



MASTER THESIS

“We will cross that bridge when we come to it”

An explorative study of the structuration of organizational conflicts and individuals' conflict management

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November 2020

UNIVERSITY OF TWENTE.

Acknowledgments

First, I would like to thank my supervisors Prof. Dr. M. D. T. de Jong and Dr. H. A. van Vuuren for their support, patience, and feedback throughout the conductance of my research project.

I would also like to thank my beloved family and friends who have supported me and helped me during this research project. I would like to especially thank my second coder for her help, support, and feedback during the process of assessing intercoder reliability.

Lastly, I would like to thank my farmor for making this possible from the very beginning.

Abstract

Purpose: The theory of conflict cultures views individual conflict management from an organizational point of view and suggests that there are socially shared norms for how conflicts should be managed within an organization. According to the theory, a conflict culture influences organizational members' conflict management, but at the same time, a conflict culture may be influenced by the members and their conflict management. The purpose and objective of this study is to create a better understanding of conflict cultures by studying the reciprocal relationship between an organization's conflict culture and organizational members' conflict management.

Method: Based on the critical incident technique (CIT), 20 interviews with participants from different organizations were conducted. CIT encouraged the participants to recall specific events of conflicts they had experienced within their organization and share their interpretations of the conflicts and their outcomes. The interviews took the form as online interviews. Further, grounded theory and open and axial coding were used to understand the reciprocal relationship.

Findings: The results of the study suggest that individuals perceive an organization's conflict culture by referring to one or several of the conflict culture's organizational features and the organization's characteristics. This perception is created and/or strengthened when individuals experience conflicts within their organization. Depending on which feature(s) is prominent in the individual's perception, the conflict culture's influence may be perceived differently by individuals, and either guide, prevent and minimize, or support the individual's choice of conflict management. Furthermore, the result suggests that reproduction of a conflict culture is stronger than production of it, and as a consequence of the conflict culture's capability to influence, individuals can experience an intrapersonal conflict as part of their choice of strategy.

Conclusion: The results of this study explain and provide an understanding of how conflict culture works and influences organizational members' choice of conflict management. The result also illustrates how the power and stability of a conflict culture enables it to constantly reproduce, and what consequences this can cause organizational members to experience.

Keywords: organizational conflict, conflict management, conflict culture, structuration theory

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1. Introduction

“[T]o work in an organization is to be in conflict” (Tjosvold, 2007, p. 19). Whether we like it or not, conflicts are inevitable when working within an organization (Gelfand et al., 2008). Conflicts are often considered as something negative (Rispens, 2014), and can for example have a negative impact on individuals’ satisfaction and group performance (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Jehn, 1995, 1997). Nevertheless, conflicts do not only have a negative impact on individuals and organizations but can also have a positive impact and result in positive outcomes. For example, a well-managed conflict can result in promoted learning (Tjosvold, Sun, & Wan, 2005), increased team performance (Alper et al., 2000; Tjosvold, Poon, & Yu, 2005), increased group satisfaction and group performance (DeChurch & Marks, 2001), and increased job satisfaction and productivity among individuals (Choi & Ha, 2018).

Conflict management can be described as a process where individuals manage conflicts through different activities of interaction and communication (Behfar et al., 2008). When managing a conflict, individuals choose from various conflict management strategies and this choice may be influenced by the context of the conflict (Choi & Ha, 2018; DeChurch & Marks, 2001), the individual’s preferences of conflict management strategies (Gelfand et al., 2008), and individual and organizational features (e.g., Balay, 2007; Gonçalves et al., 2016; Holt & DeVore, 2005; Kugler & Brodbeck, 2014).

Previous research on conflict management has mainly focused on its general processes on an individual and small-group level (Gelfand et al., 2008; Gelfand et al., 2012; Kugler & Brodbeck, 2014). To increase the knowledge of conflict management on an organizational level, Gelfand et al. (2008) proposed the theory of *conflict cultures*, which is defined as “a socially shared and normative way to manage conflict” (p. 139) within an organization. The conflict culture is influenced by both top-down and bottom-up features such as leadership style, organizational structure and reward system, and organizational members’ characteristics, personalities, and value orientations. In turn, the conflict culture influences organizational members’ conflict management and their choice of strategy during a conflict (Gelfand et al., 2008).

Even though the theory of conflict cultures was proposed more ten years ago, there is little research available on conflict cultures. The few studies conducted focused on proving the proposed theory by identifying the different conflict cultures within organizations, and on how the suggested features influence the conflict culture (Gelfand et al., 2010; Gelfand et al., 2012).

Additionally, previous research on conflict culture mainly describes what a conflict culture may look like, but not necessarily how it works. Therefore, to create a better understanding of conflict cultures, the purpose and objective of this study is to understand how a conflict culture influences its organizational members' conflict management. Furthermore, considering that conflict culture consists of a shared and mutual understanding of how conflicts should be managed (Gelfand et al., 2008), it is also of interest to understand how organizational members and their conflict management influences the conflict culture to better understand the development and maintenance of it. Therefore, the research question for this study will be as follows:

- RQ: What is the reciprocal relationship between an organization's conflict culture and individual organizational members' choice of conflict management?

Conflict can be thought of as an act of social interactions and communication (Putnam, 2006), and considering the socially shared understanding that characterizes a conflict culture, one could argue that the normative way of managing conflicts is created and communicated among organizational members through interactions of conflicts (Gelfand et al., 2008). Therefore, to better understand the social processes and communicative practices of the reciprocal relationship, structuration theory will be used in this study to help answering the research question. Because of this, and to create a better understanding of how an organization's conflict culture influences an individual's choice of conflict management, and how individuals' conflict management influences the conflict culture, the following sub questions were formulated:

- SQ1: How does an individual describe a conflict culture?
- SQ2: How does an individual make sense of the organization's conflict culture?
- SQ3: How does the conflict culture of an organization influence an individual's choice of conflict management?
- SQ4: How do individuals and their conflict management influence an organization's conflict culture?

2. Theoretical framework

In this chapter, the theoretical framework of the study will be presented. First, an introduction will be given of the concept of organizational conflict, which is followed by an introduction of the concept of conflict management. Thereafter follows an explanation of the theory of conflict cultures, and lastly, there will be a section explaining the structuration theory and why it is relevant for this study.

2.1 Organizational conflict

A conflict can be defined as “an interactive process manifested in incompatibility, disagreement, or dissonance within or between social entities (i.e., individual, group, organization, etc.)” (Rahim, 2002, p. 207). In other words, a conflict can occur when an individual of a group behaves in a way, possesses salient values and/or attitudes that the other members do not accept or tolerate, or when there are differences in, for example, personalities, cultural backgrounds, age, and experiences (Rahim & Bonoma, 1979). They are most often considered as negative (Rispen, 2014), and are associated with negative outcomes for both the individual and the organization. For instance, conflicts can have a negative impact on individuals’ satisfaction and group performance (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Jehn, 1995, 1997). They can also decrease cohesion, respect, and trust among group members, which in return can have a negative impact on the group’s viability with decreased group member satisfaction and intention to remain with the group (Jehn et al., 2008). Nevertheless, conflicts can have positive outcomes as well, and can for example result in increased satisfaction, performance, and productivity (Choi & Ha, 2018; DeChurch & Marks, 2001). For example, a group who manages a conflict in collaboration with each other and are accommodating to each other’s needs, i.e., using active and agreeable conflict management, may experience promoted group satisfaction and performance as an outcome. The open discussions about differences of opinions and exchange of information associated with active conflict management provide the group members with a possibility to solve problems together, whereas agreeable conflict management ensures that all group members’ expectations are satisfied and/or met (DeChurch & Marks, 2001).

Conflicts can be categorized in different ways and are most often categorized based on their type and what made them occur. For example, Mikkelsen and Clegg (2018) summarize previous research and explain that four different types of conflicts can occur within

organizations. These are *relationship conflict*, *task conflict*, *process conflict*, and *status conflict*. A relationship conflict occurs when there are differences in personality, preferences, and/or opinions regarding non-task issues; a task conflict occurs when there are disagreements regarding the content of and/or opinions about the task at hand; a process conflict occurs when there are disagreements about how to approach a task—i.e., who should do what, and what resources to use (Jehn, 2014); and lastly, a status conflict occurs when there is disagreement or dispute regarding individuals' status positions within the group (Bendersky & Hays, 2012).

Organizational conflicts should be thought of as an organizational phenomenon, meaning that the practices and processes of conflicts are embedded in the social structures of an organization and individuals' mindsets (Mikkelsen & Clegg, 2018). Especially since literature suggests that the structure and context of an organizational conflict influence how a conflict occurs (Gray et al., 2007; Sheppard, 1992), and how individuals manage it (Morrill, 1995; Sheppard, 1992).

2.2 Individual conflict management

The way individuals, groups, or organizations handle conflicts can be referred to as conflict management. On the individual level, conflict management involves different behavioural styles of handling interpersonal conflicts (Rahim & Bonoma, 1979). These styles can be explained and categorized in different ways using different models. However, within conflict management literature, the dominant one is the dual-concern model (Ma, 2007).

The dual-concern model is based on two dimensions that differentiate how an individual manages interpersonal conflict; “concern for self and [concern] for others” (Rahim, 1983, p. 368; Rahim & Bonoma, 1979). The dimensions explain to what degree an individual may attempt to satisfy their own concern and is willing to satisfy the concern for others (Rahim & Bonoma, 1979). The combination of these two dimensions creates five behavioural styles namely integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising. Each style is associated with specific types of conflict management behaviour. To begin with, the integrating style is associated with a behaviour of exchange of information, examination of different opinions and points of views, and problem-solving. The obliging style is associated with acts of smoothing, and a behaviour of finding commonalities and talking down differences to satisfy the other party. The dominating style is associated with a forcing behaviour where the individual often ignores the other party's concern. The avoiding style involves a behaviour of withdrawal and/or sidestepping where the individual rarely satisfy any of the involved parties concerns and/or

needs, whereas the compromising styles implies that both parties are giving up on something to be able to reach a solution which is beneficial for them both (Rahim & Bonoma, 1979).

Nevertheless, it is not only the concern for oneself and others that influence an individual's choice of conflict management strategy. Research suggests that different individual, situational, and organizational features influence an individual's choice of conflict management style. For example, the individual feature gender (Holt & DeVore, 2005; Rahim & Katz, 2020); personality traits (Barbuto Jr. et al., 2010; Erdenk & Altuntaş, 2017); emotions (Montes et al., 2012); level of cultural intelligence (Gonçalves et al., 2016); level of organizational commitment (Balay, 2007); and levels of mental construal, i.e., how one perceives the world either as abstract or concrete (Mukherjee & Upadhyay, 2019) may influence one's conflict management style. Furthermore, the situational features relational fit (Bélanger et al., 2015), type of conflict, and the opposite partner's choice of strategy (Tamm et al., 2014), together with the organizational features organizational role (Holt & DeVore, 2005); national culture (Holt & DeVore, 2005; Ma, 2007); and level of organizational integrative complexity (Kugler & Brodbeck, 2014) can influence an individual's choice.

2.3 Conflict culture

Previous research about conflict management has mainly focused on its general processes on an individual and small-group level (Gelfand et al., 2008; Gelfand et al., 2012; Kugler & Brodbeck, 2014). To broaden the research about conflict management, Gelfand et al. (2008) proposed the theory of conflict cultures. This theory studies conflict management from an organizational point of view by introducing a conflict culture as the shared norms, associated assumptions, and values of organizational members of how conflicts should be managed within their organization (Gelfand et al., 2014). Even though organizational members have individual preferences of conflict management strategies (Gelfand et al., 2008), organizations create strong contexts which influence an individuals' behaviour (Johns, 2006; O'Reilly, 2008). Because of this, Gelfand et al. (2008; Gelfand et al., 2014) suggest that an organization's conflict culture influences organizational members' behaviour and attitudes during conflict management, and can also, to some extent, prevent and minimize organizational members' preferences of choice of conflict management strategies (Gelfand et al., 2008; Gelfand et al., 2014).

2.3.1. *Types of conflict culture*

According to the theory of conflict cultures by Gelfand et al. (2008), cultures that can develop and exist within an organization are *collaborative cultures*, *dominating cultures*, *conflict avoidant cultures*, and *passive-aggressive cultures*, each of which is associated with different behaviours and attitudes toward conflict management. These cultures are based on two dimensions of norms for the way conflicts are managed within an organization; either in an agreeable or disagreeable manner, and either actively or passively (Gelfand et al., 2008).

A collaborative culture is based on norms characterized as agreeable and active and can be illustrated by an organization that trusts and empowers its members to actively manage conflicts. A dominating culture is based on norms characterized as disagreeable and active, and similar to a collaborative culture, members are allowed to actively manage conflicts. However, unlike a collaborative conflict culture, there are few organizational constraints on conflict behaviour, and disagreeable behaviour is accepted within a dominating conflict culture. A conflict avoidant culture is based on norms characterized as agreeable and passive, and within this culture, it is important to have order and control to maintain harmony and interpersonal relationships within the organization. Lastly, a passive-aggressive culture is based on norms characterized as disagreeable and passive. This conflict culture can be illustrated by an organization that does not believe that its members are able to actively manage conflicts, and there are therefore constraints on behaviour, and competition among members and antisocial behaviour is accepted (Gelfand et al., 2008). Nevertheless, even though the theory of conflict cultures suggests four different conflict cultures, research has only found evidence that supports and confirms the existence of three conflict cultures on an organizational level, which are the collaborative, dominant, and conflict avoidant culture (Gelfand et al., 2010).

2.3.2. *Organizational features of a conflict culture*

A conflict culture is developed and influenced by both organizational top-down and bottom-up features. The top-down features that influence the development and maintenance of a conflict culture are both prominent such as leadership, organizational structure and reward systems, and distal such as community, national and regional culture. The most influential bottom-up feature that facilitates the development and maintenance of a conflict culture are the characteristics, personalities, and value orientations of the organizational members (Gelfand et al., 2008; Gelfand et al., 2010; Gelfand et al., 2014). Furthermore, Gelfand et al. (2008) also suggest that the bottom-up features demographic composition of organizational members and social

networks within the organization facilitate the development and maintenance of different conflict cultures.

Regarding the organizational feature leadership, research suggests that leadership style influences organizational culture (Klein et al., 2013; Mahalinga Shiva & Suar, 2012; Vito, 2020), and that the vision and actions of an organization's senior leaders reinforce the current culture of an organization (Schein, 1983). Gelfand et al. (2008) suggest a similar influential relationship between managers' leadership styles and an organization's conflict cultures, and that different leadership styles facilitate the development and maintenance of different conflict cultures. In their study, Gelfand et al. (2012) found evidence which supports the suggestion that a manager's conflict management influences the organization's conflict culture. Nevertheless, research suggests that a manager's potential to influence her/his subordinates' attitudinal outcomes depends on the subordinates' trust in their manager (Chan et al., 2008). In the context of conflict cultures, this could imply that the influence of the feature leadership style is made possible and/or stronger when the organizational members have a trust for the management of the organization.

Continuing with the feature organizational structure and reward systems, Gelfand et al. (2008) suggest that different levels of centralization and formalization within an organization facilitate the development and maintenance of different conflict cultures. Organizations create strong contexts that influence individuals' behaviour (Johns, 2006; O'Reilly, 2008), and the structural characteristics of an organization provide its members with a context in which they are exposed to the same norms, procedures, and policies (Ashraf & Rowlinson, 2015). In the context of organizational conflict management, this would imply that members of an organization create a shared understanding of the organization's conflict culture (Gelfand et al., 2008) since all members are exposed to the same structural characteristics of the organization. In other words, the structure of an organization strengthens the existing culture (Janićijević, 2013). To illustrate, research suggests that organizations with an organizational communication that differentiate points of views are perceived by its members as fostering and practicing cooperative conflict management (Kugler and Brodbeck, 2014).

Regarding the distal features proposed by Gelfand et al. (2008), Chatman and Jehn (1994) found that there is a bigger variation of organizational cultures across industries than within them. This implies that the type of industry may facilitate the development and maintenance of different conflict cultures (Gelfand et al., 2008). Additionally, research suggests that national culture influences organizational culture (Hofstede, 2001), and that an

organization's culture often reflects its society's national culture (Javidan et al., 2004). Considering this, Gelfand et al. (2008) suggest that the national culture of the society where the organization is located facilitates the development and maintenance of different conflict cultures.

Regarding bottom-up features, the most influential feature concerns the characteristics, personalities, and value orientations of the organizational members (Gelfand et al., 2008; Gelfand et al., 2010). According to Schneider (1987) and the attraction-selection-attrition (ASA) model, individuals are attracted to different organizations for different reasons. The individuals are thereafter selected based on their similarity with the characteristics of the organization, and if there is a fit, the individual will remain with the organization. This process creates a homogeneity in the attributes of the members, which strengthens for instance an organization's culture (Schneider, 1987). In accordance with Schneider's (1987) model, Gelfand et al. (2008) suggest that the homogeneity of attributes among organizational members also facilitates the development and maintenance of different conflict cultures. For example, an organization consisting of members who possess the characteristic agreeableness is more likely to experience a collaborative conflict culture (Gelfand et al., 2010). This homogeneity is further strengthened during organizational members' day-to-day interactions at work. When members engage in interactions at work, they take part in the processes of sensemaking and development of a shared understanding of their organization (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000). Considering this, Gelfand et al. (2008) suggest that the repetition of being involved in and observe the management of conflicts creates a shared understanding of how conflicts are viewed and managed within the organization.

Lastly, Gelfand et al. (2008) suggest that the demographic composition of organizational members and social networks within the organization facilitate the development and maintenance of different conflict cultures. For example, research suggests that men are more direct when expressing aggression compared to women (Österman et al., 1998), which in turn suggests that an organization with a majority of male members is more likely to experience a dominating conflict culture (Gelfand et al., 2008). Additionally, research suggests that high-status individuals tend to not engage in communal behaviours (Conway et al., 1996), and according to Gelfand et al. (2008), an organization dominated by high-status members would therefore be more likely to facilitate the development of and experience a disagreeable conflict culture.

2.3.3. The development and influence of a conflict culture

The development of a conflict culture is influenced and facilitated by several top-down and bottom-up organizational features, and Gelfand et al. (2008) and Gelfand et al. (2014) suggest several emergence processes. Furthermore, depending on the emergence process, the strength of a conflict culture's influence may vary. This strength is also influenced by the organizational features (Gelfand et al., 2014), the homogeneity of the organizational members, and the possibility of interaction between the members (Gelfand et al., 2008). Lastly, a conflict culture is not static, it is dynamic and can change over time (Gelfand et al., 2014).

As part of the presentation of the theory of conflict cultures, Gelfand et al. (2008) suggest that the development of an organization's conflict culture takes place during the processes of attraction, selection, attrition, and socialization, where the organizational features become active and relevant, and the combination of them creates a shared understanding and similar attitude for how conflicts are managed within the organization (Chatman, 1991; Schneider, 1987). This shared understanding is further reinforced through social interactions and organizational members experiencing similar working conditions (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000). However, in more recent literature, Gelfand et al. (2014) explain the development process differently and suggest that there are numerous processes in where the conflict culture of an organization emerges. For example, they suggest that a conflict culture can emerge when individuals' preferences are converged around a partially normative and shared understanding for handling conflict, something they refer to as a composition process. The authors also suggest that there can be shared norms for handling conflict within an organization, but that it exists an individual variation in conflict management behaviour, i.e., a pooled constrained emergence, or that there are two or more conflict cultures within the same unit (Gelfand et al., 2014).

The emergence process can influence the strength of a conflict culture, and its power to influence may vary depending on what type of process the conflict culture emerged from. Furthermore, a conflict culture's influence is strengthened when the organizational features are aligned, i.e., when they facilitate the same type of conflict culture. Understandably, when not aligned, the influence of the conflict culture is weakened (Gelfand et al., 2014). Additionally, the homogeneity of the characteristics and attributes of the organization and its members, and the possibility of interaction between the organizational members influence the strength of a conflict culture. If there is low homogeneity and little to no interaction, the strength of the organization's conflict culture and its influence will be low (Gelfand et al., 2008).

Lastly, Gelfand et al. (2014) suggest that a conflict culture is dynamic and can change over time. If one of the organizational features changes, e.g., if there is a change in the leadership team and/or a change of leadership style which facilitate another conflict culture, one can expect that correlated changes will emerge in the other features, which in turn will have an impact on the conflict culture. This could be illustrated by the study of Husemann et al. (2015), who investigated the concept of conflict culture and conflict management in an online consumption community. In their study, Husemann et al. (2015) found that when the online community experienced a conflict, the members would perform a routinized conflict by drawing on a socially accepted toolkit of formal and informal conflict culture elements, which allowed them to manage, and also stabilize and reproduce the conflict culture of the community. However, when members were not able to make use of the toolkit, the community advanced and forced its members to produce new conflict culture elements to solve the ongoing conflict. Except for supporting Gelfand et al.'s (2014) suggestion that a conflict culture can change, the study of Husemann et al. (2015) also provides an illustration of how a conflict culture can be reproduced and produced. It has already been presented that organizational members are influenced by structural and cultural contexts when managing a conflict (Morrill, 1995; Sheppard, 1992). An implication which one can argue, is strengthened by the study of Husemann et al. (2015) and the online community's possibility to reproduce and produce its conflict culture.

2.4 Structuration theory

Structuration theory was developed by Giddens (1984), and describes the relationship between individuals and organizational contexts, and how and in what way they influence each other. According to the theory, an organization can be defined as a social system of human practices (Poole & McPhee, 2005), which consists of social structures such as group compositions, norms, status hierarchies, and communication networks (Poole, 2008). Giddens (1984) refers to these social structures as rules and resource. A rule is something that guides individuals' actions, e.g., a norm, principle, or routine (Poole & McPhee, 2005), whereas a resource is a possession individuals bring with them in to an interaction and could be personality traits, different abilities, and/or knowledge (Poole, 2008).

The rules and resources of a social structure guide and influence individuals' actions during an interaction. When bringing a social system's rules and resources into action during interactions, the individuals also reproduce and produce the social system with its structures

(Poole & McPhee, 2005). This is also known as structuration (McPhee et al., 2013), and this process of (re)production creates what one could call a cycle of influences, or what Giddens (1984) refers to as the duality of structure. The duality is the reason why a social system can be viewed as both the medium and the outcome of individuals' interactions and actions (Poole & McPhee, 2005). In other words, individuals' interactions and actions are both influenced by the social structures of an organization, but they also produce them.

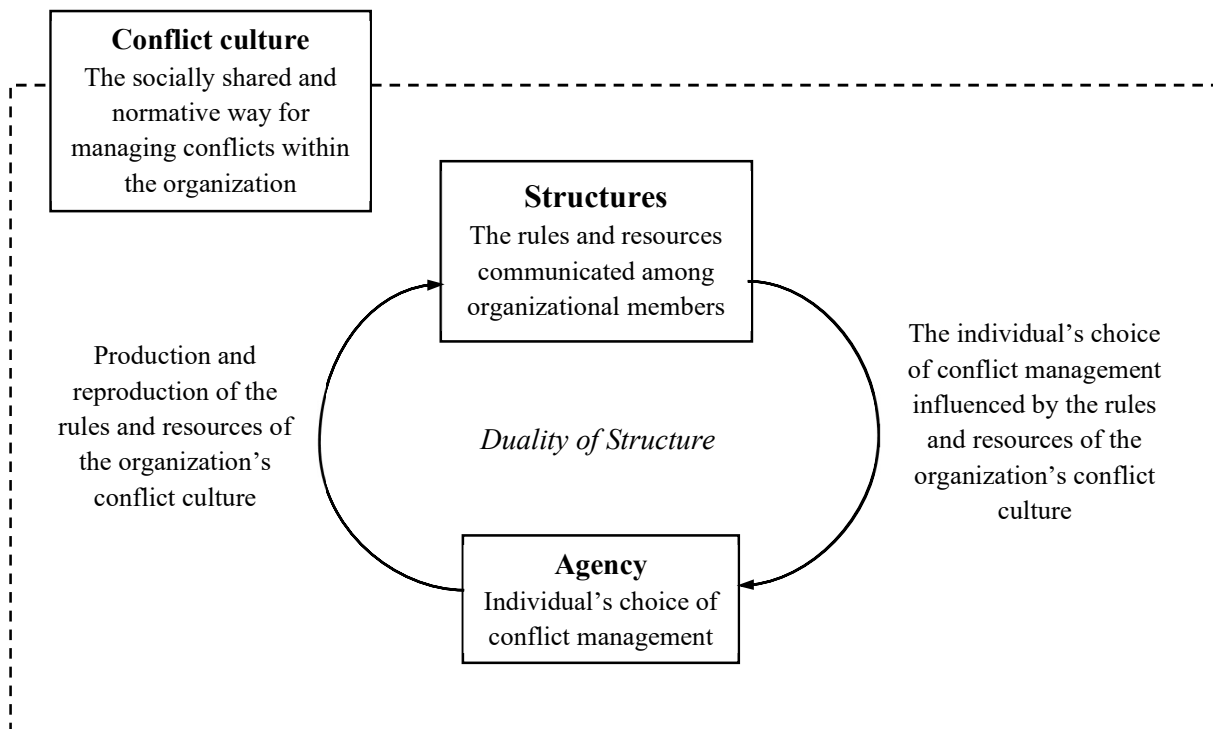
Individuals who are part of an organization, a social system with structures of rules and resources, are referred to as agents. These individuals possess an understanding of the rules and resources of the social structures, which in turn makes them knowledgeable (Giddens, 1984). Being knowledgeable is crucial since it allows for reproduction of the social structures to constantly occur (den Hond et al., 2012). Furthermore, by being knowledgeable, agents also have an understanding of when production of a social system is possible, which according to Giddens (1984), possesses them with agency. An individual who possess agency has the capability to act both according to but also different to the rules and resources of a social structure. In other words, agency is what makes reproduction and production possible (Giddens, 1984).

Structuration theory is relevant and useful for this study since it considers interactions as the arena where different structures and structuring occurs (Poole & McPhee, 2005). Further, just as in the case of previous research about conflict culture, previous research about safety culture mainly focuses on describing what a safety culture looks like, but not necessarily how it works (Groves et al., 2011). To address this, Groves et al. (2011) suggest that structuration theory can be used to create a better understanding of how a safety culture among nurses works and how it is (re)produced, and the authors explain that a safety culture system is (re)produced through the communication among nurses. Considering that conflicts is a social act of interactions and communication (Putnam, 2006), and that it is through the experience of being involved in and/or observe the management of conflicts within the organization that members come to create a shared understanding of the organization's conflict culture (Gelfand et al., 2008), structuration theory can be used to both understand and explain how and in what way an organization's conflict culture influences its members during their conflict management, and how the members of an organization (re)produces the conflict culture of an organization. In other words, by employing the structuration theory, it will be possible to create a better understanding of the social processes and interactions of communication associated with conflict management and conflict cultures, and also the reciprocal, influential relationship

between organizational members, their organizations, and their conflict cultures (Ashcraft et al., 2009). To illustrate, a structuration model of the reciprocal relationship is shown in Figure 1. The model is inspired by Groves et al.'s (2011) suggestion and explanation of using structuration theory to better understand how safety culture works.

Figure 1

Structuration model of the reciprocal relationship



The model illustrates that the rules and resources associated with the normative way of managing conflicts are communicated among organizational members during events of conflicts. In turn, these rules and resources influence the individual's choice of conflict management, and depending on the individual's knowledge of the rules and resources, and agency, the individual can choose to or not choose to bring the rules and resources into action. Depending on the individual's choice, he/she either reproduces or produces the social structure of the conflict culture and contributes to the conflict culture as a system.

2.5 Concluding remarks

Managing conflicts involves acts of interactions and communication, but it also involves a choice of conflict management strategy (Rahim, 1983; Rahim & Bonoma, 1979). This choice of strategy is first of all influenced by the extent the individual cares for the concern of herself/himself, or the other involved party (Rahim & Bonoma, 1979). Additionally, the choice of strategy is also influenced by individual, situational, and organizational features (e.g., Holt & DeVore, 2005; Rahim & Katz, 2020; Ma, 2007). Furthermore, previous research stresses that structural and contextual factors influence this choice (Morrill, 1995; Sheppard, 1992), and one could therefore argue that it is of importance to understand how these factors influence an individual's conflict management.

In line with this reasoning, Gelfand et al. (2008) suggest that a shared understanding and normative way for how conflicts should be managed within an organization exists, i.e., a conflict culture. Even though individuals have their own preferences of conflict management strategies, an organization's conflict culture influences members' conflict management and their choice of strategy and can even to some extent minimize members' preferences of strategies (Gelfand et al., 2008; Gelfand et al., 2014).

Previous research has mainly focused on strengthening the theory of conflict cultures and explaining what kind of organizational features facilitate the development and maintenance of specific conflict cultures (Gelfand et al., 2010; Gelfand et al., 2012). However, there is a lack of research which explains in what way and how a conflict culture influences members' choice of conflict management. Additionally, considering that the organizational members and their conflict management is one of the features contributing to the development and maintenance of a conflict culture (Gelfand et al., 2008), one can assume that there is a reciprocal relationship between these two. To be able to create a better understanding of the reciprocal relationship, structuration theory will be used. The structuration theory considers and acknowledges the structural and influential features of an organization by explaining that individuals who are part of an organization are both guided by and (re)produce the rules and resources of the structures of an organization during interactions (Giddens, 1984). Since conflict is an act of social interactions and communication (Putnam, 2006), structuration theory can be used to both explain and understand how and in what way an organization's conflict culture influences its members during conflict management, and how the members of an organization (re)produces the conflict culture of an organization.

3. Method

This chapter is dedicated to explaining the study's research design and how it was conducted. Hence, the following sections will explain the research design of the study, the participants and how they were chosen, which instrument was used to gather data, and the process of gathering it. Lastly, there will be an explanation of how the gathered data was analysed.

3.1 Research design

To create a better understanding of the reciprocal relationship between an organization's conflict culture and an individual's conflict management, an explorative research design was employed. The choice was based on the interest of studying individuals from different organizations and with different experiences of organizational conflicts and conflict management. Furthermore, studying individuals from different organizations made it possible to create a more generalized understanding of the reciprocal relationship. It also provided the study with the possibility of examining how organizational members might make sense of, and may be influenced, by different conflict cultures.

The study applied a qualitative research approach and collected primary data through semi-structured interviews based on the critical incident technique (CIT). The choice of using CIT as a method was based on several reasons. To begin with, the technique offers an opportunity to gather detailed data that can reveal how the individual interpreted the incident and how it made her/him feel. The gathered data also provides a description and insights into what made the individual act in a certain way during the incident, and how the outcomes of the incident were affected by the individual's way of acting (Chell & Pittaway, 1998). In this study, CIT encouraged the participants to recall specific events of conflicts that they had experienced within their organization, either as a participant or as a witness, and allowed them to focus on details and characteristics of their own interpretations of their conflict management during events of conflict (Chell & Pittaway, 1998; Zwijze-Koning et al., 2015). CIT made it possible to understand how a participant managed a conflict, the reasons behind her/his choice of conflict management, and what influenced this choice.

3.2 Participants

Because of Gelfand et al.'s (2008) explanation that all organizational members influence the development and maintenance of a conflict culture, all members of an organization were of interest for this study. The choice of participants was therefore based on the criteria: (1) the

participant was currently working in an organization or had done so until recently; and (2) the participants felt confident conducting the interview in English.

To recruit participants, the researcher reached out to different individuals using her personal social media accounts on Instagram and LinkedIn, or via word-of-mouth. The individuals who indicated an interest in participating in the study were contacted by the researcher to explain the objective of the research, and to determine if the individuals fulfilled the two criteria for participating in the study. 20 participants were chosen, where fourteen participants were recruited with the help of the researcher's social media accounts, and six participants were recruited with the help of word-of-mouth.

All participants were part of different organizations and consisted of both females (N=11) and males (N=9), between the ages of 21 and 52, and were from different Western countries such as Canada, the Netherlands, Sweden, Italy, Mexico, Germany, Spain, and the United States. The participants worked within different industries, had different roles within their organization, and were either currently working or had until recently been working for the organization when the interview was conducted. The participants either had a full-time job (N=13), a part-time job (N=5) or had recently done an internship (N=2). When the participants had done a part-time job or an internship, they have either been part of the organization for longer than three months or were working for at least 20 hours per week.

3.3 Instrument and interview procedure

For this study, an interview guide was developed using CIT, and was based on literature about individual conflict management and conflict cultures. This resulted in an interview guide containing four sets of questions addressing background information about the participant, the participant's experience of managing conflicts within her/his organization, the participant's interpretation of the general management of conflicts within her/his organization, and if a conflict had ever been managed differently. Before the interviews, two pilot interviews were conducted to test the interview guide. (For a review of the interview guide, see Appendix B).

Before the interview, the participants received an email which contained information about the research and the interview procedure. Conflicts can be a sensitive topic for individuals to talk about, and some might find it uncomfortable to share their experiences. Therefore, to provide a safe and comfortable environment, several strategies were used. For example, the participants had the option to suggest what time the interview would be held, and on what online

platform the interview would take place. Additionally, by taking place online, the participants could be interviewed when being at home, which to many can be considered as a safe place.

For this study, 20 interviews were conducted during a period of four weeks. Most of the interviews took place online, using the online platforms Skype, Facebook Messenger, and WhatsApp. Upon participants request, two interviews took the form as a face-to-face interview. All interviews started with an introduction about the interview and information about the implications of participating, and the participants were thereafter asked for consent to record the interview. All interviews were recorded except one interview where notes were taken because of technical issues with the audio recorder.

Background information

Once the interview started, the participant was asked about some background information, such as age, nationality, and information about the participant's organization and role within the organization. The function of these questions was to make the participant feel more comfortable about the online interview, and to help explain and/or generalize the result of the study.

CIT and the participant's experience of conflict management

The second set of questions addressed the participant's own experience of managing conflicts within her/his organization. By using CIT, the participants were asked to recall conflicts that they had either been involved in or witnessed, and explain what happened, who was involved, and what impact it had/outcomes it resulted in for the participant and the organization. The participant was also asked to explain why he/she managed the conflict the way he/she did, and what he/she thought of the management. These questions were asked to create an understanding of the organization's conflict culture, but most of all to create an understanding of how the participant made sense of the conflict culture of her/his organization, what influenced her/his choice of conflict management, and what impact the conflict and the management of it had on both the participant and the organization.

Conflict culture

During the third part, the participant was asked to explain how conflicts are managed more generally within her/his organization. He/she was thereafter told about the theory of conflict cultures and its implications, and thereafter asked if he/she considered that the conflict culture of her/his organization influenced her/his individual conflict management and in what way. These questions were asked to create an understanding of the participant's perception of the

organization's conflict culture, and how, in what way, and to what extent, the conflict culture of the organization influenced the participant.

Production of conflict culture

The last set of questions asked the participant to explain if there had been anyone who had managed conflicts differently compared to the organization's conflict culture, and what impact it might have had on the organization and its conflict culture. These questions were asked to further add to the understanding of how organizational members make sense of the organization's conflict culture, but most of all how the conflict management of an organizational member may influence an organization's conflict culture. The interview was thereafter ended.

Overall, the interviews went according to plan. Nevertheless, eight interviews were disrupted in some sort of way, either by bad internet connection, social media notifications, or having to charge one's device, which delayed the conversation. This possibly had an impact on the flow of the interview and disturbed the open exchange. As previously mentioned, one interview was not recorded because of technical difficulties. This was solved by the researcher and the participant summarizing the interview by putting down notes. This potentially had an impact on the analysis of the interview, and relevant findings might have been left out. Additionally, two more interviews were not fully recorded, where either the first or last ten minutes of the interview were left out. In one of the cases, the researcher forgot to start the audio recorder, and in the second case the audio recorder ran out of battery. In the first case, the first ten minutes were summarized in the beginning of the recording. In the second case, there was no possibility to re-record and/or summarize the ten last minutes of the interview, and it was left out. Just as in the case of the interview that was not recorded, the part of the interviews that was either summarized or not recorded possibly had an impact the analysis of the interview, and relevant findings might have been left out.

3.4 Analysis

To answer the research question, grounded theory, and open and axial coding were used to analyse the conducted data. For the two first rounds of open coding, the researcher applied an inductive approach (Elo & Kyngnäs, 2008), and constant comparison (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) was used to roughly categorize the similar concepts to be able to get an understanding of the data and the reciprocal relationship (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The two rounds of open coding

resulted in 188 different codes. However, many of the codes were similar to each other, and during the first round of axial coding, a large amount of the codes was either grouped together to one overall code or reduced because of lack of relevance for the study. This was considered necessary to later in the process be able to reach an acceptable level of intercoder reliability (Hruschka et al., 2004).

The two rounds of open coding, and first round of axial coding resulted in the first version of the code book with six categories and 45 codes. However, the code book was too complicated and, in some cases, confusing. This required another round of revision of the code book, and another round of open and axial coding to create a more simplified code book, which would improve the intercoder reliability (Campbell et al., 2013). Compared to the first session of coding, the researcher applied both a deductive and inductive approach for the second round of coding. The deductive approach was used to check the identified codes generalization. The inductive approach was applied to allow further insights to appear (Elo & Kyngnäs, 2008).

After the second round of coding, revision, and a restructuring of the code book, it consisted of six categories and 44 codes. When the second version of the code book was finished, the first coding session with a second coder was performed. To reach an acceptable level of intercoder reliability, the researcher followed the advised procedure of Campbell et al. (2013). To begin with, the second coder was introduced to the topic and purpose of the study, as well as the theory of conflict cultures through a thorough description. The second coder was moreover informed about the purpose and procedure of the coding and was thereafter provided with the code book. By doing this, the second coder was given the opportunity to create a better understanding of the study and evaluate if further clarifications of codes and descriptions of the code book were needed. However, the second coder deemed the code book as sufficient, and no adjustments were therefore made.

In the next step, two transcripts were chosen based on the criteria: (1) that one transcript was from the first week of the data collection, and the second transcript was from the last week of the data collection; and (2) there were no technical issues regarding the recording of the interview. To avoid unitization problems (Campbell et al., 2013), the researcher first coded the interviews, and then demarcated the units of texts before they were handed over to the second coder. The second coder was therefore only aware of what parts of the text the researcher had coded but was not aware of what code had been used.

After coding of the two interviews, the researcher and the second coder evaluated their coding. However, intercoder reliability was not deemed as sufficient, and an emphasis was put

on intercoder agreement to refine codes and their definitions, and to avoid bias coding (Campbell et al., 2013). Intercoder reliability was also measured using Cohen's kappa (Cohen, 1960; McHugh, 2012). However, the agreement was far from substantial, and another session of coding was performed.

Before the second round of coding, the second coder was once again provided with the code book, which had been modified based on the decisions taken during the discussions of intercoder agreement. The second coder agreed on the changes that had been made, and two new transcripts were chosen based on the previous criteria. To avoid the problem of unitization, the researcher once again demarcated her codes. However, this time, the researcher also let the second coder know what category the unit of text belonged to.

After coding the two transcripts, intercoder reliability was once again measured using Cohen's kappa (Cohen, 1960; McHugh, 2012) and was calculated for each category as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Results of intercoder reliability

#	Category	Cohen's kappa
1	The nature of the conflict	0.73
2	General perception of the organization and its conflict culture	0.58
3	The individual's choice of conflict management	0.68
4	(Re)production of the conflict culture	0.67
5	Evaluation of individual conflict management	0.72
6	Individual outcome(s) of the conflict	0.73

Intercoder agreement reached acceptable levels of intercoder reliability for almost all categories except *General perception of the organization and the conflict culture* which had a calculated kappa of 0.58. Cohen suggests a kappa of at least 0.61 to be considered as an acceptable and substantial level of intercoder reliability (Cohen, 1960; McHugh, 2012). To achieve and ensure an acceptable intercoder reliability for future studies, the researcher made the decision to put an emphasis intercoder agreement to clarify the description of the codes.

This decision was taken because in two recurring cases the researcher and the second coder coded the same yet different codes. In the first case, the researcher would use the code *Perception of organizational structure and reward system*, whereas the second coder would use *Perception of organization*. In this case, there was a difference in the interpretation of organizational structure, and in agreement with the second coder, this was addressed by adding the definition and explanation of organizational structure in the code description of *Perception of organizational structure and reward system*. In the second case, the researcher would use *Perception of conflict culture*, while the second coder would use *Perception of colleagues*. In this case, there was a difference in the interpretation of whether the participant was referring to the conflict culture as a whole, or her/his colleagues. To address this difference, the code description of *Perception of conflict culture* was refined by adding emphasis on explaining the conflict culture as the general conflict management within the organization. For a review of the code book, see Appendix A.

4. Results

In this chapter, the results will be presented. First, the results will be illustrated and explained through the structuration model of the reciprocal relationship. The second section will present descriptive data of the conflicts brought up by the participants. The following and remaining sections will present the results of the analysis regarding the reciprocal relationship. The results will be presented in the following order: individual's general perception of the organization and its conflict culture, how individual's make sense of a conflict culture, how a conflict culture influences an individual's choice of conflict management, and lastly, how a conflict culture is reproduced and produced.

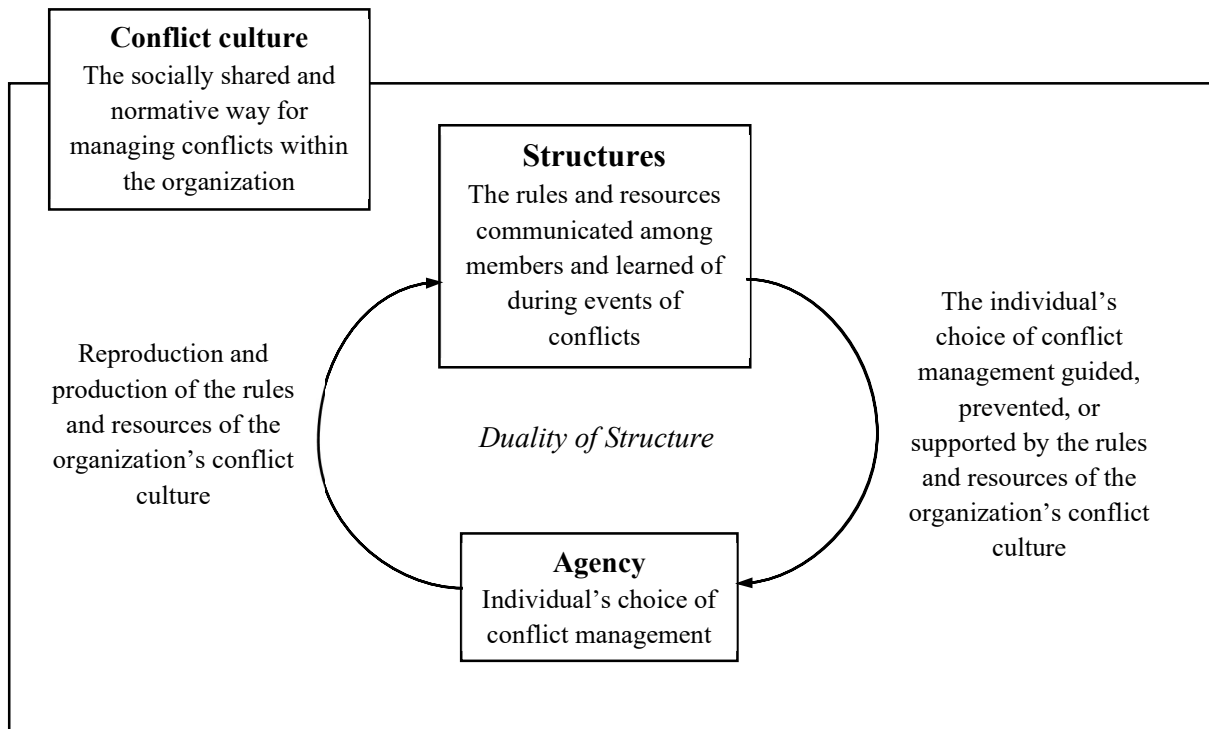
4.1 An overview of the reciprocal relationship

The main objective of this study is to create an understanding of the reciprocal relationship between an organization's conflict culture and an individual's choice of conflict management. In other words, how the conflict culture influences organizational members' choice of conflict management, and how the members' choice of conflict management influences the conflict culture of an organization.

To provide a better understanding of the results, the structuration model of the reciprocal relationship is shown in Figure 2, which has been modified to illustrate the results of this study.

Figure 2

Structuration model of the reciprocal relationship



As illustrated in the model, the result of the study suggests that the rules and resources of the different structures associated with the organization's normative way for managing conflicts are communicated among organizational members during events of conflicts. Furthermore, by being involved in or being a witness of conflicts, members come to learn of and create a perception and an understanding of the conflict culture of their organization. This perception can be compared to the individual's knowledge of the conflict culture, and depending on this perception, the result of the study suggests that the individual's choice of conflict management is either guided, prevented and minimized, or supported by the influence of the conflict culture. Even though the individual has agency, i.e., the knowledge and possibility to oppose the influence of the conflict culture, the result of the study suggests that reproduction of a conflict culture is stronger than production of it.

The following sections will provide a more detailed presentation of the results. In the first section, there will be a presentation of descriptive data of the conflicts brought up by the participants. This presentation will illustrate what kind of conflicts organizational members can experience and provides the contexts of when the rules and resources of a conflict culture are

communicated among organizational members. The second section will present the results concerning what a conflict culture is thought of from an individual's point of view, and addresses what understanding, and knowledge organizational members have of an organization's conflict culture. The third section will present the results of how organizational members come to learn and create a perception of the organization's conflict culture, and it addresses how the rules and resources are communicated among organizational members, but also how organizational members strengthen their knowledge of the conflict culture. The fourth section will present the results, and also address, how and in what way a conflict culture influences organizational members' choice of conflict, and what can be a consequence of this influence. Lastly, the results of the (re)production of a conflict culture will be presented and the section also addresses the strong influence of the conflict culture and the challenges associated with changing it.

4.2 The nature of the conflicts

20 interviews with individuals from different organizations were conducted. The participants brought up between two to six conflicts per interview, which resulted in a total number of 77 conflicts with the average number of 3.85 conflicts per participant. In some cases, the participants found it hard to describe isolated events of conflicts, and instead described more generally how conflicts were managed within the organization and made use of examples of conflicts to illustrate their descriptions.

As shown in Table 2, the different types of conflicts brought up were either conflict with/between colleague(s), conflict with leadership team/conflict between subordinate and leadership team, conflict within leadership team, intergroup conflict, and conflict with external party. The participant was either involved in or had been a witness or heard of the conflict from another organizational member. Lastly, the conflicts brought up were either occasional or recurring. If the conflict was occasional, the problem and/or reason behind the conflict was only addressed once, or the conflict with the other involved party only happened once. If the conflict was recurring, the participant brought up a specific conflict out of a series of conflicts regarding the same problem or with the same involved party. The most brought up conflicts were conflict with/between colleagues, and conflict with leadership/conflict between subordinate and leadership team. The participants experienced more occasional conflicts than recurring conflicts and were more often involved in the conflict than a witness of it. Furthermore, the participants experienced a higher amount of recurring conflicts with their colleagues by either being

involved or witness of it compared to occasional conflicts. They also experienced a higher amount of occasional conflicts with their leadership team by either being involved in or witness of a conflict between the leadership team and another subordinate compared to recurring conflicts.

Table 2

Differences between the different conflicts

	<i>Conflict with/between colleagues</i>	<i>Conflict with leadership/conflict between colleague and leadership</i>	<i>Conflict within leadership</i>	<i>Intergroup conflict</i>	<i>Conflict with external party</i>	Frequency
Occasional	7	25	3		7	42
Recurring	19	6	3	2	3	35
Involved	19	18		2	8	47
Witness	7	13	6		2	30
Frequency	26	31	6	2	9	

Based on this result, one can argue that conflicts are common and can be viewed as a broad phenomenon in the context of organizations. This can be strengthened by the recurring events of conflicts brought up by the participants, which further implies that conflicts are not isolated events, but once again, an inevitable part of organizations. The conflicts brought up by the participants also show that conflicts can have different shapes within an organization, and that they can occur between different organizational members and address different issues and topics. Overall, the participants have brought up and described a wide range and variety of conflicts, which provides this study with the possibility to further generalize its result.

4.3 General perception of the organization and its conflict culture

To further understand conflict culture and its influence, it can be of benefit to understand how the conflict culture is thought of from an individual's point of view. The result of the study suggests that individuals rarely describe or refer to the conflict culture as a whole. Instead, when describing their perception, they tend to refer to one or several of the different organizational features, and the most referred features are leadership, organizational structure and reward system, and the characteristics, and personalities of other members. Furthermore, the result of the study suggests that individuals make use of different organizational characteristics to

describe their perception of the conflict culture of the organization. In this case, individuals mainly refer to the identity of the organization.

Regarding the referencing to one or several of the conflict culture's features, one participant described her/his perception of how conflicts are managed more generally within the organization as follows:

I think it is a very impulsive thing, as well as like a situation specific way. So, whenever, (...), a conflict arises, then my boss would just look for a solution to it. But yeah, he didn't really use a strategy. (Interview 10).

In the participant's perception, he/she describes the general conflict management of the organization but also refers to the leadership of the organization and its conflict management. Considering the reference to the leadership of the organization, one could assume that the manager possesses an important and influential role in the organization's general conflict management and the participant's perception of the organization and its conflict culture. To further illustrate, one participant described her/his perception of the organization's conflict culture by referring to the organizational structure of the organization:

[T]he school never talks to us about conflicts, but they (do) to the managers and the managers will talk to us. But [the managers] talk to us as a (group) and not as individuals. So, I never get feedback on my way of working, and only as a group we get feedback. (Interview 2).

In the participant's perception, he/she refers to the leadership of the organization, but also to the structure of the organization and how certain activities are performed. In the last example, the participant describes the general conflict management within her/his department by referring to her/his colleague:

Generally, within my department, all the conflicts we have are managed in between, which ever parties are involved. Generally, the need for the manager or the owner is not needed. We can figure out the conflicts ourselves. I should emphasize the environment of the (...) department, we're all very relaxed, very. We all know what we have to deal with. (Interview 8)

In the participant's description, he/she mentions the leadership of the organization. However, emphasis is on the participant's perception of her/his colleagues, their characteristics, and conflict management. The previous examples illustrate the result of how a conflict culture is thought of from an individual's point of view, and how individuals refer to either one or several of the different features. By referring to these features, it also implies that they play a more important role in the participant's perception of the organization's conflict culture.

When including other organizational characteristics in their perception, one participant described her/his perception as follows: *"It's an organization that strives for improvement, so bringing this up would probably lead to improvements"* (Interview 3). In her/his perception, the participant made use of the organizational identity to describe her/his perception of the conflict culture of the organization. To further illustrate, one participant described her/his perception as follows: *"In this organization, we have to treat everyone with respect, even though kind of conflicts like this happen more."* (Interview 5). In this case, the participant refers to the organizational identity of the organization but also how he/she identifies with the organization, which influences how the participant perceives the organization's conflict culture.

4.4 Conflicts as a source of learning

How do organizational members make sense of their organizations and their conflict cultures, and how does this sensemaking influence their perceptions? The result of the study suggests that conflicts and the management of them can be thought of as a source of learning, which in turn suggests that by either being involved in or a witness of a conflict, organizational members become more knowledgeable about the conflict culture of the organization. To further explain, the participants described the outcomes of the conflict and the management of it as a better understanding of themselves as individuals and their conflict management, but also their organizations, its conflict culture, and its different organizational features. Because of these learnings, the participants' perception of the organization's conflict culture was either reinforced or changed. If the participant's perception changed, it often led to a change in the participant's conflict management to better suit the conflict culture of and/or the day-to-day interactions at the organization.

The learnings the participants experienced when managing conflicts could be perceived as both positive and negative. For example, one participant expressed a somewhat negative learning for herself/himself as: *"personally to not trust people that I don't know"* (Interview 4), whereas another participant expressed the learning as more positive: *"I have a better*

understanding of my threshold, (...), up to what point am I maximizing my output for work.” (Interview 6). In several cases, the participants described the conflicts as a necessary mean to improve their conflict management and to feel more confident in their conflict management. One participant described the outcome of managing a recurring conflict as follows: *“Eventually, you realize how to deal with it, and that gives you the experience to deal with it in a more quick and efficient manner.”* (Interview 8). The recurring conflict and the management of it provided the participant with an opportunity to make use of and try different conflict management strategies, which also allowed her/him to become more confident in her/his conflict management. Conflicts can also improve participants’ conflict management in certain situations, and one participant expressed the learning of an occasional conflict as follows: *“I have learnt how to push someone who is not good at giving a straight answer to giving a straight answer better.”* (Interview 3).

Regarding the better understanding of their organization, its conflict culture, and its different features, one participant described the learning of her/his organization as follows:

It definitely made me aware of some dynamics that can go on in work level, and how some people can have very bad intentions that... At first look, it wouldn't seem like it. So, definitely to, not to give too much confidence to people at work and give it some time to understand what kind of people they are. (Interview 16).

Another participant described a learning of the conflict culture of her/his organization as follows:

It makes me, makes me realise that there is not any other way to, to manage conflicts but structurally. (...). I think for myself that if that's the best way to manage a conflict. Because it is true that it's (the) simplest way. It's the most efficient. It's the correct one. It's the one that everybody gets more happy (about). Not happy but, more efficiency after. (Interview 12).

As an outcome of the conflicts, the participant created a better understanding of how to manage conflicts more accordingly to the conflict culture of the organization, which eventually made the participant’s conflict management more effective and better suited. Lastly, one participant described how a conflict resulted in a better understanding of one of the organizational features:

I have learnt a lot about (...), the levels of authority. (...). The closer the authorities is to you and the more engaged you are with that authority, the more easier. The more easier it is for that authority to get you on board with what their agenda is. (Interview 13).

As a result of this increased understanding, participants expressed either a reinforced or changed perception of their organizations and their conflict cultures. One participant described her/his change of perception as follows:

I thought that I was supposed to handle it myself, but then when I actually asked [name of colleague] and she was like no, this is not reasonable. Don't. Don't do that. Or, you know, I realized that I could ask my colleagues. So that's (...). The way I handle all of my conflicts now is I always ask someone else about their opinion. (Interview 11).

As a result of the changed perception, the participant also changed her/his conflict management to always ask her/his colleagues for advice. A conflict may not only result in a change of a participant's conflict management, but also in a participant's behaviour of day-to-day interactions. For example, one participant described this change as follows:

I think I tend to, now, to bring people in at an earlier stage to not. Well, to not risk having it, this whole thing later on in the project. So constantly informing people of what we do and why we do it. So, we have their agreement in everything that we do. I would say that have changed and, yeah, involving people and different people from different departments. (Interview 19).

4.5 The individual's choice of conflict management

Regarding how the conflict culture influences an individual's choice of conflict management, the result of the study suggests that the individual's choice is influenced by her/his perception of the organization and the conflict culture's different features. Based on the result that the participants referred to either leadership, organizational structure and reward systems, and/or characteristics and personalities of the organizational members in their perceptions, the result of the study further suggests that these features are more prominent and possess a more important role in the individuals' perception of the organization's conflict culture, and how it influences the individual's choice of conflict management. Depending on which feature(s) is referred to in the individual's perception, the result suggests that the conflict culture either

guides, or minimizes and prevents the individual's choice of conflict management, but it can also support the individual in her/his choice. This influence can either be perceived as positive or negative, and when the influence is perceived as negative, individuals can experience what one could refer to as an intrapersonal conflict. This can be thought of as a consequence of the influence of a conflict culture since it in most cases makes members adapt to the conflict culture even though they do not accept it.

To illustrate how an individual's choice of conflict management is influenced by her/his perception of the organization, one participant expressed her/his perception of the organization as following: *"It's an organization that strives for improvement, so bringing this up would probably lead to improvements"* (Interview 3). In her/his perception, the participant reveals that he/she feels confident to bring up her/his problem with the leadership team. This perception was later mirrored in the further description of her/his conflict management regarding the same conflict.

Regarding the referencing to one or several features, one participant described her/his perception of her/his leadership team, its leadership, and its conflict management as follows: *"the top manager, you can't say anything against his word."* (Interview 5). The participant clearly expresses her/his perception of how to interact with this person within the leadership team, and later reinforced this perception by admitting that he/she would not address the top manager directly:

I wouldn't talk to the top manager as well and say, OK, the things that you said were inappropriate. So, maybe I would talk to my manager or colleague. But I would never talk to the boss. (Interview 5).

In this case, the participant's perception of the organizational structure and reward system is also visible, which also influences the participant in her/his choice of conflict management. The participant refers to the hierarchical power of her/his leadership team in her/his perception and describes how it influences her/him in her/his choice of conflict management. Another context where the influence of an organization's organizational structure becomes visible is in the participants' perception of their position within this structure. After witnessing a conflict between a subordinate and someone within the leadership team, the participant evaluated her/his choice of conflict management as follows:

I don't think it was my place to interfere. I think the only person that was like, or (where it) made sense to interfere was like the other boss that came in and (...). Because I don't think like as my position as intern, I had the power to interfere and to say something. (Interview 14).

The participant's perception of her/his position within the organization's structure influenced her/his choice of conflict management and made the participant refrain from interfering, even though the participant previously had expressed the management of the conflict as unjust for the subordinate. To illustrate the last feature of organizational members and their characteristics and personalities, one participant described her/his perception of another member and his conflict management as follows:

A part of me feel like it's not worth it to talk about it, because it wouldn't really. I mean, I definitely think he would apologize if I said that I thought he was being disrespectful. But I don't think that it would give anything, like, to me or to him or to anybody else. I don't think. I mean if he said oh, I'm sorry, I think I would just like, oh, OK. But it would probably happen again. Maybe not in the way it happened now, but like, it will be the same thing again. (Interview 20).

In this case, the conflict was still an ongoing conflict, part of a series of conflicts and/or events with the same colleague. Even though the participant considered the behaviour and conflict management of the other person as disrespectful, he/she chose to not address the conflict based on her/his perception of her/his colleague's behaviour. To the participant, it was not worth it since it would not have resulted in any changes for neither of them.

It is worth mentioning that there are some instances when the participants refer to the industry the organization belongs to or the national culture where the organization is located in in their perceptions. For example, one participant expressed her/his perception of the industry as: *"When you work in this [industry] and the people are not familiar with the computer, they are afraid to do something. Maybe it will break down or something."* (Interview 15). However, even though there are examples, these perceptions are not necessarily mirrored in the participants choice of conflict management. This strengthens the suggestion that the features leadership, organizational structure and reward systems, organizational members, and their characteristics, and personalities possess a more important role in the individual's perception of the conflict culture.

Hence, if the prominent features are either leadership and/or organizational members and their characteristics and personalities, participants perceived the conflict culture as a guide into how to manage conflicts accordingly. In most of the cases, the conflict culture was perceived as something positive, and the participants expressed an approval and/or acceptance of the influence of the conflict culture. For example, one participant described her/his perception of her/his manager and the manager's leadership and conflict management as follows:

If I come up with (an idea), [the manager] is always glad to hear the idea, but if he don't like it, he (will) come up with a better idea. We should do that instead don't you think? So, he is learning me and all of the others. You should think like this. (...), he sees the whole picture. Like, he sees all of it, but we see straight on our task. So, he can see the whole picture and guide us through." (Interview 18).

As expressed in the participant's perception, he/she approves the leadership and conflict management of her/his manager. By doing so, the participant also seems to find it more acceptable to adapt her/his conflict management to be similar to the conflict management of the manager. To further illustrate, one participant expressed her/his perception of her/his colleagues and their conflict management as follows:

I hope that it makes you more humble. Constantly working with people with different experiences and different levels, different levels of expertise, but also different types of expertise. Yeah, so I would say that this, it is a type of conflict management structure that we have, that has suited me rather well, and that makes you. As a junior [title of position], I mean, I constantly learn from other colleagues. (Interview 13).

As described by the participant, he/she accepts and also value her/his colleagues conflict management since it helps and guides her/him to become better at managing conflicts.

In the cases where the feature organizational structure and reward system is more prominent, the participants described and/or expressed the conflict culture as constraining, and that it minimized and prevented their choice of conflict management. In most cases, the participants perceived the influence as negative, and they often expressed an irritation and/or frustration of the constrained conflict management. For example, one participant expressed her/his frustration of not being able to address conflicts based on her/his perception of the

hierarchal structure within the organization: “[My managers] have a boss over them, and she has a boss over her, and then he has one boss over him, and then the politicians. So, it’s a long way to go, and there are quite, (they) have quite tight bounds.” (Interview 13). Even though the participant considered the current conflict as an important issue, and something that affected her/his work, the participant did not feel motivated to take the issue further because of her/his perception of the structure of the organization.

There are also instances where the participant described or expressed the conflict culture as more supportive of the participants’ choice of conflict management. In these cases, the participant had not experienced a need to change her/his conflict management, and instead felt confident in her/his choice of conflict management. To illustrate, one participant described this supported influence as follows:

I don’t think it influenced as much as it. It coincide with how I usually dealt with conflicts. If I had an issue with say my friend, I’ve had a similar approach that I do to work, which is it’s me and my buddy. Let’s talk about why we have this issue. (...). So, I don’t think work has such a big influence, rather I just think we had similar approach to begin with. (Interview 8).

As part of the participants’ perception of the organization and its conflict culture, they often expressed a clash of their own preferences of conflict management with the conflict culture of the organization. Because of this, the participants often described an experience of an intrapersonal conflict during their choice of conflict management, and whether they should choose to or not choose to manage the conflict according to the conflict culture of the organization. To illustrate, one participant described the intrapersonal conflict as follows:

I thought about it, (...), within myself and I decided that I, (...), at the end of the day it would sound like I’m complaining, that I’m making excuses, and I didn’t want to look like an incompetent employee. I didn’t want to risk my mission. So, I internally within myself decided to, (...), not to bring it to their attention and just kind of accept, (...), when it happened.” (Interview 6).

Whether a participant may experience an intrapersonal conflict or not seems to be depending on if they approve or disapprove the conflict culture and/or its organizational features. In the previous case, one could assume that the participant experienced an

intrapersonal conflict since he/she was questioning the management of the leadership team. To further illustrate, one could compare the previous case to an example where the participant welcomed and appreciated the organizational structure of the organization to solve a conflict, and where the participant did not express or describe an experience of an intrapersonal conflict:

You can lean yourself towards the knowledge of those levels of authority to say all right, you make the call. I'll formulate the text in that way. So, I would say I like authority. It can be a friend or foe, but oftentimes a friend, I would say. (Interview 13).

Nevertheless, even though the participant may have found the conflict culture inappropriate, at one point, the participant chooses to accept the conflict culture and adapt her/his conflict management to it. To illustrate, one participant expressed her/his disapproval of the organization's conflict culture, the intrapersonal conflict it caused, but also the acceptance of the conflict culture, and the adaptation of her/his conflict management to the conflict culture as follows:

I mean it's just. It's just weird when you are trying to (do) your best. Trying to do the best you can and then you just get shit out of it. Or when someone is talking shit about you by doing the good stuff. I mean, it's just weird because then you. Then you are like, okay, well if they are going to talk shit about me, I can just sit her on my ass and don't do anything then. (Interview 9).

What made the different participants accept and adapt their conflict management depends on individual characteristics, the circumstances of the conflict, and the conflict culture, which makes it hard to suggest an explanation. However, in the previous case, the participant was describing an event of a series of conflicts regarding the same issue. Considering the previous result of conflicts functioning as a source of learning, one can assume that through the recurring conflict, the participant has come to learn about the conflict culture of the organization. As a result, the participant created a perception where he/she saw no other choice but to adapt to the conflict culture of the organization even though he/she disapproved it.

4.6 (Re)production of the organization's conflict culture

Regarding the processes of reproduction and production of a conflict culture, the result of the study suggests that reproduction of a conflict culture is much stronger than production of it since the conflict culture possesses a strong influence and stability, which in turn ensures it to

be constantly reproduced among organizational members. Opposing a conflict culture by managing conflicts differently is possible but will probably only result in some sort of impact on the organization and its members. Instead, managing conflicts differently results in a reinforcement of the conflict culture of the organization. Nevertheless, it is possible to change a conflict culture, at least within a department, unit, or team. The result of the study shows that a change is possible if it is implemented by a member of or the whole leadership team.

As presented in the previous section, a conflict culture either guides, prevents and minimizes, or supports organizational members in their conflict management. Considering that a conflict culture influences members either to change their conflict management to act accordingly or to encourage members to continue with their conflict management implies that the organization's conflict culture is being reproduced. Furthermore, throughout the study, the participants described several examples where reproduction of the organization's conflict culture occurred, but there were few examples of production. This could imply that reproduction of a conflict culture is stronger than production of it, and that a conflict culture is rather stable and can therefore be hard to oppose and/or change. To illustrate the strong influence and stability of a conflict culture, one participant evaluated her/his of choice of conflict management as follows:

I think that, for more than I wanted, I can't act in a different (way to) how I did it. Because, in the end, you. I wasn't able to change anything, and I wasn't able to change the senior manager's opinion. Not even to make him hear our opinion, the senior's and my opinion. (Interview 12).

As described in her/his perception, the participant considered that he/she had no other option but to act according to the conflict culture of the organization even though the participant had a desire to make a change. To further illustrate the stability of a conflict culture, one of the participants described an event where one of the involved party's conflict management differed from the conflict culture of the department:

That was a very different way of handling things because no one ever experienced that before. And just like shutting everyone out, that goes against everything that we do. You know, we talk to each other and we handle things by talking, by discussing. (Interview 11).

Even though the involved party managed the conflict differently, it did not influence nor change the conflict culture, but rather strengthened it. The conflict culture and the participant's perception of the department's conflict culture was further reinforced when the person left the organization:

I think we were all very surprised and shocked with her behaviour, and it kind of made it even clearer that this is not the way we do things here, because it was so different from what we usually do. (Interview 11).

In another example, the participant described a colleague who managed conflicts differently, which had an impact on the other members of the organization and how they chose to interact with this colleague, but not the conflict culture. The participant described this as follows: “Like a lot of people tried to, like, ignore her in a sense or like not work together with her.” (Interview 16). This colleague later left the organization, and when she left, the participant described a relief among her/his colleagues since they could go back to and continue with their ordinary way of interacting within the organization. Both cases illustrate the stability of a conflict culture, and that even though someone may manage conflicts differently, the conflict culture will most probably remain the same.

Nevertheless, there are some cases where there has been a change of the conflict culture and a production of it, at least within a department, unit, or team of an organization. In these cases, the change has been implemented by either a member of or the leadership team of a department, which in turn has had an impact on the conflict culture of the department, unit, or team. To illustrate, one participant described the change of the conflict culture within her/his team as following:

From that discussion, we actually set up both individual meetings and. Weekly individual and weekly group meeting. Therefore, everyone was updating each other on what was done that week, and that brought everyone closer. Everyone know what was going on.” (Interview 16).

5. Discussion

5.1 Main findings

The main objective of this study was to create a better understanding of the reciprocal relationship between an organization's conflict culture individual organizational members' choice of conflict management. In other words, how the conflict culture of an organization influences individual organizational members in their choice of conflict management, and how this choice of strategy influences the conflict culture of the organization.

As a result of this study, the main findings consist of several insights of the reciprocal relationship, but also what function conflicts can have in an organizational context. To begin with, individuals rarely describe the conflict culture as a whole, but instead both refer to either one or several of the conflict culture's different organizational features, and make use of organizational characteristics to describe their perception of the organization's conflict culture. Further, managing and experiencing conflicts provide organizational members with a possibility to make sense of their organization and its conflict culture. It is in the process of both managing and being a witness of a conflict where individuals come to create an understanding and perception of the conflict culture. Conflicts also provide individuals with the possibility to create a better understanding of themselves, their conflict management, and their organizations.

Furthermore, the perception of the organization, its conflict culture, and its organizational features influences an individual's choice of conflict management. Depending on what organizational feature(s) the individual refers to in her/his perception, a conflict culture either guides, or prevents and minimizes, but also supports an individual's choice of strategy. This influence can be perceived as positive or negative, and either make it easier for the individual to change and adapt her/his conflict management, or it can cause the individual to experience an intrapersonal conflict as part of the process of choosing a strategy. The additional outcome of an intrapersonal conflict can be considered as a consequence of the conflict culture's capability to influence.

The consequence also further strengthens the result that reproduction of a conflict culture is stronger than production of it. Individuals can oppose a conflict culture, but it rarely results in any changes, rather it results in reinforcement of the current conflict culture. Nevertheless, changing a conflict culture is possible, at least within a department, unit, or team.

The result of the study suggests that change is possible when it is implemented as a top-down process by either one member of or the whole leadership team within a department.

5.2 Theoretical implications

The results of the study show that individuals change and adapt their conflict management to the current context of an organization, a result which further proves the influence of organizational contexts on individuals' behaviour (Johns, 2006; O'Reilly, 2008), and that structural and cultural contexts influence how individuals manage conflicts (Morrill, 1995; Sheppard, 1992). Furthermore, the results of the study provide a better understanding of the development and maintenance of a conflict culture by explaining how and during what circumstances a conflict culture either guides, prevents and minimizes, or supports organizational members in their choice and adaption of conflict management to suit the conflict culture. In other words, the result both strengthens, and further develops and explains the suggestion of Gelfand et al. (2008), and Gelfand et al. (2014) that a conflict culture influences and guides individuals' conflict management, and can to some extent minimize their preferences of conflict management. Additionally, the result that conflicts can be a source of learning strengthens the suggestion of Gelfand et al. (2008) that it is through the experience of being involved in and/or observing the management of conflicts where a shared understanding of how conflicts are managed within the organization is understood and created. The result also further develops this notion by suggesting that conflicts and the management of them provide organizational members with the opportunity to create a better understanding of themselves, their conflict management, and their organizations. Furthermore, this result also strengthens Kozlowski and Klein's (2000) suggestion that members make sense of and create a shared understanding of their organization when they engage in different interactions at work.

Besides strengthening the theory, the results of the study also question some of the suggestions made by Gelfand et al. (2008). Gelfand et al. (2008) explain that even though some organizational features are both proximal and distal, they still operate in a system (Gelfand et al., 2014), and one can assume that they are equally important. However, considering the result that the participants mainly referred to three of the different organizational features, one could assume that these features are more important in the development and maintenance of a conflict culture. The reason for this seems to be that these features have a stronger influence on the individuals' choice of conflict management

Furthermore, regarding the consequence of a conflict culture, the result of the study suggests that its capability to influence organizational members can cause them to experience an intrapersonal conflict. Gelfand et al. (2008) explains that individuals have their own preferences of conflict management strategy, but that these sometimes clash with and are minimized because of the conflict culture. The result of this study suggests that an individual often experiences this intrapersonal conflict when he/she disapproves the conflict culture or one of its organizational features. What makes an individual to eventually accept its influence and change her/his conflict management is hard to tell and seems to be rather individual. However, this result does reveal an insight since it shows that reproduction of a conflict culture is stronger than production of it. There are instances when individuals have opposed the conflict culture and managed conflicts differently, but instead of resulting in a production of the conflict culture, it has resulted in a reinforcement and a stronger, shared understanding of it. To some extent, this strengthens the ASA model of Schneider (1987) since the strong reproduction of a conflict culture influences the process of creating a homogeneity among the organizational members, which in turn makes the influence of the conflict culture even stronger (Gelfand et al., 2008). Further, the result that reproduction of a conflict culture is stronger is interesting since it to some extent questions the applicability of the structuration theory by Giddens (1984). Considering that it is easier to study the reproduction of the conflict culture than the production of it, one could say that the duality of structures has been challenged. Nevertheless, the reason for this might have to do with the organizations themselves.

A couple of the participants did describe events of conflicts whose outcomes had resulted in changes of the conflict culture, at least within the department or the team. In these cases, the initiative had been taken by either one member of or the whole leadership team. This change is strengthened by Gelfand et al. (2014) who suggest that if a feature experiences a change, one can expect correlated changes in the other features, and eventually a change in the conflict culture. However, the reason for why this change was made possible might have to do with the hierarchal structures of the organization, which, one can argue, requires a change to be implemented as a top-down process for it to be accepted and considered as successful. The hierarchal structure would also explain the result of reproduction being stronger than production of a conflict culture. Considering the result that organizational structure prevents and minimizes organizational members in their conflict management, one could assume that the same could be said about members' intention to oppose and/or change a conflict culture; members are simply constrained by the hierarchal structure of the organization.

Lastly, the result of the study further adds to the research focusing on individual conflict management by strengthening that structural and cultural contexts influence an individual's choice of conflict management (Morrill, 1995; Sheppard, 1992).

5.3 Practical implications

Besides providing theoretical implications, the results of the study suggests practical implications, too. For example, if one wishes to get an understanding of and evaluate the conflict culture of an organization, the employees and how they perceive the organization's conflict culture should be considered. Especially managers of a department or team should pay attention to this. By understanding which feature(s) is prominent, managers and other professionals can get an understanding of whether the conflict culture is perceived as positive and negative, and whether it is constructive or destructive for the employees. Additionally, by understanding which feature(s) is prominent and therefore more influential, professionals may be able to address this feature to implement and encourage a possible change in the conflict culture. Even though a conflict culture can be hard and sometimes challenging to change because of its stability, the result of the study provides members of a team and/or department part of an organization with a hierarchical structure with the implication that change of conflict culture is best implemented as a top-down process. This further implies where both employees and managers should put their focus to encourage a change in the conflict culture of their department and/or team; either at the leadership team of the department, or the leadership team of the organization.

5.4 Limitations

There are limitations to be taken into account regarding the results of this study. To begin with, one could question the representativeness of the participants. By recruiting participants through the researcher's private social media account, it can have resulted in a somewhat narrowed range of participants (O'Connor et al., 2008). Most participants were between 20-30 years old, and another method for recruiting participants could have resulted in a wider range of ages and therefore more experience of working within organizations. Additionally, all participants were from different Western countries, and by using another recruiting method, participants from different Eastern countries could have been recruited, which would have provided the result of the study with a further possibility to generalize its result.

Furthermore, the critical incident technique has its limitations. One of the disadvantages of CIT is that it makes participants focus on events or incidents which are retrospective, which can make it hard for the participants to remember all the details (Chell, 2004), and therefore limit the outcome of the interview. Also, the fact that the interviews took place online can have limited the outcome of the interview. Because of the online environment, subtle, non-verbal cues which are normally of help to interpret the participant's answer were lost, and the researcher was limited to only use visual and physical cues to make the participants feel comfortable and encourage them to share their experiences (O'Connor et al., 2008).

Moreover, some interviews did experience different disruptions, which delayed the conversation, and might have had an impact on the outcome of the interviews. Further, three of the recordings of the interviews were either not fully recorded, or not recorded at all. Even though the researcher took on different measures to correct the mistake, it had an impact on the outcome and analysis of the interviews, and relevant findings might have been left out.

In addition, all the organizations part of the study consisted of hierarchical structures, which could have had an impact on the result of the study. For example, in what ways a conflict culture influences its organizational members could differ within organizations that consist of flat or flexible structures. Additionally, because of the hierarchical structure, the result of the study only suggests how change of a conflict culture can be successfully implemented in a limited range of organizations, and do not provide a suggestion for how production and change may take place and be viewed as successful within an organization with a flat or flexible structure.

5.5 Suggestions for future research

Considering that this study recruited individuals from different organizations, it would be of interest to involve members from the same department or unit of an organization. By doing this, one could create a better understanding of how the different members influence each other and are influenced by the conflict culture, and how they together in return influence the conflict culture. Additionally, it would provide a better understanding of whether managers and subordinates perceive the conflict culture differently and in what way.

It would also be of further interest to examine what makes an individual accept and adapt her/his conflict management to the conflict culture of the organization. The result of the study suggests that through recurring conflicts, individuals may create a perception where they see no other choice but to accept and adapt. However, more research is needed to further

strengthen this suggestion, and to create an understanding of when this change happens and why.

As previously implied, it would also be of interest to study what the reciprocal relationship may look like within organizations whose structures are flexible or flat. The result of the study only provides one part of the truth, and it would be of interest to see if the relationship is similar within these organizations or if it differs.

5.6 Conclusion

The purpose and objective of this study was to create a better understanding of the reciprocal relationship between an organization's conflict culture and individual organizational members' choice of conflict management. This study explains the reciprocal relationship by suggesting that individual's choice of conflict management is influenced by their perception of the organization, its conflict culture, and its organizational features. Furthermore, the result of the study provides an understanding of how organizational members perceive and make sense of an organization's conflict culture, and how, and during what circumstances a conflict culture either guides, prevents and minimizes, or supports an individual's choice of conflict management. It also describes the consequences that can be associated with a conflict culture, and the challenges organizations and organizational members can experience when trying to change it. This study also reveals that reproduction of a conflict culture is stronger, a result which can be strengthened by the consequence of intrapersonal conflicts. Nevertheless, changing a conflict culture within a department, unit, or team is possible, and this study suggest that to encourage and achieve a change within the conflict culture, the change should be implemented by the leadership team of the department, or the leadership team of the organization.

To conclude, this study both strengthens and develops the theory of conflict culture by Gelfand et al. (2008) by explaining how a conflict culture works, and what challenges and consequences can be associated with this process. An individual's choice of conflict management is influenced by her/his perception of the organization's conflict culture, and in most cases, this perception influences the individual's choice of conflict management in such a way that he/she reproduces the conflict culture of the organization.

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Appendix

Appendix A

The code book

1. The nature of the conflict

	Code	Description	Example
1.1	Recurrence of conflict	The individual describes the frequency of the main conflict	
1.1.1	<i>Occasional conflict</i>	The individual describes the main conflict as occasional, as a onetime conflict	"I know there was a huge conflict around Christmas time, between the two of them."
1.1.2	<i>Recurring conflict</i>	The individual describes the main conflict as a recurring conflict and/or part of a series of similar conflicts	"So, that was one of. One pretty standard conflict, and this has sort of been ongoing ever since with small things, the same process."
1.2	Position within conflict	The individual describes what position he/she has within the main conflict	
1.2.1	<i>Involved</i>	The individual was involved in the main conflict	"It was between me and him."
1.2.2	<i>Witness</i>	The individual was a witness of the main conflict or heard of it	"I was just an observer that like overheard what was happening."
1.3	Parties involved	The individual describes who was involved in the main conflict	

1.3.1	<i>Conflict with leadership/Conflict between subordinate and leadership</i>	The individual describes the main conflict as a conflict with leadership, or a conflict between a subordinate and leadership	"[The manager] was like really just pushing me and giving me a lot of pressure because he was really concerned of how those presentations would go."
1.3.2	<i>Conflict within leadership</i>	The individual describes the main conflict as a conflict within the leadership team	"A lot of conflicts within the board and the management team."
1.3.3	<i>Conflict with/between colleague(s)</i>	The individual describes the main conflict as a conflict with a or between colleague(s)	"It's two people that don't get along."
1.3.4	<i>Intergroup conflict</i>	The individual describes the main conflict as a conflict between different departments and/or people from different departments	"She doesn't work in my department. She works in a different department, and she and I have very different ways of working."
1.3.5	<i>Conflict with external party</i>	The individual describes the main conflict as a conflict with an external party	"I just had one last week actually with a business partner."

2. General perception of the organization and its conflict culture

	Code	Description	Example
2.1	Perception of organization	The individual describes her/his perception of the organization as a whole and/or its characteristics	"It's an organization that strives for improvement, so bringing this up would probably lead to improvements."
2.2	Perception of conflict culture	The individual describes her/his perception of the overall conflict culture by referring to the general conflict management within the organization	"So, we can have a conversation and arguing between what we should do to get the best result."

2.2.1 <i>Perception of leadership</i>	The individual describes her/his perception of the organization's leadership team and its/their conflict management	"If we don't solve [a problem], we can go to our boss and like how do we solve this, and which is the best way? And he can just go we do it that way or that way or come up with another idea and way. And like, yeah, he is the boss, so we got to do it. But, if we think it is wrong, we can tell him like I don't think so because of this."
2.2.2 <i>Perception of organizational structure and reward system</i>	The individual describes her/his perception of the organization's organizational structure and reward system, i.e., the organization's structure, position of roles and associated responsibilities, and processes of activities	"Senior manager, the senior manager, it's the one who is in superior position than the senior."
2.2.3 <i>Perception of colleague(s)</i>	The individual describes her/his perception of his or her colleague(s) and his/her/their conflict management	"It's part of his personality to be really relaxed and talk in a really relaxed way."
2.2.4 <i>Perception of industry</i>	The individual describes her/his perception of the industry	"Working in the service industry, especially dealing with all kinds of different guests."
2.2.5 <i>Perception of national culture</i>	The individual describes her/his perception of the organization's national culture	"Yes, and it's a very [name of country] trait, of course."

3. The individual's choice of conflict management

	Code	Description	Example
3.1	Intrapersonal conflict	The individual describes or expresses the choice of conflict management as an intrapersonal conflict	"I thought about it, you know, within myself and I decided that I, you know, at the end of the day, it would sound like I'm complaining, that I'm making excuses."
3.2	Approval of conflict culture	The individual expresses an approval and/or acceptance of the organization's conflict culture	"Professionally, I look at it as professional growth. You know, I'm still developing certain skill sets. So, it's more of a challenge. You know, I'm not the very best at doing this, but I'm going to work to exceed these expectations and get this work admitted."
3.2.1	<i>Approval of leadership</i>	The individual expresses an approval and/or acceptance of the organization's leadership team and its/their conflict management	"My boss had a lot of experience as well, and like, he was the boss at the end of the day."
3.2.2	<i>Approval of organizational structure and reward</i>	The individual expresses an approval and/or acceptance of the organization's organizational structure and reward	"The ones that are in a superior (position) have more years in the company, have more power of decisions, and probably they know. They know how to manage the situations, and how to, how to react and how to behave in this, in this kind of situations."
3.2.3	<i>Approval of colleagues</i>	The individual expresses an approval and/or acceptance of her/his colleague(s) and his/her/their conflict management	"He's really good at talking to people and he's really likable. So, I think that he handled it really well."

3.3	Disapproval of conflict culture	The individual expresses a disapproval of the organization's conflict culture	"I mean, it's just, it's just weird when, when you are trying to do your best. Trying to do the best you can, and then you just get shit out of it. Or when someone is talking shit about you by doing the good stuff."
3.3.1	<i>Disapproval of leadership</i>	The individual expresses a disapproval of the organization's leadership team and its conflict management	"I don't think [the managers] are professional, and it's just causing confusion and unnecessary gossip."
3.3.1	<i>Disapproval of organizational structure and reward system</i>	The individual expresses a disapproval of the organization's organizational structure and reward system	"[My managers] have a boss over them, and she has a boss over her, and then he has one boss over him, and then the politicians. So, it's a long way to go, and there are quite, (they) have quite tight bounds."
3.3.3	<i>Disapproval of colleague(s)</i>	The individual expresses a disapproval of his or her colleague(s) and his/her/their conflict management	"It's not nice getting that, like getting an accusation like that."

4. (Re)production of the conflict culture

	Code	Description	Example
4.1	Change of individual conflict management	The individual describes or expresses a change and/or difference in her/his conflict management	"Basically, as a private person, I am very direct with conflict."
4.2	Influenced by organization and/or conflict culture	The individual describes or expresses her/his conflict management adapted to and/or supported by the context of the organization and/or the organization's conflict culture	"When you're like in this business would, you can't just solve [conflicts] directly, and you maybe sometimes just have to live with that injustice or have to like choose your fights."

4.2.1 <i>Influenced by leadership</i>	The individual describes or expresses her/his conflict management adapted to and/or supported by the organization's leadership team and its conflict management	"I felt I had the manager's trust and therefore I didn't, you know, pursue it anymore."
4.2.2 <i>Influenced by organizational structure</i>	The individual describes or expresses her/his conflict management adapted to and/or supported by the organization's organizational structure and reward	"I can give my opinion and [the manager] will think about it. But if he says let's do it that way, I shut up and just follow what he says instead of keep arguing or something like that. It's the thing I used to do before."
4.2.3 <i>Influenced by colleague(s)</i>	The individual describes or expresses her/his conflict management adapted to and/or supported by her/his colleague(s) and her/his/their conflict management	"Generally, the need for the manager or the owner is not needed. We can figure out the conflicts ourselves. I should emphasize the environment of the [name of department], we're all very relaxed and very. We all know what we have to deal with."
4.2 Ignorance of conflict culture	The individual describes or expresses her/his conflict management as not influenced by the conflict culture and/or its different features	"Meanwhile, I was writing an email and trying to get to the person and not just ignore them."

5. Evaluation of individual conflict management

	Code	Description	Example
5.1	Individual conflict management sufficient	The individual describes or expresses a belief that her/his conflict management was sufficient and/or suitable	"It was a confirmation for me that I handled it well because I was asking him again, and again... So, yeah. It gave me the feeling that I did everything I could about it, about the problem, and that it wasn't my problem anymore because he didn't respond."
5.2	Individual conflict management non-sufficient	The individual admits and/or acknowledges that her/his should have managed the conflict differently	"I maybe could have listened more or like tried to talk to them in like a better way."
5.3	Explanation of evaluation	The individual explains and/or clarifies the evaluation of her/his conflict management	
5.3.1	<i>Individual consideration</i>	The individual explains and/or clarifies her/his evaluation based on individual consideration(s)	"So, I did a really good job being patient and talking to her and won't lose interest in solving this conflict."
5.3.2	<i>Organizational consideration</i>	The individual explains and/or clarifies her/his evaluation based on organizational consideration(s)	"I think I managed it the way most other people would."

6. Individual outcome(s) of the conflict(s)

	Code	Description	Example
6.1	Source of learning	The individual describes or expresses the conflict and the management of it as a source of learning	

6.1.1 <i>Individual understanding</i>	The individual describes or expresses an increased understanding of herself/himself as an outcome of the conflict	"It taught me that I am so scared of conflict. I hate conflicts, honestly do, and I hate not being liked, and not having everyone sort of support and people disagreeing with me."
6.1.2 <i>Understanding for individual conflict management</i>	The individual describes or expresses an increased understanding of her/his conflict management as an outcome of the conflict	"I have learnt how to push someone who is not good at giving straight answers to giving a straight answer better."
6.1.3 <i>Organizational understanding</i>	The individual describes or expresses an increased understanding of the organization, its conflict culture, and/or organizational features as an outcome of the conflict	"So, I thought that I was supposed to handle it by myself. But then when I actually asked [name of colleague] and she was like no, this is not reasonable. Don't. Don't do that. Or, you know. I realized that I could ask my colleagues."
6.2 <i>Change of behaviour</i>	The individual describes or expresses a change in her/his behaviour and/or conflict management as an outcome of the conflict	"I think I tend to, now, to bring people in at an earlier stage. With to not risk having it, this whole thing later on in the project, So, constantly informing people of what we do and why we do it."

Appendix B

The interview guide

Questions

Background information

- (First of all, I would like to confirm your gender.)
- How old are you?
- Where are you from?
- Also, could you tell me about your job, what kind of organization you are working within, and what your role is within your organization?
 - o Approximately, how many people are working for the organization?
 - o How many people are working within your department/unit?
- For how long have you worked there?

PART 1: The interviewee's own experience of conflicts

To begin with, I would like to talk about conflicts that you yourself have experienced and managed within your organization. First of all, can you recall any conflicts that you have been involved in or witnessed? Of these recalled conflicts, are there any specific conflicts that stood out, that bothered you and was hard to let go off, or that affected you on a personal and/or professional level?

- Can you describe what happened?
 - o What was the conflict about? Who was involved? What was your role (involved or witness)?
- Why did it happen? What made the conflict happen?
- Was the conflict solved?
 - o If yes, how, and why?
 - o In no, why not?
- Did it have an impact on you on a personal and/or professional level?
 - o Your way of managing conflicts?
- Did it have an impact on your relationship?
- Did it have an impact on the organization and/or the way conflicts are managed within your organization? What effects? In what way?
- Did it have any positive outcomes?
- Did it teach you anything about yourself and/or your organization?
- Looking back at the conflict, what do you think of the way you managed the conflict?
 - o Why did you manage it that way?

- Can you recall any other specific conflicts?

PART II: Describing the conflict culture

- How would you say that conflicts are managed within your organization? Or if it is easier; how would you say conflicts are managed within your unit/department?

- Do you have any examples?
- Could you illustrate or explain what happened?

Research suggests that there exists an overall way of managing conflicts within organizations, something they refer to as a conflict culture. A conflict culture can be thought of as a norm, and just like norms in our everyday lives influence our behaviour, a conflict culture can influence our conflict management.

- Would you say that the conflict culture of your organization/unit/department influences your way of managing conflicts?
 - In what way?

PART III: *Employees challenging or confirming the norms*

- Have you or has anyone managed a conflict differently compared to your description of how conflicts are normally managed within your organization/unit/department?
- If yes, can you describe what happened? In what way was it differently?
 - What was the conflict about? Who was involved? What roles did they have within the organization?
- Why did the conflict happen? What made it happen?
- Was the conflict solved?
 - Why/why not?
- How did it affect the organization?
 - Did it have any impact on the organization?
- Did the conflict culture of your organization remain the same?
 - Why?

(CLOSING)

- Is there something else regarding the topics that have been covered that you would like to talk more about?