representatives by cultivating and maintaining positive relationships despite opposing views</td>
<td>Mayors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging collaboration with tribal leaders by recognizing them as a cooperative governing jurisdiction equally committed to their people and their environment</td>
<td>Mayors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soliciting ongoing stakeholder input when making difficult decisions</td>
<td>Mayors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
had created roadblocks to successful resolution of past conflicts as well as power brokers who might play a role in the successful resolution of future conflicts.

Across the spectrum of professions, subjects reported seeking out leaders of opposition groups or vocal critics of current policies to establish a relationship with those leaders. The goal of the relationships was to create a climate of mutual knowledge and cooperation such that future conflicts are addressed in a positive manner. Leaders reported that these established relationships most often led to mutually agreeable and resilient solutions to those conflicts exemplar leaders anticipated would occur in the future. Leaders anticipated significant resistance to such common highly charged situations and decisions such as employee layoffs, police-officer-involved shootings, or the reduction of services or available facilities.

Specific themes identified by the CGRT were clustered mostly around those involving people, while other behaviors were directed at creating a specific culture oriented toward collaboration. Of the total of 25 identified themes by the CGRT, 19 described those oriented toward people while five were related to building a culture of collaboration. Two were related to both people and culture.

**Collaboration—Major Activities**

Exemplar leaders engaged in at least six different collaboration activities. This was demonstrated in 262 separate references with 69 sources displaying collaboration activities. All 75 participants in the CGRT studies commented directly on collaboration as an important tool to transform conflict.

Collaboration was defined by the peer researchers of the CGRT as “the ability to involve others, in a mutually beneficial and accountable manner, which allows for achievement or acceptance of agreed-upon goals.” Collaborative groups depend on
“trust, role expectations, information exchange, persuasion, and negotiation” to increase the chances of finding creative solutions to problems (Politi & Street, 2011, p. 579).

Individuals who come together to collaborate follow no preset rules or formulas, but they depend on some kind of format or norms for behavior (Garcia, 2014).

The activities listed in Table 4 were the product of an analysis of the data available for this study. The activities represent a synthesis of the verbatim transcripts and the subjects’ description of the activities most associated with collaboration and its role in conflict transformation. Each participant described how he or she perceived EI and what action or actions were related to that activity by relating specific anecdotes describing those actions. Exemplar leaders may not have used the specific language found in Table 4. However, an analysis of the data and the themes produced by the CGRT helped to craft the language that best expressed the specific activities related to collaboration.

Table 4

Inductively Developed Collaboration Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major activities</th>
<th># Sources of activity</th>
<th># References to activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collaborating to create mutual knowledge</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating alliances and teams from stakeholders on opposing sides of a conflict</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cocreating solutions to gain acceptance for those solutions</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reducing barriers to cooperation</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitigating the negative effects of future conflict</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting in the best interests of all stakeholders</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>262</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Sources include transcripts and the results from each Chapter IV of the studies.
The participants were interviewed and asked specifically how collaboration might have been used or was used to transform conflict. Each participant included comments that described his or her judgments regarding the value of collaboration and the effect collaboration had on different aspects of conflict transformation, developing common ground, and achieving breakthrough results.

It was one college president’s perception that conflict partners were avoiding conflict, “They're not communicating and they're avoiding conflict so it just festers out there. You've got to bring them together. You've got to get that out there and fix that festering sore.” A human relations director tied collaboration to long-range success, “People who are strong enough to collaborate, communicate, articulate, professionally debate, those are the things to endure.”

**Collaborating to create mutual knowledge.** The interview transcripts provided insight into the thought processes used by exemplar leaders regarding the development of shared or mutual knowledge related to the professional fields. Contained in the transcripts and shared codes by the CGRT peer researchers, there were 84 references and 46 sources referring to collaborating to create mutual knowledge. One mayor reported this about collaborating: “So we planned trainings with all council members and the budgeting and leadership staffs so we were all hearing the same things at the same time . . and so that has the collaboration bit has gone really well in that arena.”

**Creating alliances and teams from among opposing sides of a conflict.** During the information exchange, shared mutual knowledge is critical for understanding the role of collaboration among stakeholders (Cramton, 2002; Hilliard & Cook, 2016). There is also the assumption that a collaborative group or team will produce better outcomes than
an individual acting alone (Garcia, 2014). According to Young (2015), collaboration is a way of “working together to achieve a common goal or a purpose” (p. 60), a requirement for conflict transformation just as it is for transformational leadership (Dick & Thondhlana, 2013). As one community college president put it, “There is a distinct want of desire and ability to work as a team member and to collaborate with one another.” A superintendent made the observation, “We developed a partnership with every curriculum innovation, every rollout, every idea with curriculum and instruction was jointly presented by management and union.”

**Cocreating solutions to gain acceptance for those solutions.** Collaboration among different parties with different skill sets is important in transforming conflict because working together may “generate novel solutions to complex problems” (Knapp et al., 2015, p. 1). In addition, collaboration requires identifying and selecting the right stakeholders to solve the right problem or to resolve the right conflict. Choosing the right stakeholders means those who have insight or expertise into a problem or conflict, even if those stakeholders may not support or agree with the designated leader. Understanding the characteristics and *patterns of relationships* is important for determining the success or failure of collaboration (Eliason, 2014; Garcia, 2014). A college president relayed his ideas about collaboration: “It will take some time but as you come to the council and as you are seated at the table—faculty, students, classified staff, administration—you become the voice to take it back to the group to help them understand and seek their input.” A mayor had this to say: “There is a lot of overlaps with some of them hearing about it multiple times but making them all feel like it was their proposal and were part of this suggestion or recommendation.”
Reducing barriers to cooperation. Collaboration is impeded when the group composition is homogenous, uninformed on the issues, or includes an improperly selected group of stakeholders. Collaboration is most effective when the participants have been carefully selected to represent important stakeholders during the collaborative period and the level of mutual knowledge is appropriate for the task at hand (Algozzine et al., 2016; Cramton, 2002). Additionally, collaboration is affected by the environment in which the organization functions. Often this operating environment delineates the success or failure of resolving conflict, because the parameters of a conflict fluctuate and frequently depend on the emotions of those in conflict at any point in time (Hudson, 2016). A mayor described the difficulty of working with other stakeholders: “Get out in front and then not slowly build buy in from all the different stakeholders and then the effort kind of falls apart.” Another mayor described the process: “So at the very beginning, I invited council members to budget meetings and to staff meetings so that those three in the budget committee were very familiar with what we were talking about.”

Mitigating the negative effects of future conflict. Collaborators must also agree on the eventual outcomes of the collaboration early in the process. This enables the parties to collaborate on resolving the issues as agreed upon by the collaborators. This agreement diminishes the negative effects of the premature formation of solutions to problems yet to be identified and agreed upon by the collaboration partners. Without such an agreement the partners may solve problems that do not exist, or fail to solve problems that do exist (Majchrzak et al., 2014). A superintendent reported, “So, after about a year, year and half we were able to settle all of the lawsuits. None of them ended up going to trial. We settled all of them.” A police chief remarked, “There has to be
what I always call a mutual understanding of the circumstances of why we’re here, and a mutual understanding of the nonnegotiables.”

**Acting in the best interest of stakeholders.** Collaborators must also agree on the eventual outcomes of the collaboration early in the process. This enables the parties to collaborate on resolving the issues as agreed upon by the collaborators. This agreement diminishes the negative effects of the premature formation of solutions to problems yet to be identified and agreed upon by the collaboration partners. Without such an agreement, the partners may solve problems that do not exist, or fail to solve problems that do exist (Majchrzak et al., 2014). A human relations professional said, “You look at stakeholder needs, see both sides for example competitive salary met the interest of both sides, and in a way that is sustainable.” A college president reinforced that idea when he said, “I don't think we could have good collaboration unless everybody decides that we're all working together towards a similar goal or end.”

**Communication—CGRT Results**

The CGRT developed the following themes from the five studies completed as part of the thematic research project. This theme development provided the predominant themes that led to identifying the activities described in this study.

The subjects interviewed by the members of the CGRT made the observation that communication and collaboration are closely related. Reviewing the themes established by the CGRT across the five professions demonstrates the interrelatedness of the domains of communication and collaboration. The themes themselves show that collaboration cannot occur without communication. Effective collaboration depends on effective communication.
Exemplar leaders reported that the type, frequency, and duration of communications were important in engaging stakeholders and keeping them informed. Regular and relevant communication kept stakeholders involved. Frequent and transparent communication created a culture of openness between exemplar leaders and stakeholders—even oppositional stakeholders—that created mutual knowledge critical to transforming conflict and achieving common ground. Leaders reported that establishing important relationships and creating trust transformed relationships before a conflict occurred, making transforming future conflict simpler and the solutions more resilient.

The CGRT identified 29 themes related to communication and described both specific communication processes, such as gathering information, listening skills, and feedback, but also more abstract issues, such as building trust, behavior predictability, and repeating positive messages related to the profession. The CGRT developed themes that illuminate the idea that communications perform an overarching role in each of the conflict transformation domains including collaboration, ethics, EI, process, and problem solving. The themes are listed in Table 5.

**Communication—Major Activities**

Exemplar leaders engage in at least six different communication activities. This is demonstrated in 318 separate references with 63 sources displaying communication activities. For this study the CGRT defined communication 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.”
Table 5

*Communication Themes Developed by the CGRT*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Profession</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communicating with the local community, board of trustees, executive</td>
<td>College presidents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>team, faculty, staff, and students on an individual basis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being an active listener</td>
<td>College presidents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building relationships through communication</td>
<td>College presidents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intentionally ensuring communication was received and understood by</td>
<td>HRO professionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diverse stakeholders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening and being responsive to stakeholders</td>
<td>HRO professionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making it a priority to be transparent, approachable, and accessible</td>
<td>HRO professionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to all stakeholders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being transparent by ensuring stakeholders had all of the necessary</td>
<td>K12 superintendents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>information on important issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuously interacting with stakeholder groups in a positive way</td>
<td>K12 superintendents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being the listener more often than the talker</td>
<td>K12 superintendents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building and maintaining a high level of trust with stakeholders</td>
<td>K12 superintendents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategically planning communication to ensure the right message was</td>
<td>K12 superintendents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>delivered</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respecting all stakeholders and treating them as equals rather than</td>
<td>K12 superintendents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>talking down to them</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focusing on developing and supporting stakeholder relationships</td>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding the communication process</td>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating and engaging in dialogue with stakeholders</td>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using active listening with stakeholders</td>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding and recognizing the communication filters involved in</td>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the communication process</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking for input from stakeholder</td>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considering the weight of the information communicated</td>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizing and interpreting nonverbal communication</td>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluating the accuracy of the information communicated</td>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using the appropriate communication medium channels</td>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving and receiving feedback when appropriate</td>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being a storyteller to help relay messages</td>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Profession</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Building and communicating a vision through creative and new ideas not previously imagined</td>
<td>Mayors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating weekly, monthly, or quarterly meetings with citizens and department heads that are safe, open, and informal to decrease anxiety</td>
<td>Mayors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gathering information and metrics from various resources well in advance to making important decisions</td>
<td>Mayors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizing and overcoming personal filters in order to engage in active listening</td>
<td>Mayors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding the importance of transparency with every stakeholder despite opposing views</td>
<td>Mayors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The activities listed in Table 6 were the product of an analysis of the data available for this study. The activities represent a synthesis of the verbatim transcripts and the subjects’ description of the activities most associated with communication and its role in conflict transformation. Each participant described how he or she perceived EI and what action or actions were related to that activity by relating specific anecdotes describing those actions. Exemplar leaders may not have used the specific language found in Table 6. However, an analysis of the data and the themes produced by the CGRT helped to craft the language that best expressed the specific activities related to communication.

The perception of an organization as having designated leaders with effective communications skills enhances an organization’s internal reputation. Internal reputation is key to attracting, developing, and keeping talented employees, increasing worker satisfaction, and improving citizenship behaviors. A positive internal reputation as perceived by members of the organization reinforces loyalty and motivation and generates better work performance as well as increases in organizational effectiveness.
Table 6

*Communication Activities*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major activities</th>
<th># Sources of activity</th>
<th># References to activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communicating to develop relationships to prepare for conflict</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pushing out information so stakeholders are informed</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reducing the impact of barriers to communication</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determining what to communicate</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using communication to progress towards some desired end state</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working on content, tone and frequency to reduce misunderstanding</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>155</strong></td>
<td><strong>318</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Sources include transcripts and the results from the CGRT studies.*

**Communicating to develop relationships to prepare for conflict.** Conflicts often involve numerous individuals and groups, and maintaining open communications with the parties is important (Aula & Siira, 2010; Politi & Street, 2011; Weeks, 1994).

One police chief put it succinctly when she said a chief must include “focusing on developing and supporting stakeholder relationships.” Another exemplar leader noted, “I think my emphasis on relationships are really based on that—on trying to figure out what are your connections to people and trying to get a read on where people are.” A college president said, “Part of it was because I didn't know a lot of those folks, I had to establish those relationships and establish trust.”

Leaders are viewed as competent or incompetent communicators based on the leader’s ability to effectively and appropriately deliver messages that are relevant to the situation. One superintendent reviewed a past incident: “I remember one of my arch enemies in the union speaking at a board meeting pointing at me and saying to the board,
‘You need to listen to this man.’ And I’m thinking, oh my God? What’s happened here? This is—am I dreaming?”

**Determining what to communicate.** Research on leaders’ communication demonstrates that “communicative leadership” implies that these leaders are not just talking but need to be “good communicators” (Johanson et al., 2014, p. 149). Leaders who send more relevant messages more often were found to be more effective in certain situations. A college president had this to say: “When you have to deliver bad news, don't beat around the bush.” Another said, “Mostly, our sympathies go out to those people, but any questions, concerns, whatever that people have to express those to me. I just thought it was important to send that kind of communication out to people.” A superintendent said, “The key ingredient in leadership is communicating when you need to communicate and not communicating when you should not communicate.”

**Pushing out information so stakeholders are informed.** Leaders also need to communicate with and incorporate the correct stakeholders to solve the right problems (Politi & Street, 2011). Moreover, communication between leaders and stakeholders takes on a much larger role in organizations, greater than the exchange of meaning between two individuals outside of the organizational context (Garcia, 2014; Hanson & Stultz, 2015; Majchrzak et al., 2014). It has been shown that leaders who actively engage subordinates on a regular basis through listening and information exchange have more favorable interactions and support from those employees (Zagenczyk et al., 2015). A superintendent acknowledged the importance of sending out information via as many channels as possible with this statement: “So the message changed, actually the intensity of the message, the frequency of the message was increased because everybody was
A police chief responded to the idea by saying, “Because you will always think you are communicating enough, and you are not.”

**Reducing the impact of barriers to communication.** Leaders need to engage all stakeholders, especially coworkers and employees before making a decision. This dialogue contributes to the well-being of each group as their feedback is critical to improving the decision or action (Hamrin et al., 2016). Enlisting the opinions and feedback from subordinates is a method shown to improve decision making and increase coworkers’ respect (Heath & Heath, 2013; Johansson et al., 2014). A superintendent described his process for getting unfiltered feedback: “We asked the principals and our union reps to meet weekly. No prepared agenda. Talk about whatever you want to talk about. We were probably 75% successful with the principals.” A communicative leader who seeks out negative feedback and creates the conditions for “dissent, difference and the facilitation of alternative viewpoints” may likely reduce social, organizational, or economic harm (Tourish, 2014, p. 80). A college president supported this concept by saying, “I think the best thing to do in conflict is to continue to listen. Let people get things out, and put them on the table.”

**Using communication to progress toward some desired end-state.** A mayor described the process as “creating weekly, monthly, or quarterly meetings with citizens and department heads that are safe, open, and informal to decrease anxiety.” Another mayor described her experience with gaining stakeholder acceptance with an idea as “often and a lot you know just in telling everyone the same thing in what we are doing and why we’re doing it.” Another mayor said, “When we do our street projects we have
an open house with the neighbors and invite them in to look at the plans and get their feedback and their comments and their concerns.”

**Working on content, tone, and frequency to reduce misunderstanding.**

Leaders who send more relevant messages more often were found to be more effective in certain situations. This process of interaction and communication builds on the idea that leadership occurs outside of the normal understandings of communication as a simple linear process from messenger to receiver (Hamrin et al., 2016). One college president relayed this experience, “I spent more time about the content on the message, the tone of the message, frequency, those type[s] of things.” A superintendent cautioned, “You had better be able to explain how—why you are doing this and how you will be communicating it to the people.”

**EI—CGRT Results**

The CGRT developed the following themes from the five studies completed as part of the thematic research project. Their analysis and development of the themes led to support the findings of this study and the activities described herein. The following is a brief synopsis of the findings by the CGRT.

From college presidents to chiefs of police, exemplar leaders across the five professions reported on the importance of maintaining awareness of one’s own emotional state. Monitoring one’s emotional state was reported in the interviews as important during times of stress, conflict, or delivering negative news to stakeholders. Exemplar leaders reported that monitoring one’s own emotional state and responding appropriately to criticism, stakeholders’ emotional outbursts, unfriendly crowds, and other conflict partners was an important component of finding lasting solutions to problems and transforming conflict. This restraint was instrumental in diffusing or mitigating the
exacerbating effects on conflict of inappropriate or unfiltered responses made in haste by exemplar leaders.

Subjects further reported that maintaining openness and approachability, humility, and tempered communications reduced potential conflict. This restraint by leaders made finding resilient solutions to conflict simpler and more efficient. Additionally, a leader’s sensitivity to the emotional states of others, such as critical stakeholders on all sides of conflict, was reported to help to prevent making conflict worse.

Often exemplar leaders’ behavior involved an awareness of the emotional states of conflict partners and then figuratively stepping in between key stakeholders as an effort to redirect the stakeholders’ behavior in a more positive way. Subjects reported that exemplar leaders’ awareness of the emotional states of key stakeholders created the condition where those leaders chose to redirect stakeholders’ attention to a different topic related to the conflict, thus lessening the tension in the room. Exemplar leaders also reported that they evaluated the necessity to end the session for the day or allow time for stakeholders to regain perspective on an issue or examine new information based on the emotional states of the stakeholders involved. Exemplar leaders reported that these aspects of EI played a role in the transformation of conflict and achieving common ground. The themes are listed in Table 7.

**EI—Major Activities**

Exemplar leaders engage in at least four different activities related to EI. This is demonstrated in 100 separate references with 74 sources displaying EI activities. For this study, EI was defined by the peer-research team as “the self-awareness of one’s own emotions and motivations,
Table 7

*EI Themes Developed by the CGRT*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Profession</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-awareness</td>
<td>College presidents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding the emotions of others</td>
<td>College presidents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social awareness</td>
<td>College presidents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting clear boundaries</td>
<td>College presidents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Putting the humanity in HR by being vulnerable, admitting mistakes,</td>
<td>HRO professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and being in touch with personal motives, values, and temperament</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consciously avoiding egocentrism by seeking to genuinely understand</td>
<td>HRO professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>others’ perspectives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modeling the characteristics necessary to work through conflict with</td>
<td>HRO professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>respect, dignity, and empathy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being keenly aware that situations could rarely be taken at face</td>
<td>HRO professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>value</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizing when stakeholders were becoming apprehensive and</td>
<td>K12 superintendents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adjusting the agenda to accommodate the situation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing that every person or group carries a different life experience</td>
<td>K12 superintendents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and understanding that experience has an effect on their agenda</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regularly reflecting on their decisions and experiences to help them</td>
<td>K12 superintendents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grow professionally and personally</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding that they cannot take the words or actions of stake</td>
<td>K12 superintendents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>holder groups personally</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being approachable internally and externally</td>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being aware of the social emotional impacts/reactions in times of</td>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conflict</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing emotional reactions/responses of others in social settings</td>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being self-aware of emotional reactions during times of conflict</td>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using self-management to control emotional responses during times</td>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of conflict</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizing the difference between professional persona and personal</td>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>persona</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking for accountability rather than blame for conflict</td>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being humble and empathetic to the needs of stakeholders despite</td>
<td>Mayors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>personal egos</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridging cultural and emotional divides by building trust with</td>
<td>Mayors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stakeholders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and the ability to understand the emotions of others in social settings, which allows for management of behavior and relationships.” McCleskey (2014) further refined the concept of EI as “the ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional meanings, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote both better emotion and thought” (p. 85).

The activities listed in Table 8 were the product of an analysis of the data available for this study. The activities represent a synthesis of the verbatim transcripts and the subjects’ description of the activities most associated with EI and its role in conflict transformation. Each participant described how he or she perceived EI and what action or actions were related to that activity through various storytelling or relating specific anecdotes describing those actions. Exemplar leaders may not have used the specific language found in Table 8. However, an analysis of the data and the themes produced by the CGRT helped to craft the language that best expressed the specific activities related to EI.
Table 8

EI-Related Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major activities</th>
<th># Sources of activity</th>
<th># References to activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Managing a leader’s own emotions and resultant behavior</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceiving the emotional state of others</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting in tune with the present social conditions</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceiving one’s own emotional state</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Sources include transcripts and the results from the CGRT studies.

**Perceiving one’s own emotional state.** D. Anderson (2016) stated, “Self-awareness is the ability to perceive one’s own emotions and how they affect oneself and others” (p. 178). Leaders with what are regarded as strong EI skills are perceived by others in the organization as more in tune within the context of the organization’s mission, goals, and desired outcomes. A police chief said, “First of all, you have to not be defensive and think that this is directed at me, you know, the person, if someone is upset about a particular thing.” An HRO professional advised, “And so sometimes it's a matter of remaining calm and in control. That will help settle a situation down.”

**Managing a leader’s own emotions and resultant behavior.** Self-management is the ability to monitor and control “one’s internal states, impulses and resources” (Sadri, 2012, p. 537). In the workplace, value is placed on the ability of a leader to remain grounded and calm when confronted with stressful situations. It is important that a leader listens, thinks, and reacts appropriately (Dabke, 2016). A superindent supported this idea: “I think what we have to do is build a culture of comfortability in disclosing sensitive information.” A police chief supported that by saying, “You know, just because
in your mind you may think you are right, and maybe even be proven right, that doesn’t 
mean to just shove it in someone’s face.”

**Perceiving the emotional state of others.** Social awareness describes leaders 
who are aware of the impact of negative stimuli on those individuals surrounding the 
leader. They are more likely to mitigate their own behavior if the leader has an effective 
grasp of the EI skill set (Barbuto et al., 2014; Dabke, 2016; Sadri, 2012). A leader’s 
calmness and patience with bad news ensures that any employee can approach the leader 
with concerns without sanction or abuse. Approachability is important to employees 
when one might have concerns about safety, manufacturing processes, risk management, 
or other issues relevant to the organization’s ability to accomplish assigned tasks in a safe 
and economical manner. One community college president had this to say: “I’m 
constantly reading how are they reading me, what are they thinking about me at this 
moment and then the moment I start feeling uncomfortable or tense around how I believe 
other people are reacting, I immediately just bring it down a little bit.”

**Acting in tune with the present social conditions.** Relationship management 
involves leaders with strong EI who act in predictable ways with behaviors that are 
measured, temperate, and appropriate for the situation (Walter et al., 2011). This skill set 
includes monitoring one’s own feelings and accurately identifying the general mood and 
emotions of others in close proximity. This ability to “read the room” is important when 
communicating instructions, dealing with myriad stakeholders, addressing conflict, 
engaging superiors, counseling subordinates, and working with teams. It is also 
important to a leader’s ability to perceive issues before they become problems or 
conflicts (Dabke, 2016; Hutchinson & Hurley, 2013; Monzani et al., 2015; Sadri, 2012).
A superintendent describes a scene where understanding the emotional state of the room is paramount: “You can’t win that argument when an old man is shaking his walker at you.”

**Ethics—CGRT Results**

The CGRT developed the following themes from the five studies completed as part of the thematic research project. This theme development provided the overarching themes that led to identifying the activities described in this study. The CGRT listed a total of 28 themes relating to ethics. Of those listed, 16 were directly related to personal actions taken or not taken by exemplar leaders. For example, a theme, such as “be truthful,” as described by one participant, is a direct action taken by a leader. A more abstract example might be the theme from HRO professionals: “Making it a priority to be transparent, approachable, and accessible to all stakeholders.” The actions not taken are reported by the subjects to be as important as those taken.

The more abstract themes, 10 in all, relate more to exemplar leaders’ attempts to create and maintain an ethical organizational climate. The climate of an organization is related to the perceptions held by both internal and external stakeholders of the organization and how the organizations’ members behave ethically and are rewarded or sanctioned appropriately.

The personal actions taken or not taken by exemplar leaders have to do with observable behaviors such as lying, misusing company property, or taking credit for others’ ideas or work. Exemplar leaders reported another example if a decision was made that directly benefited the leader or for the entire organization as perceived by the involved stakeholders. Many of the actions taken by exemplar leaders in building an ethical climate are not directly observable by stakeholders.
Exemplar leaders’ actions are not readily apparent to the casual observer or stakeholders. It is the pattern of behavior that forms the reputation of the exemplar leader. The same holds true for an organization’s ethical climate. It is the pattern of behavior and policies that define the organization. Exemplar leaders reported that they devoted their efforts at both personal conduct defined as ethical and the necessary measures taken at the organizational level. The themes are listed in Table 9.

**Ethics—Major Activities**

Exemplar leaders engage in at least five different activities related to ethics. This is demonstrated in 225 separate references with 61 sources displaying ethics activities. The peer researchers defined ethics as “human beings making choices and conducting behavior in a morally responsible way, given the values and morals of the culture.” Ethics is an action an individual takes or does not take in response to a stimulus according to his or her moral code (Kaya & BaŞKaya, 2016; Schwepker, 2013).

The activities listed in Table 10 were the product of an analysis of the data available for this study. The activities represent a synthesis of the verbatim transcripts and the subjects’ description of the activities most associated with ethics and its role in conflict transformation. Each participant described how he or she perceived ethics and what action or actions were related to that activity through various storytelling or relating specific anecdotes describing those actions. Exemplar leaders may not have used the specific language found in Table 10. However, an analysis of the data and the themes produced by the CGRT helped to craft the language that best expressed the specific activities related to ethics.
**Table 9**

*Ethics Themes Developed by the CGRT*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Profession</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Be an authentic leader</td>
<td>College presidents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrity and honesty</td>
<td>College presidents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong values</td>
<td>College presidents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead with the heart</td>
<td>College presidents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be truthful</td>
<td>College presidents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being guided by principles</td>
<td>College presidents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding the ethical implications and potential consequences of decision making</td>
<td>HRO professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modeling highly ethical decision-making principles based on doing what was right for everyone</td>
<td>HRO professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considering ethics as a defining factor for a person</td>
<td>HRO professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being willing to take a stand even if it was unpopular or controversial</td>
<td>HRO professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making it a priority to be transparent, approachable, and accessible to all stakeholders</td>
<td>HRO professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing where their ethical boundaries are prior to being faced with an ethical dilemma</td>
<td>K12 superintendents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always basing decisions on what was in their students’ best interests</td>
<td>K12 superintendents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being transparent by making sure stakeholders have all of the necessary information on important issues</td>
<td>K12 superintendents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being transparent by ensuring stakeholders had all of the necessary information on important issues</td>
<td>K12 superintendents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create and maintain an ethical climate</td>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain a personal moral (ethical) compass based on values</td>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being congruent in words and actions</td>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address unethical and incongruent behavior</td>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modeling desired behavior for stakeholders</td>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be self-reflective regarding decisions and the ethical impacts</td>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admitting mistakes and apologizing for them</td>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rewarding ethically appropriate behaviors</td>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create and maintain an ethical environment through ongoing ethical training</td>
<td>Mayors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate a moral and ethical code through transparent behavior</td>
<td>Mayors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Profession</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Modeling ethical decision making through nonpartisanship</td>
<td>Mayors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizing and managing politically divisive situations by</td>
<td>Mayors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>incorporating various views</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valuing the responsibility of the city as it pertains to the</td>
<td>Mayors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10

*Ethics Related Activities*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major activities</th>
<th># Sources of activities</th>
<th># References of activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inculcating the need to do right—maintaining a positive ethical climate</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting ethically to support a future desired end state</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthening collaboration through transparency</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking truthfully to remove a potent conflict pollutant</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opening a window into an organization through transparency</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Sources include transcripts and the results from CGRT studies.

Inculcating the need to do right—maintaining a positive ethical climate.

Hannah et al. (2011) described modern organizations as “morally complex environments that impose significant ethical demands and challenges on organizational actors” (p. 555). Moreover, ethics is based in “shared values and ideology” and is recognizable by committing commonly defensible acts of doing “right” (Hannah et al., 2011, p. 555). Often the act of moral courage is unpopular or may go against the established organizational culture. These actions may either change the unethical practice or result in serious repercussions for the individual from the action taken (Hannah et al., 2011). A college president said, “On the ethical side, it's very difficult for me to look the other
way. It’s very difficult for me to say, ‘Well this might create conflict, or I don't want to do it.’” An ethical climate is not built overnight, but is constructed over the long term (Schwepker, 2013). The climate is maintained by the socialization of newcomers, which involves a clear discussion of norms, expectations, training, and modeling of ethical behavior by senior managers and executives (Demirtas & Akdogan, 2015; Duane et al., 2015). A police chief described the importance of ethical boundaries, “And we all have our own ethics and our own boundaries, but as an organization you also have to have those boundaries. And when people step outside those boundaries, there has to be consequences.”

**Acting ethically to support a future desired end state.** The value of ethical solutions in transforming conflict is that those solutions are defensible, durable, and contribute to society (Aula & Siira, 2010). Therefore, ethical acts lay the groundwork for the long-term success of agreed-upon solutions derived from between or among conflict partners (Korver & Howard, 2008). A superintendent put it this way, “Because I’m going to do other hard things with this same group of people later, and I need them to trust me.”

**Strengthening collaboration through transparency.** An organization that builds an ethical climate supports employees’ overall positive view of the organization. When an organization is perceived by its members as having an overall positive climate, this perception helps to reduce conflict, worker-management clashes, and other factors that affect the success of individuals in the workplace (Duane et al., 2015). Transparency is another factor in an organization’s ethical climate and leader behaviors (Hannah et al., 2011). Transparency is sharing information that good or bad is relative to the business of
the organization. A superintendent expanded on the idea by saying, “So they are not beyond manipulating the board to help them get there. Sort of the ends justify the means. And I think that that gets you into trouble because trust is such a delicate thing.”

**Speaking truthfully to remove a potent conflict pollutant.** A leader’s openness to admitting mistakes while acknowledging the contributions of others builds the perception of honesty and integrity (Demirtas & Akdogan, 2015). The lack of full and complete information interchange between management and staff or leader and follower creates the perception of a lack of trust management may have for the employees (Farrell, 2016). This perception of lack of trust further erodes the relationship between management and labor. Leaders must be open and approachable on how information is gathered and decisions constructed (Schwarz, 2002). A superintendent was clear when he said, “Particularly superintendents, there’s a code, your word has to be good. I mean you have to know if I tell you something, it’s the absolute truth as I know it. And you don’t monkey around with people.”

**Opening a window into an organization through transparency.**

Approachability and transparency encourage workers to contribute their expertise on issues under discussion by approaching management with their concerns. Transparency does improve decision making in organizations and leaders and employees may contribute to those improved processes by being open and candid (Farrell, 2016; Heath & Heath, 2013). Transparency is one factor in developing and maintaining an ethical climate, and leaders and employees fare better when the topic is discussed in the organization as a matter of principle (Houser et al., 2014). A school superintendent put it this way:
We would take the books and we would have a meeting for anybody that wanted to attend. And we would show, not just the teachers, not just CTA, not just the classified, we would show the moms and dads, everybody in the community, this is exactly what financial situation is.

Process—CGRT Results

The CGRT developed the following themes from the five studies completed as part of the thematic research project. The CGRT found that exemplar leaders reported there are two distinct types of process. The first is the formal or legal process that must take place as part of resolving conflict. It was necessary for the formal process to be explained to stakeholders to ensure that the process would be conducted fairly and openly. If due to legal reasons the process was not open to stakeholders, leaders ensured this was clearly explained to interested stakeholders. As reported by exemplar leaders, many of these formal processes are legally mandated or required by contracts. Common processes closed to stakeholders are personnel decisions, disciplinary actions, and legal negotiations. Leaders explicated the process while explaining that if the process was opened to all stakeholders it could worsen the conflict, jeopardize solutions, or be unlawful. Leaders also reported that conflict was resolved through the full implementation of the processes surrounding the conflict or problem such as termination hearings or union contract negotiations.

The second type of process reported by exemplar leaders is informal or undefined. Those processes as reported by exemplar leaders are those such as establishing relationships with previous conflict partners who may be stakeholders in some future action or in decision making. Other informal processes, often described as efforts toward transparency, but not required by law or contract would be to divulge information.
otherwise not available to stakeholders. For example, a superintendent described that making all budget records open to stakeholders’ scrutiny during contract negotiations would tend to minimize the impression of any duplicitous or unethical behavior by the superintendent. Often these processes were ad hoc, created as necessary and expanded or contracted as the situation demanded.

The CGRT developed the following themes, which provided the overarching ideas that led to identifying the activities described in this study. The CGRT themes are listed in Table 11.

**Process—Major Activities**

Exemplar leaders engage in at least two different process activities. This is demonstrated in 96 separate references with 41 sources displaying process activities. Process was defined by the peer-research team as “a method that includes a set of steps and activities that group members follow to perform tasks such as strategic planning or conflict resolution.” There is difficulty in describing and evaluating a process or processes, because process can be both explicit and tangible as well as abstract (Patton, 2015). Process is defined much like problem solving in that “process . . . begins when an individual invokes any goal-directed sequence of cognitive operations” (Vernon et al., 2016, p. 231).

The activities listed in Table 12 were the product of an analysis of the data available for this study. The activities represent a synthesis of the verbatim transcripts and the subjects’ description of the activities most associated with process and its role in conflict transformation. Each participant described how he or she perceived process and what action or actions were related to that activity through various storytelling or relating specific anecdotes describing those actions. Exemplar leaders
### Table 11  
*Process Themes Developed by the CGRT*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Profession</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transform conflict by making data-driven decisions</td>
<td>College presidents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask questions and collect data</td>
<td>College presidents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilize process to collaborate with the local community, board of</td>
<td>College presidents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trustees, executive team, faculty, staff, and students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate processes for effectiveness</td>
<td>College presidents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking to identify diverse parties to an issue and their interests</td>
<td>HRO professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing and/or utilizing processes and protocols to facilitate</td>
<td>HRO professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>effective organizational operations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing, communicating, reinforcing, or enforcing organizational expectations</td>
<td>HRO professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing and communicating legal parameters to diverse stakeholders</td>
<td>HRO professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing clear processes and protocols for different situations</td>
<td>K12 superintendents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistently using the processes put in place.</td>
<td>K12 superintendents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensuring that all stakeholders are aware of and understand the</td>
<td>K12 superintendents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>organizational processes in place</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being willing to course correct when necessary.</td>
<td>K12 superintendents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizing and utilizing the primary processes in place</td>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding and utilizing decision-making processes</td>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using committees and team decision-making processes</td>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding the roles of the processes involved</td>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a working knowledge of the types of processes involved in the conflict and conflict resolution</td>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizing and using the secondary processes in place</td>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using subject matter experts to help clarify issues and conflict peculiarities</td>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizing political aspects of situations/conflict/etc.</td>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving processes and procedures appropriate to the size of their city</td>
<td>Mayors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving processes that ensure the safety of the community</td>
<td>Mayors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restructuring departments to become more efficient</td>
<td>Mayors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding the relationship between the mayor and city council as a process for government</td>
<td>Mayors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

109
Table 12

*Process-Related Activities*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major activities</th>
<th># Sources of activity</th>
<th># References to activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explicating processes for achieving some desired end state</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding that processes are important for stakeholders</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Sources include transcripts and the results from each Chapter IV of the studies.

may not have used the specific language found in Table 12. However, an analysis of the data and the themes produced by the CGRT helped to craft the language that best expressed the specific activities related to process.

**Explicating processes for achieving some desired end state.** Organizations may use clearly defined and articulated steps in a process such as in manufacturing a particular product, while a service organization may use heuristics to establish the methods used to serve the organization’s stakeholders and customers (Green, 2016; Rattiner, 2011). Moreover, the word *process* is often used to describe the outcome of some action taken without using a standard procedure in shaping the result and only recognized after the fact as the result of a process (Oueslati, 2014; Rattiner, 2011). An HRO professional explained it this way, “What signs did we miss? What gaps allowed this to happen? And you tighten down and you constantly tighten down. So as a result of that, we rewrote our policies.”

**Understanding that processes are important for stakeholders.** A leader may invoke a predetermined process to resolve a conflict. This process may be the result of trial and error limited to the experiences of the leader. The process also involves working to correctly identify the parameters of the conflict. The leader then might engage
stakeholders who are perceived as having insight into the conflict or special knowledge about the nature and origin of the conflict. A superintendent stated, “I think all that process stuff is that around questioning, interacting, listening, restating. Their feeling and sensing that you are genuine.”

**Problem Solving—CGRT Results**

Exemplar leaders reported that problem solving is inherent in resolving conflict. Problems and a lack of easily instituted solutions lead to conflict. Exemplar leaders invoke problem-solving processes as a method of engaging stakeholders and transforming conflict. Leaders reported identifying key stakeholders and involving these conflict partners in developing and implementing solutions to those problems.

Exemplar leaders also reported that stakeholders were used to help define and investigate the depth and width of a problem. This method was also used to narrow the parameters of the problem until stakeholders were satisfied the problem had been accurately described and defined.

Exemplar leaders then moved forward with key stakeholders, including those who formed opposition groups, to creatively craft possible solutions to the presenting problem. For example, HRO professionals reported the necessity of including stakeholders in the budget process when deciding salary raises or employee layoffs. Including the stakeholder groups of union representatives, individual teachers, district staff, and parents was key to the long-term success of proposed solutions. Involving these key stakeholders along with open documents helped to create trust among the stakeholders and the long-term resiliency of the decisions eventually made. Exemplar leaders also articulated that this was not governance by committee. The solutions decided upon were a product of collaboration, cooperation, and concern by stakeholders.
for the long-term success of the organization with the final decision(s) made by the exemplar leader.

The CGRT developed the following themes from the five studies completed as part of the thematic research project. Their research provided the primary themes that supported identifying the activities described in this study. The themes are listed in Table 13.

**Problem Solving—Major Activities**

Exemplar leaders engage in at least four different problem-solving activities. This is demonstrated in 143 separate references with 76 sources displaying problem-solving activities. The CGRT defined problem solving as “the act of choosing and implementing a solution to an identified problem or situation.” Awareness that a goal is thwarted or suppressed may be the first indication a problem exists or may exist.

The activities listed in Table 14 were the product of an analysis of the data available for this study. The activities represent a synthesis of the verbatim transcripts and the subjects’ description of the activities most associated with problem solving and its role in conflict transformation. Each participant described how he or she perceived problem solving and what action or actions were related to that activity through various storytelling or relating specific anecdotes describing those actions. Exemplar leaders may not have used the specific language found in Table 14. However, an analysis of the data and the themes produced by the CGRT helped to craft the language that best expressed the specific activities related to problem solving. The major activities are listed in Table 14.
Table 13

Problem-Solving Themes Developed by the CGRT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Profession</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commissioning a work group/team to focus on solutions</td>
<td>College presidents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soliciting input/advice</td>
<td>College presidents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging the executive team to solve problems at their level</td>
<td>College presidents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizing and considering potential solutions generated by all of those involved</td>
<td>HRO professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking to identify diverse parties to an issue and their interests</td>
<td>HRO professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem solving when issues were multifaceted</td>
<td>HRO professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being willing to try novel ideas and course correct as needed</td>
<td>HRO professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correctly identifying and inviting all stakeholder groups to participate in the problem-solving process</td>
<td>K12 superintendents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a formal problem-solving process in place</td>
<td>K12 superintendents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensuring the first step in problem solving is a common understanding of the problem.</td>
<td>K12 superintendents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being willing to take risks and accept a solution that may be different than the one expected.</td>
<td>K12 superintendents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborating with every necessary stakeholder group to ensure all ideas and suggestions were heard and discussed prior to deciding on a solution</td>
<td>K12 superintendents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continually conducting damage control assessments internally and externally</td>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking for input from outsiders when necessary for different perspective</td>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using goal-setting strategies for developing goals and objectives</td>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determine root cause</td>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding the leader/follower relationships</td>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applying discipline as needed</td>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considering best solutions to difficult problems despite a lack of resources</td>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating and building momentum to solve a problem</td>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognize the value of using a diverse committee to help with problem solving</td>
<td>Mayors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizing the value of involving local business owners in solving problems with economic development</td>
<td>Mayors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding how county and state codes impact problem solving</td>
<td>Mayors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 14

*Problem-Solving Related Activities*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major activities</th>
<th># Sources of activity</th>
<th># References to activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activating problem solving to leverage the collective skills of stakeholders</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investing the time to discover the most accurate assessment of the problem</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizing the importance of stakeholder participation in implementing solutions</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provoking conflict to address it</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Sources include transcripts and the results from each Chapter IV of the studies.

**Activating problem solving to leverage the collective skills of stakeholders.**

The leader might engage stakeholders who are perceived as having insight into the conflict or special knowledge about the nature and origin of the conflict. The leader could then meet with those stakeholders to gather information, suggestions, and other input into possible solutions for the conflict. One college president said, “I go in with the data and I go in with the values. I open the discussion and I really try to define the problem then I stop talking and let other people work on that.” A police chief supported that idea by saying, “I think if you initiate somebody’s own creativity and let them come up with a solution, they develop ownership of it.”

**Investing the time to discover the most accurate assessment of the problem.**

Research has found that it matters little whether the problem is engaged by one person or engaged by groups with expert knowledge. The approach of close attention, parameter discovery, detailed analysis, and continued push to solutions are indicators of solid problem-solving processes (Algozzine et al., 2016). Researchers have constructed the
case that the level and quality of information known and the preciseness of those factors that will support the desired end state assist to define the problem (Algozzine et al., 2016; Vernon et al., 2016). The more precisely the problem can be described and defined leads to the possibility the problem will be solved more quickly and more creatively (Moreau & Engeset, 2016). This was supported by a superintendent who said, “We took probably 20 minutes digging and digging and digging to define what the problem was. Then we set a—then it was a fairly easy fix.” Another superintendent said, “I think step one is to make sure have a common understanding of what the problem is. The biggest mistake I see that’s been made is that people sit down and they talk for two or three weeks and they are not talking about the same thing.”

Recognizing the importance of stakeholder participation in implementing solutions. Often when a determination is made that a solution fits the problem, solves the problem, or will solve the problem, that determination is based on the perspectives and interpretations of stakeholders and observers (Moreau & Engeset, 2016). That does not guarantee that any proposed solution will adequately solve the problem. Also disagreements among and between different stakeholders can create new impediments to implementing the correct solution to a common problem (Garcia, 2014). Resolving those disagreements may lead once more to the problem-solving cycle and be oriented in the direction of eventual conflict transformation. A college president said, “You don't have the conflict if you listen and you let people . . . people will own you and your decisions if they feel like they've had an audience with you and been able to give you feedback.”

Provoking conflict to address it. A college president said, “You're right, yeah. I don’t avoid conflict. In fact, sometimes I'll provoke it.” A superintendent supported this
by saying, “I was very intentional and I continued to be very intentional in my leadership to create conflict.” Another said, “I’m not against controversy if it’s going to produce positive results.”

**Key Findings Grounded in the Six Domains**

Exemplar leaders who actively conducted the activities associated with the following behaviors in each of the six domains developed common ground, transformed conflict, and achieved breakthrough results. The key findings were determined to be any activity referenced more than 37 times by the 75 exemplar leaders who participated in the five studies conducted by the CGRT.

The number 37 represents that a majority of respondents in the study referenced the activity. Data analysis identified at least one or more key activity in each domain: four in communication, three in ethics, two each in collaboration, EI, problem solving and one in process. The key findings are listed in Table 15.

**Summary**

The purpose of this GT research consisting of five collective phenomenological studies was to generate a theory that explains how exemplar leaders from five fields use six domains of conflict transformation behaviors to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results. This chapter described the data summarized in 27 activities conducted by 75 participants in five different fields. The data were synthesized using GT methodology and arranged in activities by behavior domain.

Chapter V concludes the dissertation, with the final summary of the study, including major activities, theoretical development, and a theory or set of theory that describes the activities used by exemplar leaders to transform conflict to achieve common
ground and breakthrough results. The chapter also includes implications for action, significant findings, unexpected findings, recommendations for further research, concluding remarks, and reflections.

Table 15

*Key Findings*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Finding</th>
<th>Domain</th>
<th># References to activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creating mutual knowledge</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating alliances and teams from among opposing sides of a conflict</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating to develop relationships to prepare for conflict</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating to progress towards some desired end state</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reducing the impact of barriers to communication</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pushing out information</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inculcating the need to do right</td>
<td>Ethics</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting ethically to support a future desired end state</td>
<td>Ethics</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthening collaboration through transparency</td>
<td>Ethics</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activating problem solving to leverage the collective skills of stakeholders</td>
<td>Problem Solving</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investing the time to discover the most accurate assessment of the problem</td>
<td>Problem Solving</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing his or her own emotions and resultant behavior</td>
<td>EI</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceiving the emotional state of others</td>
<td>EI</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicating processes for achieving some desire end state</td>
<td>Process</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Sources include transcripts and the results from each Chapter IV of the studies.
CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to generate a theory that explains how exemplar leaders from five different professional fields use six domains of conflict transformation behaviors to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results. The research question was designed to identify a theory that might emerge from a systematic comparative analysis of five studies. The six domains examined were communication, collaboration, emotional intelligence (EI), ethics, problem solving, and process.

The main question was, “What theory emerges from a systematic comparative analysis of five studies to explain how exemplar leaders from various professions use the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors to transform conflict and achieve common ground?”

The research method used in this study was grounded theory (GT) using the five completed studies from the Common Ground Research Team (CGRT) to conduct a research synthesis from the archival data produced by those studies. The members of the CGRT provided their redacted interview transcripts, and over 1,300 pages of transcripts were coded using the computer software Nvivo. The data were analyzed during multiple iterations using GT methodology to identify the activities used by exemplar leaders to transform conflict and achieve common ground.

The sample was composed of anonymous exemplar leaders who participated in the CGRT research studies. The CGRT researched conflict transformation behaviors by leaders in different fields and there were no two groups of leaders in the same field. The
studies, sample, and number of subjects are included in Table 1 (repeated here for ease of reference).

Table 1

Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Field and location</th>
<th># of subjects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Police chiefs</td>
<td>Municipal police departments—California</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendents</td>
<td>K-12 education—California school districts</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidents</td>
<td>Community colleges—Washington State</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayors</td>
<td>Large and medium cities—Washington State</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executives</td>
<td>Human resources mid-size school districts—CA</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Total number of participants, by profession and location.*

The criteria used by the CGRT to define exemplar leaders included the following:

- Evidence of successful relationships with stakeholders
- Evidence of resolving conflict to achieve organizational success
- A minimum of 5 years’ experience in the profession
- Articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings
- Recognition from their peers
- Membership in professional associations in their field

**Key Findings**

The purpose of this grounded theory research was to generate a set of theories that explains how exemplar leaders from different fields use six domains of conflict transformation behaviors to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results.
A summary of the major findings presented in the previous chapter follows and is delineated by domain.

After the archival data were examined, the interview transcripts were analyzed. There were 14 significant findings that emerged from the data on how the exemplar leaders who participated in the CGRT research studies used the six domains of behavior to establish common ground. The significant findings were determined to be any activity referenced more than 37 times by the 75 exemplar leaders who participated in the five studies conducted by the CGRT. The number 37 represents that a majority of respondents in the study referenced the activity or process. Data analysis identified at least one or more significant activity or process in each domain: communication (4), ethics (3), collaboration (2), EI (2), problem solving (2), and process (1). The key findings are listed in Table 15.

**Communications**

Exemplar leaders used communication as the primary tool to establish common ground, transform conflict, and achieve breakthrough results as shown with communication having the highest number of responses across the six domains (27%). Data analysis demonstrated how communication is used by exemplar leaders to facilitate behavior relative to the other domains, such that collaboration, EI, problem solving, and process are all enabled by communication. These domains are directly intertwined by what exemplar leaders communicate regardless of the method or media chosen to transmit the messages. Exemplar leaders intentionally work on message content, tone, relevancy, and length designed to communicate specific ideas to stakeholders at specific and predetermined times. Exemplar leaders reported using communication as the primary means to develop or improve relationships with stakeholders, even those who
were past conflictants. The exemplar leader’s effort at transparency and creating a positive ethical climate furthered the development or improvement of relationships related to conflict. Those improved relationships not only reduced conflict but also helped to transform conflict in the future.

Table 15

**Key Findings**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Finding</th>
<th>Domain</th>
<th># References to activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Creating mutual knowledge</td>
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<td>Perceiving the emotional state of others</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicating processes for achieving some desire end state</td>
<td>Process</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_Note._ Sources include transcripts and the results from each Chapter IV of the studies.

**Collaboration**

Exemplar leaders used collaboration as a direct method to engage stakeholders as evidenced by having a high number of responses across the six domains (23%).

Collaboration for the exemplar leader was a tool used in conjunction with keeping
communication flowing, engaging talented or knowledgeable stakeholders to identify and solve problems, and building relationships with other stakeholders. Stakeholders engaged in collaborative efforts with an exemplar leader to take ownership of problem solutions created as a result of collaboration and those cocreated solutions were found to be more resilient and trusted by stakeholders. Collaboration was also identified by exemplar leaders as an effective method for maintaining open lines of communication.

**Ethics**

Ethics plays an important role in exemplar leadership as exhibited by a relatively high number of responses (19%). Exemplar leaders did not identify ethics as a domain of binary behavior in that exemplar leaders “do” ethics with either an on-or-off switch. Ethics is explicated as a series of behaviors that reflect good works, transparency, openness, predictable behavior, honesty, and moral courage. Ethical conduct is often a choice or course of action not taken by an exemplar leader. The exemplar leader is aware that he or she is under constant surveillance by the stakeholders in an organization and the conduct of the exemplar leader is under scrutiny at all times. Any level of ethical or unethical behavior is noticed and either strengthens or erodes the ethical climate of an organization.

Moral courage helps to shape an exemplar leader’s behavior by his or her refusal to undertake an activity that crosses ethical boundaries established by agreement, contract, regulations, laws, or organizational culture. Moral courage also demands that an exemplar leader undertake an action that may be deeply unpopular with stakeholders, but must be undertaken because of necessity regardless of the consequences to the exemplar leader.
Emotional Intelligence

EI plays a fairly important role in the six domains of behavior as represented by the percentage of responses (10%) related to EI. An exemplar leader with a strong EI skillset accepts criticism, responsibility for mistakes, and the reception of unfavorable information in a manner consistent with temperate and predictable behavior. Exemplar leaders set the conditions such that stakeholders are not reluctant to challenge, question, or deliver to the exemplar leader unfavorable information about the leader or the organization. Exemplar leaders consistently seek feedback as a method to improve all forms of behavior, not just those from the six domains studied here.

Process

The domain of process may be the most difficult for exemplar leaders to intentionally invoke or describe as represented by the fewest number or percentage of responses (8%). Although fewest responses in number, process still played an important role in organizations that have cultural, legal, regulatory, or formal processes for addressing myriad situations including problems and conflict. Exemplar leaders explicated those identifiable and required processes to all stakeholders accurately and on time. Exemplar leaders implemented those processes without favoritism or exception regardless of the potential consequences. Stakeholders often reached agreement with exemplar leaders based solely on the processes chosen and completed by the exemplar leader regardless of the nature of the conflict or the impact on the stakeholder(s). Where necessary, exemplar leaders invented processes where none existed or identified informal processes to help stakeholders solve, resolve, or transform conflict.
Problem Solving

Exemplar leaders use problem-solving skills as one of the domains of the six behaviors (13%). Exemplar leaders leveraged the skills and talents of stakeholders to create innovative and resilient solutions to common or uncommon problems. Inherent in problem solving is the determination of the exact nature, extent, and impact of the presenting problem. Using stakeholders to help perfect the exact parameters of any problem was identified as a part of the problem-solving skills of exemplar leaders.

Stakeholders

Exemplar leaders also identified and categorized stakeholders into useful groupings to assist in transforming conflict or solving problems. Exemplar leaders described the first group of stakeholders as those closest to them in the organization such as immediate staff members who accomplish the work as directed by the exemplar leader. These activities included gathering data, operating programs, giving direction to others, and completing tasks important to the exemplar leader. This was often the first group of stakeholders engaged by the exemplar leaders. The second group of stakeholders was composed of members of supervisory bodies with hire-or-fire authority over the exemplar leader such as boards of directors, city councils, city managers, college boards, and other powerful but more distant clusters of interested individuals. The third group was composed of those directly impacted by the conflict, problem, or change. This group generally included individuals affected by layoffs, reductions, facilities closure, and others who perhaps would either suffer or benefit from proposed changes in the organization. The fourth group was composed of interested individuals from the community at large.
Exemplar leaders tailored their conflict transformation behaviors depending on which group of stakeholders was involved and the type of conflict. Exemplar leaders also shaped communications relevant to those classes of stakeholders involved. For some stakeholder groups, exemplar leaders created exhaustive messages with detailed information relevant to the situation. In other cases, exemplar leaders provided only the data the stakeholders required to effectively operate, not with the intent to withhold information but to make the information more easily accessible to the stakeholders. Exemplar leaders refined information by extracting irrelevant information that might possibly detract from positive decision making, while simultaneously operating as transparently as legally permitted and ethically required. Moreover, some stakeholders were invited to participate in closed sessions to not only develop open and honest relationships but also to prepare those stakeholders to better understand complicated or esoteric information related to the organization.

**Unexpected Findings**

Two unexpected significant findings emerged from the data. The first was that exemplar leaders from across all five professions reported that they used their communication skills to transform relationships before conflict. Exemplar leaders engaged traditional enemies in relationship-building activities of various types before conflict occurred. Exemplar leaders engaged oppositional individuals such as union representatives, environmentalists, law enforcement detractors, organizational critics, and others who had traditionally opposed the organizations’ goals and policies.

This engagement included personal communications such as telephone calls, cards, letters, and e-mails. Exemplar leaders also organized small groups or individual
stakeholders on trips, dinners, and invitation-only strategic planning events. The exemplar leaders worked to create bonds of trust and openness. They reported that these relationships newly constructed from previous opponents reduced, eliminated, or softened the negative effects of conflict and went further than any other effort to transform conflict, achieve common ground, and create breakthrough results. Moreover, these newly established or rebuilt relationships created an atmosphere of cooperation and collaboration even when conflict was absent (Lederach, 2003a).

The second was that subjects reported creating conflict to solve it. The leaders who identified this behavior also addressed the need to engage in conflict using the six domains of behavior as appropriate. These leaders recognized the importance of using skills related to EI as well as communications to allow other conflictants to improve their relationships as part of a problem-solving process suggested by the exemplar leader. This seems appropriate since conflict is recognized as an important component of innovation as discussed in Gelfand et al. (2013): “Collaborative conflict cultures” involve vigorous debate (p. 1133). The exemplar leaders who participated in the CGRT research described the significance of creating conflict to both acknowledge that conflict existed and also to bring hidden conflict into the open as means of addressing it among members of certain stakeholder groups. This idea is supported by facilitators engaging in organizational development activities in established organizations (Schwarz, 2002).

**Conclusions**

The exemplar leaders who participated in the CGRT research established common ground and produced breakthrough results by engaging all six domains of behavior including communication, collaboration, EI, ethics, problem solving, and process. The
conclusions described in the following paragraphs are a result of the data analysis and findings.

**Transforming Conflict**

Leaders who want to transform conflict and find common ground approach the six conflict transformation behavior domains as composed of distinct activities associated within each domain. The leader uses any of the behaviors individually or together when necessary. Leaders deploy activities associated with each domain singularly, in combinations, or at times, not at all. Leaders use the activities associated within each and across the six domains. Leaders understand that those activities have to interact at some point in the progression of transforming conflict and achieving common ground.

**Conclusion 1.** Leaders who transform conflict and achieve the most success use the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors in different ways at different times depending on the situation, the stakeholders, the problem, or the conflict. Leaders at various times in the conflict transformation process concentrate on one domain or all six domains together as necessary, contingent on the nature and circumstances of the conflict.

**Conclusion 2.** Leaders begin the conflict transformation process using communication skills to engage stakeholders at different times in different ways to have the strongest potential for engaging conflict partners in collaboration activities. Leaders work to enhance and leverage the talents and abilities of those stakeholders by describing the desired end result of the collaborative effort. Leaders create alliances and teams composed of multiple stakeholders even if those stakeholders are seen as enemies to the organization. If leaders do so, they are better positioned within the organization to create common ground and transform conflict (Eliason, 2014; Garcia, 2014). Leaders form and
develop differing groups of stakeholders composed of different categories of individuals from different levels associated with the organization. Leaders then collaborate with those stakeholders to create the mutual knowledge needed to create common ground and transform conflict.

**Conclusion 3.** Leaders communicate intentionally with past conflict partners with the specific purpose of improving those relationships if they want to be more successful at transforming conflict. Leaders are open and build trust with past conflictants to create a better chance of transforming conflict (Garcia, 2014; Young, 2015). Leaders reduce the impact of barriers to communication with those conflict partners by listening and accepting feedback. Leaders push out information equally to all stakeholder groups, including past conflictants, to have a better chance at transforming conflict.

**Conclusion 4.** Leaders communicate, remain approachable, and share power with collaboration partners to create more resilient solutions to conflict. Leaders share all information legally permissible across as wide a network as possible to keep stakeholder groups informed, improve communications, and potentially have more success creating common ground. Leaders tailor communications for each stakeholder group such that it is relevant, timely, accurate, and related to the conflict.

**Conclusion 5.** Leaders must maintain personal ethical standards beyond reproach to assist in creating a predictable and positive ethical climate. Leaders provide rewards or sanctions as the consequences of ethical or unethical behavior to improve the chances of maintaining a positive organizational ethical climate and thereby increase the possibilities of transforming conflict and achieving common ground. Leaders must model ethical behavior and teach, train, and explain the ethical norms expected of the
members of the organization. Such a leader is better able to create an enduring ethical climate and increase the possibility of transforming conflict and achieving common ground (Houser et al., 2014).

**Conclusion 6.** Leaders build on their EI skills to reduce or eliminate behaviors that exacerbate conflict or impair relationships with stakeholders. Leaders continuously monitor their personal emotional states and remain open to unfavorable or negative information without rancor or criticism. Leaders control their behavior and support a climate of openness and concern for stakeholders’ emotional states. Such leaders will have a better chance of transforming conflict and achieving common ground.

**Conclusion 7.** Leaders create processes to promote a healthy, participative organizational culture and encourage stakeholders to participate in those processes. By doing so, these leaders would improve the possibility of transforming conflict and achieving common ground.

**Conclusion 8.** Leaders engage some or all stakeholder groups to address problems in an organized and efficient manner to increase the chances of successfully transforming conflict. Leaders must leverage the talents and abilities of individuals, stakeholders, and groups of stakeholders to solve problems in the organization. Leaders accept input and help to clarify the parameters and elements of a problem before suggesting solutions or making decisions. Leaders accept responsibility for ensuring mutually agreed-upon solutions are supported, enforced, and implemented. These leaders are better positioned for transforming conflict and achieving common ground.

**Common Ground Theory**

There is an abundance of literature on leadership behavior related to conflict management; however, the literature that does exist focuses on one or two behavior
domains. For example, developing strong communication skills was thought to be essential in conflict resolution (Harvey & Drolet, 2004; Hilliard & Cook, 2016; Politi & Street, 2011; Umezurike, 2011; Weeks, 1994). Other studies have examined additional domains, such as likeability, respect, and ethics, as these domains relate to conflict management. However, the research only examined individual domains or was limited to the interaction of one or two others (Ashcroft, 2014; Hannah et al., 2011; Werther, 2010).

Arguably, individual domains do have an impact on conflict; however, the impact of the six domains working in concert with each other has not been previously examined. While expertise in one or two domains is helpful, the conclusion of this study indicates that moving from conflict management to conflict transformation requires the powerful interaction of all six domains of communication, collaboration, ethics, EI, problem solving, and process. The findings from this study support the conclusion that all six domains of behavior are intertwined in a complex series of interactions that include the tangible and intangible activities a leader may or may not employ separately or together. Figure 3 provides a visual model showing the influential relationships among the six behavior domains and the corresponding potential results. As those activities are employed, each one directly or indirectly influences a leader’s behavior and the stakeholder(s)’ reaction to that activity, which then initiates a subsequent interaction. The involved stakeholders’ reactions and subsequent behavior are also influenced by additional activities the leader initiates. This is an iterative process that results in action plus reaction and continues from the beginning to the end of a conflict. A leader may employ one or more of those behaviors consciously or unconsciously with stakeholders;
However, those interactions between leader and stakeholder continue to be influenced by other behaviors from each of the domains.

The number, quality, and types of activities from the domains that a leader chooses to employ can have a strong influence on the outcome of an attempt to transform conflict. The higher the quality of the activities used during the leader-stakeholder interaction, the greater the influence those activities have on the outcome.

Schuh, Zhang, and Tian (2013) examined the multiple behaviors understood to be part of transformational leadership. They described those behaviors as operating simultaneously within the charismatic model including “walking the talk,” “inspiring others,” and providing an “inspiring view of the organization’s future.” The transformational leaders also took “personal risks, encouraged their subordinates to collaborate and to work towards the same goals” (Schuh et al., 2013, p. 630). Their
research supports the idea that leadership behaviors or skills are not employed one at a
time as necessary but are always in use in some degree or available as needed.

This research found that when behaviors from multiple domains are employed concurrently, those activities had a more powerful influence on the results of the effort to transform conflict. When successful leaders intentionally, carefully, and consciously bring to bear behaviors from all six domains before, during, and after a period of intense conflict, they create the conditions with stakeholders that have the greatest potential for achieving common ground. The combined impacts of high-quality activities from each domain exert positive influences on both the leader and the affected stakeholders and create the best conditions for breakthrough results in conflict transformation. The following theories have emerged from this study and are listed in Table 16.

Table 16

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Theories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The six domains of behavior are intertwined in a complex series of interactions that include tangible and intangible activities a leader may or may not employ separately or together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>When activities from all domains are used before and after, as well as during a conflict, the potential to achieve and maintain common ground is greater.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Care in choosing high-quality activities from each domain during leader-stakeholder interaction positively influences both the leader and the affected stakeholders and creates the best conditions for breakthrough results in conflict transformation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The leader who has developed significant expertise in all six domains, and the ability to move nimbly from one domain to the other, has the greatest potential to transform conflict and achieve common ground.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* These theories are a result of the GT method and corresponding data analysis.
Theory 1

The theory that the six domains of behavior are intertwined in a complex series of interactions that include tangible and intangible activities a leader may or may not employ separately or together was supported by all 14 of the significant findings identified earlier in this chapter. The activities arose from every domain and included behaviors that restrained an exemplar leader from engaging in some negative activity to help him avoid exacerbating conflict. This is supported by one participant who said, “We would not react and get baited by some inflammatory comment.” Exemplar leaders employed behaviors quietly or in full public view as necessary. As one respondent reported, “So I met with just tons of people, employees, parents, community members, elected officials some of our key vendors, like our attorneys, and others.” Another posited, “You have to have patience and you have to be willing usually to take the first step.” There are many examples of leaders intertwining communication and EI. Tourish (2014) made this point when he wrote that it was not possible to separate the dual roles of leadership that combined a process of communication and social interaction with all members of the organization. A participant stated, “If they’re yelling and screaming at me, just say ok, just try to get the emotions down enough to say, ok look, can I tell you why we need to do something different?”

Theory 2

The theory that when activities from all domains are used before and after, as well as during a conflict, the potential to achieve and maintain common ground is greater was supported by all 14 of the significant findings identified earlier in this chapter. Exemplar leaders reported that employing good communication skills or collaborating on a one-time basis were not enough to transform conflict. A participant had this to say: “So, I
spent a lot of time, crafting, if you will, collaborating and building that level of relationships so that when we went through those times together, they already trusted and respected me.” Another said, “I took the time to build and foster those relationships, because I knew I couldn’t ask them to stand by my side or take reductions in their pay, if they couldn’t trust who I was and what I was about.”

Exemplar leaders made the point that referring to developing multiple skills in each of the six domains was an important step in achieving successful conflict transformation. As one mentioned regarding acting transparently, “If we hadn't had that trust built, if we had not engaged in transparent communication, honest communication, et cetera, none of this would have happened 13 years later.” Another stated the consequences of not using all the domains, “Unfortunately it wasn’t a real honest and open discussion in a lot of ways and that hindered a lot of the collaborative process and free exchange of ideas.” Multiple experts have written that conflict resolution skills need to be used prior to a conflict as well as during and after (Allen, 2014; Jacobsen, 1999; Jameson et al., 2010; Liu, 2014).

**Theory 3**

The theory that care in choosing high-quality activities from each domain during leader-stakeholder interaction positively influences both the leader and the affected stakeholders and creates the best conditions for breakthrough results in conflict transformation was supported by all 14 significant findings identified earlier in this chapter. Exemplar leaders reported a commitment to doing the best they could. If they needed to create better communication products, improve information flow, work with past conflictants, soften their responses, and meet people half way, they did so. One reported, “What I ended up doing was through collaboration. Through the investment I
had made up until that point, where I made decisions based on what I thought was in the
best interest of the organization, I had a little credibility with staff, so I was able to
capitalize on the credibility where that other person didn’t have that.” Another reported,
“Getting back to, yes, communication is everything, and communication means being
present, listening, and being self-aware.”

A respondent mentioned, “Once you established a relationship then the next time
something came up then people would listen to, or at least give you the benefit of the
doubt which made all the difference in advancing ideas.” A superintendent added, “The
older I get the more strategic, the more thoughtful, the more purposeful I have become.”

This effort by exemplar leaders to do the best they could in any situation is
described by Significant Finding 7: Exemplar leaders inculcate the need to do right.
Leaders who displayed high-quality behaviors reinforced the perception by stakeholders
of a positive organizational climate, and this positive perception alone increased
employee satisfaction and creativity, and reduced conflict and employee absenteeism
(Duane et al., 2015; Schwepker & Schultz, 2015)

**Theory 4**

The theory that the leader who has developed significant expertise in all six
domains, and the ability to move nimbly from one domain to the other, has the greatest
potential to transform conflict and achieve common ground was supported by all 14
significant findings identified earlier in this chapter. At one moment, a leader has to
adjust to the immediate developing situation to change his or her communication style,
increase or decrease information flow, work with emotionally charged stakeholders while
remaining calm, employ mandatory processes or invent new ones, and continue to
persevere in the pursuit for conflict transformation (Dabke, 2016; Sadri, 2012). It is the
ability of a leader to understand the meaning of and consciously employ those activities that are most appropriate for the situation. One exemplar leader related an event that demonstrates behaviors from each of the domains as described by Theory 4. The context was a district budget crisis that had the potential for serious economic consequences for the entire range of stakeholders. The exemplar leader explained,

So we developed this budget committee and we had reps from teachers and classified staff from every single one of our schools [process]. So it was a large group of folks and there wasn’t just a rep from each school, you know, it was like five, six or seven, and we met in the boardroom regularly and I asked our CBO, I said, we’re going to share everything with them and teach them budget 101 [ethics, communication]. We’re going to teach you how the budget works and what, what exists now and what we’re facing in the third year out [EI]. So sharing everything with them and being incredibly inclusive and transparent was how we were able to get through that [collaboration, ethics, process, EI]. Because I didn’t have to say to them we have to do this, we have to do that [EI]. They saw the big picture and saw the details behind that and collectively, and we worked really, really closely with our three employee associations [communication, collaboration, process, problem solving, EI]. We were blessed to have wonderful, wonderful leaders in the employee associations. They are collaborative. They collectively problem-solve together all the time [problem solving, collaboration]. In little things and big things. And we collectively problem solved that budget crisis [communication, collaboration]. (Anonymous, personal communication, 2016)
The four theories provide guidance and insight into programs designed for developing leaders in organizations who may not have the tools necessary to transform conflict and achieve common ground. The following implications for action provide some examples on how these theories might be employed to develop the new, inexperienced, or unsuccessful leader.

**Implications for Action**

The implications from this research synthesis have the potential to alter the way organizations hire, develop, and promote individuals to leadership positions. Middle management and senior leaders can benefit from implementing any one or all recommendations. Any organization composed of hierarchies with designated leaders like paramilitary organizations, military organizations, legacy corporations, nonprofits, trade organizations, school and college districts, and others that seek to develop common ground and transform conflict may benefit. It is recommended that,

1. Senior leaders from either associated or disassociated fields assemble on a regular basis to explore issues and concerns related to any of the six domains of behavior. For example, leaders meet and discuss, share experiences, and develop solutions to various ethical issues encountered in their respective organizations including improving weak or defective ethical climates. On different occasions, those same leaders continue the discussion concerning aspects of communication, collaboration, problem solving, process, and EI as it relates to current issues in the organization.

2. In organizations with a history of conflict, senior leaders hire an independent coach or facilitator to assist organizations to transform conflict and achieve common ground.
3. Company presidents conduct a 360-degree assessment of the organization’s leadership climate to examine the current status of behaviors associated with the six domains of conflict transformation and determine where the organization would improve the overall leadership effort.

4. Senior leaders evaluate a candidate for potential promotion to an intermediate leadership position based on his or her ability to lead teams while in conflict with stakeholders and other members of the team.

5. Hiring authorities evaluate a candidate’s understanding of the ethical climate of the organization. Part of this evaluation is the candidate’s ability to adhere to, model, teach, and articulate the components of an ethical climate.

6. A book describing the importance of relationships among stakeholders and the imperative for interest-based conflict transformation is written on the essentials of finding common ground and transforming relationships.

7. That organizations bring in all elements of the organization such as top staff, supervisors, team leaders, and individuals for training on how to identify common interests and develop those common interests to move away from position-based conflict and move toward identifying common interests and working toward achieving common ground.

8. Hiring authorities in organizations carefully screen a candidate for his or her ability to create effective, relevant and timely communications. HRO departments develop or purchase those instruments designed to evaluate the communication skills of candidates.
9. Hiring authorities evaluate a candidate’s approachability and his or her tolerance for negative feedback. The hiring authority develops the instrument or a practical test to evaluate a candidate’s ability to stay calm and maintain an even temperament when confronted with negative information.

10. Leadership development curriculum in university management degree programs or in-service professional development programs include emphasis on explicating the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors that lead to common ground.

11. Leadership development curriculum in university management degree programs or in-service professional development programs include coursework and field work for practical experience aimed at facilitating potential leaders to identify key stakeholders in an organization, analyzing the state of relationships between the stakeholders, techniques to improve those relationships, what components are included in effective collaboration and
   a. Conducting 360-degree evaluations designed to determine the baseline quality of the relationships among stakeholders.
   b. Participating in leadership apprentice programs where potential leaders act in an experiential leadership capacity to provide an opportunity for direct leadership learning and in situ real-time feedback.
   c. Emphasizing the importance of sharing power during collaboration by highlighting the free flow of all legally permissible and relevant information while maintaining the openness to feedback from all sides of an issue or conflict.
   d. Creating coursework related to understanding the nature of relationships and the impact those relationships positive or negative on problem solving or resolving
conflict.
e. Recognizing the need to maintain responsibility for decisions while simultaneously respecting the contributions of stakeholders and individuals.
f. Emphasizing empowering lower status stakeholders with every component of collaboration allocated to higher status stakeholders.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

Based on the findings and conclusions expressed in this study future research in the transformation of conflict and finding common ground is suggested as follows:

1. A qualitative research study to explore how power structures change in organizations and what impact, if any, those changes might have on conflict transformation.

2. A qualitative research study to examine whether processes or activities put into place by exemplar leaders remain after the leader departs and how and to what extent these processes or activities are strengthened to survive leadership succession.

3. A qualitative research study to determine what kinds of activities are necessary to keep positive and productive relationships in place while solving problems or conflict in a high-stress environment.

4. A research study to investigate possible hypotheses surrounding conflict origination and whether conflict originates or is related to negative relationships between organizational stakeholders.

5. A research study to examine the potential impact negative relationships among organizational stakeholders have on organizational culture and conflict transformation.

6. A research study to examine the effectiveness and efficacy of leaders who provoke conflict and whether this provocation supports the resolution of, or exacerbates
conflict.

7. One of the unexpected findings was exemplar leaders work to transform relationships before conflict arises. A qualitative research study to investigate this process and describe and define the procedures, techniques, and tactics of relationship transformation.

**Concluding Remarks and Reflections**

When I started this journey I was naïve about the consequences of attempting to create new knowledge. I have to say it has been a life changing experience and I’m surprised at the positive affect this work has had on me. I had no idea that going through the same process I would expect future leaders to go through to change their leadership habits also changed mine.

Having extensive service as a designated leader during a 20-year military career and civilian leadership experience including as president of two nonprofit organizations, I thought I knew what needed to be done to eliminate poor leadership. I couldn’t have been more wrong.

Participating in the CGRT gave me the opportunity to look inside the real lives of exemplar leaders to see how they were navigating the choppy waters of leading organizations in the 21st century. With the flattening of organizational hierarchies and the changing workplace, leadership has changed significantly over the past 40 years. It is evident that the old days of simply directing employees to “work smarter, not harder” or to implore stakeholders to “just do their jobs,” or demand that employees “do more with less” or “to not do what I do, but do what I say” are long gone.
Instead, leaders are expected to listen, empathize, communicate, act ethically, give credit, build or repair relationships, define problems, and to seek empowering, creative, and resilient solutions for problems and conflict. Exemplar leaders also have to simultaneously maintain a steady temperament in the face of an ever-changing workplace with ever-changing expectations.

Now and in the future exemplar leaders are, and will be expected to develop relationships with adversaries, create mutual knowledge, seek out common ground, and move forward. Simultaneously exemplar leaders will also have to cooperate with those adversaries on potential solutions that benefit the community, organization, and society regardless of positions or ideology. Relationships form the backbone of all conflict and transforming relationships has become critically important in the 21st century. As John Lederach (2003b) said,

We negotiate the nature and quality of our relationships, our expectations of each other, our interpretation of our identity as individuals and family, our sense of self-worth and care for each other, the nature of power and decision making in our relationships. (p. 11)

He also said, “Peace is centered and rooted in the quality of relationships composed of two parts. Face-to-face interaction and the ways we structure our social, political, economic and cultural relationships” (Lederach, 2003b, p. 20). I couldn’t have said it better.
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APPENDIX A

Brandman University Institutional Review Board Approval

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
IRB Application Action – Approval
Date: October 26, 2016

Name of Investigator/Researcher: Scott Dick
Faculty or Student ID Number: B00461863
Title of Research Project:
Transforming Conflict: A Grounded Theory Study of Six Behavior Domains of Leaders in Nine Different Fields

Project Type: ✔ New ☐ Continuation ☐ Resubmission

Category that applies to your research:
✔ Doctoral Dissertation EdD
☐ DNP Clinical Project
☐ Masters’ Thesis
☐ Course Project
☐ Faculty Professional/Academic Research
Other: 

Funded: ✔ No ☐ Yes [Funding Agency; Type of Funding; Grant Number]

Project Duration (cannot exceed 1 year): six months
Principal Investigator's Address: PO Box 484, Carmel Valley, CA 93924
Email Address: sdick@mail.brandman.edu Telephone Number: 831-238-0532
Faculty Advisor/Sponsor/Chair Name: Dr. Patricia White
Email Address: pwhite@brandman.edu Telephone Number:

Category of Review:
✔ Exempt Review ☐ Expedited Review ☐ Standard Review

APPENDIX B

Data Material Releases

Research Materials Release

Primary researcher: Scott Dick
Committee Chair: Dr. Patricia White

(Please complete the following information: name, email address and title of research study and indicate with an X that you agree then and sign and date the form - use electronic signature)

Name: Karen J. Bolton
Email address: boll1801@mail.brandman.edu

X I hereby agree to allow Brandman University doctoral candidate Scott Dick access to the redacted transcripts and NVIVO codes from my study on: Community College Presidents

Signature: Karen J Bolton
Date: 10/17/2016

Research Materials Release

Primary researcher: Scott Dick
Committee Chair: Dr. Patricia White

(Please complete the following information: name, email address and title of research study and indicate with an X that you agree then and sign and date the form - use electronic signature)

Name: Ambra Dodds
Email address: ambrauddds@saglobal.net

X I hereby agree to allow Brandman University doctoral candidate Scott Dick access to the redacted transcripts and NVIVO codes from my study on: New Exception K-12 Superintendents Utilize the Six Domains of Conflict Transformation to Establish Common Ground and Produce Breakthrough Results: A Phenomenological Study for use in the meta-analysis; “Transforming Conflict: A Grounded Theory Study of Six Domains of Leaders in Nine Different Fields.”

Signature: Ambra Dodds
Date: 10/25/16

Please keep a copy for your records

Research Materials Release

Primary researcher: Scott Dick
Committee Chair: Dr. Patricia White

(Please complete the following information: name, email address and title of research study and indicate with an X that you agree then and sign and date the form - use electronic signature)

Name: Christopher M. Fuzie
Email address: fuzie301@mail.brandman.edu

X I hereby agree to allow Brandman University doctoral candidate Scott Dick access to the redacted transcripts and NVIVO codes from my study on: A Qualitative Study to Discover and Describe Common Ground Strategies used by Exemplar Municipal Police Chiefs to Proactively Transform or Resolve Conflict as They Attempt to Shape the Future for use in the meta-analysis; “Transforming Conflict: A Grounded Theory Study of Six Domains of Leaders in Nine Different Fields.”

Signature: ____________________________
Date: 10/17/2016

Please keep a copy for your records
Research Materials Release

Primary researcher: Scott Dick
Committee Chair: Dr. Patricia White

(Please complete the following information: name, email address and title of research study and indicate with an X that you agree then and sign and date the form—use electronic signature)

Name: Darin Hand, Ed.D.
Email address: chand@brandman.edu

I hereby agree to allow Brandman University doctoral candidate Scott Dick access to the redacted transcripts and NVIVO codes from my study on: How Washington State Mayors Transform Conflict


I understand that my redacted transcripts will be kept in a secure location and confidentiality will be protected. My permission to access these documents expires on October 17, 2017.

Signature: Darin Hand
Date: Oct 18, 2016

Please keep a copy for your records

Research Materials Release

Primary researcher: Scott Dick
Committee Chair: Dr. Patricia White

(Please complete the following information: name, email address and title of research study and indicate with an X that you agree then and sign and date the form—use electronic signature)

Name: Denise LaRue
Email address: laru4401@mail.brandman.edu

X I hereby agree to allow Brandman University doctoral candidate Scott Dick access to the redacted transcripts and NVIVO codes from my study on: Going from breakdown to breakthrough: a human resource professional’s perspective of conflict resolution in K-12 public education


I understand that my redacted transcripts will be kept in a secure location and confidentiality will be protected. My permission to access these documents expires on October 17, 2017.

Signature: Denise LaRue
Date: October 17, 2016

Please keep a copy for your records
# APPENDIX C

## Synthesis Matrix

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