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CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AMONG CHURCH ELDERS:  
A DELPHI STUDY

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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Doctor of Education

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by  
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December 2022

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A DELPHI STUDY

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For the glory of God and the good of His church

To my wife Katy, and our four children, Lydia, Levi, Abijah, and Judah

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## PREFACE

In 2015, Shelly Johns completed her doctorate with the publication of her thesis entitled “Shared Leadership: Best Practice in a Ministry Context.”<sup>1</sup> This thesis presented a theologically sound case for every local church to be led by a plurality of biblically qualified elders, then presented research findings which offered best practices for how those elders should interact and share ministry responsibilities. In the final chapter of her thesis, Johns offered suggestions for further research in which she recommended conflict resolution among church elders as a worthy topic for study. One participant in her study, from Trinity Baptist Church in New York, New York commented on the problem faced by many church leadership teams by saying, “Too often conflict is swept under the rug, which then breeds resentment, which breeds distrust. . . . That keeps a team from really moving forward.”<sup>2</sup> These, and other comments, resonated with personal observations from church leadership teams on which I have served. I have seen men who, though I sincerely believe they loved the Lord, struggled to admit that there was conflict and therefore avoided it; this undermined the unity of the leadership team and negatively affected the team’s ability to shepherd the church. Surely, we who are called by God to lead His church can do better.

With God’s empowerment, I pray that my efforts serve to maximize the effectiveness of church leadership teams by enhancing elders’ ability both mitigate conflict and manage any conflict that arises with wisdom and a commitment to God’s

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<sup>1</sup> Sheldena Juanette Johns, “Shared Leadership: Best Practice in a Ministry Context” (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Johns, “Shared Leadership,” 116.

glory. My hope is that the church be led by men who understand that conflict will come, and when it comes, they are prepared to manage it in ways which glorify God and best serve His church.

John H. Lookabaugh

Ravenna, Ohio

December 2022

CHAPTER 1  
INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

**Conflict: A Result of the Fall**

Ken Sande summarizes the human struggle with conflict, saying, “Conflict is inevitable in a fallen world; Christians and unbelievers alike struggle with disputes and broken relationships.”<sup>1</sup> M. Afzalur Rahim concurs, saying, “Conflict is inevitable among humans.”<sup>2</sup> Christians are called to “pursue peace with all men” (Heb 12:14), and “if possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men” (Rom 12:18), but the author of Hebrews and the apostle Paul both seem to hint at the same inevitable reality that conflict is, in fact, unavoidable.<sup>3</sup> The effects of the fall extend out to “the whole of creation” (8:22),<sup>4</sup> and pierce into the inmost nature of the human condition; thus, when fallen people interact, conflict on some level will eventually occur.<sup>5</sup>

Emil Turner points out the obvious, yet sad fact that those within the church are not immune to conflict, saying, “In reality a church split begins because of conflict in an existing congregation.”<sup>6</sup> Correspondingly, Ken Howard observes the number of

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<sup>1</sup> Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), 290.

<sup>2</sup> M. Afzalur Rahim, *Managing Conflict in Organizations*, 3rd ed. (Westport, CT: Quorum Books, 2001), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture are references taken from NASB.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, rev. and exp. ed. (Chicago: Moody, 2008), 389.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Enns describes result of the fall on the nature of man, saying, “Every part of man is affected: intellect (2 Cor. 4:4); conscience (1 Tim. 4:2); will (Rom. 1:28); heart (Eph. 4:18); and the total being (Rom. 1:18–3:20).” Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook*, 323.

<sup>6</sup> Emil Turner, “Some Observations on ‘Church Splits’ in the Arkansas Baptist State Convention,” *The Journal of Evangelism and Missions* 7, no. Spring (2008): 28.

congregations and denominations rising at a disproportionately high rate compared to the number of professing Christians, leading him to conclude that the trend “is largely due to church fragmentation more than it is to evangelistic practices.”<sup>7</sup> The pattern of unhealthy or unresolved conflict leading to fragmentation or a church split is ironically more common in theologically conservative churches. “Conflicts over biblical interpretation may be one of the dominant causes of conservative church splits and why biblicism<sup>8</sup> would cause fragmentation among evangelicals more than it would among their liberal Protestant counterparts.”<sup>9</sup> How is it that those who claim to have the deepest commitment to Scripture tend to be more susceptible to unhealthy conflict and division?

Even among the leaders in the local church who are to be “mature in their faith and live consistent, humble lives,” there is a struggle to manage the inevitable conflict in God-honoring ways.<sup>10</sup> As Shelly Johns pointed out in her research with local church leaders, “Conflict occurs in all aspects of life, and Christians have to lead from a place unlike the world in every area, including resolving conflict.”<sup>11</sup> Johns discovered that among those who practiced shared leadership within the local church, healthy and biblical practices of conflict resolution needed to be improved; “nevertheless, many

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<sup>7</sup> Kenneth W. Howard, “The Religion Singularity: A Demographic Crisis Destabilizing and Transforming Institutional Christianity,” ed. Benjamin L. Merkle and Thomas R. Schreiner, *International Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Society* 7, no. 2 (2017): 13.

<sup>8</sup> Biblicism is defined as “a theory about the Bible that emphasizes together its exclusive authority, infallibility, perspicuity, self-sufficiency, internal consistency, self-evident meaning, and universal applicability.” Christian Smith, *The Bible Made Impossible: Why Biblicism Is Not a Truly Evangelical Reading of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2011), viii.

<sup>9</sup> Darren M. Slade, “Religious Homophily and Biblicism: A Theory of Conservative Church Fragmentation,” *International Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Society* 9, no. 1 (2019): 14.

<sup>10</sup> Benjamin Merkle, “Offices, Titles, and Roles” Leadership in Early Church Polity,” in *Biblical Leadership: Theology for the Everyday Leader*, ed. Benjamin Forrest and Chet Roden (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2017), 387.

<sup>11</sup> Sheldena Juanette Johns, “Shared Leadership: Best Practice in a Ministry Context” (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015), 116.

leaders overlook the damage unresolved conflict or overlooked conflict has on truth, communication, and other characteristics of the best practices of shared leadership.”<sup>12</sup>

God has given the church local leaders who are called to set an example and teach others to grow in sanctification in all areas, including God-honoring approaches to conflict management (CM). Therefore, this research seeks to better equip local church leaders, especially those who practice biblical models of shared leadership, to mitigate and resolve conflict in God-honoring ways. By better understanding the challenges and opportunities conflict presents, along with healthy methods for resolving conflict, local church leaders can maintain unity amongst the leadership team and within the congregation and thus better represent Christ to the world (1 Cor 12:12–27).

In the following sections, the importance of local church leadership will be discussed, after which a brief case will be made for the biblical model of shared leadership while pointing out the acute limitations of the solitary-pastor model. After presenting the case for shared leadership within the local church, challenges inherent to this model will be discussed, especially the greater propensity for conflict when authority is shared among equals. Finally, the research questions that will guide this thesis will be presented with an overview of the methodological design intended to discover answers to the research questions.

### **Caring for the Church: God’s Shepherds**

As the resurrected Christ sat by the Sea of Galilee with His disciples, He questioned Simon Peter three times asking, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” (John 21:15–17). In each of the brief exchanges, Peter confirms his love for Jesus after which Jesus gives a command to take care of the flock, saying in turn, “Tend My lambs. . . . Shepherd My sheep. . . . Tend My sheep” (21:15–17). Surely, Peter was cognizant of the

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<sup>12</sup> Johns, “Shared Leadership,” 116.

three times he had denied Jesus, but this scene also brings to mind the discussion at the last supper where Jesus foretold Peter's denials and instructed the disciples, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (14:15). Three times Peter professes his love for Jesus, and each instance is followed by an incredible command to fulfil the solemn role as a shepherd of God's flock. This short interaction by the sea brought the events of the proceeding week full circle for Peter and culminated in an attentive student being given a concise lesson with perfectly clarity—care for the church.

The simplicity and brevity of the command is contrasted by the complexity and interminable nature of the task. As a shepherd, or pastor<sup>13</sup> of Christ's flock, the church, Peter was called to look after and care for the eternal souls of those for whom Christ died. Christ's possessive pronoun, "My," makes clear the point that Thomas Schreiner offers in saying, "The flock belongs to God."<sup>14</sup> Christ's directive to Peter is not limited to the apostles though; Andreas Köstenberger points out, "Christ's undershepherds in the twenty-first century must recognized that they share the mandate to tend God's flock which Christ originally extended to Peter."<sup>15</sup> A higher calling and greater responsibility could not be given to men, and yet research indicates that 65 percent of pastors surveyed were experiencing burnout to some degree while 11 percent reported extreme burnout.<sup>16</sup> The term "burnout," is defined by Christina Maslach, Wilmar Schaufeli, and Michael Leiter as "a prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the

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<sup>13</sup> The English word 'pastor' is taken directly from the Latin *pastor* meaning shepherd. cf. John 10:14a from the Latin Vulgate: "*Ego sum pastor bonus,*" and the English NASB, "I am the good shepherd."

<sup>14</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, "Overseeing and Serving the Church in the Pastoral and General Epistles," in *Shepherding God's Flock: Biblical Leadership in the New Testament and Beyond*, ed. Benjamin L. Merkle and Thomas Schreiner (Grand Rapids: Kregel Ministry, 2014), 113; cf. Bruce A. Ware, "Putting It All Together: A Theology of Church Leadership," in Merkle and Schreiner, *Shepherding God's Flock*, 285–88.

<sup>15</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger, "Shepherds and Shepherding in the Gospels," in Merkle and Schreiner, *Shepherding God's Flock*, 58.

<sup>16</sup> Joseph D. Visker, Taylor Rider, and Anastasia Humphers-Ginther, "Ministry-Related Burnout and Stress Coping Mechanisms among Assemblies of God-Ordained Clergy in Minnesota," *Journal of Religion and Health* 56, no. 3 (2017): 951–61.

job, and is defined by the three dimensions of exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy,” though “exhaustion is the central quality of burnout and the most obvious manifestation.”<sup>17</sup>

Later research, which included data collected on 8,150 randomly selected ministers from Reformed and evangelical churches indicated 46 percent of pastors have seriously considered leaving the ministry altogether, of which 4 percent were actively looking for other work at the time of the survey.<sup>18</sup> When the same group was asked what they would do if they could go back and start over again, 21 percent responded that they would not have entered the ministry as a career.<sup>19</sup> On the surface these findings appear difficult to reconcile with the high and glorious calling God places on pastors of His local churches. Indeed, the very research report that provided the above findings concludes with the following encouragement: “Last, but most important, being a pastor is a special calling, and it is worth it, if you keep the main thing the Main Thing—glorifying Christ as Lord!”<sup>20</sup>

In Peter’s final face-to-face lesson with the master teacher Jesus, there was no ambiguity as to the level of importance assigned to the role of pastor. If that tradition has been passed down through Scripture to the church today, how is it that so many men who heed the call to serve the church as pastors find themselves burned out or desiring to leave full-time ministry altogether?

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<sup>17</sup> Christina Maslach, Wilmar B. Schaufeli, and Michael P. Leiter, “Job Burnout,” *Annual Review of Psychology* 52, no. 1 (2001): 397, 492.

<sup>18</sup> Richard Krejcir, “Statistics on Pastors: 2016 Update Research on the Happenings in Pastors’ Personal and Church Lives” (Francis A. Schaeffer Institute of Church Leadership Development, 2016), 1, 10. <https://files.stablerack.com/webfiles/71795/pastorsstatWP2016.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> Krejcir, “Statistics on Pastors,” 14.

<sup>20</sup> Krejcir, “Statistics on Pastors,” 20.

## The Challenges of a Solitary Pastor

Though each pastor's situation is unique and no broadly collected statistics could offer sufficient depth to illuminate the specific problems leading to pastoral burnout and attrition for all, there are common themes that emerge from the research that offer insights as to why so many pastors find themselves unable to meet the demands of the call. Of the 8,150 randomly selected Reformed and evangelical pastors surveyed in 2016, 43 percent categorized themselves "stressed," with 54 percent of respondents reporting that they average more than fifty-five hours of work per week, among whom 18 percent work more than seventy hours a week.<sup>21</sup> The stress and long hours are surely related to the fact that 52 percent of pastors feel they are "overworked and can't meet their church's unrealistic expectations."<sup>22</sup> In a similar survey of over fifteen-hundred evangelical and protestant pastors conducted by Lifeway Research, 94 percent say they are on call twenty-four hours a day and 54 percent "find the role of pastor frequently overwhelming."<sup>23</sup>

James O'Toole, Jay Galbraith, and Edward Lawler suggest that it is difficult for any single leader to possess the broad range of expertise needed to competently lead an organization.<sup>24</sup> Though many professions demand long hours and entail high stress, no other occupation bears the eternal weight of those called by God to shepherd the church. Pastors find themselves pulled in many directions with "an incredible amount of ministry responsibilities," and "an unending list of ministry assignments," says Matthew Barrett.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Krejcir, "Statistics on Pastors," 4, 9.

<sup>22</sup> Krejcir, "Statistics on Pastors," 15.

<sup>23</sup> Lisa Cannon Green, "Despite Stresses, Few Pastors Give Up on Ministry," Lifeway Research, September 1, 2015, <https://lifewayresearch.com/2015/09/01/despite-stresses-few-pastors-give-up-on-ministry/>.

<sup>24</sup> James O'Toole, Jay Galbraith, and Edward E. Lawler, "When Two (or More) Heads Are Better Than One: The Promise and Pitfalls of Shared Leadership," *California Management Review* 44, no. 4 (2002): 65–83.

<sup>25</sup> Matthew Barrett, "The Duty of a Pastor: John Owen on Feeding the Flock by Diligent Preaching of the Word," *Themelios* 40, no. 3 (2015): 459.

In an attempt to narrow the true calling of a pastor by reviewing the life and teachings of the Puritan pastor John Owen, Barrett argues that the essential duties of a pastor include the following: feed the gospel to the sheep, pray continually, “protect, defend, and preserve the truth and the doctrine of the gospel against all opposition,” and “labor diligently for the conversion of souls.”<sup>26</sup> Though this list of the narrowed and necessary duties is arduous enough, 50 percent of pastors report spending three to four hours a week in “needless meetings,” and though 75 percent of pastors report the blessing of spending at least twenty hours a week with their families, more than a quarter of pastor’s wives feel the “church is a prime source of stress for not just the pastor, but the whole family.”<sup>27</sup>

With all that is biblically required of a pastor as the shepherd of a local church, in addition to the sundry responsibilities most pastors find placed upon them, one would expect local churches and pastors to seek help in leading the flock and yet a recent survey of over fifteen-thousand congregations revealed that 53 percent were led by a solitary pastor.<sup>28</sup> Considering “exhaustion is the central quality of burnout and the most obvious manifestation,” local congregations and pastors seeking to avoid the pitfall of pastoral burnout must question the solitary pastor model.<sup>29</sup> What is needed is a biblical model of leadership.

### **Shared Leadership**

Alexander Strauch says, “The New Testament provides conclusive evidence that the pastoral oversight of the apostolic churches was a team effort—not the sole

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<sup>26</sup> Barrett, “The Duty of a Pastor,” 464, 467, 469.

<sup>27</sup> Krejcir, “Statistics on Pastors,” 15.

<sup>28</sup> Scott Thumma, “Twenty Years of Congregational Change: The 2020 Faith Communities Today Overview” (Hartford, CT: Hartford Institute for Religion Research, Hartford Seminary, 2021), 7, <https://faithcommunitiestoday.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Faith-Communities-Today-2020-Summary-Report.pdf>.

<sup>29</sup> Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter, “Job Burnout,” 459.

responsibility of one person.”<sup>30</sup> As will be discussed in further detail later, the New Testament describes a form of shared ministry leadership during the time of Christ and the apostles which was prescribed as a continued pattern of ecclesiastical organization throughout the early church.<sup>31</sup> Johns points out the fact that shared leadership is the consistent pattern the New Testament starting with Christ and the apostles (Mark 3:13–19; Acts 15) and continuing later in preparation for the post-apostolic age (Titus 1:5–9; 1 Tim 3; 1 Pet 5:1–5; Acts 20:17–38).<sup>32</sup> Johns recognizes the need for modern church leaders to follow the biblical pattern of shared leadership by acting “jointly within a team ministry where each has subordinated his individual interests and opinions to the unity and efficiency of the group.”<sup>33</sup> Joseph Hellerman agrees, saying, “Ideally the local church should be led by a plurality of pastor-elders,” as that the best way to facilitate a Christ-like approach to pastoral ministry.<sup>34</sup>

The concept of shared leadership is not unique to the church. Outside of the church, shared leadership can take various forms. Jonathan Cox, Craig Pearce, and Monica Perry offer the following description that fits shared leadership in all its forms: “Shared leadership relies on a dynamic exchange of lateral influence among peers rather than simply relying on vertical, downward influences by an appointed leader.”<sup>35</sup> Lee

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<sup>30</sup> Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership*, 3rd ed. (Littleton, CO: Lewis and Roth, 1995), 35.

<sup>31</sup> See Merkle and Schreiner, *Shepherding God’s Flock*; Benjamin L. Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer: One Office in the Early Church* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003); Benjamin L. Merkle, *Why Elders? A Biblical and Practical Guide for Church Members* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009); Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*.

<sup>32</sup> Johns, “Shared Leadership,” 27.

<sup>33</sup> Johns, “Shared Leadership,” 19.

<sup>34</sup> Joseph Hellerman, *Embracing Shared Ministry: Power and Status in the Early Church and Why It Matters Today* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2013), 17.

<sup>35</sup> Jonathan F. Cox, Craig L Pearce, and Monica L. Perry, “Toward a Model of Shared Leadership and Distributed Influences in the Innovation Process: How Shared Leadership Can Enhance New Product Development, Team Dynamics, and Effectiveness,” in *Shared Leadership: Reframing the Hows and Whys of Leadership*, ed. Craig L. Pearce and Jay A. Conger (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2003), 48.

Bolman and Terrence Deal describe a shared leadership arrangement as a team sharing “multiple connections so that each person can talk to anyone else. Information flows freely; decisions require touching multiple bases.”<sup>36</sup> Other complex organizations, businesses, universities, and nations of people have for millennia practiced various forms of shared leadership.<sup>37</sup>

An important clarification should be noted, neither Scripture nor modern leadership researchers advocate for shared leadership as an exclusive best-practice paradigm for all settings, situations, or institutions; as Bolman and Deal point out, shared leadership “works well if a task is amorphous or complicated, but it is slow and inefficient for a simpler task.”<sup>38</sup>

Though even a cursory glance at world history reveals the fact that shared leadership is far from the exclusive or even most common practice, researchers continue to point out the limitations of one-man rule for organizations as they better understand the advantages shared leadership. Peter Drucker, identified by *BusinessWeek* magazine as “the man who invented management,”<sup>39</sup> noted the fact that many organizations fail to shift toward shared leadership, saying, “There is a tendency towards one-man rule and towards a system under which only one man—the President or Chairman of the Board—is not confined within departmental lines but sees knows the whole business.”<sup>40</sup> Similarly, Craig Pearce, in a 2007 article advocating the importance of shared leadership states,

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<sup>36</sup> Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2013), 98.

<sup>37</sup> Though a complete description of the specific workings of the democracy of ancient Athens is difficult to piece together, Aristotle, Herodotus, and Thucydides leave enough information to be sure of the practice of shared leadership in a form. See, Christopher W. Blackwell, “Evidence for Athenian Democracy,” in *Dēmos: Classical Athenian Democracy*, The Stoa, January 24, 2003, [https://www.stoa.org/demos/article\\_evidence@page=all&GreekEncoding=UnicodeC](https://www.stoa.org/demos/article_evidence@page=all&GreekEncoding=UnicodeC).html.

<sup>38</sup> Bolman and Deal, *Reframing Organizations*, 98.

<sup>39</sup> John A. Byrne, “The Man Who Invented Management: Peter Drucker, Why His Ideas Still Matter,” *BusinessWeek*, November 28, 2005, front cover.

<sup>40</sup> Peter F. Drucker, *Concept of Corporation*, rev. ed. (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction, 1993), 32.

“We can no longer rely on simple notions of top-down, command-and-control leadership.”<sup>41</sup>

Bemoaning the shortsightedness of a solitary leader, Drucker points out the fact that “under one-man rule there will be nobody in the corporation who has the opportunity to be trained and tested in independent leadership.”<sup>42</sup> While a solitary leader is juggling the entire organization, there is little time for an apprentice to be coached and mentored, thus the solitary leader model nearly necessitates long hours and high stress. The failure of a leader to train others has an even greater shortsightedness for the organization as a whole, as Drucker recognizes, “No institution can endure if it is under one-man rule. Industrial dictatorship like any other dictatorship threatens the survival of the institution in the event—an inevitable event—of the dictator's death.”<sup>43</sup>

In addition to the benefits of the shared leadership model on the longevity of an organization itself, it is clear that the organization that would benefit from shared leadership necessitates a leader who would himself benefit from shared leadership as stressors and tasks are shared and thus reduced for individual leaders so as not to overwork any one leader.<sup>44</sup> As the aforementioned statistics regarding burnout, stress, and long work hours indicated regarding pastors, the solitary pastor imposes an undue workload on himself which harms the organization in direct proportion to the harm done to the leader himself. Even in the Jerusalem church, with leaders who were personally selected, trained, and empowered by God, the apostles shared leadership with other qualified leaders identified as elders.

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<sup>41</sup> Craig L. Pearce, “The Future of Leadership Development: The Importance of Identity, Multi-Level Approaches, Self-Leadership, Physical Fitness, Shared Leadership, Networking, Creativity, Emotions, Spirituality and on-Boarding Processes,” *Human Resource Management Review* 17, no. 4 (2007): 355.

<sup>42</sup> Drucker, *Concept of the Corporation*, 27.

<sup>43</sup> Drucker, *Concept of the Corporation*, 26.

<sup>44</sup> Pearce, “The Future of Leadership Development,” 355–59.

The question must be asked therefore, in light of the clear example from Scripture, and the logical benefits recognized by researchers and organizations outside of the church, why is it that such a high percentage of congregations are still led by a solitary pastor?<sup>45</sup>

### **Obstacles to Shared Leadership within the Local Church**

If Christ and the apostles did indeed prescribe and practice shared leadership in every local church established in the New Testament, and organizational research touts the benefits of shared leadership outside the church as well, there must be mitigating factors that prevent more churches from adopting the shared leadership model known as a plurality of elders. Setting aside denominations and pseudo-Christian congregations who have departed from Scripture in matters weightier than church leadership style, the historic practice of Christian churches has not always been the solitary pastor model. Specifically, Reformed<sup>46</sup> and Baptist<sup>47</sup> churches historically practiced shared leadership between multiple elders,<sup>48</sup> but as Shawn Wright observes, “For all of their emphasis on Scripture’s role in regulating how local churches should be ordered, Baptist have been surprisingly quiet about the necessity of having a plurality of elders in their churches.”<sup>49</sup>

### **Baptists’ Historic Resistance to a Plurality of Elders**

As the largest Christian denomination in the U.S., Baptist serve as a test-case

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<sup>45</sup> Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter, “Job Burnout,” 492.

<sup>46</sup> For a brief history of eldership practices within the Reformed traditions, see Thomas F. Torrance, “The Eldership in the Reformed Church,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 37, no. 4 (1984): 503–18.

<sup>47</sup> For a brief history of the use of a plurality of elders in Baptist traditions, see Shawn D. Wright, “Baptists and a Plurality of Elders,” in Merkle and Schreiner, *Shepherding God’s Flock*, 249–81.

<sup>48</sup> James M. Renihan, *Edification and Beauty: The Practical Ecclesiology of the English Particular Baptists*, Studies in Baptist History and Thought 17 (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2008), 101.

<sup>49</sup> Wright, “Baptists and a Plurality of Elders,” 249.

by which insights can be gained regarding the lack of churches practicing shared leadership among a plurality of elders.<sup>50</sup> Wright points out that Baptists present a paradox: “Claiming to be the consistent followers of Scripture, Baptists have allowed other concerns to trump the clear pattern of plural elders found in the New Testament.”<sup>51</sup> Wright describes several factors that have led Baptist congregations away from establishing rule by a plurality of elders as opposed to the solitary pastor model.

First, since at least the late eighteenth century, many Baptists, in the South especially, have been committed to congregational autonomy and thus have bristled at the prospect of authority vested in any body save the congregation itself. As the book, *History of the Baptist Denomination in Georgia* points out,

Every Baptist church is, in itself, a republic in miniature. “The government is with the body,” is a sentiment dear to every member of the Baptist denomination: they rejoice that it is not committed to church wardens, to the preacher in charge, to the bishop, to the ruling elders, to presbyteries, conferences, associations, conventions, nor to any other body or set of officers, but to the church itself. With them “the church is the highest ecclesiastical authority on earth,” and they do not admit that the civil courts have any power or right to prescribe regulations regarding worship.<sup>52</sup>

The sentiments of many colonial congregations were likely similar due to the common practice of collecting taxes for Anglican church in the pre-Revolutionary War southern colonies.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, following the *zeitgeist* of the times, many churches redoubled their insistence upon congregational independence after the passage of the Quebec Act of 1774 which was passed by the British Government and restored French civil law in Canada

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<sup>50</sup> Pew Research Center, “America’s Changing Religious Landscape” (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2015), 101, <https://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>.

<sup>51</sup> Wright, “Baptists and a Plurality of Elders,” 249.

<sup>52</sup> *History of the Baptist Denomination in Georgia: With Biographical Compendium and Portrait Gallery of Baptist Ministers and Other Georgia Baptists* (Atlanta: J. P. Harrison, 1881), 264–65, Google Books.

<sup>53</sup> Ira C. Lupu et al., “Shifting Boundaries: The Establishment Clause and Government Funding of Religious Schools and Other Faith-Based Organizations” (Washington, DC: The Pew Forum on Religious & Public Life, 2009), 2, <https://www.pewforum.org/2009/05/14/shifting-boundaries2/>.

thus allowing the Roman Catholic Church to legally collect taxes in Quebec and the Ohio River Valley as French Canadians were granted settlement of the area.<sup>54</sup>

Second, this commitment to independence and resistance to outside influence contributed to Baptist groups developing a “complex hermeneutic for interpreting the plurality passages in the New Testament. This allowed them to favor the scriptures teaching on congregational authority over Scripture's teaching on plurality.”<sup>55</sup> Both sides claiming to hold the biblical position, the resultant split between those favoring congregational rule and those favoring rule by a plurality of elders resulted in Baptist confessional documents remaining ambiguous regarding church leadership models.<sup>56</sup>

Finally, Wright points to prominent Baptist pastors and theologians including John Gill<sup>57</sup> and Andrew Fuller<sup>58</sup> who advocated for a solitary pastor under the authority of the independent congregation.<sup>59</sup> John Gill remained fixed in his insistence that a single pastor should carry the duties of the church even as his strength abated. “During the two last year of his life, he was seldom capable of preaching more than once on a Lord’s Day,” which in turn “affected the attendance of the congregation. The juvenile part of the audience first attended in other assemblies.”<sup>60</sup> In order stem the outward tide and to help Gill by lightening his pastoral load, the church conversed on the topic of getting a co-pastor to assist him, to which Gill complained, “I should not like a co-pastor to hang

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<sup>54</sup> Maxime Dagenais, “Quebec Act, 1774,” in *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, ed. Andrew McIntosh and Celine Cooper, Historica Canada, May 11, 2020, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/quebec-act>.

<sup>55</sup> Wright, “Baptists and a Plurality of Elders,” 255.

<sup>56</sup> Wright, “Baptists and a Plurality of Elders,” 271–73.

<sup>57</sup> John Gill (1697–1771) was a Baptist pastor, scholar, and theologian in England. The church he served was later pastored by Charles Spurgeon.

<sup>58</sup> Andrew Fuller (1754–1815) was an English Baptist pastor and theologian who served as the first secretary of the Baptist Mission Society.

<sup>59</sup> Wright, “Baptists and a Plurality of Elders,” 274–77.

<sup>60</sup> John Rippon, *A Brief Memoir of the Life and Writings of the Late Rev. John Gill, D.D.* (London: Bennett, 1838), 130, <http://archive.org/details/briefmemoiroflif00ripp>.

about my neck, nor an assistant to be dangled at my heels.”<sup>61</sup> To Gill, the prospect of sharing leadership with another pastor seemed to be more of a hindrance than a help. Though it would be difficult to extend Gill’s personal reasons for resisting shared leadership to others, the fact that shared leadership presents its own challenges cannot be overlooked.

### **Conflict: A Reality of Shared Leadership**

Research in the fields of leadership and teamwork in both Christian and secular organizations point to a more common motivation for avoiding the shared leadership model, a desire to avoid conflict.<sup>62</sup> Even within a church context, working within a team can seem daunting due to the fact that “conflict is inevitable in a fallen world; Christians and unbelievers alike struggle with disputes and broken relationships.”<sup>63</sup> Michael LaFasto and Danette Larson, in reviewing over thirty-five-thousand team assessments, found that conflict was the greatest challenge to a working relationship.<sup>64</sup> Patrick Lencioni reports similar findings, saying, “Genuine teamwork in most organization remains as elusive as it has ever been,” one of the foundational reasons being a “fear of conflict.”<sup>65</sup> Strauch’s findings are similar suggesting that the solitary pastor model is preferred by many simply

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<sup>61</sup> Rippon, *Memoir of John Gill*, 131.

<sup>62</sup> Michael E. Roloff and Danette E. Ifert, “Conflict Management Through Avoidance: Withholding Complaints, Suppressing Arguments, and Declaring Topics Taboo,” in *Balancing the Secrets of Private Disclosures*, ed. Sandra Petronio (New York: Routledge, 2000), 151–64; Michael E. Roloff and Courtney N. Wright, “Conflict Avoidance: A Functional Analysis,” in *Uncertainty, Information Management, and Disclosure Decisions: Theories and Applications*, ed. Tamara Afifi and Walid Afifi (New York: Routledge, 2009), 320–40; Thom S. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive* (Nashville: B&H, 2014), 71; Aubrey Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning: A New Model for Church and Ministry Leaders*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 230.

<sup>63</sup> Sande, *The Peacemaker*, 290.

<sup>64</sup> Frank LaFasto and Carl Larson, *When Teams Work Best: 6,000 Team Members and Leaders Tell What It Takes to Succeed* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2001), 43.

<sup>65</sup> Patrick M. Lencioni, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 155.

because “colleagueship is slower and more difficult than unitary leadership, most pastors prefer to work alone or with a staff under them,” thus, avoiding potential conflict.<sup>66</sup>

### **Need for Study**

Specifically in churches, Johns points out the importance of conflict resolution but laments the fact that many leaders fail to address conflict resulting in a lack of trust which undermines team unity and ministry effectiveness.<sup>67</sup> Especially amongst a group of church elders who love the Lord and love each other, it seems that conflict should be avoided at all costs. How can Elder A, who loves his brother Elder B and longs for unity in the church and amongst its leadership, question Elder B’s qualification as an elder when Elder B’s high school-aged child refuses to come to church? What is the best way for Elder C to address Elder D’s questionable, yet popular use of sarcasm and risky humor when teaching the youth group? Or, how should the elders of a local church address the impasse when they cannot agree on tertiary points of theology?

These are important situations that cannot be brushed aside, but if leaders fail to set God-honoring examples of how conflict can be managed and resolved amongst themselves, there is little expectation for congregants to fair better. When avoided or left unresolved, conflict in a church can lead to bitter infighting and schism, especially when important matters like proper interpretation of Scripture and orthodox doctrine are at stake.<sup>68</sup> Darren Slade’s research in conservative church fragmentation led him to conclude:

Devoted members of a church will want to associate with other likeminded members, and if there is a deep division occurring over biblical interpretation, then likeminded members will continue to associate in a potentially ever-increasing belief that they possess absolute biblical truth. As a psychological explanation for

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<sup>66</sup> Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 44.

<sup>67</sup> Johns, “Shared Leadership,” 116.

<sup>68</sup> Slade, “Religious Homophily and Biblicism,” 13.

certain types of fragmentation, an in-group/out-group mentality forms where the out-group is marginalized, stigmatized, and eventually disfellowshipped.<sup>69</sup>

There are certainly times for churches to practice God-ordained disfellowship through the process of church discipline recommended in Scripture,<sup>70</sup> but research indicates that petty personal preferences are more commonly the cause of conflict that leads to congregants leaving the church in numbers resulting in a church closing its doors.<sup>71</sup>

Assessing the factors that led to fourteen churches closing, Thom S. Rainer discovered that all fourteen suffered from unresolved conflicts stemming from personal preferences.<sup>72</sup> Many new pastors never make it through the first few years when conflict is inevitable; “for these pastors, decline and death of the church was preferable to conflict.”<sup>73</sup> As Aubrey Malphurs puts it, “Most people want to avoid conflict at any price, because it makes them uncomfortable.”<sup>74</sup>

The negative ramifications of unhealthy conflict are particularly acute among men called upon to lead the church as a unified group. Strauch summarizes the problem saying,

Conflict among elders is a serious, all-too-common problem. It is appalling how little regard some Christian leaders have for the sacredness of the unity of the body of Christ and how quickly they will divide the body in order to gain their own way. In the end they may get their own way, but it is not God’s way.<sup>75</sup>

For men qualified and called to shepherd God’s flock, an ineptitude for managing conflict cannot not continue, they have a duty to practice God-honoring methods of conflict

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<sup>69</sup> Slade, “Religious Homophily and Biblicism,” 24.

<sup>70</sup> See Matt 18:15–20; cf. 1 Cor 5:1–13.

<sup>71</sup> Thom S. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive* (Nashville: B&H, 2014), eBook.

<sup>72</sup> Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, 56–59.

<sup>73</sup> Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, 71.

<sup>74</sup> Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 230.

<sup>75</sup> Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 96.

management within the team of elders; only then would one expect them to be able to lead the church in doing the same.

According to the pattern of the New Testament churches, God expects a group of qualified elders to work together to shepherd local congregations by their teaching and pattern of living (Titus 1:7–9; 1 Tim 3:2–7). Therein lies an inherent danger, as imperfect men work together, conflict in some form is unavoidable.<sup>76</sup> Conflict, when mis-managed or left unresolved can produce mistrust, discord, church splits, and even lead to the death of a local church, none of which are good for the flock or honoring to God.<sup>77</sup> Scripture establishes the foundation and framework upon which a Christian model of CM can be built though many of the details in the practice of CM are left to the Christian to discern and apply through wisdom and experience. Christian resources for CM based exclusively on Scripture exist, yet there also exists a body of secular research in the field of CM that has been left unutilized. The leading Christian models of CM do not account for concepts or practices developed through secular research.<sup>78</sup> This does not mean the Christian models of CM are faulty or necessarily lacking, but it is possible that a thorough study of secular models may yield concepts and practices that are both congruent with Scriptures and build upon the biblical model to enhance church elders' ability to manage conflict in God-honoring ways.

In *The Peacemaker*, Ken Sande seeks to correct Christians who have abandoned Scripture to practice secular models CM within the church, saying,

Unfortunately, many believers and their churches have not yet developed the commitment and ability to respond to conflict in a gospel-centered and biblically faithful manner. This is often because they have succumbed to the relentless pressure our secular culture exerts on us to forsake the timeless truths of Scripture

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<sup>76</sup> Sande, *The Peacemaker*, 290.

<sup>77</sup> Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*; Slade, “Religious Homophily and Biblicism”; Turner, “Some Observations on ‘Church Splits.’”

<sup>78</sup> E.g., Sande, *The Peacemaker*; Stuart Scott, *Communication and Conflict Resolution: A Biblical Perspective* (Bemidji, MN: Focus, 2005).

and adopt the relativism of our postmodern age. . . . Instead of resolving differences in a distinctively biblical fashion, they often react to conflict with the same avoidance, manipulation, and control that characterize the world. In effect, both individually and congregationally, they have given in to the world's postmodern standard, which is 'What feels good, sounds true, and seems beneficial to me?' This self-validating and self-serving mind-set clashes head on with the divinely established and self-denying way of thinking God has revealed in Scripture. I hope this book will help you see this clash of cultures more clearly and identify some of the ways that you and your church may have been led away from a firm reliance on God and his Word, especially when it comes to resolving conflict.<sup>79</sup>

Though the author of this thesis wholeheartedly agrees that Christians should not abandon, reinterpret, or judge Scripture by any other source, he seeks to discover if a model of CM can both build upon Scripture and be enhanced by outside sources such as secular research.

### **Research Question**

With a firm commitment to remain faithful to a thoroughly Christian practice of CM, this study will seek to discover which, if any, are the concepts and practices from secular models of CM congruent with biblical principles and beneficial to elders practicing shared leadership within a local church.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Sande, *The Peacemaker*, 6–7.

<sup>80</sup> The author is fully committed, without reservation, to the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. The author views research seeking to discover concepts and practices intended to enhance conflict management among Christians as he views the addition of modern instruments and contemporary songs to the musical worship of God. The Psalter loses neither its authority nor beauty if accompanied by a modern piano but may be enhanced by the addition of an instrument not found in Scripture. Similarly, hymns written after the closing of the Canon are not considered a challenge to the sufficiency of Scripture.

## CHAPTER 2

### PRECEDENT LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Introduction**

The following review will examine the precedent literature relevant to conflict management (CM) among elders serving together as shepherds of a local church. The first section will define frequently used terms including conflict management, elder, type of conflict, level of conflict, and styles of conflict management. The second section will establish a theological foundation for the practice of shared leadership in the church. The third section will review and discuss the process of CM established in Scripture. Building upon the theological foundation, the secular research in the area of conflict and CM will be reviewed and discussed, this section will focus on academic research and literature outside of Scripture.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Definition of Terms**

##### **Conflict Management**

Susan Raines offers a nuanced and complete definition for *conflict management* which will be used throughout this thesis: “Conflict management (CM) refers to the systematic prevention of unproductive conflict and proactively addressing those conflicts that cannot be prevented.”<sup>2</sup> This definition of CM includes three key

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<sup>1</sup> The term “secular” is used throughout to distinguish those concepts and practices of CM derived explicitly from Scripture from those concepts and practices which do not come explicitly from Scripture. The author acknowledges the fact that academic research, herein classified as “secular,” is carried out by both Christians and non-Christians alike; the author’s commitment to the authority of Scripture demands such a distinction.

<sup>2</sup> Susan S. Raines, *Conflict Management for Managers: Resolving Workplace, Client, and Policy Disputes*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), 10.

elements, (1) conflict is neither inherently good or bad, (2) some conflict can be managed and mitigated with forethought and appropriate preemptive action, (3) unavoidable conflict must be addressed proactively.

The first aspect of Raines definition that must be established is understanding that “conflict isn’t positive or negative.”<sup>3</sup> Conflict conveys an inherent negative connotation for many, but as Raines points out, “It is our reaction to conflict that determines whether the consequences will be *constructive* or *destructive*. Conflict presents an opportunity for positive change, deepening relationships, and problem solving.”<sup>4</sup> When conflict no longer carries the negative stigma, it but can instead be seen in a hopeful and positive light and those in the midst of it will be less prone to “want to avoid conflict at any price,” but instead engage with in the hopeful expectation of the good that may result from proper management.<sup>5</sup>

Specifically, in the context of conflict among church elders, Alexander Strauch reinforces Raines’s perspective that conflict can be good, saying “elders must understand that the agonizing frustrations, problems, and conflicts of pastoral life are the tools God uses to mold them into the image of the Good Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>6</sup> In God’s sovereign providence, He uses conflict in the context of a group of church elders, to enable qualified men to encourage and shape each other; as “iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another” (Prov 27:17).

The second aspect of the definition is the recognition that CM encompasses the proactive effort to “prevent those conflicts that can be prevented.”<sup>7</sup> At least some conflict

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<sup>3</sup> Raines, *Conflict Management*, 16.

<sup>4</sup> Raines, *Conflict Management*, 16.

<sup>5</sup> Aubrey Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning: A New Model for Church and Ministry Leaders*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 230.

<sup>6</sup> Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership*, 3rd ed. (Littleton, CO: Lewis and Roth, 1995), 97.

<sup>7</sup> Raines, *Conflict Management*, 266.

can be systematically prevented by forethought and organizational policies.<sup>8</sup> Policies that are created proactively can serve to minimize anticipated areas of conflict with preestablished practices and expectations.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, Raines' definition alludes to the fact that conflict is a reality that must be anticipated, leaders therefore, must be proactive in addressing unavoidable or unforeseen conflicts in a timely manner. Christians especially should understand and anticipate the reality of conflict, as Alfred Poirier reminds reasons, "If peace characterizes the eternal relations of the Triune persons of God and his original creation, and if man's fall disrupted that peace, the resulting reality of sinful conflict should neither surprise nor confuse us."<sup>10</sup> As conflict will arise, resolution should be proactively pursued. Raines points out that when conflict is left unmanaged "positions begin to harden. Cognitive biases, including attribution bias, work to filter out information that runs contrary to our own views. Eventually, we refuse to communicate," which leads to unmanaged conflict spiraling out of control.<sup>11</sup> Conflict must be addressed before "the relationships between stakeholders are characterized by demonization and disrespect and the dispute becomes intractable;" conversely, there is a danger in attempting to address conflict too early when "there may be a lack of data on which to base ideas for resolution," which can lead resolutions that miss the mark.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, a proper understanding of CM anticipates conflict and seeks to wisely address it at the right time.

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<sup>8</sup> Mark Simpson, "Policies and Procedures as Planning Tools," in *Management Essentials for Christian Ministries*, ed. Michael Anthony and James R. Estep, Google Books (Nashville: B&H, 2005), 117–8.

<sup>9</sup> Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 216–7.

<sup>10</sup> Alfred Poirier, *The Peacemaking Pastor: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Church Conflict* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), Chap. 4, "God Ordains Conflict," para 1, eBook.

<sup>11</sup> Raines, *Conflict Management*, 67, 320.

<sup>12</sup> Raines, *Conflict Management*, 230.

## **Sources of Conflict**

The sources of conflict, levels of conflict, and styles of CM will be discussed in further detail later in the chapter but a brief definition of each will help to clarify and distinguish the related terms. *Sources of Conflict* are “the antecedent conditions that lead to conflict.”<sup>13</sup> M. Afzalur Rahim says, “Conflict may originate from a number of sources, such as tasks, values, goals,” and knowing the source of the conflict is helpful in determining the best approach for managing the conflict.<sup>14</sup>

## **Levels of Conflict**

The levels of conflict are determined by the parties involved and their relation to one another. Conflict may exist between two individuals, or between two distinct groups, or it may occur between two members of the same group or even within a single individual. “The classification of conflict into four types, based on the level of its origin, shows that analysis at different levels may be beneficial depending on the nature of the problem(s).”<sup>15</sup>

## **Styles of Conflict Management**

Rahim recognizes five distinct styles of CM within the field and though various researchers prefer varying labels, the styles typically fall into one of the five categories labeled *integrating*, *obliging*, *dominating*, *avoiding*, and *compromising*. As will be discussed further on, each style is uniquely suited for different applications and no single style will best fit every situation.

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<sup>13</sup> M. Afzalur Rahim, *Managing Conflict in Organizations*, 3rd ed. (Westport, CT: Quorum Books, 2001), 21.

<sup>14</sup> Rahim, *Managing Conflict in Organizations*, 21.

<sup>15</sup> Rahim, *Managing Conflict in Organizations*, 24.

## **Elder: A Pastor, Overseer, Bishop, and Shepherd**

In defining the term elder one must first distinguish the terms general usage from the particular use of the New Testament. Second, the terms pastor, elder, overseer, and bishop and sometimes shepherd must be clarified as to how they relate and are often used interchangeably in the context of church leadership.

For the present work, one must differentiate the term elder when used in the context of a church office from the general usage of the term elder referring to one advanced in years. Similarly, for the present work the term will be used in a more specific way than the term's usage in in the context of the nation of Israel both in the Old Testament (Exod 3:16; 24:9; Lev 4:15; Num 11:16; Deut 21:3; Josh 8:10; 1 Sam 8:4; 1 Kgs 12:6; Ezra 6:8; Prov 31:23; Ezek 8:11; Joel 2:16) and New Testament in the context of the synagogue, Temple, or Sanhedrin in the New Testament (Matt 15:2; 16:21; 21:23; 27:20; Mark 11:27; 15:1; Luke 7:3; Acts 4:5). James Hamilton describes term elder in the Jewish context saying it refers to leaders within the nation of Israel but “there is never an outright definition of who they were, never a set of qualifications, or requirements for them, never an overt statement of where they stand if relationship to other leading figures . . . or how they functioned as elders.”<sup>16</sup>

Conversely, an elder in the New Testament church served as a shepherd with defined qualifications and responsibilities. Strauch explains, “Elders lead the church, teach and preach the Word, protect the church from false teachers, exhort and admonish the saints in sound doctrine, visit the sick and pray, and judge doctrinal issues. In biblical terminology, elders shepherd, oversee, lead, and care for the local church.”<sup>17</sup> Thus, with the New Testament model in mind, the term elder will be used to refer to a Christian

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<sup>16</sup> James M. Hamilton Jr., “Did the Church Borrow Leadership Structures from the Old Testament or Synagogue?,” in *Shepherding God's Flock: Biblical Leadership in the New Testament and Beyond*, ed. Benjamin L. Merkle and Thomas R. Schreiner (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014), 14–15.

<sup>17</sup> Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 16.

male, qualified according to the standards in the New Testament (1 Tim 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9), serving as a recognized leader in a local church.

Second, English bibles vary in their translation Greek words for the terms elder, pastor, overseer, bishop, and shepherd. The Greek nouns πρεσβύτερος (*presbuteros*), ἐπισκοπή (*episkopē*), and ποιμήν (*poimēn*) are not uniformly translated among different English versions of the Bible. Even within a single English translation, the nouns elder, pastor, overseer, bishop, and sometimes shepherd are alternately used.<sup>18</sup> Commenting on the fact that terms all relate to the same office, James Hamilton Jr. says, “The pastors of the early churches were referred to as elders and overseers. These terms are used interchangeably at several points in the New Testament (see esp. Acts 20:17; 28; 1 Peter 5:1–2; also, Titus 1:5–7; 1 Tim. 3:1–7; Phil. 1:1; James 5:14).”<sup>19</sup> Tom Pennington similarly concluded, “All three words—elder, overseer, and shepherd—clearly refer to the same office.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> The NASB, KJV, and ESV typically translate the Greek noun *presbuteros* (πρεσβύτερος) as *elder*. The Greek noun *episkopē* (ἐπισκοπή) is translated *bishop* in the KJV, is rendered *overseer* in the NASB and ESV. Whereas, *poimēn* (ποιμήν) is translated *shepherd* or *pastor* in the NASB and KJV but only *shepherd* in the ESV. For a more thorough treatment of the topic see Benjamin L. Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer: One Office in the Early Church* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003); John Calahan, “Church Leadership: Function and Qualifications of Elders,” NeverThirsty, accessed December 6, 2021, <https://www.neverthirsty.org/bible-studies/leadership-documents/church-leadership-function-qualifications-elders/>; Denny Burk, “Can Women Be Pastors But Not Elders?,” 9Marks, December 11, 2019, <https://www.9marks.org/article/can-women-be-pastors-but-not-elders/>.

<sup>19</sup> James M. Hamilton Jr., “Did the Church Borrow Leadership Structures,” 13.

<sup>20</sup> Tom Pennington, “A Biblical Case for Elder Rule,” in *The John MacArthur Handbook of Effective Biblical Leadership*, ed. John F. MacArthur, (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2019), 454.

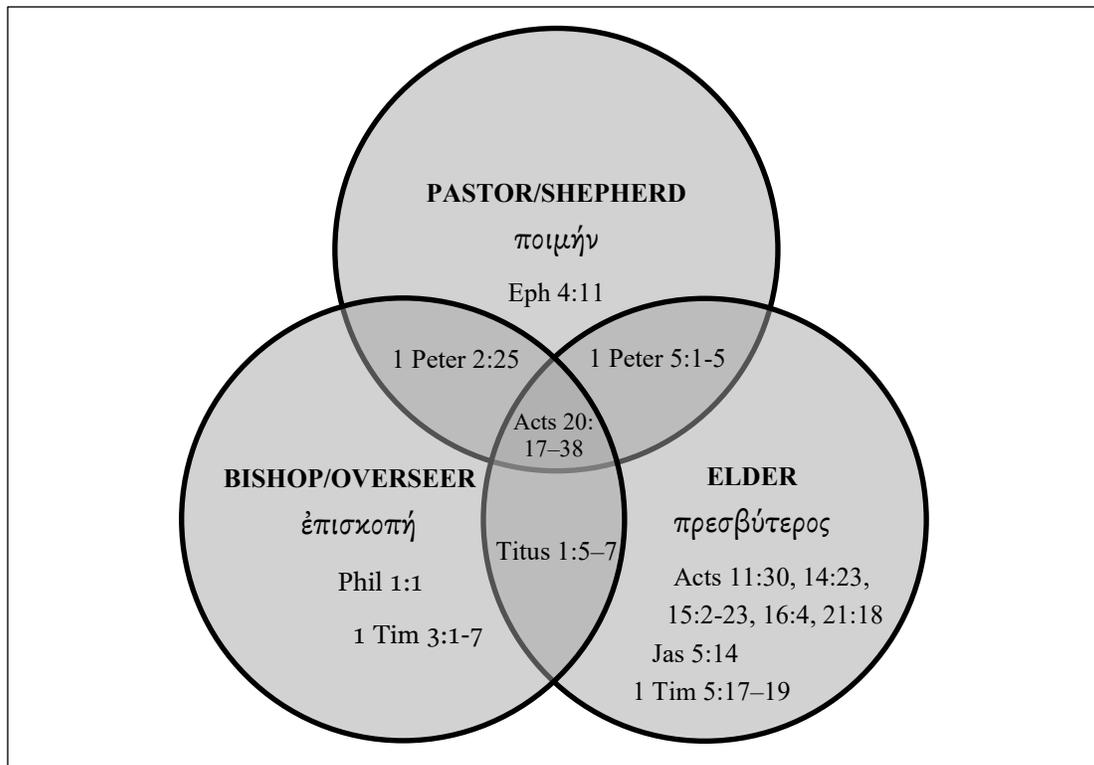


Figure 1. Interconnected facets of one church leadership office<sup>21</sup>

Bruce Ware concurs, pointing out “the terms elders, overseers, pastors refer to one and the same office.”<sup>22</sup> Ware argues “from various contexts in the New Testament that the three Greek terms, presbyteros, episkopos, and poimēn, all refer to the same office, an office we will refer to . . . as the office of ‘elder.’”<sup>23</sup> In reconciling the diverse terms used for the same church leadership role (see figure 1), Ware explains:

Not only do all three terms [elder, overseer, pastor] apply to this spiritual leadership office in the church, each of these terms presents some of what is involved in the

<sup>21</sup> Adapted from J. A. Medders, “Don’t Title People ‘Pastor’ if They aren’t An Elder,” J. A. Medders, January 28, 2021, <https://jamedders.com/dont-title-people-pastor/>; originally appearing in Colin Smothers, “Pastor, Elder, and Overseer: A Baptist View,” *Anchored*, May 13, 2012, <https://colinssmothers.wordpress.com/2012/05/13/pastors-elders-and-bishops-a-baptist-view/>.

<sup>22</sup> Ware, “Putting It All Together,” in Benjamin L. Merkle and Thomas Schreiner, eds., *Shepherding God’s Flock: Biblical Leadership in the New Testament and Beyond* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Ministry, 2014), 290.

<sup>23</sup> Ware, “Putting It All Together,” in Merkle and Schreiner, *Shepherding God’s Flock*, 289.

work of those who carry out this office. . . . “Elders,” are to be “seasoned” in the faith. . . . The term “overseer” adds the dimension that these spiritual leaders must be men who take and exercise responsibility for the well-being of those under their charge. . . . Indicating their ability to provide training, instruction, and discipline within the church. . . . Also, the term “shepherd” or “pastor” (as is more commonly used) adds the dimension of tender care, provision, and protection of the flock. One calls to mind the good shepherd of Psalm 23 and John 10 who seeks good pasture and clear water for his flock, all the while watching carefully to defend against the attempt of any predator to harm any of his sheep.<sup>24</sup>

Throughout this work, the terms elder, pastor, and shepherd will be used synonymously.

When attempting to define the term *elder* in its official capacity as a recognized authority tasked with shepherding a local church, the list of qualifications must be discussed. Every believer has a high calling as one personally representing Christ to the world (2 Cor 5:20). The call to shepherd God’s flock acknowledges that the elder is a steward of God’s people, a people purchased at great cost to the owner of the flock as Paul points out to the Ephesian elders in his parting exhortation, “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28). In Strauch’s assessment of importance of defining elders in accordance with the requisite qualifications he says, “The overriding concern of the New Testament in relation to church leadership is for the right kind of men to serve as elders . . . The offices of God church are not honorary positions.”<sup>25</sup> Those who serve as elders must meet the qualifications, “The New Testament is unequivocally emphatic on this point.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ware, “Putting It All Together,” in Merkle and Schreiner, *Shepherding God’s Flock*, 290.

<sup>25</sup> Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 68.

<sup>26</sup> Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 68.

Table 1. Qualifications for elders<sup>27</sup>

Category	Qualification	Reference
Desire	Spirit-motivated	Acts 20:28
	Godly desire	1 Timothy 3:1
	Eager to Serve	1 Peter 5:2
Integrity	Above reproach	1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:6–7
	Good reputation	1 Timothy 3:7
	Respectable	1 Timothy 3:2
	Devout	Titus 1:8
	Upright	Titus 1:8
	An Example	1 Peter 5:3
Scripture	Faithful to the word	Titus 1:9
	Able to teach	1 Timothy 3:2
	Exhort doctrine	Titus 1:9
	Refute error	Titus 1:9
Family	One-woman man	1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6
	Obedient, believing children	1 Timothy 3:4; Titus 1:6
	Manage household	1 Timothy 3:4–5
Personal	Lover of good	Titus 1:8
	Prudent/sensible	1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8
	Self-controlled	Titus 1:8
	Temperate	1 Timothy 3:2
	Not a new convert	1 Timothy 3:6
	Not a drunkard	1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7
	Not greedy	1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7
Relational	Hospitable	1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8
	Gentle	1 Timothy 3:3
	Not lording	1 Peter 5:3
	Not quarrelsome	1 Timothy 3:3
	Now quick-tempered	Titus 1:7
	Not self-willed	Titus 1:7
	Not violent	1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7

The qualification for an elder are primarily listed in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, with additional insights presented in 1 Peter 5, Acts 20. Chuck Gianotti and Jack Spencer have broken the thirty qualifications into six general categories, (1) desire, (2) integrity, (3) Scripture, (4) family, (5) personal, (6) relational, in a table that coalesces the four

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<sup>27</sup> Adapted from Chuck Gianotti and Jack Spencer, *Spiritual Maturity: Based on Qualifications for Biblical Elders*, 2nd ed. (Colorado Springs: Lewis and Roth, 2018).

passages of Scripture, the six categories, and the thirty qualifications into one table (see table 1).<sup>28</sup> Any discussion of elders, therefore, must presuppose those being spoken of indeed, meet the qualifications listed.<sup>29</sup>

### **Plurality of Elders: Biblical Foundations for Shared Leadership**

Pearce and Conger broadly define shared leadership as “a dynamic, interactive influence process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group or organizational goals.”<sup>30</sup> This general definition can include several distinct forms of cooperation among leaders that have at their core a resistance to autocratic, dictatorial, or exclusively top-down modes of operation.<sup>31</sup>

### **Inadequate Models**

Books and articles abound offering leadership, models, systems, and advise for the church. Many of these books contain helpful insights and wisdom gleaned from experience though the advice is packaged in a system foreign to the New Testament’s model of shared leadership among a plurality of elders.

Lovett Weems Jr. offers helpful advice for church leaders but frames church leadership within the context of individuals with specific traits, skills, and practices.<sup>32</sup> In

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<sup>28</sup> Kenneth O. Gangel and Samuel L. Canine, *Communication and Conflict Management in Churches and Christian Organizations* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002).

<sup>29</sup> For further insights into the passages, see Benjamin L. Merkle, *Why Elders? A Biblical and Practical Guide for Church Members* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009); Benjamin L. Merkle, *40 Questions about Elders and Deacons* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009); Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*; Merkle and Schreiner, *Shepherding God’s Flock*; John MacArthur, *Titus*, vol. 26, 33 vols., The MacArthur New Testament Commentary Series (Chicago: Moody, 1996); John MacArthur, *1 Timothy*, vol. 24, 33 vols., The MacArthur New Testament Commentary Series (Chicago: Moody, 1995).

<sup>30</sup> Craig L. Pearce and Jay A. Conger, “All Those Years Ago: The Historical Underpinnings of Shared Leadership,” in Craig L. Pearce and Jay A. Conger, eds., *Shared Leadership: Reframing the Hows and Whys of Leadership* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2003), 1.

<sup>31</sup> Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2013), 95–112.

<sup>32</sup> Lovett H. Weems, Jr., *Church Leadership: Vision, Team, Culture, Integrity*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010).

the chapter recommending the benefit of teams and shared leadership, Weems offers advice for selecting key church leaders. Though a plurality of elders is not addressed in the book, setting aside consideration of biblical qualifications for key leaders Weems suggests key church teams can be “identified because of interest or expertise . . . The process of forming this ‘group’ is democratic in the sense that persons are identified not because of who they are but because of what the vision is,” and their ability to help the pastor bring it to fruition.<sup>33</sup> By way of example, Weems extols the efforts of a pastor who, upon learning that one of his congregants was the president of a major company, works around a nay-saying leadership nomination committee by creating a select pastoral advisory team and then appointing the man to it.<sup>34</sup>

Throughout the book dedicated to church leadership, neither elders nor deacons<sup>35</sup> are mentioned within the context of ecclesiastical offices. Models which fail to reflect the importance of shared church leadership are inadequate in establishing a biblical model of church leadership.

Other works, like that of Gary McIntosh, are dedicated to the teamwork and collaboration. Under the general category of shared leadership, McIntosh offers various models of team leadership for the church. McIntosh suggests the standard had historically been a single pastor for each congregation, but, “With the increase in the complexity and variety of needs represented in today’s church . . . we now live in an age of specialization,” requiring teamwork.<sup>36</sup> McIntosh’s pragmatic approach to teamwork is not

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<sup>33</sup> Weems, Jr., *Church Leadership: Vision*, chap 6, "Teaming Together," para. 3–5.

<sup>34</sup> Weems, Jr., *Church Leadership: Vision*, chap 6, "Teaming Together," para. 3–5.

<sup>35</sup> The importance and role of deacons (Acts 6:1-7; 1 Tim 3:8–13) is a worthy topic though it falls outside the scope of this discussion. For a thorough handling of the topic see Alexander Strauch, *The New Testament Deacon: The Church’s Minister of Mercy*, 1st ed. (Littleton, CO: Lewis & Roth, 1992); Alexander Strauch, *Paul’s Vision for the Deacons: Assisting the Elders with the Care of God’s Church* (Littleton, CO: Lewis & Roth, 2017); Matt Smethurst, *Deacons: How They Serve and Strengthen the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021).

<sup>36</sup> Gary L. McIntosh, *Staff Your Church for Growth: Building Team Ministry in the 21st Century* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), eBook, chap 6, "Teaming Together," para. 1-2.

primarily grounded in the New Testament model but instead intended to “help you reach your growth goals,” by meeting the expectations of modern congregants.<sup>37</sup>

McIntosh offers three ways of looking at the leadership role of the senior pastor including “tribal chief,” “medicine man,” and “chief executive officer,” each of which maintain the final authority of the senior pastor with the understanding that any leadership positions added would function under him.<sup>38</sup> McIntosh goes on to illustrate seven configurations for structuring church teams though six of the seven maintain the top-down authority of the senior pastor.<sup>39</sup> In describing the seventh and only model that resembles shared leadership, McIntosh says, “The newest approach to be used as a model of pastoral team ministry is the collaborative model.”<sup>40</sup> He then cautions, “While this approach looks good on paper, it is much more difficult to pull off successfully.”<sup>41</sup>

This myopic view of church history and ecclesiastical leadership offers inadequate models for shared leadership and teamwork within a church. Any study of church leadership must be built upon and remain consistent with Scripture; therefore, an examination of Scripture will be made to discover biblical patterns of church eldership.

### **Trinitarian Foundations for Shared Leadership**

Ultimately, the quintessential model of perfect shared leadership is established for the local church by the pattern of God’s trinitarian interactions and sovereign dominion over His creation. In Scripture, God clearly communicates and demonstrates His triune existence. One text in the Old Testament that clearly conveys the three persons

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<sup>37</sup> McIntosh, *Staff Your Church*, chap. 1, "Staffed for Decline," para. 5.

<sup>38</sup> McIntosh, *Staff Your Church*, chap. 5, "Leadership Roles."

<sup>39</sup> McIntosh, *Staff Your Church*, chap. 6, "Models for Staffing," para 1-10.

<sup>40</sup> McIntosh, *Staff Your Church*, chap. 6, "The Collaborative Model," para. 1.

<sup>41</sup> McIntosh, *Staff Your Church*, chap. 6, "The Collaborative Model," para. 1.

of God is recorded by Isaiah in the preincarnate Christ's call to Israel. Introducing Himself, Christ says, "I am He, I am the first and also the last. Surely My hand founded the earth, and My right hand spread out the heavens" (Isa 48:12; cf. John 1:1–10; Rev 1:8–17; 22:12). Christ goes on to call Israel, saying, "Come near to Me, listen to this: from the first I have not spoken in secret, from the time it took place, I was there. And now the Lord GOD has sent Me, and His Spirit" (Isa 48:16). Enns points out the Triune cooperation in this passage as "the Father has sent the Messiah and the Spirit to speak."<sup>42</sup>

Similarly, God demonstrates His triune nature in the New Testament, at the baptism of Jesus. All three persons of the trinity cooperate to "fulfill all righteousness," and authenticate the incarnate ministry of God the Son (Matt 3:15). As Christ was physically coming up from the water "the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased'" (16–17). It is because God is three that He alone perfectly models relational love. Alfred Poirier says, "These three persons of the Trinity exist in an eternal, interpersonal relationship with one another. Thus God, by nature, is radically personal and radically relational."<sup>43</sup>

Though God exists as three distinct persons, He also shows Himself to be one. This central tenant of God's existence was communicated by God through Moses in Deuteronomy 6:4 in order to establish an accurate understanding of the one true God in the hearts and minds of the Israelites before crossing the Jordan and entering a pagan land full of unknown gods, "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!" In the New Testament, James reiterates this truth. As he implores believers to respond in gratitude to their salvation in Christ by living out their faith in works, James cautions that

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<sup>42</sup> Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, rev. and exp. ed. (Chicago: Moody, 2008), 204.

<sup>43</sup> Poirier, *The Peacemaking Pastor*, Chap. 4, "Our Triune God of Peace," para. 6.

simply possessing a correct understanding of the unity of God is by no means evidence of saving faith, saying, “You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder” (2:19).

Bruce Ware offers an apt summation of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity:

The Christian faith affirms that God is one and that God is three: God is one in essence but three in persons. In essence, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are fully coequal and coeternal; in persons, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are different and distinct. These twin pillars, then, necessarily uphold the Christian doctrine of the Trinity: the *equality of the divine persons . . .* and the *distinctiveness of the divine person*, as the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.<sup>44</sup>

In the Trinity, three distinct persons perfectly cooperate to accomplish a single and unified purpose. Seeking to better emphasize the unity of the three persons, Douglas Blount refers to God’s trinitarian nature as the *Triunity*.<sup>45</sup>

This perfect, divine cooperation and distinction offers model foundation upon which for the church’s understanding of how shared leadership should be built. Ware points out that God wants His trinitarian cooperation and unity expressed, especially among those in the church.<sup>46</sup> In what has been described as “the high priestly prayer,”<sup>47</sup> of John 17, Jesus prays for believers to be united to Himself and each other, just as Christ is united to the Father and Spirit. Jesus prayed:

That they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me (21–23).

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<sup>44</sup> Bruce A. Ware, “Unity and Distinction of the Trinitarian Persons,” in *Trinitarian Theology: Theological Models and Doctrinal Application*, ed. Keith Whitfield (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2019), chap. 1, “Introduction: God as One and Three,” para. 1.

<sup>45</sup> Douglas K. Blount, “Article II: God,” in *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000: Critical Issues in America’s Protestant Denomination*, ed. Douglas K. Blount and Joseph D. Woodell (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 18.

<sup>46</sup> Bruce A. Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 132.

<sup>47</sup> J. Gerald Janzen, “The Scope of Jesus’s High Priestly Prayer in John 17,” *Encounter* 67, no. 1 (2006): 1–26.

Reflecting on Jesus's prayer, Abraham Kuyper says, "Those who are in the church are not each considered individually; rather, as Christ Himself entreated the Father, they are one 'just as we are one.'"<sup>48</sup> J. Gerald Janzen highlights the external witness this unity communicates to those outside the church, saying, Jesus "prays so intensely for his followers precisely because, once he returns to the Father, it is they who are to bear his name in witness to the world."<sup>49</sup>

Kuyper rightly points out that Jesus's prayer emphasizes unity among believers, but he goes on to show how there are other images of the church within Scripture which alternately reflect the individuality of the members and the unity of the church, such as:

Friends of the one bridegroom (Matt 9:15), the crowd of friends (John 15:14) . . . a vine (Matt 20:1–16) or a flock of sheep (John 21:15–17; 10:2, 11, 14, 16; Luke 12:32; Matt 18:12; Luke 15:4). . . . God's field (1 Cor 3:9), God's house (1 Cor 3:16; Eph 2:21; 1 Tim 3:15), the body of Christ (Eph 1:23), members of the household of God (Eph 2:19), citizens of one city, "in one body" (Rom 12:4–8; 1 Cor 12:12), or the wife of one husband [1 Tim 5:9]; and Peter also employs the image of royal priests and a beloved people (1 Pet 2:9). Finally, "You are all one in Christ" (Gal 3:28), so that you would offer your heart to God and glorify God with one voice (Rom 15:6).<sup>50</sup>

By understanding the God revealed in Scripture, one can surmise the principle of unity amid uniqueness within the church made possible by a common salvation in Christ. This trinitarian understanding of God lays a solid foundation upon which the church can trace a biblical pattern for shared leadership within the local church.

### **Unique Members of One Body**

The unity of the church helps communicate God's unity within the Trinity to the world, but this is not to the diminution of the distinct roles of the Father, Son, and

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<sup>48</sup> Abraham Kuyper, *On the Church*, ed. John H. Wood Jr. and Andrew M. McGinnis, trans. Harry Van Dyke et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016). Chap. 1, "The Character of the Church," para. 2, eBook.

<sup>49</sup> Janzen, "The Scope," 25.

<sup>50</sup> Kuyper, *On the Church*, Chap. 1, "The Character of the Church," para. 2.

Spirit. Expanding upon Christ's desire for unity within the church, the apostle Paul uses the analogy of the body to illustrate distinctly unique parts all working in coordination for the good of the body, yet still retaining their respective roles. In 1 Corinthians, the apostle Paul says, "For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ" (12:12). The analogy is extended as Paul points out each part of the body has a unique role to fulfil, one as an eye, another as a hand, or ear, another as the head, but all part of one body and all mutually in need each other (vv. 15–21). "The body is not one member, but many. . . . God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. . . . But now there are many members, but one body" (vv. 14, 18–20).

Paul humorously imagines a personified foot complaining that it is not a hand, and an ear bemoaning the fact that it is not an eye, but understanding the deeper connection to the trinitarian model of distinct roles makes the scenario even more absurd. Each person within the Trinity functions in a distinct way, while coordinating unified outcomes they do not share every aspect of their unique roles. Without remaining grounded in a trinitarian understanding of unity amid uniqueness, believers, including elders, risk discontentment in their function within the church.

This is the exact scenario Paul was addressing in the discontented Corinthian church as he points out, "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons" (12:4–6). D. A. Carson and Douglas Moo summarize the Paul's analogy in chapter twelve succinctly, saying, "Here the apostle insists on the need for diversity in unity."<sup>51</sup> This principle should be carried forward in a proper understanding of not only the way the church in general functions, but also in the

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<sup>51</sup> D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 417.

way elders of a church share the responsibilities as equals in position and importance, though not identical in role and function.

Referring specifically to the shared leadership model described in the New Testament, Strauch states, “By definition, the elder structure of government is a collective form of leadership in which each elder shares equally the positions, authority, and responsibility of the office.”<sup>52</sup> This specific form of shared leadership operates with two particular dynamics, first, as a “council of equals,” and second, recognizing specific giftings and acknowledging what Strauch calls a “first among equals.”<sup>53</sup>

Within a church led by a plurality of elders, there is no distinction in title, office, authority, importance, or responsibility. Each elder must meet the qualifications including being able to teach (1 Tim 3:2, Titus 1:9), but this does not require they all preach an equal number Sundays. “Although elders act jointly as a council and share equal authority and responsibility for the leadership of the church, all are not equal in their giftedness, biblical knowledge, leadership ability, experience, or dedication.”<sup>54</sup> Therefore, a church led by a plurality of elders does not exclude distinction in roles according to gifting or training, though it does exclude distinction in authority and title.

### **A Plurality of Elders: The New Testament Model**

The teaching of Scripture, the practice of the apostles, and the pattern of the early church never pointed toward a solitary pastor leading a local church alone, as Strauch points out:

It is a highly significant but often overlooked fact that our Lord did not appoint one man to lead His church. He personally appointed and trained twelve men. *Jesus Christ gave the church plurality of leadership.* The Twelve comprised the first leadership council of the church and, in the most exemplary way, jointly led and

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<sup>52</sup> Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 39.

<sup>53</sup> Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 39, 45.

<sup>54</sup> Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 45.

taught the first Christian community. The Twelve provide a marvelous example of unity, humble brotherly love, and shared leadership structure.<sup>55</sup>

After the ascension of Christ, the first Christian church was led by apostles and a plurality of elders.

The leaders of the Jerusalem church conferred together when faced with doctrinal challenges as when pressed to answer whether gentile believers needed to be circumcised (Acts 15). Benjamin Merkle points out the importance that Luke records in the book of Acts that Paul and Barnabas were “appointed to go to Jerusalem to discuss the issue with the ‘apostles and elders.’”<sup>56</sup> The elders were highly involved in the discussion so that James, the half-brother of Jesus who was never counted among the apostles in any New Testament listing, ultimately issues the final judgment that was agreed upon by the group (13–21). Merkle also suggests, “It is likely that as the apostles began to gradually leave Jerusalem, the responsibility of spiritual leadership was transferred into the hands of the elders.”<sup>57</sup> The office of elder existed alongside the apostles in the Jerusalem church and as the Apostles spread and eventually passed from the scene, elders naturally carried on the shepherding and leadership role as pastors and overseers.<sup>58</sup>

This transition of leadership appears complete by the time Paul makes his final visit to Jerusalem (Acts 21:17–26). Luke records, “Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present” (18). Merkle points out that the apostles are no longer in

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<sup>55</sup> Alexander Strauch, *The Biblical Eldership Booklet: Restoring the Eldership to Its Rightful Place in the Church*, rev. ed. (Littleton, CO: Lewis and Roth, 1997), 12–13, [https://biblicaleldership.com/files/pdfs/BE\\_booklet.pdf](https://biblicaleldership.com/files/pdfs/BE_booklet.pdf).

<sup>56</sup> Benjamin L. Merkle, “The Pattern of Leadership in Acts and Paul’s Letters to Churches,” in *Shepherding God’s Flock: Biblical Leadership in the New Testament and Beyond*, ed. Benjamin L. Merkle and Thomas R. Schreiner (Grand Rapids: Kregel Ministry, 2014), 61.

<sup>57</sup> Merkle, “The Pattern of Leadership,” 61.

<sup>58</sup> It must be noted that the transition of leadership does equate local church elders to the status, title, or authority of apostles. As will be mentioned further down, the Roman Catholic tradition of apostolic succession and the resultant Petrine Theory are to be soundly rejected as wholly unbiblical and untenable from the pattern of the early church.

Jerusalem and even James, the half-brother of Christ “is not the central person in in Luke’s account. The Passage is taken up with the dialogue between the elders and Paul, which is indicated by the use of the plural throughout . . . this text demonstrates the elders’ authoritative role in the life of the church.”<sup>59</sup>

The pattern of a plurality leaders to shepherd the flock continued throughout the New Testament’s record as the apostles established local congregations led by multiple elders, interchangeably referred to as pastors, shepherds, and overseers. Commenting on this pattern, Merkle says, “Barnabas and Paul appoint elders in every church which signifies that these leaders were set apart with a special task within the church. This appointing also implies the elements of permanency of position, recognition by others, and authority within the community.”<sup>60</sup>

Paul continues the pattern, instructing Titus as to the necessity of having a plurality of elders in each local church. Paul explained that one of the primary functions Titus was to carry out on the island of Crete by saying, “For this reason I left Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you” (Titus 1:5). Ware clarifies the passage as being prescriptive rather than simply descriptive, saying,

Paul commands Titus to set in order the things that remain in the establishing of churches, which involves appointing “elders in every town” as he had instructed him previously (Titus 1:5). In case one wonders if this passage requires an understanding of a plurality of elders for each local church, it should be kept in mind that Paul’s goal was to see a church established in each town or city. It is most probable, then, that appointing elders (plural) in every town amounted to appointing elders (plural) in every church (singular), i.e., the church that was planted in each particular town.<sup>61</sup>

Christ and the apostles left a clear model in the early church that called for and

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<sup>59</sup> Merkle, “The Pattern of Leadership,” 62.

<sup>60</sup> Merkle, “The Pattern of Leadership,” 67.

<sup>61</sup> Bruce A. Ware, “Putting It All Together: A Theology of Church Leadership,” in Merkle and Schreiner, *Shepherding God’s Flock*, 294.

exemplified the sharing of pastoral responsibilities among a group of qualified elders. As the pattern was set for a plurality of elders in the Jerusalem church, so the model was continued throughout the establishment of local congregations in the book of Acts and the rest of the New Testament.<sup>62</sup>

Strauch offers an overview of the consistent model of local churches in the New Testament being shepherded by a plurality of elders. James “instructed the sick believer to ‘call for the elders [plural]<sup>63</sup> of the church [singular]’ (James 5:14).”<sup>64</sup> In the churches planted by Paul on his missionary journeys, “Leadership by the plurality of elders was established in the churches in Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch (Acts 14:20–23); . . . in Ephesus (Acts 20:17; 1 Tim. 3:1–7; 5:17–25); in the church in Philippi (Phil. 1:1); and in the churches on the island of Crete (Titus 1:5).”<sup>65</sup> In his first epistle, Peter wrote to the churches “scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (1 Peter 1:1) and he “exhorted the elders to pastor the flock (1 Peter 5:1). This indicated that Peter knew that the elder structure of government was standard practice in these churches.”<sup>66</sup>

As the terms refer to the same office, there can be no biblical argument made for an asserted hierarchy of one church ruling another through the authority of archbishops ruling bishops, bishops ruling pastors, and so on. Historically, the Roman Catholic church has outlined the differences between these offices and their functions

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<sup>62</sup> It should be noted that the early churches alone enjoyed the benefit of having apostles as elders, nowhere in Scripture is there any indication that the office of apostle was to continue throughout the church age, nor that local churches were expected to be overseen by or appoint apostles. The apostles were elders, but no elder is an apostle today. For further reading see John MacArthur, “Six Arguments Against Modern-Day Apostleship,” *Grace to You*, March 29, 1998, <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/47-87/>.

<sup>63</sup> Brackets in original.

<sup>64</sup> Strauch, Alexander, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership, Revised and Expanded*, 3rd Edition (Littleton, CO: Lewis and Roth, 1995), 36–37.

<sup>65</sup> Strauch, *Biblical Eldership Booklet*, 32.

<sup>66</sup> Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 37.

justified by the theory of apostolic succession.<sup>67</sup> These unbiblical traditions will be laid aside for proper definition of the terms herein. Throughout the present work, the terms elder, shepherd, and pastor will primarily be used and will refer to the same ecclesiastical office within the local church.

The New Testament gives a very clear and particular list of qualifications a man must meet in order to be considered as an elder within the local church (see table 1). These qualifications describe the men who seek to be considered as elders within the local church regardless of the specific role in which they function; therefore, though one may not hold the principle duties of weekly preaching, he still must “be able to teach” (1 Tim 3:2).<sup>68</sup> Similarly, though one may not be primarily responsible for the finances of the church, he still must be “free from the love of money” (3:3). Therefore, the complete list of qualifications is irreducible, meaning if a man meets all qualifications but one, then he is not to be considered for the office of elder. The fully inclusive set of qualifications “protect the church from incompetent or morally unfit leaders.”<sup>69</sup>

Strauch offers a final distinctive qualifier, saying, “Biblical eldership . . . must be an all-male eldership.”<sup>70</sup> Scripture and the pattern of the New Testament churches are clear that the office of elder is one of male leadership.<sup>71</sup> Since the terms elder, pastor, overseer, and bishop have already been shown to refer synonymously to the same office,

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<sup>67</sup> “Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2nd Edition,” 1994, 227–41, <https://www.usccb.org/sites/default/files/flipbooks/catechism/232/>.

<sup>68</sup> For further insights into the passages, see Merkle, *Why Elders?*; Merkle, *40 Questions about Elders*; Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*; Merkle and Schreiner, *Shepherding God’s Flock*; MacArthur, *The MacArthur Commentary: Titus*; MacArthur, *The MacArthur Commentary: 1 Timothy*.

<sup>69</sup> Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 68–71.

<sup>70</sup> Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 51.

<sup>71</sup> The author is fully aware of the current gender-confusion debate and the attempt to redefine the terms *male* and *female*. Therefore, for clarity’s sake, the term *male* will be used in the present work to refer to biological males, born with XY chromosomes, born with male reproductive organs, and outwardly conforming to the patterns of male dress and behavior consistent with Scripture and respective Christian cultural contexts.

none of these titles could be correctly applied to women. In addition to the fact that a qualified elder must be “the husband of one wife” (1 Tim 3:2), Ware points out the limitation that all elders must be able to teach (3:2) though in the preceding chapter Paul had specifically forbade women from teaching or holding authority in the church over men (2:12).<sup>72</sup> “If elders must be qualified to teach, and their audiences would include both men and women, but if women are not permitted to teach men, then it follows that women cannot be elders.”<sup>73</sup> Strauch says Scripture is equally clear that men and women are fully equal in “personhood, dignity, and value, but distinct in gender roles.”<sup>74</sup>

### **Summary of the Biblical Foundation for Shared Leadership**

God’s triune nature establishes an eternal foundation for unity amid diversity. As God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are unique in function though unified in being, purpose, and nature, so the church is to function many members of one body. Likewise, leaders within the churches are to function as equals in a cohesive team while recognizing the unique giftings and roles of each leader. Finally, the pattern of ministry during the time of Christ and the apostles, the apostles and elders of the first churches, and throughout the establishment of churches in the New Testament collectively describe and prescribe a pattern of organization and leadership requiring a plurality of elders shepherding each local church. Attention will now be given to the topic of conflict management.

### **Conflict Management**

The following section will summarize established principles of conflict

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<sup>72</sup> Bruce Ware, “Putting it all Together: A Theology of Church Leadership,” in Merkle and Schreiner, *Shepherding God’s Flock*, 140.

<sup>73</sup> Ware, “Putting it all Together,” in Merkle and Schreiner, *Shepherding God’s Flock*, 140.

<sup>74</sup> Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 51.

management (CM). The first section will seek to discover a theological foundation for the root of conflict from Scripture. Working up from the theological foundation, key biblical concepts for promoting peace and managing unavoidable conflict will be discussed.

Having discovered the theological foundation and scriptural framework for CM, the second section will survey the secular literature in the field of CM. After categorizing the sources and levels of conflict, styles for CM will be reviewed.

### **Biblical Principles for Managing Conflict**

Returning to the Raines definition, “Conflict management refers to the systematic prevention of unproductive conflict and proactively addressing those conflicts that cannot be prevented.”<sup>75</sup> Consistent with the biblical emphasis on peace, Raines starts with the prevent conflict when possible. Similarly, Scripture’s emphasis on the Christian’s pursuit of peace is the first biblical principle to be discussed in light of CM. Thereafter, the passages of Scripture that guide the processes by which Christians proactively address and resolve conflicts which cannot be avoided will be discussed.

### **Scripture’s Emphasis on Peace**

Conflict is a perennial topic throughout Scripture. Before getting to the fifth chapter in the history of the universe, it was recorded that very first human born as a result of procreation murdered his brother (Gen 4:1–8). A survey of world history does not show much hope for unguided improvement as conflict, battles, and large-scale wars serve as benchmarks for the study of world history. As was discussed above, Christians should expect conflict; accordingly, Scripture provides Christians with a framework for how to mitigate and manage conflict. This does not imply however, that conflict is, or should be the standard framework by which people, especially Christians, relate to one another. The emphasis of Scripture’s approach to CM starts with a diligent pursuit of

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<sup>75</sup> Raines, *Conflict Management*, 10.

peace. The emphasis on peace does not initially result from a desire to mitigate or manage conflict, Poirier points to a deeper, more essential motivation rooted in the fact that all people are created in the image of God (Gen 1:26–27). Poirier states:

No relationship could better demonstrate the essence of peace. When we confess the Trinity, we confess that God is a God of peace! Conventional thinking, in keeping with its ancient predecessors, understands peace as a state of being that comes only subsequent to conflict—as a condition that follows disorder. But because peace is an attribute of the eternal, Triune God, we know that peace precedes conflict. Moreover, peace precedes creation. When the apostle tells a conflicted church that “God is not a God of disorder but of peace” (1 Cor. 14:33), he is saying more than that God wants us to stop fighting. He is rooting our very nature in the reality that we are created and redeemed in the “image of God”—in the God of peace.<sup>76</sup>

Made in His image and recognizing that all others bear his image as well, pursuing peace should rightly establish a foundational truth for Christians. It is no wonder then that Scripture is filled with passages reminding the listeners and readers of the importance of peace (see table 2). A blessing of peace was also used as a common greeting and parting salutation among those in the Old Testament, שָׁלוֹם (*shalom*) (Exod 4:18; Judg 18:6; 1 Sam 25:35; 29:7; 2 Kgs 5:19) and New Testament εἰρήνη (*eirēnē*) (Luke 7:50; 8:49; Acts 16:36; Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2; Phil 1:2; Col 1:2; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:2; Phlm 1:3; 2 Pet 1:2; Rev 1:4). Scripture does not simply extol the virtues of peace and yet leave mankind to figure out how to attain peace, instead the path to peace lies at the center of the redemptive narrative of all Scripture through salvation in Christ. Before peace among men can be hoped for, man has a greater need to be at peace with God.

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<sup>76</sup> Poirier, *The Peacemaking Pastor*, chap. 4, "Our Triune God of Peace," para. 7.

Table 2. Scripture passages emphasizing the pursuit of peace

Scripture Reference	The Commendation of Peace
Proverbs 10:12	Love covers all transgressions
Proverbs 12:20	Counselors of peace have joy
Matthew 5:9	Blessed are the peacemakers, they'll be called the sons of God
Matthew 5:23–24	Peace with men is a priority in worshiping God
Mark 9:50	Be at peace with one another
Luke 6:27–30	Love your enemies, pray for your persecutors, turn the other cheek
Luke 17:3–4	If a brother sins against you seven times a day and repents seven times, forgive him
Romans 12:17	So far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men
Romans 12:19–21	Overlook an offence, do not seek revenge, overcome evil with good
2 Corinthians 13:11	Live in peace and the God of peace will be with you
Ephesian 4:3	Be diligent to preserve unity in the Spirit in the bond of peace
Ephesians 4:26	Don't let the sun set on your anger, make peace
1 Thessalonians 5:13	Live in peace with one another
Hebrews 12:14–15	Pursue peace with all men
James 3:17–18	Wisdom from above is peaceable, the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace

### **The Need for Peace with God**

In the book of Romans, Paul says, “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness” (1:18), and then goes on to make it clear that there are none counted righteous before the holy God (3:10), “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (23). Left to oneself, no man can be at peace with God “but God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love,” made a way for men to be redeemed from slavery to sin and strife (Rom 6:6) through Christ. Paul goes on to say, “Christ died for our sins according . . . He was buried, and . . . He was raised on the

third day” (1 Cor 15:3–4), in order to justify mankind through faith, and “having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:1).

Peace with God through salvation in Christ not only enables man to be free from the slavery to sin (Rom 6:6) but it also motivates (1 John 4:19) and empowers (2 Pet 1:2–4) obedience to His commands to “pursue peace with all men” (Heb 12:14). Ultimately, one’s love for God and desire to glorify Him through obedience (John 14:15) establishes the foundation for the pursuit of peace. Similarly, Sande constructs his approach to peacemaking and CM on the same foundation. As he puts it:

Biblical peacemaking is motivated and guided by a deep desire to bring honor to God by revealing the reconciling love and power of Jesus Christ. As we draw on his grace, follow his example, and put his teachings into practice, we can find freedom from the impulsive, self-centered decisions that make conflict worse, and bring praise to God by displaying the power of the gospel in our lives.<sup>77</sup>

As the believer is enabled and motivated to pursue peace with others after finding peace with God, Scripture paves a path forward toward peace.

### **Growing in the Image of the Prince of Peace**

Growing into the likeness of Christ, the Prince of Peace (Isa 9:6), referred to as the process of sanctification, requires repentance from sin, an awareness of sin and a conscious choice to pursue holiness. As one grows in sanctification, it only seems natural they would experience greater peace with others. Kenneth Gangel and Samuel Canine conclude, “If it is really possible for a believer to possess and display the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22) and a loving, caring burdenbearing attitude toward others (Phil 2:1–4), then the capacity for constant koinonia<sup>78</sup> must be present.”<sup>79</sup> Even if one were to

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<sup>77</sup> Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), 4.

<sup>78</sup> Koinonia (κοινωνία), most often translated *fellowship* in the NASB, cf. 1 John 1:7.

<sup>79</sup> Gangel and Canine, *Communication and Conflict Management*, 55.

narrowly define Christian sanctification as only possessing the fruit of the Spirit, “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal 5:22–23), it is difficult to imagine one who possess these in even an early stage of ripeness having much conflict. Nevertheless, Scripture provides a pathway of sanctification that deals directly with mitigating conflict (see table 3).

By growing into the image of Christ, believers not only avoid being the source of unproductive conflict, but naturally diffuse situations and misunderstandings that may have escalated by addressing their own shortcomings as opposed to avoiding or attacking. As Sande summarizes the benefits of sanctification and honest self-assessment:

Jesus teaches us to face up to our own contributions to a conflict before we focus on what others have done. When we overlook others’ minor offenses and honestly admit our own faults, our opponents will often respond in kind. As tensions decrease, the way may be opened for sincere discussion, negotiation, and reconciliation.<sup>80</sup>

Honest self-assessment requires weights desires, thoughts, and actions through the lens of Scripture and the conviction of the Holy Spirit (John 16:7–10). Addressing sin in one’s own life is a vital step in promoting peace and a prerequisite to Christian CM.

Jesus addressed the need to deal with personal sin before addressing others’ sin in His discourse warning against judging others wrongly. Attempting to help others remove a speck from their eye while possessing a log in one’s own eye is both hypocritical and would likely increase strife (Matt 7:3–5). As the believer is convicted of sin and made aware the ways in which his sin has affected others, Christ offers forgiveness thought confession to Him (1 John 1:9), and hope for relational reconciliation through confession to others. Gangel and Canine sum up the need for confession and the peace orienting benefits of sanctified living, saying, “Strife linked to our sin must be confessed and corrected. . . . Conflict is best avoided by living a loving and faithful type of life.”<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Sande, *The Peacemaker*, 4.

<sup>81</sup> Gangel and Canine, *Communication and Conflict Management*, 158.

Table 3. Scripture passages promoting sanctification leading to peace

Scripture Reference	Behaviors that Promote Peace
Leviticus 19:18	Do not take revenge, do not hold a grudge, love your neighbor
Deuteronomy 1:17	Do not show partiality in judgment
Proverbs 13:10	Insolence causes strife, the wise receive counsel
Proverbs 15:18	A temper stirs up strife, the slow to anger calm disputes
Proverbs 16:28	Perversion spreads strife, slander separates friends
Proverbs 18:13	Be slow to speak, quick to listen
Proverbs 19:11	Discretion makes one slow to anger, overlook a transgression
Proverbs 21:23	Guard the mouth and tongue to prevent trouble
Ecclesiastes 7:9	Be slow to anger
Matthew 6:12	Forgive others as God forgave you
Matthew 7:5–6	Remove the log from your eye addressing another's speck
Matthew 18:21–35	Do not stop forgiving the repentant brother, forgive like God
1 Corinthians 13	Practice Christ-like love
Ephesians 4:31–32	Put away bitterness, anger, slander, forgive others like Christ
Philippians 2:1–7	Practice humility as Christ who took on flesh and died
Colossians 3:12–13	Be compassionate, kind, humble, gentle, patient, forgiving
Colossians 4:6	Speak with grace when responding to others
James 1:19	Be slow to speak, quick to listen, slow to anger
James 4:1–6	Worldly desires lead to conflict, submit humbly to God's will
James 5:16	Confess sins to and pray for one another

Sande offers seven helpful guidelines for God-honoring confession to others, including (1) address everyone involved, (2) avoid minimizing or blame-shifting conjunctions like *if*, and *maybe*, (3) admit specifically your wrongs, (4) acknowledge the hurt caused, (5) accept the consequences, (6) alter your behavior, (7) ask for forgiveness and allow time for it to be given.<sup>82</sup>

Even when a Christian has been made right with God, pursues peace with all men, and steadfastly grows in grace and sanctification, and actively repents from sin, conflict will come. Again, returning to the definition of CM, conflict is not always bad.

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<sup>82</sup> Sande, *The Peacemaker*, 118–24.

Gangel and Canine point out that even when a believer is wrongfully attacked and the conflict seems one-sided, it “can provide the opportunity to demonstrate the love of Christ and give the witness of the gospel, even to people who are attacking us.”<sup>83</sup>

### **Managing Unavoidable Conflict**

The priority of peace does not mean all conflict is bad. Sande points out “conflict is not necessarily bad... in fact, the Bible teaches that some differences are natural and beneficial.”<sup>84</sup> But this does not mean conflict is not difficult, especially for believers who have been taught to earnestly desire and pursue peace. After experiencing and enjoying the blessing of peace that results from salvation and sanctification, the prospect of conflict can be daunting. Considering the list of qualifications for church elders, it would only seem reasonable to expect to find only the kind of men who have long desired and enjoyed peace and therefore seek to avoid conflict at all costs.<sup>85</sup> But Scripture does not present conflict as exclusively negative; along with imperatives for how to manage conflict God gives certain situations in which He requires believers to initiate conflict for His glory and the believers’ good (see table 4).

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<sup>83</sup> Sande, *The Peacemaker*, 135.

<sup>84</sup> Sande, *The Peacemaker*, 30.

<sup>85</sup> Thom S. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive* (Nashville: B&H, 2014), 71.

Table 4. Scripture passages requiring and describing beneficial conflict

Scripture Reference	Imperatives for Beneficial Conflict
Leviticus 19:17	Failure to reprove known sin stems from hatred in your heart
Proverbs 19:18	Discipline a son, failure to do so could lead to death
Proverbs 24:11–12	Failure to restrain a brother from sin brings condemnation
Proverbs 27:5–6	Better an open rebuke than artificial peace
Proverbs 28:23	One who rebukes his brother will later find favor with him
Matthew 18:15–17	The process of confronting a brother's sin
Matthew 21:12–13	Jesus cleared the Temple to defend God's glory
1 Corinthians 5	Church discipline protects the flock and may restore the sinner
Galatians 6:1	Gently restore a brother caught in sin
Colossians 3:16	With the word of Christ, teach and admonish one another
James 5:19–20	Turning a brother from sin saves a soul from death
1 Thessalonians 5:14	Believers urged to admonish the unruly
1 Timothy 5:1–2	Gently rebuke an older man as a father, rebuke other in purity
1 Timothy 5:20	Publicly rebuke the unrepentant for the good of all
2 Timothy 2: 24–26	Be not quarrelsome but correct unruly toward repentance
2 Timothy 4: 1–4	Paul solemnly charges Timothy to reprove and rebuke

Several key themes emerge from a review of the passages in table four, (1) failure to confront sin can lead to serious repercussions for the sinner and God will judge those who idly watch a brother stumble on towards their demise, (2) preserving a false peace by avoiding conflict that would benefit the one needing reproof is like a kiss from an enemy, (3) confronting a brother's sin should be done with gentleness and remain private if he repents, (4) unrepentant sinners confronted in private must be publicly admonished for their own good and the good of the church, (5) elders bear a specific mandate to rebuke, reproof, and restore those in the church.

A seeming paradox is presented with the addition of the final foundation stone in a biblical understanding of CM. Christians are to pursue peace with all men as enabled by the Spirit and dedicated to the process of knowing Scripture and practicing obedience to God toward sanctification. The subsequent requirement that Christians actively pursue conflict though admonishing, rebuking, and reproofing others seems to stand contrary to peace. Aware of the risk Christians face in losing their balance and falling into an unbiblical overcommitment to peace, or an overzealous dedication to confronting others, Sande offers a helpful graphic illustrating the need for balancing peace and conflict in the biblical center (see figure 2).



Figure 2. The slippery slope of biblical peace and conflict<sup>86</sup>

Striking the perfect balance between a desire for peace and a commitment to God-honoring obedience, Jesus explains the process of peace through conflict. in the seminal texts in Scripture dealing with initiation and resolution of beneficial conflict,

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<sup>86</sup> Sande, *The Peacemaker*, 15.

Matthew 18:15–17.

If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a gentile and a tax collector.

The process integrates nearly every facet of the seventeen passages in table 4. The process is simple, and straightforward, but a few elements bear emphasis. First, it is important to note that the entire process starts with a *brother*, inferring a fellow believer. In Paul’s application of God-honoring confrontation in the church at Corinth, he clarifies the fact that this process is for one who claims to be a fellow believer (1 Cor 5:9–12; Matt 7:6; Prov 9:8).<sup>87</sup> Next, of focus of the rebuke is a *sin*, not a personal slight or unintended offense given. There may be times when addressing non-sinful matters solely for the good of the offender is beneficial, as when a missionary breaks an unknown cultural norm that may hinder his ability to present Christ, but Sande recommends overlooking an offense if it is “relatively minor and has not permanently affected your relationship.”<sup>88</sup> This is in keeping with the previously laid foundation stones of striving for peace and growing in the ability to practice peace through sanctification.

The final element of the passage that needs to be highlighted is the conclusion of the matter. If the brother remains unrepentant after having his sin made known before the church, then he is to be put out of the church, but this is not a permanent, unredeemable state of being. Again, in Paul’s application of the process in the church at Corinth, the entire justification for putting the unrepentant brother out is “so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Cor 5:5). Though it impossible to know for sure, it is at least possible that Paul is addressing the same situation in 2 Corinthians

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<sup>87</sup> There are times when one may confront a non-Christian, as when they are wandering toward imminent harm (cf. Lev 19:17; Prov 24:11-12), but a discussion on this topic detracts from the focus of and elder managing conflict with fellow elders.

<sup>88</sup> Sande, *The Peacemaker*, 150.

when encouraging the church to forgive, comfort, and reaffirm a previously punished brother (2:5–11). As such, if Matthew 18:15–17 serves as the letter of the law, 2 Timothy 2:24–26 serves well as a summation of the spirit of the law.

The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.

Believers who practice necessary confrontation with a gentle and redemption-focused attitude keep the good of others and the glory of God in the center of the process.

## **Conclusion**

Through a review of relevant Scripture passages, a theological foundation has been laid and the framework for CM among Christians has been established. First, foundational to the Christian understanding of CM is the overarching commitment to peace with others after having been made to be at peace with God through salvation in Christ. The second foundation stone is a commitment to peace with men in obedient response to God's call toward sanctification in accordance with His imperatives in Scripture. The final foundation stone is a proper, balanced understanding of the beneficial aspects of conflict in order to help fellow believers better glorify God. Avoiding the slide down either extreme on the slippery slope, believers can build each other up according to the framework of CM in Matthew 18:15–17 in the spirit of 2 Timothy 2:24–26.

## **Review of Secular Research in Conflict Management**

Having established a biblical philosophy and basic framework for CM, secular theories and practices of CM developed through academic research will now be reviewed.<sup>89</sup> David Powlison's three epistemological priorities have been adapted to the

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<sup>89</sup> Again, the term "secular" is used throughout to distinguish between concepts and practices of CM derived explicitly from Scripture and those concepts and practices which do not come explicitly

current topic and will guide the evaluation and potential integration of the secular literature; the epistemological priorities are, (1) articulate positive biblical truth relevant to CM, (2) evaluate alternative theories of and approaches to CM by the standard of Scripture, rejecting elements irreconcilable with the biblical principles of CM, and (3) learn from and adapt compatible secular concepts and practices for use in a Christian approach to CM.<sup>90</sup> These epistemological priorities do not limit the scope of inquiry into secular CM theories, but they guide the process by which the researcher will include and integrate secular concepts and practices for use among church elders. Though the current research review will primarily focus on studies conducted in the last few decades, it is important to recognize the historic traditions upon which many secular CM theories have been built. M. Afzalur Rahim traces the foundation for the secular study of CM back to key figures from a variety of disciplines including Plato, Aristotle, John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, G. F. W. Hegel, Karl Marx, John Dewey, Charles Darwin, and Max Weber.<sup>91</sup>

### **Classifying Conflict Sources**

Not all conflict is the same, some sources of conflict have been shown to be generally helpful while others are nearly always detrimental. Moreover, not all conflict occurs on the same level. In an effort to enable productive conflict and diminish harmful conflict, researchers categorize conflict into twelve categories differentiated by the respective sources of conflict along with four distinct levels identified by the parties involved. The categories are (1) substantive conflict, (2) affective conflict, (3) transforming and masquerading conflicts, (4) process conflict, (5) goal conflict, (6)

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from Scripture. The author acknowledges the fact that academic research, herein classified as “secular” is carried out by both Christians and non-Christians alike.

<sup>90</sup> The three epistemological priorities used here have been adapted from David Powlison, “Cure of Souls and the Modern Psychotherapies,” in *The Biblical Counseling Movement: History and Context* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2010), 277.

<sup>91</sup> Rahim, *Managing Conflict in Organizations*, 1–9.

conflict of interests, (7) conflict of values, (8) structural or institutionalized conflict, (9) realistic versus nonrealistic conflict, (10) retributive conflict, (11) misattributed conflict, and (12) displaced conflict.<sup>92</sup> The four levels are (1) intrapersonal, (2) interpersonal, (3) intragroup and, (4) intergroup. By learning to distinguish between the sources and levels of conflict, individuals and organizations may be able to discover and apply strategies for resolution and prevention more precisely. The twelve sources of conflict will be defined and described below followed by the four levels.

**Substantive conflict.** Substantive conflict, also referred to as cognitive conflict<sup>93</sup> or task conflict,<sup>94</sup> results from a difference in opinions on the best path forward stemming from dissimilar ideas, logic, critical thinking, data, or evidence.<sup>95</sup> Substantive conflict among leadership teams has been shown to produce enhanced outcomes as team members debate, discuss, collaborate, and push one another forward, but the benefits of substantive conflict can be minimized if higher levels of affective, or relational conflict prevent healthy task conflict and team effectiveness.<sup>96</sup> Petrou, Bakker, and Bezemer concluded “task conflict is not an obstacle to employee creativity; on the contrary, it has

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<sup>92</sup> Rahim, *Managing Conflict in Organizations*, 18–22.

<sup>93</sup> Allen C. Amason, “Distinguishing the Effects of Functional and Dysfunctional Conflict on Strategic Decision Making: Resolving a Paradox for Top Management Teams,” *The Academy of Management Journal* 39, no. 1 (1996): 123–48; R. James Holzworth, “Intervention in a Cognitive Conflict,” *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance* 32 (1983): 216–31; Richard A. Cosier and Gerald L. Rose, “Cognitive Conflict and Goal Conflict Effects on Task Performance,” *Organizational Behavior & Human Performance* 19, no. 2 (1977): 378–91.

<sup>94</sup> Kathleen M. Eisenhardt, Jean L. Kahwajy, and L. J. Bourgeois III, “Conflict and Strategic Choice: How Top Management Teams Disagree,” *California Management Review* 39, no. 2 (1997): 42–62.

<sup>95</sup> Karen A. Jehn, “A Qualitative Analysis of Conflict Types and Dimensions in Organizational Groups,” *Administrative Science Quarterly*, no. 1997 (n.d.): 530–57.

<sup>96</sup> Amason, “Distinguishing the Effects of Functional and Dysfunctional Conflict,” 143; Yan Li, Baiyin Yang, and Lin Ma, “When Is Task Conflict Translated Into Employee Creativity?,” *Journal of Personnel Psychology* 17, no. 1 (2018): 22–32, <https://doi.org/10.1027/1866-5888/a000192>; Karen A. Jehn, “A Multimethod Examination of the Benefits and Detriments of Intragroup Conflict,” *Administrative Science Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (1995): 256–82, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2393638>.

the potential to boost the creative performance.”<sup>97</sup> Sigal Barsade’s team also reported that leadership teams that embrace task conflict while avoiding relationship conflict perform better, share a higher level of consensus, and produce outcomes with greater quality.<sup>98</sup>

**Affective conflict.** Affective conflict can also be referred to as relationship conflict,<sup>99</sup> emotional conflict,<sup>100</sup> and interpersonal conflict.<sup>101</sup> This type of conflict involves hurt feelings which may stem from real or perceived personal attacks, criticism, distrust, or cynicism.<sup>102</sup> Amason says “when conflict is dysfunctional, it tends to be emotional and focused on personal incompatibilities or disputes.”<sup>103</sup> Pelled, Eisenhardt, and Xin describe affective conflict as “a condition in which group members have interpersonal clashes characterized by anger, frustration, and other negative feelings.”<sup>104</sup> Affective conflicts are detrimental because they hinder team performance,<sup>105</sup> diminish each individual’s ability to accomplish tasks, and increase the likelihood of job

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<sup>97</sup> Paraskevas Petrou, Arnold B. Bakker, and Katinka Bezemer, “Creativity Under Task Conflict: The Role of Proactively Increasing Job Resources,” *Journal of Occupational & Organizational Psychology* 92, no. 2 (2019): 325, <https://doi.org/10.1111/joop.12250>.

<sup>98</sup> Sigal G. Barsade et al., “To Your Heart’s Content: A Model of Affective Diversity in Top Management Teams,” *Administrative Science Quarterly* 45, no. 4 (2000): 802–36.

<sup>99</sup> Jehn, “A Qualitative Analysis of Conflict Types and Dimensions in Organizational Groups.”

<sup>100</sup> Lisa H. Pelled, Kathleen M. Eisenhardt, and Katherine R. Xin, “Exploring the Black Box: An Analysis of Work Group Diversity, Conflict and Performance,” *Administrative Science Quarterly* 44, no. 1 (1999): 1–28.

<sup>101</sup> Eisenhardt, Kahwajy, and Bourgeois, “Conflict and Strategic Choice.”

<sup>102</sup> Amason, “Distinguishing the Effects of Functional and Dysfunctional Conflict”; Harold Guetzkow and John Gyr, “An Analysis of Conflict in Decision-Making Groups,” *Human Relations* 7 (1954): 367–82.

<sup>103</sup> Amason, “Distinguishing the Effects of Functional and Dysfunctional Conflict,” 129.

<sup>104</sup> Pelled, Eisenhardt, and Xin, “Exploring the Black Box,” 2.

<sup>105</sup> Carsten K. W. De Dreu and Annelies E. M. Van Vianen, “Managing Relationship Conflict and the Effectiveness of Organizational Teams,” *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 22, no. 3 (2001): 309–28, <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.71>; De Dreu and Weingart, “Task Versus Relationship Conflict”; Jehn, “A Multimethod Examination of the Benefits and Detriments of Intragroup Conflict”; Razia Shaukat, Amna Yousaf, and Karin Sanders, “Examining the Linkages Between Relationship Conflict, Performance and Turnover Intentions: Role of Job Burnout as a Mediator,” *International Journal of Conflict Management* 28, no. 1 (2017): 4–23.

burnout.<sup>106</sup>

**Transforming and masquerading conflict.** Transforming and masquerading conflict are subsets of affective conflict but need to be distinguished due to their tendency to negatively impact otherwise healthy substantive conflict. *Transforming conflict* occurs when substantive conflict shifts, or transforms into affective conflict, as when a meeting starts with seemingly objective debate but becomes emotional and personal.<sup>107</sup> In leadership teams, when substantive conflict is perceived as personal criticism, intended or not, the benefits of substantive conflict transition to the detriments of affective conflict.<sup>108</sup> Consequently, Ensley and Pearce observe that in leadership teams, the *process* leading to unity is more important than the specific goal or vision around which a group becomes unified.<sup>109</sup> Conversely, *Masquerading Conflict* have pre-existing personal, emotional or relational conflicts but disguise them as substantive conflicts.<sup>110</sup> Lisa Pelled describes a possible scenario to describe masquerading conflict, saying, “Individuals may express hostility by manufacturing useless criticisms of each other’s task-related ideas.”<sup>111</sup> Addressing the fact that affective conflict can easily spoil substantive conflict, Amason suggests, “The first step to resolving this conundrum is to recognize that conflict comes in at least two distinct but related forms and that to address one while ignoring the other

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<sup>106</sup> Shaukat, Yousaf, and Sanders, “Examining the Linkages Between Relationship Conflict.”

<sup>107</sup> Rahim, *Managing Conflict in Organizations*, 20.

<sup>108</sup> Amason, “Distinguishing the Effects of Functional and Dysfunctional Conflict,” 129.

<sup>109</sup> Michael D. Ensley and Craig L. Pearce, “Shared Cognition in Top Management Teams: Implications for New Venture Performance,” *Journal of Organizational Behavior: The International Journal of Industrial, Occupational and Organizational Psychology and Behavior* 22, no. 2 (2001): 145–60.

<sup>110</sup> Shazia Khalid and Iram Fatima, “Conflict Types and Conflict Management Styles in Public and Private Hospitals,” *Pakistani Armed Forces Medical Journal* 66, no. 1 (2016): 122; Rahim, *Managing Conflict in Organizations*, 20; i.e., “Timothy’s Story,” in Joseph Hellerman, *Embracing Shared Ministry: Power and Status in the Early Church and Why It Matters Today* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2013), 208–14.

<sup>111</sup> Lisa H. Pelled, “Demographic Diversity, Conflict, and Work Group Outcomes: An Intervening Process Theory,” *Organization Science* 7, no. 6 (1996): 620.

is to invite trouble.”<sup>112</sup>

In light of the danger of allowing substantive conflict to move toward affective conflict, Kristin Behfar and her team determined top performing teams (1) focus on the content at the source of the conflict and not personal delivery styles, (2) clearly communicate motivations behind distributed work, and (3) they divide and delegate work based on expertise and experience rather than arbitrarily or out of convenience.<sup>113</sup>

**Process conflict.** Process conflicts are related to substantive conflicts but focus on the process of accomplishing a previously agreed upon goal.<sup>114</sup> Instead of conflict centering on the overall task or objective, process conflict stems from “disagreements about logistical and delegation issues such as how task accomplishment should proceed and . . . who's responsible for what.”<sup>115</sup>

**Goal conflict.** Goal conflict involves incompatible preferred outcomes. By comparison, those involved in process conflict agree on the desired outcome but team members fail to agree on how best to attain the stated outcome, while those involved in goal conflict cannot agree on what the desired outcome should be.<sup>116</sup>

**Conflict of interests.** Conflict of interests is similar to goal conflict but involves the groups or individuals involved directly competing for limited resources, as

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<sup>112</sup> Amason, “Distinguishing the Effects of Functional and Dysfunctional Conflict,” 143.

<sup>113</sup> Kristin J. Behfar et al., “The Critical Role of Conflict Resolution in Teams: A Close Look at the Links Between Conflict Type, Conflict Management Strategies, and Team Outcomes,” *Journal of Applied Psychology* 93, no. 1 (2008): 170–88.

<sup>114</sup> Karen A. Jehn, Clint Chadwick, and Sherry M. B. Thatcher, “To Agree or Not to Agree: The Effects of Value Congruence, Individual Demographic Dissimilarity, and Conflict on Workgroup Outcomes,” *International Journal of Conflict Management* 8, no. 4 (1997): 287–305; Karen A. Jehn and Elizabeth A. Mannix, “The Dynamic Nature of Conflict: A Longitudinal Study of Intragroup Conflict and Group Performance,” *Academy of Management Journal* 44, no. 2 (2001): 238–51.

<sup>115</sup> Karen A. Jehn et al., “The Effects of Conflict Types, Dimensions, and Emergent States on Group Outcomes,” *Group Decision and Negotiation* 17, no. 6 (2008): 467.

<sup>116</sup> Cosier and Rose, “Cognitive Conflict and Goal Conflict Effects on Task Performance”; Rahim, *Managing Conflict in Organizations*, 21.

when a local chief of police and fire captain disagree over which department should receive limited grant money for the purchase of new equipment.<sup>117</sup>

**Conflict of values.** A conflict of values stems from incompatible moral, ethical, or ideological positions held by individuals or groups. Rahim points to the conflict between pro-life and pro-abortion groups as an example; both groups claim the moral high ground due to differing values, perspectives, and underlying beliefs.<sup>118</sup>

**Structural or institutionalized conflict.** Structural, or institutionalized conflict occurs between different groups within the same organization and can be divided into horizontal and vertical subcategories. Horizontal structural conflict occurs between groups on the same authoritative level, as when the toy department and clothing department within a store disagree over which should be able to expand into the space between the two which recently opened as a result of closing the jewelry department. Vertical conflict involves groups on different authoritative levels within the same organization, as when disagreements arise between management and staff or administration and the faculty.

**Realistic versus nonrealistic conflict.** This type of conflict distinguishes *realistic* conflicts stemming from disagreements about goals, processes, or values related to rational content in the context of the conflict, from *nonrealistic* conflict which is manufactured and unrelated to the organizational goals.<sup>119</sup> Herb Bisno provides a helpful example of *nonrealistic* conflict, saying, “This would be the situation in which union leaders precipitated a conflict with management in order to strengthen their hold over the

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<sup>117</sup> Daniel Druckman and Kathleen Zechmeister, “Conflict of Interest and Value Dissensus: Propositions in the Sociology of Conflict,” *Human Relations* 26, no. 4 (1973): 449–66.

<sup>118</sup> Rahim, *Managing Conflict in Organizations*, 21.

<sup>119</sup> Raymond Samuel Ross and Jean Ricky Ross, *Small Groups in Organizational Settings* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1989).

union membership.”<sup>120</sup>

**Retributive conflict.** Retributive conflict is an especially strong form of affective conflict where an individual or group possesses such deeply held animosity toward another individual or group that “each party determines its gains, in part, by incurring costs to the other party.”<sup>121</sup> Retributive conflict can lead, in its extreme, to violence and wars though violence and war may stem from nearly any category of conflict. Rahim offers the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as an example.<sup>122</sup>

**Misattributed conflict.** Misattributed conflict stems from incorrectly assigning the source of conflict to individuals or groups not responsible for the situation which led to conflict, as when employees experience affective conflict against management for removing their privileged parking spots only to find out later the city required the action as a part of a project to widen the sidewalks.

**Displaced conflict.** Displaced conflict occurs when involved parties focus on secondary or tertiary issues instead of addressing the primary sources of the conflict.<sup>123</sup>

The ability to categorize and distinguish the various sources of provides a path toward assessment which may be instrumental in choosing the appropriate method for management. The ability to identify substantive conflict and recognize the potential benefits would likely lead a team leader or church elder to refrain from attempting to cut off productive dialogue. Conversely, when one identifies affective conflict characterized by interpersonal strife, personal attacks, and emotional reactivity, a prudent leader would

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<sup>120</sup> Herb Bisno, *Managing Conflict* (Newbury Park, CA: SAGE, 1988), 31.

<sup>121</sup> Thomas L. Saaty, “The Analytic Hierarchy Process in Conflict Management,” *International Journal of Conflict Management* 1, no. 1 (1990): 47–68.

<sup>122</sup> Rahim, *Managing Conflict in Organizations*, 22.

<sup>123</sup> Rahim, *Managing Conflict in Organizations*; Morton Deutsch, *The Resolution of Conflict: Constructive and Destructive Processes* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977).

seek to resolve the conflict as quickly as possible, even if it means setting aside potentially productive substantive disagreements mixed throughout.

### **Levels of Conflict: Who Is Involved**

Conflict does not simply occur between two individuals. Especially in organizations and in and among teams, conflict can occur at different levels. The four levels are differentiated by the people involved and their relation to one another. The four levels of organizational conflict will be reviewed, adding a further dimension to the understanding of CM. The four level are (1) intrapersonal, (2) interpersonal, (3) intragroup, and (4) intergroup.

**Intrapersonal level of conflict.** This conflict is also called intra-individual or intra-psychic conflict, occurs when an individual is asked to preform functions or play a role for which he is not prepared or capable<sup>124</sup>, or when an individual is forced to choose between options with some measure of risks and or rewards causing stress.<sup>125</sup>

**Interpersonal level of conflict.** The interpersonal level of conflict involves the presence of “incompatibility, inconsistency, or disagreement between two or more interacting individuals.”<sup>126</sup> Like structural conflict, interpersonal conflict can exist vertically, as with subordinates or managers and horizontally, as with peers and colleagues.

**Intragroup level of conflict.** This type of conflict “refers to the incompatibility, incongruence, or disagreement among the members of [the same] group

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<sup>124</sup> Subhach C. Pandey and E. S. Santhosh Kumar, “Development of a Measure of Role Conflict,” *International Journal of Conflict Management* 8, no. 3 (1997): 187–215, <https://doi.org/10.1108/EB022795>.

<sup>125</sup> Harold H. Mosak and Carol LeFevre, “The Resolution of ‘Intrapersonal Conflict,’” *Journal of Individual Psychology (00221805)* 32, no. 1 (1976): 19.

<sup>126</sup> Rahim, *Managing Conflict in Organizations*, 87.

or its subgroups,” in one or more of the twelve categories of conflict listed above.”<sup>127</sup> Intragroup conflict can be beneficial when characterized as being competitive yet cooperative though affective intragroup conflict disrupts the ability to agree on and achieve goals.<sup>128</sup> Ayoko, Härtel, and Callan found that heterogeneous groups are more prone to conflict stemming from mis-communication,<sup>129</sup> consequently, groups with high levels of clear communication tend to have productive conflicts whereas groups with low levels of interpretability have more destructive conflicts.<sup>130</sup> In order to guard against exclusive communication behaviors that leave members out of the conversation, majority members should check for understanding, regularly defining terms and explaining elusive concepts.<sup>131</sup> This is especially true for groups including generational differences, Ping, Bell, and Li observed a greater identification with the organization can mitigate the conflict though a higher willingness to oblige or compromise.<sup>132</sup> In related research, Lena Beitler and her team suggest the experience of older generations leads to a heightened ability to manage conflict.<sup>133</sup>

**Intergroup level of conflict.** The intergroup level of conflict is also known as

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<sup>127</sup> Rahim, *Managing Conflict in Organizations*, 117.

<sup>128</sup> James W. Julian and Franklyn A. Perry, “Cooperation Contrasted with Intra-Group and Inter-Group Competition,” *Sociometry* 30, no. 1 (1967): 79–90, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2786440>.

<sup>129</sup> Oluremi B. Ayoko, Charmine E. J. Härtel, and Victor J. Callan, “Resolving the Puzzle of Productive and Destructive Conflict in Culturally Heterogeneous Workgroups: A Communication Accommodation Theory Approach,” *International Journal of Conflict Management* 13, no. 2 (2002): 165–95, <https://doi.org/10.1108/eb022873>.

<sup>130</sup> Ayoko, Härtel, and Callan, “Resolving the Puzzle,” 183.

<sup>131</sup> Ayoko, Härtel, and Callan, “Resolving the Puzzle,” 179, 183–4.

<sup>132</sup> He Peng, Chris Bell, and Yiran Li, “How and When Intragroup Relationship Conflict Leads to Knowledge Hiding: The Roles of Envy and Trait Competitiveness,” *International Journal of Conflict Management* 32, no. 3 (2021): 383–406.

<sup>133</sup> Lena Aline Beitler et al., “Conflict Management and Age in Service Professions,” *International Journal of Conflict Management* 27, no. 3 (2016): 302–30; Mehmet Okan, Ayse Banu Elmadag, and Elif İdemen, “Frontline Employee Age and Customer Mistreatment: A Meta-Analysis,” *Journal of Services Marketing* 35, no. 1 (2021): 98–115.

interdepartmental conflict within organizations and involves conflict between two or more groups or departments within the same organization similar to structural or institutional conflict above.<sup>134</sup>

With the ability distinguish between the twelve sources of conflict along with the four levels of conflict, attention will be given to the styles of CM and the research based recommendations for the situational application of the various styles of CM.

### **Conflict Management Models**

Considering the ubiquity of the problem, much research has been done in the field of CM and secular models for handling conflict, especially interpersonal conflict, emerged in the early twentieth century. Though similarities exist and later models build upon those earlier produced, Rahim identifies twelve distinct models that have been developed for managing conflict (see table 5). The twelve models are identified according to the recommended styles of CM presented in each respective model, some offering a dichotomous approach between cooperation or competition<sup>135</sup> while other offer more nuanced style options including collaboration, accommodation, avoiding, competing, and compromising.<sup>136</sup>

In order to differentiate between the twelve models, the five styles of CM will be reviewed. The section will conclude with a proposed application of the five styles to specific situations in which one style may be most appropriate according to the research.

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<sup>134</sup> Rahim, *Managing Conflict in Organizations*, 23.

<sup>135</sup> Morton Deutsch, "Sixty Years of Conflict," *International Journal of Conflict Management* 1, no. 3 (1990): 237–63, <https://doi.org/10.1108/eb022682>.

<sup>136</sup> Kenneth W. Thomas, "Conflict and Conflict Management," in *Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, ed. Marvin D. Dunnette (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1976), 889–935.

## Five Styles of Conflict Management

According to Rahim, the five styles first appeared in the early twentieth century in the work of Mary Follett whose work was built upon over the decades.<sup>137</sup> Though not every model makes use of all five styles of CM, each of the models makes use of some combination of the five styles. Rahim categorizes the five styles into the following groups: (1) integrating style, (2) obliging style, (3) dominating style, (4) avoiding style, and (5) compromising style. Rahim and Bonoma define the five styles of CM according to their relation to the dual concerns for self and others (see figure 3).<sup>138</sup>

**Integrating style of CM.** The integrating style, also known as collaborating and problem solving, is characterized by high concern for self and high concern for others. It involves the exchange of information, examination of differences, and collaboration to solve the conflict in a way agreed upon by both parties.<sup>139</sup> Barbara Gray says the integrating, or collaborating style is “a process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible.”<sup>140</sup> One of the keys to the integrating style is open and clear communication. Integrating style is best for situations where one party does not or cannot possess all relevant information or authority to move forward to address an issue and the issue being addressed is consequential enough to warrant the time necessary for discussion.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Rahim, *Managing Conflict in Organizations*, 26.

<sup>138</sup> Afzalur Rahim and Thomas V. Bonoma, “Managing Organizational Conflict: A Model for Diagnosis and Intervention,” *Psychological Reports* 44, no. 3 (June 1, 1979): 1323–44, <https://doi.org/10.2466/pr0.1979.44.3c.1323>.

<sup>139</sup> Rahim, *Managing Conflict in Organizations*, 27.

<sup>140</sup> Barbara Gray, *Collaborating: Finding Common Ground for Multiparty Problems*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991), 5.

<sup>141</sup> Rahim, *Managing Conflict in Organizations*, 52–53.

Table 5. Models using 2–5 styles of conflict management<sup>142</sup>

CM Styles →	Style 1	Style 2	Style 3	Style 4	Style 5
↓ Models	Integrating	Obliging	Avoiding	Dominating	Compromising
<i>Models Using Two Conflict Management Styles</i>					
Deutsch <sup>143</sup>	Cooperation	—	—	Competition	—
Knudson, Sommers, and Golding <sup>144</sup>	Engagement	—	Avoidance	—	—
<i>Models Using Three Conflict Management Styles</i>					
Putnam and Wilson <sup>145</sup>	Solution-Orientation	Non-Confrontational	—	Control	—
Lawrence and Lorsch <sup>146</sup>	Confrontation	Smoothing	—	Forcing	—
Billingham and Sack <sup>147</sup>	Reasoning	—	—	Verbal Aggression, Violence	—
Rands, Levinger, and Mellinger <sup>148</sup>	—	—	Avoid	Attack	Compromise
<i>Models Using Four Conflict Management Styles</i>					
Pruitt <sup>149</sup>	Problem Solving	Yielding	Inaction	Contending	—
Kurdek <sup>150</sup>	Problem Solving	Compliance	Withdrawal	Engagement	—
<i>Models Using Five Conflict Management Styles</i>					
Follett <sup>151</sup>	Integration	Suppression	Avoidance	Domination	Compromise
Blake and Mouton <sup>152</sup>	Confrontation	Smoothing	Avoidance	Forcing	Compromise
Thomas <sup>153</sup>	Collaboration	Accommodating	Avoiding	Competing	Compromising
Rahim <sup>154</sup>	Integrating	Obliging	Avoiding	Dominating	Compromising

<sup>142</sup> Table adapted from Rahim, *Managing Conflict in Organizations*, 25.

<sup>143</sup> Deutsch, “Sixty Years of Conflict.”

<sup>144</sup> Roger M. Knudson, Alison A. Sommers, and Stephen L. Golding, “Interpersonal Perception and Mode of Resolution in Marital Conflict,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 38, no. 5 (1980): 751–63, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.38.5.751>.

<sup>145</sup> Linda L. Putnam and Charmaine E. Wilson, “Communicative Strategies in Organizational Conflicts: Reliability and Validity of a Measurement Scale,” in *Communication Yearbook 6*, ed. Michael Burgoon (Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE, 1982), 629–52, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203856246>.

Integrating style is best for situations where one party does not or cannot possess all relevant information or authority to move forward to address an issue and the issue being addresses is consequential enough to warrant the time necessary for discussion.<sup>155</sup>

**Obliging style of CM.** The obliging style, also known as accommodating, involves a low concern for self and a high concern for others. Consequently, the obliging style of conflict management is characterized by the attempt to minimize differences and emphasis the common ground between parties. When the obliging style is used to manage conflict, it can be seen as generosity, selflessness, graciousness, or obedience.<sup>156</sup>

The obliging style may be best suited for those lacking expertise or familiarity with topics pertinent to make choices around which the conflict is centered. This style is

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<sup>146</sup> Paul R. Lawrence and Jay W. Lorsch, "Differentiation and Integration in Complex Organizations," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 12, no. 1 (1967): 1–47, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2391211>.

<sup>147</sup> Robert E. Billingham and Alan R. Sack, "Conflict Tactics and the Level of Emotional Commitment Among Unmarrieds," *Human Relations* 40, no. 1 (1987): 59–74, <https://doi.org/10.1177/001872678704000105>.

<sup>148</sup> Marylyn Rands, George Levinger, and Glenn D. Mellinger, "Patterns of Conflict Resolution and Marital Satisfaction," *Journal of Family Issues* 2, no. 3 (1981): 297–321, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X8100200303>.

<sup>149</sup> Dean G. Pruitt, "Strategic Choice in Negotiation," *American Behavioral Scientist* 27, no. 2 (November 1, 1983): 167–94, <https://doi.org/10.1177/000276483027002005>.

<sup>150</sup> Lawrence A. Kurdeck, "Conflict Resolution Styles in Gay, Lesbian, Heterosexual Nonparent, and Heterosexual Parent Couples," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 56, no. 3 (1994): 705–22, <https://doi.org/10.2307/352880>.

<sup>151</sup> Mary Parker Follett, "Constructive Conflict," in *Dynamic Administration: The Collected Papers of Mary Parker Follett*, ed. Henry C. Metcalf and L. Urwick (New York: HarperCollins, 1940), 30–49.

<sup>152</sup> Robert R Blake and Jane Srygley Mouton, *The Managerial Grid: Key Orientations for Achieving Production Through People* (Houston, TX: Gulf, 1964).

<sup>153</sup> Thomas, "Conflict and Conflict Management."

<sup>154</sup> M. Afzalur Rahim, "A Measure of Styles of Handling Interpersonal Conflict," *The Academy of Management Journal* 26, no. 2 (1983): 368–76, <https://doi.org/10.2307/255985>.

<sup>155</sup> Rahim, *Managing Conflict in Organizations*, 52–53.

<sup>156</sup> Rahim, *Managing Conflict in Organizations*, 28.

also appropriate for those involved in conflict who lack the authority or standing to argue their case.

**Dominating style of CM.** The dominating style of CM, also known as control and competition, has a high concern for self and a low concern for others. The dominating style of CM ignores the desires of the other party.

The dominating style may be most beneficial for use in situations where expertise and authority are involved, and negative outcomes will be harmful. For example, Yetunde, Igbinoba, and Adejumo recently reported their “research concludes that dominating conflict management style has a positive effect on the quality of work,” among medical workers in the Lagos State University Teaching Hospital.<sup>157</sup>

**Avoiding style of CM.** The avoiding style, also known as suppression, has a low concern for self and a low concern for others. Sometimes characterized by withdrawal, blame-shifting, or postponing decisions involved in the conflict, the avoiding style fails to address the concerns of one’s self or others. Often the one practicing the avoiding style of CM will refuse to even acknowledge the conflict openly.

Rahim suggests this style may be best when “the potential dysfunctional effect of confronting the other party outweighs the benefits of the resolution of conflict. This may be used to deal with some trivial or minor issues or when a cooling-off period is needed before a complex problem can be effectively dealt with.”<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Adejayan Oreoluwa Yetunde, Ebe Igbinoba, and Babafemi Adesina Adejumo, “Dominating Conflict Management Style and Quality of Work in Lagos State University Teaching Hospital,” *Academy of Strategic Management Journal* 20, no. 2 (2021): 1.

<sup>158</sup> Rahim, *Managing Conflict in Organizations*, 54.

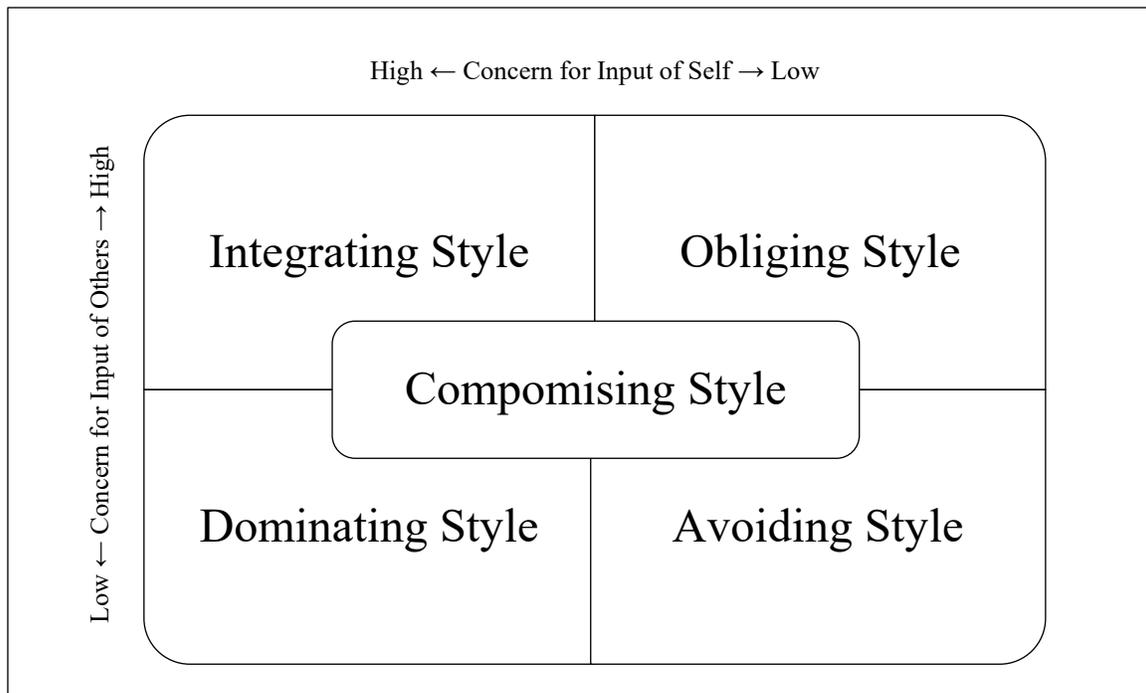


Figure 3. Dual concern matrix of conflict management styles<sup>159</sup>

**Compromising style of CM.** The compromising style involves a balanced concern for the input of self and a others’ and involves seeking a middle ground through a “give-and-take,” approach.<sup>160</sup> Compromising style provides a *via media* by which each party involved in the conflict moves toward the position of the other without obliging or dominating. The compromising style is best suited for situations when neither party possesses the authority to compel those with whom they have conflict to submit, and the goal of each party is mutually exclusive. When such an impasse is reached the compromising style of CM may avoid lengthy delays and may provide mutually acceptable outcomes to complex situations.<sup>161</sup>

<sup>159</sup> Figure 3 adapted from Rahim, *Managing Conflict in Organizations*, 27.

<sup>160</sup> Rahim, *Managing Conflict in Organizations*, 28.

<sup>161</sup> Rahim, *Managing Conflict in Organizations*, 29.

## Situation-Specific Application of Styles

A knowledge of the five styles of CM is important considering no single style will best suit every situation (see table 6). This is important considering the connotations associated with terms like dominating, compromising, and avoiding. Dominating, for example, is often associated with aggression, abuse of power, or an attempt to perpetuate hegemonic structures for the benefit of some and at the expense of others. While these connotations may be justifiably associated with some who use the dominating style of CM, sometimes its use may stem from benevolent good-will or kindness. The mother who uses the style to require a child to eat nutritious meals as opposed to candy only may have employed the dominating style, though it could hardly be assumed she has done so for malevolent or self-serving purposes. Similarly, it is doubtful that a pastor would like to be characterized as compromising in matters of morality or doctrine, but when working with the music director on the best song selection for a particular service, compromise, as a style of CM may well suit the situation. Finally, avoiding may carry the association with one who is non-committal, indifferent, or shirks responsibilities, but as a style of CM, avoiding is beneficial when a long-time member enters the sanctuary only to find a new family fully occupying *his* pew.

Understanding what each style of CM entails and when to use it is vital to a proper application of the five styles. The ability to apply the right style to the right situation moves research from the realm of theory to practice, but those who do not understand their styles may be less prepared for CM. Johnson and Johnson discovered individuals untrained in CM will tend toward managing conflicts in destructive ways.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> David W. Johnson and Roger T. Johnson, "Teaching Students To Be Peacemakers: A Meta-Analysis" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Seattle, WA, April 10–14, 2001).

Table 6. Selecting the right style of CM for the situation<sup>163</sup>

	Appropriate Situations For Use	Inappropriate Situations for Use
Integrating Style of CM	Issues are complex.	Task or problem is simple.
	Synthesis of ideas is needed to come up with better solutions	Immediate decision is required
	Commitment is needed from other parties for successful implementation	Other parties are unconcerned about the outcome
	Time is available for problem solving	Other parties do not have problem-solving skills
	One party alone cannot solve the problem	—
	Resources possessed by different parties are needed	
Obliging Style of CM	You believe that you may be wrong	Issues or outcomes are important to you
	Issue is more important to the other party	You believe that you are right
	You are willing to give now to get in the future	The other party is wrong or unethical
	You are working from a position of weakness	—
	Preserving the relationship is important	
Dominating Style of CM	Issue is trivial	Issue is complex
	Speedy decision is needed	Issue is not important to you
	Unpopular course of action is required	Both parties are of equal power
	Necessary to overcome assertive subordinates	Decision does not have to be made quickly
	Unfavorable decision by the other party may be costly to you	Subordinates possess high degree of competence
	Subordinates lack expertise	—
Avoiding Style of CM	Issue is trivial	Issue is important to you
	Potential dysfunctional effect of confronting outweighs benefit of resolution	You have a responsibility to decide
	Cooling off is needed	Parties are unwilling to defer resolution
	—	Decision is time sensitive
Compromising Style of CM	Goals of parties are mutually exclusive	One party is more powerful
	Parties are equally powerful	Problem is complex and needs collaboration
	Consensus cannot be reached	—
	Integrating or dominating style will not be successful	
	Temporary solution to a complex problem is needed	

<sup>163</sup> Adapted from M. Afzalur Rahim, "Toward a Theory of Managing Organizational Conflict," *The International Journal of Conflict Management* 13, no. 3 (2002): 219.

## Discussion

The question underlying and motivating at the center of this research seeks to discover potentially enhanced practices of CM for use among elders participating in the biblical shared leadership model within a local church. The following section will review the findings from the previous chapter and describe the process by which items were selected for inclusion in the study.

### **The Biblical Foundation for Conflict Management**

The review of Scripture yielded several foundational truths upon which any proposed Christian model of CM among elders must be built. The first is a commitment to peace with God through salvation in Christ. All men are born under the just condemnation of God (Eph 2:1–3; Ps 51:5) and multiply their guilt through sinful choices (Rom 2:5–6; 3:23; 5:12). This conflict is often felt as intrapersonal conflict and must be resolved first. This may have been the peace Augustine spoke of when saying to God, “You made us for Yourself and our hearts find no peace until they rest in You,”<sup>164</sup> (Rom 8:1; 2 Cor 5:17).

This peace is first given by grace through faith (Eph 2:8) in Christ’s death for sin and resurrection according to the Scriptures (1 Cor 15:1–4). After salvation, intrapersonal conflict is managed through sanctified living (John 14:23; Col 1:9–14) and continued forgiveness as Christians confess their sins to God and walk in forgiveness (1 John 1:9).

Once peace with God through salvation in Christ has been established, the second foundation stone is a commitment to peace with others (Heb 12:14; Rom 12:18). Peace with others is a result of an obedient response to God’s call for sanctification in accordance with His commandments in Scripture to pursue peace with all (Heb 12:14;

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<sup>164</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (New York: Penguin Books, 1961), 21.

Rom 12:18). For Christians, peace is both motivated and empowered by the Holy Spirit as a response to salvation (1 John 4:19–21) which is informed by Scripture (see table 3).

The final foundation stone is an understanding that the priority of peace is balanced by the beneficial aspects of conflict. Avoiding the slide down the extremes on the slippery slope towards either “escape,” or “attack” (see figure 2), believers are called to warn the wayward (Lev 19:17), reprove fellow believers who sin (Matt 18:15–17; Gal 6:1), and to teach and train others according to the Scriptures (Col 3:16; 2 Tim 3:16). The process for managing these required conflicts may vary according to the source of the conflict (the issue around which conflict arises) and the level of the conflict (the parties involved), but it must remain centered over the biblical foundation.

### **The Biblical Framework for Conflict Management**

After establishing the biblical priorities of peace with God, peace with man, and edifying conflict, Scripture lays out the basic framework for CM. The passage in Matthew 7:1–7 establishes several guidelines for CM including the fact that one must judge according to Scripture, the Christian must address personal shortcomings before addressing the shortcomings of others, and Christians must be cautious about correcting those unwilling to submit to God. The passage in Matthew 18:15–17 outlines the process of CM for Christians initiating necessary and redemptive conflict among fellow believers by addressing the sin privately, then with a small group of witnesses, and then turning the matter over to the church for public admonishment and discipline if needed. Passages in both Matthew (5:23–25) and Ephesians (4:26) also require that conflict be handled in a timely manner. Finally, 2 Timothy 2:24–26 provides a context for the process of Christian CM by requiring that all necessary conflict be managed with kindness and patience with a desire to lead others to repentance.

## **The Process of Selecting Items for Inclusion in the Study**

According to Powlison's three epistemological priorities, the first of which is to articulate positive biblical truth, the review of precedent literature first focused on establishing a biblical foundation for understanding conflict and CM.<sup>165</sup> On that biblical foundation, a framework for a Christian understanding of CM was discovered which defined some of the basic imperatives for the Christian practice of CM.

The second of Powlison's epistemological priorities was to refute or reject truth claims which conflict with the standard of all truth, Scripture. Thus, a review of the research was conducted which yielded the discovery of many potential concepts and practices associated with CM from secular sources. Those items were compared and contrasted with the biblical foundation and Christian framework for CM previously established. Those items which, in the judgment of the researcher conflicted with the Christian practice of CM were eliminated from consideration in the study while those items which did not conflict were considered for use. Of the items considered for use, twelve sources of conflict, the four levels of conflict, and the five styles of CM from secular models were initially considered for use in the study. The four levels of conflict were later eliminated from the study due to the fact that all potential conflict among biblically qualified elders within the same church, will necessarily occur on the same intragroup level, thus inclusion of the four levels within the study was deemed unnecessary.

## **Conclusion**

With a theological foundation to build on, a biblical framework to establish the outline for the Christian practice of CM, and some of the basic structure in place according to Scripture, there are many details regarding the practice of CM that are left to

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<sup>165</sup> David Powlison, "Cure of Souls and the Modern Psychotherapies," in *The Biblical Counseling Movement: History and Context* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2010), 277.

prudent discernment. This is where a thorough study of CM in the secular literature can be assessed to discover if there are concepts and practices which are able to inform and develop the Christian practice of CM in general, and specifically among church elders.

There were concepts and practices derived from secular research which fell outside of the biblical foundation and others that were incompatible with the framework established in Scripture. Other concepts and practices seemed to not only work well within the biblical framework, but they may inform and aid elders within local churches by adding nuance and insights from secular research to existing practices of Christians CM. In order to discover which concepts and practices from secular models of CM are both congruent with biblical principles and beneficial to elders practicing shared leadership within a local church, the author proposes a Delphi study seeking review, analysis, and feedback from expert panelists concerning the twelve sources of conflict and the five styles of CM discovered during the review of secular models of CM.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Due to the highly specific context of the research, CM among the elders of a local church, inclusion of the levels of conflict has been determined to be less applicable, considering all of the conflict church elders experience within the group of elders should theoretically be interpersonal and intragroup conflict.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Research Question**

This research will seek to answer the following question regarding selected concepts and practices from secular models of conflict management: Which, if any, are the concepts and practices from secular models of conflict management congruent with biblical principles of conflict management and beneficial to elders practicing shared leadership within a local church?<sup>1</sup>

Of the secular concepts and practices of CM discussed in chapter 2, the following will be examined in light of the research question: an understanding of, and the ability to recognize the twelve sources of conflict, including (1) substantive conflict, (2) affective conflict, (3) transforming and masquerading conflicts, (4) process conflict, (5) goal conflict, (6) conflict of interests, (7) conflict of values, (8) structural or institutionalized conflict, (9) realistic versus nonrealistic conflict, (10) retributive conflict, (11) misattributed conflict, and (12) displaced conflict;<sup>2</sup> and an understanding of, and the ability to appropriately employ the six practices of conflict management, including (13) integrating style, (14) obliging style, (15) dominating style, (16) avoiding style, and (17)

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<sup>1</sup> As stated in chapter 2, the term “secular” is used throughout to distinguish those concepts and practices of CM derived explicitly from Scripture from those concepts and practices which do not come explicitly from Scripture. The author acknowledges the fact that academic research, herein classified as “secular,” is carried out by both Christians and non-Christians alike; the author’s commitment to the authority of Scripture demands such a distinction.

<sup>2</sup> M. Afzalur Rahim, *Managing Conflict in Organizations*, 3rd ed. (Westport, CT: Quorum Books, 2001), 18–22.

compromising style,<sup>3</sup> and (18) an understanding of the dual-concern matrix and the ability to use it in selecting the appropriate CM style.<sup>4</sup>

### **Research Design**

In order to discover if any concepts and practices from secular models of CM were both congruent with the biblical principles and beneficial to elders practicing shared leadership within a local church, the researcher proposed a Delphi study.

### **Overview of the Delphi Study**

The Delphi study, or the Delphi technique, as described by Dalkey and Helmer, was developed “in order to obtain the most reliable opinion consensus of a group of experts by subjecting them to a series of questionnaires.”<sup>5</sup> A Delphi study is uniquely suited for new or highly specified areas of research due to the fact that “common surveys try to identify ‘what is,’ whereas the Delphi technique attempts to address ‘what could/should be.’”<sup>6</sup>

In order to discover what “could/should be,”<sup>7</sup> the Delphi study employs a “group facilitation technique that seeks to obtain consensus on the opinions of experts through a series of structured questionnaires (commonly referred to as rounds).”<sup>8</sup> After a question or topic is decided upon, panelists within the relevant field are identified.

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<sup>3</sup> Rahim, *Managing Conflict in Organizations*, 27.

<sup>4</sup> See figure 3, adapted from Rahim, *Managing Conflict in Organizations*, 27.

<sup>5</sup> Norman Dalkey and Olaf Helmer, “An Experimental Application of the Delphi Method to the Use of Experts,” *Management Science* 9, no. 3 (1963): 458, <https://pages.ucsd.edu/~aronatas/project/academic/delphi%20method%20of%20convergence.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> “Determining What Could/Should Be: The Delphi Technique,” (Annual Meeting of the Mid-Western Educational Research Association, Columbus, OH, 2006), quoted in Chia-Chien Hsu and Brian Sandford, “The Delphi Technique: Making Sense of Consensus,” *Practical Assessment, Research, and Evaluation* 12, no. 10 (2007): 1, <https://doi.org/10.7275/pdz9-th90>.

<sup>7</sup> Miller et al., “Determining What Could/Should Be: The Delphi Technique.”

<sup>8</sup> Felicity Hasson, Sinead Keeney, and Hugh Patrick McKenna, “Research Guidelines for the Delphi Survey Technique,” *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 32, no. 4 (2000): 1009–10.

Panelists are contacted and enlisted until the pre-determined number of panelists confirm their participation. Round one of the Delphi study will provide panelists with a description of each of the aforementioned concepts and practices which have been drawn from a review of the relevant literature.<sup>9</sup> Hasson, Keeney, and McKenna describe the process, saying, “The questionnaires are completed anonymously by these experts (commonly referred to as the panelists, participants or respondents),” after which, the responses are collected and analyzed by the researcher, informing the formation of the next questionnaire which is again given to the panelists for consideration and evaluation in “an iterative multistage process designed to combine opinion into group consensus.”<sup>10</sup> Hasson, Keeney, and McKenna describe the process of data collection and analysis saying between each round of questioning, responses are “analyzed to identify convergence and change of respondents' judgements or opinions.”<sup>11</sup>

The current study employed three rounds of questioning based on recommendations from Delphi researchers suggesting either two or three rounds are preferred.<sup>12</sup> As Roy Schmidt puts it, “Knowing when to stop is crucial—too soon will

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<sup>9</sup> James A. Laub, “Assessing the Servant Organization: Development of the Organizational Leadership Assessment (OLA) Instrument,” (Unpublished synopsis of dissertation, Florida Atlantic University, 1999), 8, <https://olagroup.com/Images/mmDocument/Laub%20Dissertation%20Brief.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Hasson, Keeney, and McKenna, “Research Guidelines for the Delphi Survey Technique,” 1001.

<sup>11</sup> Hasson, Keeney, and McKenna, “Research Guidelines for the Delphi Survey Technique,” 1012.

<sup>12</sup> Hasson, Keeney, and McKenna, “Research Guidelines for the Delphi Survey Technique,” 1011. See also, S. Procter and M. Hunt, “Using the Delphi Survey Technique to Develop a Professional Definition of Nursing for Analyzing Nursing Workload,” *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 19, no. 5 (1994): 1003–14, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.1994.tb01180.x>; B. Beech, “Studying the Future: A Delphi Survey of How Multi-Disciplinary Clinical Staff View the Likely Development of Two Community Mental Health Centers Over the Course of the Next Two Years,” *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 25, no. 2 (1997): 331–38, <https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1365-2648.1997.1997025331.x>; Barbara Green et al., “Applying the Delphi Technique in a Study of GPs’ Information Requirements,” *Health & Social Care in the Community* 7, no. 3 (1999): 198–205, <https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1365-2524.1999.00176.x>; Roy C. Schmidt, “Managing Delphi Surveys Using Nonparametric Statistical Techniques,” *Decision Sciences* 28, no. 3 (1997): 763–74, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5915.1997.tb01330.x>.

provide results that may not be meaningful, not soon enough may cause sample fatigue and may tax resources.”<sup>13</sup>

### **Selection of Expert Panelists**

Researchers who regularly employ the Delphi method, along with those who recommend best practices for it agree that “selecting research participants is a critical component of Delphi research since it is their expert opinions upon which the output of the Delphi is based.”<sup>14</sup> Adler and Ziglio outline four requirements for the experts selected which include (1) knowledge of and experience with the topic being researched, (2) ability and consent to participate, (3) adequate time to devote to the rounds of questioning, and (4) adequate ability to communicate with the researcher.<sup>15</sup> In order to discover if potential panelists meet these four requirements, all points will be integrated into preliminary panelist selection.

Elders considered for participation, at the time of the research, served at churches that meet the following criteria: (1) the churches will have been led by a plurality of elders/pastors/overseers for no fewer than two years, (2) the churches will have a doctrinal commitment to maintaining biblically qualified elders<sup>16</sup> according to the lists found in 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9,<sup>17</sup> and (3) the churches will possess a

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<sup>13</sup> Schmidt, “Managing Delphi Surveys Using Nonparametric Statistical Techniques.”

<sup>14</sup> Gregory Skulmoski, Francis Hartman, and Jennifer Krahn, “The Delphi Method for Graduate Research,” *Journal of Information Technology Education* 6 (January 1, 2007): 3, <https://doi.org/10.28945/199>. See also, Robert H Ashton, “Combining the Judgments of Experts: How Many and Which Ones?,” *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 38, no. 3 (1986): 405–14, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978\(86\)90009-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978(86)90009-9); Fergus Bolger and George Wright, “Assessing the Quality of Expert Judgment: Issues and Analysis,” *Decision Support Systems* 11, no. 1 (1994): 1–24, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0167-9236\(94\)90061-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/0167-9236(94)90061-2); Frederick J. Parenté et al., “An Examination of Factors Contributing to Delphi Accuracy,” *Journal of Forecasting* 3, no. 2 (1984): 173–82, <https://doi.org/10.1002/for.3980030205>.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Adler and Erio Ziglio, *Gazing Into the Oracle: The Delphi Method and Its Application to Social Policy and Public Health* (Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley, 1996), 4.

<sup>16</sup> See table 1.

<sup>17</sup> See table 1.

doctrinal statement which accords with the essential elements of biblical Christianity summarized in articles I-IV<sup>18</sup> of the *Baptist Faith & Message 2000*.<sup>19</sup>

The process of identifying potential panelists employed a snowball technique starting with potential expert panelists already known to the researcher.<sup>20</sup> In order to reduce potential for unqualified elders' participation, publicly available information listed on church websites, including leadership sections and statement of faith sections was reviewed by the author. Many church websites additionally list their elders and provide contact information, therefore when a qualifying elder was identified, other elders at his church were invited to participate as well.

After identifying potentially qualified elders, the author sent an introductory letter to the elders of the respective churches describing the study and its intentions, offering an overview of the methodology, assuring anonymity of individual responses, and asked them to consider joining the study. After which, a preliminary survey was sent asking specific questions related to qualifications to participate and seeking a willingness to participate. Willing elders were asked to respond to participate if they (1) served at qualified churches according to the aforementioned standards, (2) have served as an elder for at least two years, (3) self-report having personally experienced conflict within the group of elders of a local church at some point in the past, and (4) met the four requirements outlined by Adler and Ziglio above.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Articles one through six have been selected to ensure the elimination of heterodox churches pertaining to what the author considers *first-order* theological concerns relevant to the current study while remaining open to the study of churches with differing views regarding secondary or tertiary matters for the purposes of this study.

<sup>19</sup> "Baptist Faith & Message 2000," Southern Baptist Convention, accessed November 30, 2021, <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/>.

<sup>20</sup> Skulmoski, Hartman, and Krahn, "The Delphi Method for Graduate Research," 10.

<sup>21</sup> Adler and Ziglio, *Gazing Into the Oracle*, 4.

## Population

This research seeks consensus among expert panelists regarding what, if any, concepts and practices from secular models of conflict management (CM) are both congruent with biblical principles and beneficial to elders practicing shared leadership within a local church. Therefore, the population is all elders serving in theologically orthodox churches which practice shared leadership according to the model of the New Testament.<sup>22</sup>

## Sample

Considering the highly specified nature of the present study, Michael Patton recommends a purposefully selected sample which intentionally does not represent the general population and instead seeks “people to study or interview who are especially knowledgeable about a topic,” and “who can inform an inquiry through their knowledge, experience, and expertise.”<sup>23</sup> This is also known as a representative sampling, according to Timothy Urdan, because “the researcher purposely selects cases so that they will match the larger population on specific characteristics.”<sup>24</sup> Potential study panelists were identified starting with those potentially qualified elders already known to the researcher. Introductory information sent to previously identified potential panelists included a request to share the study with other elders. In this way, a “snowball sampling technique,” was used “to generate subsequent participants.”<sup>25</sup> In accordance with Skulmoski, Harman, and Krahn’s recommendations for homogeneous groups, the expert panel was comprised of no fewer than ten and no more than fifteen elders who fulfil the

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<sup>22</sup> “Theologically orthodox,” churches will be recognized by having doctrinal statements which align with articles I-IV of the *Baptist Faith and Message, 2000*.

<sup>23</sup> Michael Q. Patton, “Expert Sampling,” in *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Educational Research, Measurement, and Evaluation*, ed. Bruce B. Frey (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2018), 648–49, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781506326139>.

<sup>24</sup> Timothy C. Urdan, *Statistics in Plain English*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2010), 3.

<sup>25</sup> Skulmoski, Hartman, and Krahn, “The Delphi Method for Graduate Research,” 4.

aforementioned requirements.<sup>26</sup>

### **Delimitations**

The study narrowly focused on Christian elders serving in theologically orthodox churches which practice shared leadership according to the New Testament standard outlined above in chapter 2, section two, *Plurality of Elders: Biblical Foundations for Shared Leadership*.<sup>27</sup>

Due to the high calling and important responsibilities local church elders have been given by God according to the New Testament model, CM within groups of elders practicing shared leadership is a vitally important topic. The present study, therefore, sought expert consensus among elders serving in churches which (1) have been led by a plurality of elders/pastors/overseers for no fewer than two years, (2) have a doctrinal commitment to maintaining biblically qualified elders<sup>28</sup> according to the lists found in 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9, and (3) possess a doctrinal statement which accords with the essential elements of biblical Christianity summarized in articles I-IV<sup>29</sup> of the *Baptist Faith & Message 2000*.<sup>30</sup>

The expert panel is further delimited by the requirements for individual elders stipulating they (1) serve at qualified churches, (2) have served as an elder for at least two

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<sup>26</sup> Skulmoski, Hartman, and Krahn, “The Delphi Method for Graduate Research,” 10.

<sup>27</sup> See also Alexander Strauch, *The Biblical Eldership Booklet: Restoring the Eldership to Its Rightful Place in the Church*, rev. ed. (Littleton, CO: Lewis and Roth, 1997), [https://biblicaleldership.com/files/pdfs/BE\\_booklet.pdf](https://biblicaleldership.com/files/pdfs/BE_booklet.pdf); Alexander Strauch, *Paul’s Vision for the Deacons: Assisting the Elders with the Care of God’s Church* (Littleton, CO: Lewis & Roth, 2017); Chuck Gianotti and Jack Spencer, *Spiritual Maturity: Based on Qualifications for Biblical Elders*, 2nd ed. (Colorado Springs: Lewis and Roth, 2018); Benjamin L. Merkle, *40 Questions about Elders and Deacons* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009); Colin Smothers, “Pastor, Elder, and Overseer: A Baptist View,” *Anchored*, May 13, 2012, <https://colinsmothers.wordpress.com/2012/05/13/pastors-elders-and-bishops-a-baptist-view/>.

<sup>28</sup> See table 1.

<sup>29</sup> Articles one through six have been selected to ensure the elimination of heterodox churches pertaining to what the author considers *first-order* theological concerns relevant to the current study while remaining open to the study of churches with differing views regarding secondary or tertiary matters for the purposes of this study.

<sup>30</sup> “Baptist Faith and Message.”

years, and (3) self-report having personally experienced conflict within the group of elders of a local church at some point in the past.

### **Limitations of Generalization**

In accordance with the specific nature of the study's requirement for a purposefully selected sampling in identifying expert panelists, the findings are technically not able to be generalized beyond the sample.

This does not mean though, that the results of such a study are unimportant; the results of a Delphi study are beneficial especially in shedding light upon previously unexplored topics as well as guiding later research in the same area. Hasson, Keeney, and McKenna point out one of the strengths of the Delphi study is that it only uses purposefully selected sampling that relies upon experts as opposed to the opinions of those less qualified to weigh in on highly specific situations or scenarios.<sup>31</sup> The expertise of the panelists may increase content validity and "the use of successive rounds of the questionnaire help to increase the concurrent validity."<sup>32</sup>

The findings of this study may benefit qualified elders serving in theologically orthodox churches practicing shared leadership as they seek to enhance and add nuance to the biblical foundation and framework of CM. Furthermore, this study may guide future researchers as they seek to aid local church elders in improved practices of CM.

### **Instrumentation**

The researcher proposed a three round Delphi study. After identifying, contacting, and securing the participation of ten to fifteen panelists in accordance with the qualifications previously listed in this chapter, rounds one through three were conducted

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<sup>31</sup> Hasson, Keeney, and McKenna, "Research Guidelines for the Delphi Survey Technique."

<sup>32</sup> Hasson, Keeney, and McKenna, "Research Guidelines for the Delphi Survey Technique," 1013. Also see Claire M. Goodman, "The Delphi Technique: A Critique," *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 12, no. 6 (1987): 729–34, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.1987.tb01376.x>.

using Qualtrics, a survey research and data analysis platform. Surveys were web-based and self-administered. According to Lesley Andres, self-administered surveys allow respondents more time to consider and complete surveys “as a result, responses may be more thoughtful and reflective.”<sup>33</sup> Andres also points out that “a self-administered format will lead to greater accuracy, and hence better quality of information reported.”<sup>34</sup> The advantage of web-based surveys for the current project is that “the sequencing of questions can be programmed,” so that respondents “will be directed automatically to the appropriate section of the survey,” based on answers given.<sup>35</sup> Rounds one through three will be described below.

### **Round One**

The first round presented panelists with instructions for how the survey were to be conducted. Then, an overview of the eighteen concepts or practices selected from secular models of CM were presented to panelists. Each panelist was asked to rate each item as congruent or incongruent with biblical principles of conflict management. Panelists were also asked to rate each item as beneficial or not beneficial to elders practicing shared leadership within a local church. The eighteen items selected for use according to Powlison’s epistemological priorities include the following concepts and practices: twelve concepts or potential sources of conflict including (1) substantive conflict, (2) affective conflict, (3) transforming and masquerading conflicts, (4) process conflict, (5) goal conflict, (6) conflict of interests, (7) conflict of values, (8) structural or institutionalized conflict, (9) realistic verses nonrealistic conflict, (10) retributive conflict,

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47. <sup>33</sup> Lesley Andres, *Designing and Doing Survey Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2012),

<sup>34</sup> Andres, *Designing and Doing Survey Research*, 47.

<sup>35</sup> Andres, *Designing and Doing Survey Research*, 52.

(11) misattributed conflict, and (12) displaced conflict.<sup>36</sup> The study will also include six practices of CM, including five styles of CM (13) integrating style, (14) obliging style, (15) dominating style, (16) avoiding style, and (17) compromising style,<sup>37</sup> along with (18) the dual-concern matrix.<sup>38</sup>

Each of the concepts or practices will be described and evaluated individually. Each item will be explained in a manner similar to the descriptions offered in the chapter above. Questions related to concepts and practices will vary, relating to a *knowledge of the concepts* as opposed to *the use of the practices*. For questions related concepts, panelists will be prompted to answer *yes* or *no* to the following two questions, one related to congruence and the second related to benefit: (1) “do you believe the [concept] is congruent with biblical principles of conflict management in so far as it does not conflict with known biblical principles or prescribed practices of conflict management?” and, (2) “do you believe church elders would be better prepared to manage conflict in God-honoring ways if they knew about the concept of [source of conflict]?”

For the items categorized as practices, panelists will also be presented with the descriptions as presented in the chapter above, but they will be asked slightly different questions related to the congruence and benefit of employing the practices. The question related to congruence will ask, “Do you believe the practice/use of the [style of CM/dual-concern matrix] in certain situations is congruent with biblical principles of conflict management in so far as it does not conflict with known biblical principles or prescribed practices of conflict management?” In regard to benefit, panelists will be asked to respond *yes* or *no* to the question, “Do you believe church elders would be better

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<sup>36</sup> Rahim, *Managing Conflict in Organizations*, 18–22.

<sup>37</sup> Rahim, *Managing Conflict in Organizations*, 27.

<sup>38</sup> See figure 3, adapted from Rahim, *Managing Conflict in Organizations*, 27.

prepared to manage conflict in God-honoring ways if they practiced/used the [style of CM/the dual-concern matrix] in certain situations?”

For any concept or practice presented which receives a *no* answer in response to both questions, panelists will be prompted to provide an open-ended rationale as follows, “You have indicated that this concept/practice is not congruent with biblical principles and is not beneficial to elders. If you would like to, please provide a brief rationale explaining your responses. If you prefer not to, please skip to the next question.”

Once completed, round one will be collected and analyzed using Qualtrics to find the mean response to both questions of congruence and benefit in order to determine which items should be used in round two. Any item rated as both congruent and beneficial by no less than sixty percent of panelists will be included in round two.

Responses to the open-ended prompts will be compiled, reviewed, and grouped thematically in order to analyze the responses. Any insights gained in this analysis will not only inform the final analysis of the research findings, but it will also be used to amend later rounds of the study as needed.

## **Round Two**

The second round will present the panelist-approved responses, those for which sixty percent of the panelists responded positively to both the question of congruence and benefit, from round one. Panelists will again have each item described and then be asked to rate the item according to congruence and benefit.

For measures of congruence related to concepts, panelists will be asked to rate items based on the following possible responses: (A) “fully congruent—this concept, as described, fully aligns with biblical principles,” or (B) “not fully congruent—this item, as described, conflicts with biblical principles.” For each item a panelist rates as “not fully congruent,” the respective panelist will be prompted to respond the following: “Briefly

explain the reason you rated this concept as incongruent with biblical principles and practices of conflict management or skip to the next question.”

For questions of benefit related to concepts, a semantic differential rating scale will be used. Concepts will be rated according to the four following choices: (A) highly beneficial—a knowledge of this concept would be highly beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring CM, (B) beneficial—a knowledge of this concept would be beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring CM, (C) slightly beneficial—a knowledge of this concept would be slightly beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management CM, or (D) not beneficial—a knowledge of this concept would provide no benefit to elders seeking to practice God-honoring CM.

For practices, panelists will be asked to rate a use of each practice according to congruence based on the following prompt, “Please rate the use of the [practice] by church elders among fellow church elders according to the choices below.” Panelists will choose from the following two options: (1) fully congruent—this practice, as described, does not conflict with biblical principles, or (2) not fully congruent—this practice, as described, conflicts with biblical principles.

For questions of benefit related to the practices, a four-tiered semantic rating scale will ask panelists to choose from among the following options: (1) highly beneficial—use of this style of conflict management at appropriate times would be highly beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management, (2) beneficial—use of this style of conflict management at appropriate times would be beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management, (3) slightly beneficial—use of this style of conflict management at appropriate times would be slightly beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management, or (4) not beneficial—use of this style of conflict management at appropriate times would provide no benefit to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.”

Responses from round two will be collected and statistically analyzed to find the mean rating of respondents for both the question of biblical congruence and the question of benefit. Each concept or practice achieving a mean benefit rating of three or higher on the four-point scale by seventy percent or more of panelists and being rated as congruent with biblical principles of CM by seventy percent or more of respondents will be included in the third round of questioning. The benchmark of seventy percent agreement signifying statistical consensus has been established and similarly used by Bernard Naughton, et al., as well as by Chia-Chen Hsu and Brian Sandford, Francis Ulschak, John Cartwright, and Paul Green.<sup>39</sup>

### **Round Three**

As described above, each concept or practice achieving a mean rating of three or higher on the four-point scale by seventy percent or more of panelists, and being rated as congruent with biblical principles of CM by seventy percent or more of respondents will be included in the third round of questioning. Round three will offer a dichotomous choice for each concept or practice from secular models of CM. Each concept will be described as in round two followed by the statement, “This concept is both congruent with biblical principles of conflict management and a knowledge of it would be beneficial to elders practicing shared leadership within a local church.” Questions regarding practices will describe the practice as in round two followed by the statement, “This practice is both congruent with biblical principles of conflict management and a

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<sup>39</sup> Bernard Naughton et al., “Medicine Authentication Technology as a Counterfeit Medicine-Detection Tool: A Delphi Method Study to Establish Expert Opinion on Manual Medicine Authentication Technology in Secondary Care,” *BMJ Open* 7, no. 5 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2016-013838>; Hsu and Sandford, “The Delphi Technique”; Francis L. Ulschak, *Human Resource Development: The Theory and Practice of Need Assessment* (Reston, VA: Prentice Hall, 1983); John Beck Cartwright, “Best Practices for Online Theological Ministry Preparation: A Delphi Method Study” (Louisville, KY, EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015), <https://repository.sbts.edu/handle/10392/4864>; Paul J. Green, “The Content of a College-Level Outdoor Leadership Course for Land-Based Outdoor Pursuits in the Pacific Northwest: A Delphi Consensus.” (EdD thesis, Eugene, OR, University of Oregon, 1983).

use of it in certain situations would be beneficial to elders practicing shared leadership within a local church.” Panelists will be asked to choose either to agree or disagree. Items identified as both congruent and beneficial by at least seventy percent of panelists will be considered statistically sufficient to establish consensus per the best practice guidelines of other researchers using the Delphi method.<sup>40</sup>

### Procedures

Procedures for the present Delphi study are adapted from Delphi technique recommendations by Skulmoski and Hartman,<sup>41</sup> Hasson, Keeney, and McKenna,<sup>42</sup> Hsu and Sandford,<sup>43</sup> and Iqbal and Pison-Young.<sup>44</sup> This Delphi study seeks to answer the question: which, if any, of the following concepts and practices from secular models of conflict management are congruent with biblical principles of conflict management and beneficial to elders practicing shared leadership within a local church? The eighteen items, twelve concepts and two practices, listed in the previous section will be used evaluated in this study.

Procedures for the present Delphi study are adapted from Delphi technique recommendations by Skulmoski and Hartman,<sup>45</sup> Hasson, Keeney, and McKenna,<sup>46</sup> Hsu

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<sup>40</sup> Naughton et al., “Medicine Authentication Technology as a Counterfeit Medicine-Detection Tool”; Hsu and Sandford, “The Delphi Technique”; Ulschak, *Human Resource Development*.

<sup>41</sup> Skulmoski, Hartman, and Krahn, “The Delphi Method for Graduate Research.”

<sup>42</sup> Hasson, Keeney, and McKenna, “Research Guidelines for the Delphi Survey Technique.”

<sup>43</sup> Hsu and Sandford, “The Delphi Technique.”

<sup>44</sup> Susanne Iqbal and Laura Pison-Young, “The Delphi Method,” *Psychologist* 22, no. 7 (2009): 598–600.

<sup>45</sup> Skulmoski, Hartman, and Krahn, “The Delphi Method for Graduate Research.”

<sup>46</sup> Hasson, Keeney, and McKenna, “Research Guidelines for the Delphi Survey Technique.”

and Sandford,<sup>47</sup> and Iqbal and Pison-Young.<sup>48</sup> The procedures used in the present study are listed in order below:

1. Review Scripture to discover theological foundations for the biblical model of CM and the framework for the biblical practice of CM.
2. Review secular literature to discover extra-biblical concepts and practices of CM from academic research.
3. Compare and contrast secular concepts and practices of CM with theological foundation and framework in order to discover those which may be both congruent with biblical principles and beneficial to elders practicing shared leadership within a local church according to Powlison's three epistemological priorities.<sup>49</sup>
4. Articulate potentially congruent and beneficial concepts and practices with clarity and concision.
5. Establish criteria for selecting expert panelists.
6. Develop preliminary qualification survey in order to evaluate and recruit potential panelists for the study.
7. Develop and pilot test round one questionnaire.
8. Identify no more than fifteen expert panelists with expectations for no fewer than ten to complete all three rounds of the study.
9. Provide potential panelists with introductory letter describing the nature of the research, the expectations for time based on the pilot tests, assuring anonymity of responses, and asking them to consider joining the study.
10. Using Qualtrics, distribute preliminary survey to ensure participants' qualifications and willingness to join the study.
11. Panelists who agree to join will be sent the links to the surveys through Qualtrics. Each round will be distributed and will have a two week window for completion. Participants who have not completed the survey after one week will be sent a reminder email.

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<sup>47</sup> Hsu and Sandford, "The Delphi Technique."

<sup>48</sup> Iqbal and Pison-Young, "The Delphi Method."

<sup>49</sup> David Powlison, "Cure of Souls and the Modern Psychotherapies," in *The Biblical Counseling Movement: History and Context* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2010), 277.

12. The first round will describe the selected concepts and practices from secular models of CM followed by two dichotomous *yes* or *no* questions related to congruence and benefit. Items rated as incongruent and not beneficial will include a prompted asking for an open-ended rationale to explain the ratings.
13. Round one responses will be analyzed to discover the mean for each concept or practice. Responses to open ended prompts will be collected, reviewed, and grouped according to theme for analysis. Items receiving a yes to both measures of congruence and benefit by no less than sixty percent of panelist will be included in round two.
14. Qualifying items from round one will be submitted in round two for panelists consideration. Each item will be rated for two components, congruence and benefit. Congruence will be rated according to a dichotomous congruence scale. Benefit will be rated on a four-response semantic rating scale. Items rated as incongruent will prompt panelists for an open-ended rationale related to their rating. Panelists will be asked to return round two within two weeks. Panelists who have not returned their survey after one week will be sent a reminder email.
15. Round two results will be analyzed to find the mean rating for each item on both measures of congruence and benefit. Items receiving a seventy percent or higher congruence rating, along with a rating of three or four on the four-point scale by no less than seventy percent of panelists on the benefit rating will be retained for use in round three. Responses to open-ended prompts will be collected, reviewed, and grouped thematically for analysis.
16. Qualifying items from round two will be included in round three. Round three will be sent out asking respondents to either fully agree or disagree with the following statement regarding each remaining concept or practice, “This concept/practice is both congruent with biblical principles of conflict management and a knowledge of it would be beneficial to elders practicing shared leadership within a local church.” Panelists will be asked to complete and return within two weeks.
17. Round three responses will be analyzed in order to discover the mean approval for each item. Those items rated as being congruent and beneficial by no less than seventy percent of panelists will have reached a consensus approval rating according to the research design.
18. After a presentation of the results, an answer to the primary question will be determined.
19. Recommendations for further research and potential areas of application will be made based on conclusions drawn from consensus.

## **Conclusion**

Chapter 1 of this study described the ubiquitous nature of conflict and described the specific and urgent need for further study in the area of CM among elders serving together in shared leadership within a local church. The first chapter concluded with a general description of the research question.

Chapter 2 started by defining commonly used terms and presenting a biblical argument for the shared leadership model commonly referred to as a plurality of elders. This section highlighted the benefits of the multiple-elders model along with the particular challenge the model presents due to a higher potential for conflict among the leadership team. Thereafter, a survey of Scripture's teachings regarding the priority of peace and the simultaneous requirement for the practice of beneficial conflict established the foundation for a Christian model of CM. The passages of Scripture specifically related to CM were also surveyed in order to discover the basic framework for the practice of CM. After establishing the Christian basis for CM, secular models of CM were studied and described in order to discover any concepts or practices not described in Scripture which may be both congruent with the biblical model and beneficial to elders practicing shared leadership within a local church.

Several potentially congruent and beneficial concepts and practices were identified and described, which have been selected for inclusion in the present Delphi study. A description of the process of conducting a Delphi study along with the specific procedures to be used in the present study were then detailed.

The following chapter will offer further details regarding the study including, compilation protocols, a presentation of findings, and an evaluation of the research design.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

This research sought to discover which, if any, are the concepts and practices from secular models of CM congruent with biblical principles of CM and beneficial to elders practicing shared leadership within a local church. In this chapter, researcher will detail the research used in search of an answer to the research question, present findings from the three-round Delphi study, and evaluate the research design.

#### **Compilation Protocols**

According to the research design outlined in the previous chapter, a three round Delphi study was employed. In this section, the process of conducting the research will be described for each of the four distinct phases of the study including the preliminary qualification survey and each of the three rounds of the Delphi study.

#### **Preliminary Qualification Survey**

An introductory email (see appendix 2) including the informed consent to participate (see appendix 1), was sent to potential participants containing a link to the preliminary qualification survey (see appendix 3). The preliminary survey was used to ensure potential participants met the established criteria according to the recommendation for purposeful, or expert sampling.<sup>1</sup> All surveys were set to only allow one response from each unique computer internet protocol (IP) address. The IP address recognition feature

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Q. Patton, "Expert Sampling," in *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Educational Research, Measurement, and Evaluation*, ed. Bruce B. Frey (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2018), 648–49, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781506326139>; Timothy C. Urdan, *Statistics in Plain English*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2010), 3.

also allowed the research participants to exit the survey at any point and continue where they left off upon returning. Each survey required the entry of the email address which was used to identify panelists and verify throughout the research that only previously qualified and invited participants were contributing to the research. The entry of the same email address for each survey to be started, and the IP address recognition feature in Qualtrics helped mitigate potential complications associated with web-based surveys.<sup>2</sup>

An invitation to take and share the preliminary qualification survey (see appendix 3) was sent June 21, 2022 and remained open until July 18, 2022. The web-based design allowed the surveys to be sequenced in a way that automatically prompted certain information or questions for some users based on their responses while reducing overall survey length for all users. For example, respondents wishing to review the relevant though lengthy sections of the *Baptist Faith and Message 2000* before answering a question related to the document were able to read the excerpts in the survey and then return to the question without changing the flow or getting lost in the survey. Programmed sequencing, or display logic, was also used for the preliminary qualification surveys in order to avoid collecting data from those who did not meet the qualifying requirements.<sup>3</sup> Respondents who answered questions in ways which disqualified them from participation were automatically advanced to the end of the survey which thanked them for their time and requested they share the link to the preliminary survey with any other potential participant. For the preliminary qualification survey, required questions were set up with forced response parameters so participants could not skip questions or submit the survey without providing the required data.

Due to the display logic and forced response requirements, the preliminary

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<sup>2</sup> Lesley Andres, *Designing and Doing Survey Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2012), 52.

<sup>3</sup> Andres, *Designing and Doing Survey Research*, 51–52.

survey ensured all participants who completed the survey were qualified according to the standards set forth in the research design. Each participant (1) had served as an elder for no less than two years (2) in a church which had been led by a plurality of elders for no less than two years. Each elder’s church (3) maintained a doctrinal commitment to maintaining biblically qualified elders and (4) possessed a doctrinal statement in agreement with essential elements of biblical Christianity as summarized in articles I-IV of the *Baptist Faith and Message 2000*.<sup>4</sup> Finally, (5) each elder reported having personally experienced conflict within the group of elders of a local church at some point in the past.

Table 7. Preliminary survey to determine participant qualification results

Questions from Preliminary Participant Qualification Survey	Answer by Percentage Respondents	
	Yes	No
Do you currently serve as an elder/pastor/overseer at your church?	100	0
Has your current church been led by a plurality of elders/pastors/overseers for two years or more?	100	0
Does your church require elders/pastors/overseers to be qualified according to the lists for elder qualifications found in Scripture (1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9)?	100	0
Have you at any point experienced conflict to any extent within a group of elders/pastors/overseers in a local church? This would include, but is not limited to differences of opinion, disagreements, disputes, etc.	100	0
Does your church’s statement of faith/doctrinal statement accord with essential elements of biblical Christianity as summarized in articles I-IV of the <i>Baptist Faith and Message 2000</i> regarding Scripture, God, man, and salvation?	100	0
Are you willing to participate in the three rounds of surveys required for this research?	100	0

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<sup>4</sup> “Baptist Faith & Message 2000,” Southern Baptist Convention, accessed November 30, 2021, <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/>.

The research design called for no more than fifteen and no less than ten panelists to start and finish the research. The preliminary survey identified eleven qualified church elders who agreed to participate. One participant withdrew from the study before the distribution of the first round of the research began, thus a total of ten participants started and completed all three rounds; the study suffered 0 percent attrition.

### **Survey 1 of 3**

The first survey (see appendix 4) was pilot tested by three non-panelists prior to distribution.

**Design and distribution.** The first survey was distributed by email on July 19, 2022. The survey remained active for two weeks, until August 2, 2022. The survey link was only sent to addresses provided by those who met the qualifications in the preliminary survey and agreed to participate. The first survey presented and requested feedback regarding eighteen total concepts and practices from secular models of CM. Of the eighteen, twelve were potential sources of conflict including (1) relational conflict, (2) substantive conflict, (3) transforming and masquerading conflicts, (4) process conflict, (5) goal conflict, (6) conflict of interests, (7) conflict of values, (8) structural conflict, (9) realistic verses nonrealistic conflict, (10) retributive conflict, (11) misattributed conflict, and (12) displaced conflict. The remaining six items were categorized as practices, these included descriptions of the five styles of CM including the (13) integrating style, (14) obliging style, (15) dominating style, (16) avoiding style, and (17) compromising style, along with use of (18) the dual-concern conflict management style selection chart, or dual-concern matrix (see figure 3). For each concept or practice, a defining description was given before asking panelists to respond yes or no to two separate questions, one regarding biblical congruence and one regarding benefit to church elders.

As with the preliminary qualification survey, the first survey of the study was

set up with display logic which prompted extended response questions based on answers given. Respondents in round one who rated any given concept or practice of conflict management as being both incongruent and not beneficial, were prompted to answer an optional extended response question requesting a brief rationale explaining their rating. The survey was also set up with required response, or force response parameters for all necessary items which included the panelists identifying email and all questions excluding the sample or practice questions and the optional extended response prompts. Therefore, participants could not skip questions or submit the survey without providing the minimal responses necessary to complete the survey. All responses for the first round were submitted between July 20, 2022, and August 2, 2022.

**Post-survey analysis.** After the collection of survey one, and before the creation and distribution of survey two, results were analyzed in two ways. First, for each of the eighteen items, a mean approval percentage was calculated for both levels of congruence (see tables 9 and 11), and benefit (see tables 10 and 12). The mean approval rating for congruence and benefit of each item needed to be no less than seventy percent to be included in the second survey.

The second analysis involved compiling, reviewing, and grouping panelists' comments into related themes. These comments were offered as rationales when prompted to explain rating items as incongruent and not beneficial. A total of six comments were collected. Due to the relatively small amount of qualitative data needing analysis, all comments were read and individually categorized between those related to congruence and those related to benefit. Two distinct themes emerged, and comments were grouped accordingly.

All of the comments were related to congruence. Four comments included a theme related to elders being above reproach. These comments explained the panelists' rating of incongruence with biblical principles based on the expectation that no group of

qualified elders would encounter conflicts that stem from inherently sinful sources.<sup>5</sup> Two comments had the common theme related to the importance and equality of each elder. These two comments indicated the panelist did not find certain practices of CM congruent among fellow elders because of the importance and equality of each elder.<sup>6</sup> The last comment was vague and though it may have related to the importance and equality of each elder as the two previous comments, it was not able to be categorized.

After analysis, the researcher conferred with his advisor and determined additional clarifications to the instructions for survey two would be appropriate, along with instructional example questions. Additionally, five items were eliminated from the study for failing to reach the minimum threshold of consensus.

### **Survey 2 of 3**

The second survey was created in light of the analysis of survey one and was pilot tested by three non-panelists before distribution.

**Design and distribution.** The second survey (see appendix 5) was distributed on August 9, 2022 and remained active until August 23, 2022. The survey link was sent to the same email addresses used in the preliminary survey and the first round survey. The second survey presented and requested feedback regarding only those items from round one which were rated as being both biblically congruent and beneficial to elders by no less than sixty percent of panelists. A total of thirteen items were included in survey two. Those items included nine concepts, (1) relational conflict, (2) substantive conflict, (3) process conflict, (4) goal conflict, (5) conflict of interests, (6) structural conflict, (7) realistic verses nonrealistic conflict, (8) misattributed conflict, and (9) displaced conflict, along with four practices, the (10) integrating style, 11) obliging style, and (12)

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<sup>5</sup> See section on Non-Consensus Items in chapter 5.

<sup>6</sup> See section on Non-Consensus Items in chapter 5.

compromising style, along with (13) the dual-concern matrix.

For each concept and practice, the same respective defining description was given as in survey one. Panelists were asked to rate each item as being either fully congruent or not fully congruent with biblical principles. Panelists were then asked to rate each item on a four tiered semantic rating scale as being either highly beneficial, beneficial, slightly beneficial, or not beneficial (see appendix 5).

The second survey was also set up with display logic prompting respondents who rated any concept or practice of conflict management as being not fully congruent with biblical principles to briefly explain the reason why. Also similar to round one, the survey was designed with force response parameters for all questions other than optional extended response questions explaining the reason for rating an item as not fully congruent. This ensured each survey submitted was fully complete. All responses for the second survey were submitted between August 9, 2022, and August 23, 2022.

**Post-survey analysis.** Responses from the second survey were collected and analyzed before the creation and distribution of the third survey. For each of the thirteen items included in the second survey, a mean approval percentage was calculated for both levels of congruence (see tables 16 and 18), and benefit (see tables 17 and 19). The mean approval rating for congruence and benefit of each item needed to be no less than seventy percent to be included in the third survey.

After collecting all surveys from the second round, twenty-five comments were compiled, reviewed, and grouped according to theme. Again, the total qualitative content was small considering most consisted of a single sentence, or sentence fragment. After reviewing all comments, four distinct themes emerged.

Only one of the twenty-five comments related to benefit in round two and relating to use of the dual-concern matrix it simply said, “The chart is not very beneficial to me in regard to church leadership dealing with conflict.” This comment was grouped

with two others which were difficult to discern.

All other comments related to congruence. In this round, four distinct themes emerged and comments were grouped accordingly. Of the twenty-four comments related to congruence, 62 percent related to elders being above reproach, 17 percent related to the importance and equality of every elder, 13 percent were themed together based on the panelists' difficulty understanding the congruence of a concept, and the remaining 8 percent fell into the grouping of vague comments.

After the analysis of the results from round two, additional clarifications about concept congruence were added to the instructional section of survey three (see appendix 6) and three items were eliminated from the study.

### **Survey 3 of 3**

The third and final survey (see appendix 6), was prepared in accordance with the findings from the analysis of the previous survey. Survey three was pilot tested by three non-panelists before distribution.

**Design and distribution.** The final survey was distributed on August 30, 2022. It was scheduled to be active until September 13, 2022, though one participant was out of the country and required an extra day to complete the survey, therefore the survey officially closed on September 14, 2022. The web-based, self-administered survey was distributed as in the previous rounds, through email. The final survey included only those items from round two which were rated as being fully congruent and highly beneficial or beneficial by no less than seventy percent of panelists.

The final survey included six concepts and four practices for a total of ten items. Those items were the concepts of (1) relational conflict, (2) substantive conflict, (3) process conflict, (4) goal conflict, (5) conflict of interests, and (6) misattributed conflict, along with the practices of the (7) integrating style, (8) obliging style, (9) compromising style, and (10) the dual-concern matrix.

For each concept, practice, or chart presented, the same defining description was given as in rounds one and two. Panelists were asked a single question regarding each item. The questions asked panelists to either agree or disagree with a statement describing the respective items as congruent with biblical principles and beneficial to elders.

Unlike the previous surveys, the final round was not designed to include display logic prompting extended responses. The final survey did include forced-response parameters for all questions. All responses for the third and final round were submitted between August 30, 2022, and September 14, 2022.

**Post-survey analysis.** No comments were collected in the third survey. Results were compiled to calculate the mean rating for each item according to both measures of congruence and benefit. A full analysis of the findings will be discussed in the analysis of results in the following chapter.

## **Presentation of Findings**

### **Round 1 of 3**

The first survey included eighteen total items, twelve potential sources of conflict, five possible practices of CM, and one CM style selection chart referred to as the dual-concern matrix (see appendix 4). Ten expert panelists completed all questions of congruence and benefit for each of the eighteen items included in survey one.

When asking about the sources of conflict, the questions did not ask if elders thought the sources of conflict were appropriate ways in which conflict starts, but whether or not the concepts themselves fundamentally contradicted known biblical truth.

Table 8. Round 1 complete panelist responses

↓ Items	x = panelists' approval of items' congruence–C, or benefit–B									
Panelist ID →	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Relational C	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	–	–
Relational B	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Substantive C	x	x	x	x	x	–	x	x	x	x
Substantive B	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Transforming C	x	–	x	–	x	–	x	–	–	x
Transforming B	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Process C	x	x	x	x	x	–	x	x	x	x
Process B	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Goal C	x	x	x	–	x	–	x	x	x	x
Goal B	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Interests C	x	x	x	–	x	–	x	x	x	x
Interest B	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Values C	x	–	x	–	x	–	x	–	–	–
Values B	x	–	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	–
Structural C	x	x	x	–	x	–	x	x	x	x
Structural B	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Real C	x	–	x	–	x	–	x	x	x	x
Real B	x	–	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Retributive C	–	–	x	–	x	x	x	–	–	–
Retributive B	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Misattributed C	x	–	x	–	x	–	x	x	x	x
Misattributed B	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Displaced C	x	–	x	–	x	–	x	x	x	x
Displaced B	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Integrating C	x	x	x	–	x	x	x	x	x	x
Integrating B	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Obliging C	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	–
Obliging B	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	–
Dominating C	–	–	x	–	x	–	x	x	x	–
Dominating B	x	–	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Avoiding C	–	–	x	–	–	–	x	x	x	–
Avoiding B	x	–	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Compromising C	–	x	x	–	x	–	x	x	x	x
Compromising B	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Dual-Concern C	x	x	x	–	x	x	x	x	x	x
Dual-Concern B	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

Of the twelve potential sources of conflict, nine (72 percent) were rated as being biblically congruent by the minimum threshold (see table 9). The remaining three concepts (28 percent) were therefore excluded from the study.

When asking about the sources of conflict, the questions did not ask if elders thought the sources of conflict were appropriate ways in which conflict starts, but whether or not the concepts themselves fundamentally contradicted known biblical truth.

Of the twelve potential sources of conflict, nine (72 percent) were rated as being biblically congruent by the minimum threshold (see table 9). The remaining three concepts (28 percent) were therefore excluded from the study.

Table 9. Round 1 congruence of sources of conflict

Potential Source of Conflict	Response Percentage	
	Yes	No
Relational Conflict *	80	20
Substantive Conflict *	90	10
Transforming or Conflict	50	50
Process Conflict *	90	10
Goal Conflict *	80	20
Conflict of Interests *	80	20
Conflict of Values	40	60
Structural Conflict *	80	20
Realistic versus Nonrealistic Conflict *	70	30
Retributive Conflict	40	60
Misattributed Conflict*	60	40
Displaced Conflict *	60	40

Note: \* Qualified for Round 2 survey based on measures of congruence and benefit.

Due to the different ways in which elders could potentially benefit from the knowledge of the concepts, as opposed to active employment of the practices and dual-concern matrix, distinct sections were developed in the surveys separating the twelve

sources from the styles and dual-concern matrix. Survey data will be displayed and considered in separate tables reflecting this distinction.

Table 10. Round 1 benefit of knowledge of the sources of conflict

Potential Source of Conflict	Response Percentage	
	Yes	No
Relational Conflict *	100	0
Substantive Conflict *	100	0
Transforming or Conflict †	100	0
Process Conflict *	100	0
Goal Conflict *	100	0
Conflict of Interests *	100	0
Conflict of Values †	80	20
Structural Conflict *	100	0
Realistic versus Nonrealistic Conflict *	90	10
Retributive Conflict †	100	0
Misattributed Conflict *	100	0
Displaced Conflict *	100	0

Note: \* Qualified for round 2 survey based on measures of congruence and benefit;  
 † Qualified for round 2 survey based on measure of benefit but not congruence.

Table 11. Round 1 perceived congruence of use of the CM styles and matrix

Practice or Item Considered	Response Percentage	
	Yes	No
Integrating Style of CM *	90	10
Obliging Style of CM *	90	10
Dominating Style of CM	50	50
Avoiding Style of CM	40	60
Compromising Style of CM *	80	20
Use of Dual-Concern Matrix *	90	10

Note: \* Qualified for Round 2 survey based on measures of congruence and benefit.

Six practices were considered in the first round of the study. Participants were asked to rate each practice based on congruence and benefit. Unlike the twelve potential sources of conflict which were evaluated as concepts, the later six questions sought panelists' insights regarding the use of practices and the dual-concern matrix.

Panelists' respective responses were used to prompt individuals who rated any concept as incongruent and not beneficial to briefly explain their rationale. The open-ended question was designed to gain insight as to why they viewed a particular source of conflict as incongruent and or not beneficial.

Table 12. Round 1 perceived benefit of the use of the CM styles and matrix

Practice or Item Considered	Response Percentage	
	Yes	No
Integrating Style of CM *	100	0
Obliging Style of CM *	90	10
Dominating Style of CM †	90	10
Avoiding Style of CM †	90	10
Compromising Style of CM *	100	0
Use of Dual-Concern Matrix *	100	0

Note: \* Qualified for Round 2 survey based on measures of congruence and benefit.

† Qualified for Round 2 survey based on measure of benefit but not congruence.

An interesting element that will be discussed in the analysis of the results, is the surprising number of instances where elders rated the use of a specific practice as being incongruent with biblical principles of CM yet indicated that the elders would be better prepared to manage conflict in God-honoring ways if they employed the same practice (see table 13). Though it seems rational to recognize the benefit of possessing the knowledge a concept deemed incongruent, when related to the employment of a style it is difficult to discern panelists' choices to rate incongruent practices as beneficial to

practice. Along with analysis of the comments, these findings prompted modification to the instructions and the addition of sample questions to the second survey.

Table 13. Round 1 affirming practice though denying congruence by panelist

Panelist ID →	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Integrating	–	–	–	X	–	–	–	–	–	–
Obliging	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Dominating	X	–	–	X	–	X	–	–	–	X
Avoiding	–	–	–	X	X	X	–	–	X	X
Compromising	–	–	–	X	–	X	–	–	–	–
Dual-Concern	–	–	–	X	–	–	–	–	–	–

Note: X indicates panelist rated the use of a practice as incongruent yet beneficial

Table 14. Round 1 percentage of items rated congruent and beneficial by panelist

Panelist ID	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total mean %
Percentage of all items rated as congruent	89	55	100	22	94	28	100	84	44	67	68
Percentage of all items rated as beneficial	100	78	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	89	97
Percentage of approval for both congruence and benefit	95	67	100	61	97	64	100	92	72	78	83

Table 15. Round 2 all panelist responses

↓ Items	x = panelists' approval of items' congruence-(C) 1-4 = panelists' rating of items' benefit- (B)									
	Panelist ID →	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Relational C	x	x	x	-	-	x	x	x	x	-
Relational B	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Substantive C	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Substantive B	3	4	3	4	4	4	4	3	4	4
Process C	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Process B	3	3	3	3	4	3	4	4	3	4
Goal C	x	x	x	-	x	-	x	x	x	x
Goal B	4	3	3	4	4	4	4	3	3	3
Interests C	x	-	x	x	-	x	x	x	x	x
Interest B	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	4	3	3
Structural C	x	-	x	-	x	-	x	x	x	-
Structural B	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	4	3	3
Real C	-	-	x	-	-	x	x	x	-	-
Real B	1	3	3	3	4	4	4	3	3	3
Misattributed C	-	x	x	x	-	x	x	x	-	x
Misattributed B	2	3	3	3	4	3	4	4	3	4
Displaced C	-	-	x	x	-	-	x	x	-	x
Displaced B	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	3	3	3
Integrating C	-	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Integrating B	2	3	4	4	4	4	3	4	4	3
Obliging C	x	-	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Obliging B	4	3	4	3	4	4	2	3	4	2
Compromising C	-	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Compromising B	2	3	4	4	4	4	2	4	4	3
Dual-Concern C	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	-	-
Dual-Concern B	4	3	3	3	4	4	4	4	2	3

Note: For items' benefit, 4-highly beneficial, 3-beneficial, 2-slightly beneficial, 1-not beneficial

### Round 2 of 3

The second round of surveys were completed by the same ten qualified elders who completed the first round, those identified in the preliminary qualification survey. The second survey included only those items from round one which received a rating of congruent by no less than sixty percent of panelists as well as a rating of beneficial by no less than sixty percent of panelists.

A total of ten of the thirteen (77 percent) items considered in survey two met the minimum threshold of congruence and benefit and were included for use in the third round of surveys. Like the first round, no items considered in round two were eliminated from further inclusion in the study due to low benefit ratings (see table 17). Each of the three concepts, structural conflict, realistic versus nonrealistic conflict, and displaced conflict, were disqualified having received congruence ratings of 60 percent, 40 percent and 50 percent respectively (see table 16).

Table 16. Round 2 biblical congruity of sources of conflict

Potential Source of Conflict	Response Percentage	
	Fully Congruent	Not Fully Congruent
Relational Conflict *	70	30
Substantive Conflict *	100	0
Process Conflict *	100	0
Goal Conflict *	80	20
Conflict of Interests *	80	20
Structural Conflict	60	40
Realistic versus Nonrealistic Conflict	40	60
Misattributed Conflict *	70	30
Displaced Conflict	50	50

Note: \* Qualified for round 3 survey based on measures of congruence and benefit.

Survey two also included display logic which prompted open-ended responses based on how questions were answered by individual participants. This survey’s design differed from the first round in that panelist were asked to provide a rationale for all responses rating an item as incongruent with biblical principles regardless of the benefit rating. Between the ten panelists, items were rated as incongruent with biblical principles thirty times. In each case, the survey prompted the panelist with an optional opportunity to provide a rationale for their selection. Twenty-five of the thirty prompts (85 percent) received a response offering a justification for the selection. These explanations provide helpful insights as to why panelists viewed so many items as beneficial to elders practicing shared leadership with a church even though they were rated as incongruent with biblical principles.

Table 17. Round 2 perceived benefit of knowledge of the sources of conflict

Source of Conflict	Response Percentage per Ranking			
	4	3	2	1
Relational Conflict *	90	10	0	0
Substantive Conflict *	70	30	0	0
Process Conflict *	40	60	0	0
Goal Conflict *	50	50	0	0
Conflict of Interests *	40	50	10	0
Structural Conflict †	40	50	10	0
Realistic versus Nonrealistic Conflict †	30	60	0	10
Misattributed Conflict*	40	50	10	0
Displaced Conflict †	30	60	10	0

Note: \* Qualified for round 3 survey based on measures of congruence and benefit.

† Qualified for round 3 survey based on measure of benefit but not congruence.

For example, having a knowledge of the concept of relational conflict received a benefit rating of highly beneficial or beneficial by 100 percent of panelist in the second

round but was rated as congruent with biblical principles by only 70 percent of panelists. When asked why he had rated relational conflict as being incongruent, Panelist 5 responded, “The Bible does teach that relational conflict does exist, but I said it was incongruent with biblical principles because the source of relational conflict is almost always sin, thus a principle inconsistent with biblical practices.” These rationales will be discussed in greater detail in the section evaluating the research design and further on in the analysis of the research in the next chapter. Potential nuances in the framing of questions related congruence of concepts versus practices will also be discussed in later sections.

All items related to practicing styles of CM and the dual-concern matrix met the threshold of seventy percent of panelists rating as congruent and benefit required to be included in the third round. Instances of practices being rated as incongruent yet beneficial dropped significantly between round one and two (down 85 percent), from thirteen occurrences in the first round (see table 13), down to two instances in the second round(see table 20). This may have resulted partly from the clarification added to the instructions and samples in the second survey (see appendix 4) and may be in part because nine of the occurrences from the first survey related to the dominating and avoiding styles, both of which were removed from round two.

Practices and use of the dual-concern matrix were not unique in the fact that panelists rated them higher on the benefit scale than the congruence scale, the sources of conflict concepts were generally rated higher on the benefit scale as compared with the congruences scale. On average, the panelists rated 92 percent of all items considered for the survey as being either highly beneficial or beneficial to elders (see table 21). By contrast, on average only 76 percent of items were rated as being congruent with biblical principles of CM. This will be discussed in light of panelist rationales in later sections.

Table 18. Round 2 biblical congruity of the use of the CM styles and matrix

Practices of CM Styles and Use of Dual-Concern Matrix	Response Percentage	
	Fully Congruent	Not Fully Congruent
Integrating Style *	90	10
Obliging Style *	90	10
Compromising Style *	90	10
Use of Dual-Concern Matrix *	80	20

Note: \* Qualified for survey 3 based on measures of congruence and benefit.

Table 19. Round 2 perceived benefit of use of styles of CM and dual-concern matrix

Source of Conflict	Response Percentage per Rating			
	4	3	2	1
Integrating Style *	60	30	10	0
Obliging Style *	50	30	20	0
Compromising Style *	60	20	20	0
Use of Dual-Concern Matrix *	50	40	10	0

Note: 4–highly beneficial, 3–beneficial, 2–slightly beneficial, 1–not beneficial

\* Qualified for round 3 survey based on measures of congruence and benefit

Table 20. Round 2 panelists affirming practice though denying congruence

Panelist ID →	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Integrating	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Obliging	–	X	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Compromising	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Dual-Concern	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	X

### Round 3 of 3

The third and final round of the study was completed by the same ten panelists who participated in rounds one and two; the study suffered no participant attrition throughout. As described in the previous chapter, concepts and practices which were rated as being congruent with biblical principles of CM by no less than seventy percent of panelists would be included so long as those items were also rated as being highly beneficial or beneficial by no less than seventy percent of panelists. Three items from round two were disqualified from use in round three, structural conflict, realistic versus nonrealistic conflict, and displaced conflict. All were disqualified due to panelists' congruence ratings; none were removed due to low ratings of benefit. All practices of CM from survey two were included for use in survey three along with the dual-concern matrix.

Table 21. Round 2 panelist percentage rated as congruent and beneficial

Panelist ID →	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total Mean
Percentage of all items rated as congruent	62	62	100	69	50	77	100	100	69	69	76
Percentage of all items rated as highly beneficial or beneficial	46	100	100	100	100	100	85	100	92	92	92
Mean percentage of approval for both congruence and benefit	54	82	100	85	75	89	93	100	81	81	84

Table 22. Round 3 all panelist responses for combined congruence and benefit

	x = panelists' approval of congruence and benefit									
Panelist ID →	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
*Relational	x	x	x	—	x	x	—	x	x	x
*Substantive	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
*Process	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
*Goal	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
*Interests	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
*Misattributed	—	x	x	—	—	x	—	x	x	x
‡ Integrating	x	—	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
‡ Obliging	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	—	x	x
‡ Compromising	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
‡ Dual-Concern	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

Note: \* indicates concept, ‡ indicates a practice of CM or use of dual-concern matrix

A total of ten items were included for consideration in round three, (1) relational conflict, (2) substantive conflict, (3) process conflict, (4) goal conflict, (5) conflict of interests, (6) misattributed conflict, (7) the integrating style of CM, (8) the obliging style of CM, (9) the compromising style of CM, and (10) the dual-concern matrix.

Unlike the previous two surveys, questions of congruence and benefit were not separated for the ten items included in this survey. For questions related to the conceptual sources of conflict, panelists were asked to agree or disagree with the statement, “This concept is both congruent with biblical principles of conflict management and a knowledge of it would be beneficial to elders practicing shared leadership within a local church.” For questions related to practices of CM styles panelists were asked to agree or disagree with the statement, “This practice is both congruent with biblical principles of conflict management and a use of it in certain situations would be beneficial to elders practicing

shared leadership within a local church.” The statement with which panelists were asked to agree or disagree related to the dual-concern matrix varied slightly in the wording, saying, “An understanding and use of this chart is both congruent with biblical principles of conflict management and beneficial to elders practicing shared leadership within a local church.”

Table 23. Round 3 biblical congruity and benefit

Potential Source of Conflict	Response Percentage
*Relational Conflict	80
*Substantive Conflict	100
*Process Conflict	100
*Goal Conflict	100
*Conflict of Interests	90
*Misattributed Conflict	60
‡ Integrating Style of CM	90
‡ Obliging Style of CM	90
‡ Compromising Style of CM	100
‡ Dual-Concern Matrix	100

Note: \* indicates concept, ‡ indicates a practice of CM or use of dual-concern matrix

As displayed in table 23, the concepts related to the sources of conflict which received consensus ratings of congruence and benefit by no less than seventy percent of panelists in the third survey were (1) relational conflict with 80 percent, (2) substantive conflict with 100 percent, (3) process conflict with 100 percent, (4) goal conflict with 100 percent, and (5) conflict of interests with 90 percent. Of the concepts included, only misattributed conflict failed to achieve the standard for consensus with a 60 percent score for congruence and benefit.

Of the three styles of conflict management included in the third round, all met the threshold for group consensus (see table 23) with 90 percent of panelists agreeing on

both measures of congruence and benefit for the integrating style, 90 percent for the obliging style, and 100 percent for the compromising style. Use of the dual concern matrix was also rated as congruent and beneficial by 100 percent of panelists.

Table 24. Round 3 percentage of congruent and beneficial by panelist

Panelist ID →	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Mean
Percentage of all items rated as congruent and beneficial	90	90	100	80	90	100	70	90	100	100	91

The mean rating for all items considered in the third round was 91 percent agreement with measures of both congruence and benefit (see table 21). This coincides with the approval of nine of the ten items considered in round three. The nine items reaching a final consensus approval rating for both congruence and benefit represent 90 percent of the items reviewed from the third round, 69 percent of the items considered in the second round, and 50 percent of those included for consideration at the start of the study.

Table 25. Mean percentage of congruence and benefit by round

↓ Item	Round →	1	2	3	Mean of All Three Rounds
*Relational Congruence		80	70	80	77
*Relational Benefit		100	100	80	93
*Substantive Congruence		90	100	100	97
*Substantive Benefit		100	100	100	100
Transforming Congruence		50	–	–	–
Transforming Benefit		100	–	–	–
*Process Congruence		90	100	100	97
*Process Benefit		100	100	100	100
*Goal Congruence		80	80	100	87
*Goal Benefit		100	100	100	100
*Interests Congruence		80	80	90	83
*Interest Benefit		100	90	90	93
Values Congruence		40	–	–	–
Values Benefit		80	–	–	–
Structural Congruence		80	60	–	–
Structural Benefit		100	90	–	–
Real Congruence		70	40	–	–
Real Benefit		60	90	–	–
Retributive Congruence		40	–	–	–
Retributive Benefit		100	–	–	–
Misattributed Congruence		60	70	60	63
Misattributed Benefit		100	90	60	83
Displaced Congruence		60	50	–	–
Displaced Benefit		100	90	–	–
*Integrating Congruence		90	90	90	90
*Integrating Benefit		100	90	90	93
*Obliging Congruence		90	90	90	90
*Obliging Benefit		90	80	90	87
Dominating Congruence		50	–	–	–
Dominating Benefit		90	–	–	–
Avoiding Congruence		40	–	–	–
Avoiding Benefit		90	–	–	–
*Compromising Congruence		80	90	100	90
*Compromising Benefit		100	80	100	93
*Dual-Concern Congruence		90	80	100	90
*Dual-Concern Benefit		100	90	100	97

Note: \* Indicates items determined by consensus of panelists to be congruent and beneficial according to the research design

## Summary of Findings

The driving question behind the design and implementation of this three-round Delphi study was to discover which, if any, are the concepts and practices from secular models of CM congruent with biblical principles of CM and beneficial to elders practicing shared leadership within a local church. After the three-round Delphi study, nine items including, (1) relational conflict, (2) substantive conflict, (3) process conflict, (4) goal conflict, (5) conflict of interests, (6) the integrating style of CM, (7) the obliging style of CM, (8) the compromising style of CM, and (9) use of the dual-concern matrix, were recognized as having reached a consensus of approval by the expert panel in both measures of congruence with biblical concepts of CM and benefit to elders practicing shared leadership within a local church.

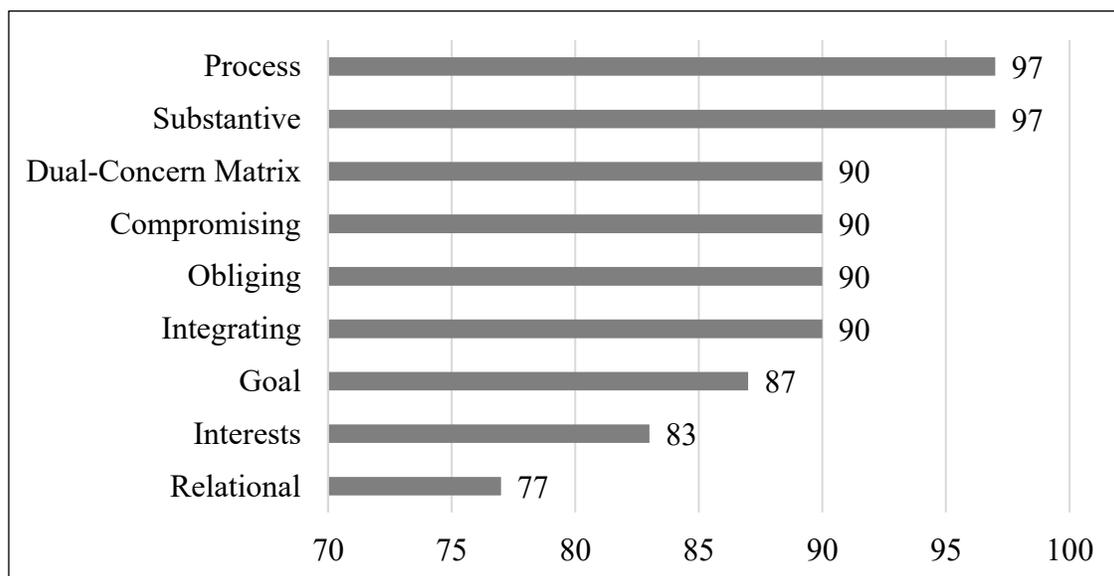


Figure 4. Consensus mean percentage rating of congruence across all rounds

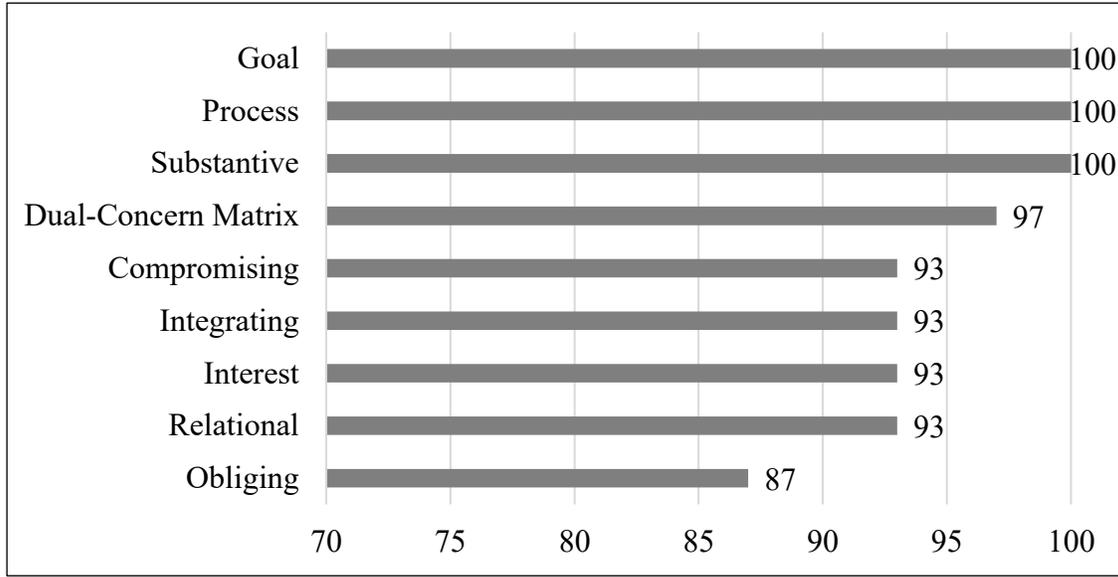


Figure 5. Consensus mean percentage rating of benefit across all rounds

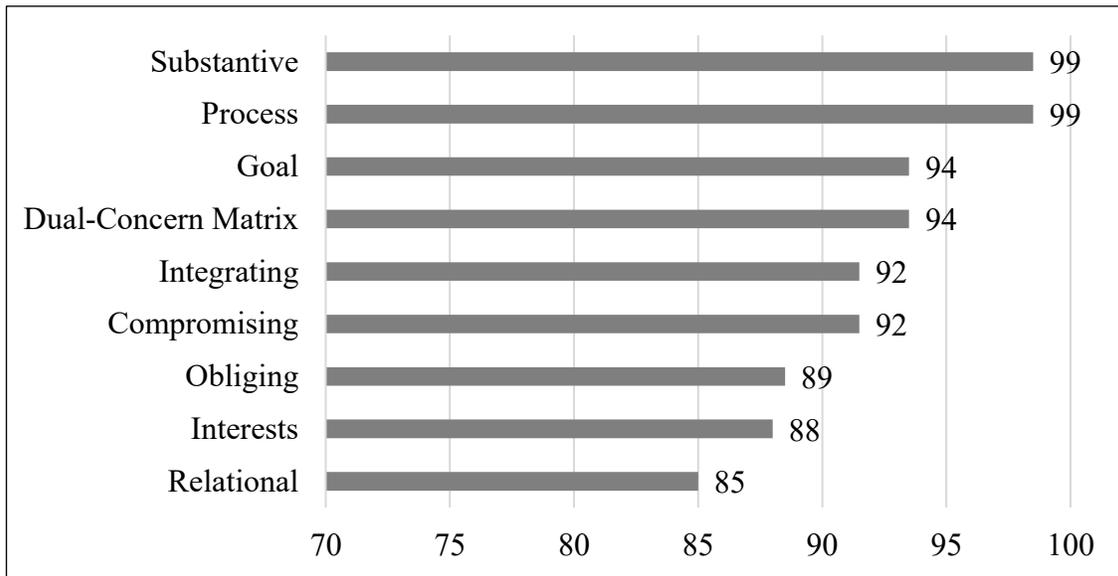


Figure 6. Consensus mean of congruence and benefit across all rounds

Though the parameters for consensus were determined round by round, it is helpful to see the ranked mean percentage of both congruence and benefit across all three rounds for all items on which panelists reach a consensus. The thresholds for consensus

rounds for all items on which panelists reach a consensus (see figure 4). The thresholds for consensus of congruence and benefit were raised from sixty percent in round one, to seventy percent in rounds two and three. Interestingly, all nine items which met the threshold for consensus in round three achieved no less than eighty percent agreement by the expert panelists for both measures of congruence and benefit (see table 23). As before, the threshold was moved from sixty to seventy percent approval, so three round averages may be less than the eighty percent (see *relational* in figure 4) even though the final congruence and benefit rating in the third round was 80 percent or higher.

### **Evaluation of Research Design**

Although the Delphi technique was well suited for this type of research considering the unique and exploratory nature of the question, each study must be constructed in a way that gathers the appropriate data in order to draw appropriate conclusions. The following section will briefly discuss the strengths and weaknesses of this study's research design.

#### **Strengths of Research Design**

The following items were identified by the researcher as design strengths which enabled panelists to complete the surveys, and which aided the researcher in answering the primary research questions.

**Use of closed- and open-ended questions.** Andres encourages the use of closed-ended questions along with open-ended questions within the same survey to focus answers in a way which requires participants to directly address the topic while giving an opportunity to explain their answers.<sup>7</sup> The surveys for the first and second rounds employed the use of both question types.

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<sup>7</sup> Andres, *Designing and Doing Survey Research*, 62–71.

Surveys for rounds one and two included closed-ended questions which were designed in alignment with the four guiding principles Andres recommends, (1) they were answerable in a way that produced meaningful results, (2) each included only one thought or idea, (3) each was carefully worded to the best ability of the researcher, and (4) they provided instructions on how to answer.<sup>8</sup> For questions of congruence, panelists were given dichotomous questions in both rounds one and two, while questions of benefit used dichotomous questions in round one and rating scale responses without mid points in round two.<sup>9</sup> The use of multiple closed-ended questions regarding benefit allowed panelists to provide a rationale for their responses. The collection, review, and grouping of these comments into themes allowed subsequent rounds to be improved. This analysis of the qualitative data also allowed for a more nuanced understanding of the data produced by the closed-ended questions.

**Web-based survey design.** The web-based survey design, as Andres pointed out, enables researchers to capitalize on “all of the advantages of self-administered surveys and email surveys,” in addition to “several added bonuses.”<sup>10</sup> Surveys for all three rounds in addition to the preliminary qualification survey were web-based.

One of the “added bonuses,” of the web-based design was the ability to utilize forced response questions, meaning self-administered survey takers were unable to submit incomplete results due to question omission, whether intentional or accidental. The use of a web-based survey platform (Qualtrics) also allowed for panelists to be seamlessly prompted with open-ended questions when a specific set of answers were

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<sup>8</sup> Andres, *Designing and Doing Survey Research*, 66–68.

<sup>9</sup> Andres, *Designing and Doing Survey Research*, 69–74.

<sup>10</sup> Andres, *Designing and Doing Survey Research*, 51.

given. This allowed for a panelist-specific survey flow without the potential for panelists get lost among “if, then skip to,” survey designs.<sup>11</sup>

Additionally, the fact that panelists could take surveys at their leisure allowed them to be “more thoughtful and reflective,” according to Andres, leading to “greater accuracy, and hence, better quality of information reported.”<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the web-based survey design was utilized because it “avoids direct confrontation of the experts with one another,” which could possibly sway an individual’s choices or limit open-ended responses in front of a group.<sup>13</sup>

**Expert panelists and the preliminary survey.** The Delphi study was developed specifically “in order to obtain the most reliable opinion consensus of a group of experts by subjecting them to a series of questionnaires.”<sup>14</sup> When seeking to determine the biblical congruence of any given concept or practice, a survey of the general population would not be expected to yield valid results. The population for this study was all elders serving in theologically orthodox churches which practice shared leadership according to the model of the New Testament, therefore the preliminary qualification survey was used to selectively identify a sample both representative of the population and qualified to participate.

In concordance with recommendations for Delphi studies from Adler and Ziglio, the preliminary qualification survey determined all ten panelists (1) had knowledge of, and experience with the topic being researched, (2) had the ability and gave consent to participate, (3) were able to devote adequate time to the three rounds, and

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<sup>11</sup> Andres, *Designing and Doing Survey Research*, 47.

<sup>12</sup> Andres, *Designing and Doing Survey Research*, 47.

<sup>13</sup> Norman Dalkey and Olaf Helmer, “An Experimental Application of the Delphi Method to the Use of Experts,” *Management Science* 9, no. 3 (1963): 458, <https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.9.3.458>.

<sup>14</sup> Dalkey and Helmer, “An Experimental Application of the Delphi Method,” 458.

(4) were able to communicate with the researcher through surveys and email when needed.<sup>15</sup> The preliminary survey was also designed to prompt all participants, regardless of qualification status, to share the survey in accordance with the snow-balling technique.<sup>16</sup>

### **Weaknesses of Research Design**

The following items were identified by the researcher as areas of weakness within the research design. Many of these weaknesses were recognized and were able to be mitigated between survey rounds, but they may have affected the data collected and therefore the conclusions able to be drawn from the research.

**Defining biblical congruence of a concept.** This research was conducted in an effort to help church elders better manage conflict within their elder teams in ways which honor God and benefit the church. Therefore, before items could be considered based on perceived benefit, the question of congruence with Scripture was required. The term *congruent* was chosen specifically because a truth claim may be absent from Scripture, and yet recognized by qualified experts as consistent with reality and related biblical principles. Panelists' responses to the open-ended comments along with the anomalies related to the incongruence of practices panelists rated as beneficial for practice (see table 13) prompted the addition of further clarification in the instructions to round two, along with the inclusion of sample questions.<sup>17</sup> The survey design may have been stronger had it included the further clarifications and samples in round one as well.

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<sup>15</sup> Michael Adler and Erio Ziglio, *Gazing Into the Oracle: The Delphi Method and Its Application to Social Policy and Public Health* (Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley, 1996), 4.

<sup>16</sup> Gregory Skulmoski, Francis Hartman, and Jennifer Krahn, "The Delphi Method for Graduate Research," *Journal of Information Technology Education* 6 (January 1, 2007): 4, <https://doi.org/10.28945/199>.

<sup>17</sup> The addition of clarification to the instructions and the inclusion of sample questions for round two was done after consultation and upon the recommendations of the researcher's faculty advisor.

**Limited open-ended questions.** Related to the difficulty in defining congruence related to concepts, another weakness in the research design was the lack of open-ended prompts asking for panelists to clarify answers. Open-ended questions were limited in the first round due to the large amounts of reading and the expectation that the first survey would overwhelm panelists leading to attrition. In round one, panelists were only prompted to provide open-ended rationales for items they rated as incongruent *and* not beneficial. The ten panelists collectively marked items as incongruent with biblical principles thirty-eight times, yet only six instances occurred where the same panelists marked the same item as not beneficial which prompted them to offer a rationale.

In addition to the researcher's sensitivity to survey length, researcher bias may have been a factor in failing to prompt open-ended questions seeking a rationale for items rated as congruent or beneficial. Those concepts and practices from secular models of CM deemed most likely to be congruent and beneficial were selectively included in order to avoid burdensomely long surveys; but the underlying hypothesis that all items would be considered congruent and beneficial likely played a factor in failing to ask for more open-ended questions. Asking and receiving more open-ended questions may have led to greater insight regarding panelists' ability to understand the question of congruence along with greater insight into why items were considered beneficial to panelists.

**Distinguishing between congruence of concepts and practices.** The question of congruence differed slightly, but significantly for concepts and practices, which may have led to confusion regarding congruence. For practices of styles of CM and use of the dual-concern, congruence focused on actual use by elders, whereas for sources of conflict, congruence was related to the concept as an observable truth divorced from the moral goodness of the practice. The potential for confusion was noted when analyzing the first round; the eighteen items earned a collective 97 percent benefit rating while the same items earned a collective 68 percent congruence rating. The confusion for the

congruence of the concept of relational conflict was confirmed in round two when Panelist 5 rated the concept of relational conflict as incongruent yet beneficial. When asked for a rationale, Panelist 5 responded, “The Bible does teach that relational conflict does exist, but I said it was incongruent with biblical principles because the source of relational conflict is almost always sin, thus a principle inconsistent with biblical practices.”

This response indicates Panelist 5 recognized the congruence of relational conflict as defined in the instructions to the survey yet did not think its occurrence was morally good to practice, therefore he rated relational conflict as incongruent. In cases like this, an interview administered survey may have helped panelists by allowing them to seek clarifications, though this benefit may have been mitigated by the higher chance of interviewer influence affecting the results of the survey.<sup>18</sup>

**Limited ability to generalize results.** As noted in the section on limitations of generalization (see chapter3), the research design does not allow for generalization beyond the sample of ten panelists. Though this limitation is a function of the exploratory nature of the Delphi study, the author recognizes this as a weakness of the research design.

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<sup>18</sup> Andres, *Designing and Doing Survey Research*, 53–54.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS

Ken Sande’s observation that “conflict is inevitable in a fallen world; Christians and unbelievers alike struggle with disputes and broken relationships,” aptly clarifies the central problem behind this study.<sup>1</sup> Conflict, on some level or to some extent, exists in all situations where humans interact, but some conflicts are more consequential because those involved are engaged in a more important work. If players on a little league ball team have conflict, a t-ball game could be lost; but if elders tasked with shepherding God’s flock have a conflict, the name of Christ could be defamed and the proverbial sheep could get left to the wolves.

Since Christians are susceptible to conflicts that causes divisions within the church, and because God has called for local churches to be led by a plurality of elders working closely with one another, a priority must be placed on improving church elders’ ability to understand and manage conflict. Therefore, this research set out with a firm commitment to remain faithful to a thoroughly Christian practice of CM while seeking to discover which, if any, are the concepts and practices from secular models of CM congruent with biblical principles and beneficial to elders practicing shared leadership within a local church.

In this section, the results of the Delphi study will be discussed and analyzed, followed by implications and applications which may be drawn from the study. Finally, recommendations for practice and further research will be offered.

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<sup>1</sup> Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), 290.

## **Analysis of Results**

In the previous chapter, the findings were presented following the flow of the three rounds of the Delphi study seeking to discover which, if any, are the concepts and practices from secular models of CM congruent with biblical principles and beneficial to elders practicing shared leadership within a local church. Panelists responses to questions of congruence and benefit were reported for eighteen items in round one, which was narrowed to thirteen items in round two, and which was again narrowed to ten items for the final round. Results from the final round of the Delphi study identified nine individual items from secular models of CM about which panelists reached a consensus regarding congruence and benefit. In this section, each of the nine consensus items will be discussed individually in light of the research findings and the precedent literature starting with those items with the highest mean consensus of congruence and benefit across all three rounds. Remaining items will be grouped and briefly discussed.

### **Consensus Items**

The nine consensus items include five concepts, (1) relational conflict, (2) substantive conflict, (3) process conflict, (4) goal conflict, (5) conflict of interests, and four practices, (6) the integrating style of CM, (7) the obliging style of CM, (8) the compromising style of CM, and (9) use of the dual-concern matrix, from secular models of CM. Within the nine items achieving consensus below, concepts and practices will be intermixed but distinguished by parenthetical descriptors. Concepts related to potential sources of conflict will be followed by the letter (C) for concept. Practices related to styles of CM and use of the dual-concern matrix will be marked with a (P) for practice.

**Substantive conflict (C).** The concept of substantive conflict was given a mean rating for congruence and benefit across all three rounds of 99 percent (see figure 6). Along with process conflict, substantive conflict tied for the highest level of consensus among items in question. The concept itself may have earned such a high level

of consensus regarding congruence because it aligns well within the biblical model of CM. As discussed in chapter 2, biblical principles of CM place an unmistakable emphasis on the pursuit of peace (see table 2) but this in no way negates the recognition of beneficial conflict (see table 4).

Substantive conflict, as defined in secular models of CM and described in the surveys (see appendix 4), would be precisely the type of conflict that elders would be remiss to ignore.<sup>2</sup> Resolution of substantive conflict lies at the heart of church discipline (Matt 18:15–17) which epitomizes the concept of beneficial conflict, but even in less weighty matters, research demonstrates the unity and progress which can be achieved by addressing and resolving substantive conflict as opposed to avoiding the issue.<sup>3</sup>

**Process conflict (C).** The concept of process conflict equaled substantive conflict for the highest combined mean of congruence and benefit across the three rounds of the Delphi study at 99 percent (see figure 6). This seems fitting considering process concept is defined as a subset of substantive conflict.<sup>4</sup>

Church elders may have resonated with the concept of process conflict in particular due to past experiences with this type of conflict. One would assume most

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<sup>2</sup> Karen A. Jehn, “A Qualitative Analysis of Conflict Types and Dimensions in Organizational Groups,” *Administrative Science Quarterly*, no. 1997 (n.d.): 530–57; Allen C. Amason, “Distinguishing the Effects of Functional and Dysfunctional Conflict on Strategic Decision Making: Resolving a Paradox for Top Management Teams,” *The Academy of Management Journal* 39, no. 1 (1996): 123–48; Yan Li, Baiyin Yang, and Lin Ma, “When Is Task Conflict Translated Into Employee Creativity?,” *Journal of Personnel Psychology* 17, no. 1 (2018): 22–32, <https://doi.org/10.1027/1866-5888/a000192>; Karen A. Jehn, “A Multimethod Examination of the Benefits and Detriments of Intragroup Conflict,” *Administrative Science Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (1995): 256–82, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2393638>; Paraskevas Petrou, Arnold B. Bakker, and Katinka Bezemer, “Creativity Under Task Conflict: The Role of Proactively Increasing Job Resources,” *Journal of Occupational & Organizational Psychology* 92, no. 2 (2019): 305–29, <https://doi.org/10.1111/joop.12250>; Petrou, Bakker, and Bezemer, “Creativity Under Task Conflict.”

<sup>3</sup> Sigal G. Barsade et al., “To Your Heart’s Content: A Model of Affective Diversity in Top Management Teams,” *Administrative Science Quarterly* 45, no. 4 (2000): 802–36.

<sup>4</sup> Karen A. Jehn, Clint Chadwick, and Sherry M. B. Thatcher, “To Agree or Not to Agree: The Effects of Value Congruence, Individual Demographic Dissimilarity, and Conflict on Workgroup Outcomes,” *International Journal of Conflict Management* 8, no. 4 (1997): 287–305; Karen A. Jehn and Elizabeth A. Mannix, “The Dynamic Nature of Conflict: A Longitudinal Study of Intragroup Conflict and Group Performance,” *Academy of Management Journal* 44, no. 2 (2001): 238–51.

elders who serve at the same local church would agree on major points of doctrine, share the same evangelical mission, and desire to shepherd God’s people toward greater experiences of sanctification; but agreeing on the best way to accomplish shared goals may leave some elders feeling frustrated, especially if they lack the ability to articulate the specific nuances of the disagreement. Process conflict may have been at the heart of what Strauch was describing when he pointed out the fact that many pastors prefer the solitary model as opposed to working with a plurality of elders because “colleagueship is slower and more difficult than unitary leadership.”<sup>5</sup> Strauch’s observation that “most pastors prefer to work alone or with a staff under them,” could very well come from a desire to bypass the potential for process conflict in determining how to get things done.<sup>6</sup>

The connection between this concept from secular models of CM, and Christian models of CM is clear. Though Sande does not identify sources of conflict categorically, he does allude to a distinction between process conflict and goal conflict, saying,

When a person in authority instructs you to do something that you believe is unwise, unfair, or sinful, it is appropriate to make an appeal and respectfully try to persuade that person to do what is right and wise (Esther 7:1–6; Prov. 25:15; Acts 4:5–17; 24:1–26:32). When doing so, it is helpful to try to discern the purpose or goal of the person in authority and seek to offer creative alternatives that will accomplish the same end (assuming it is a proper one) but do it in a biblical and efficient manner (e.g., 1 Sam. 25:1–35; Dan. 1:6–16; 2:14–16; Eccles. 8:2–5).<sup>7</sup>

Sande’s hypothetical situation revolves around substantive conflict and the advice offered centers on distinguishing between goal conflict and process conflict. This ability to identify process conflict in this situation, may allow the one involved in the situation to understand the best path forward for resolution; seeking to understand the goal and then

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<sup>5</sup> Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership*, 3rd ed. (Littleton, CO: Lewis and Roth, 1995), 44.

<sup>6</sup> Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 44.

<sup>7</sup> Sande, *The Peacemaker*, 24.

offer a better process which could accomplish the same goal in a potentially more efficient and biblical way.

**Goal conflict (C).** With a mean rating of 94 percent approval for measures of congruence and benefit across all three rounds, the concept of goal conflict tied with use of the dual-concern matrix for achieving the second highest level of consensus. As the name implies, goal conflict stems from a group's inability to agree on the preferred outcome, contrasting with process conflict which stems from agreement on the outcome but disagreement regarding the best way to achieve it. For example, elders within a local church may disagree on the goal of a youth group activity debating whether or not the event should be geared more toward fun and fellowship, or more for evangelism and discipleship.

Returning to Sande's hypothetical situation mentioned in the discussion of process conflict above, after assessing the situation, it may be determined that the process is irrelevant if the goals are not first aligned. Again, based on the congruence rating by panelists, neither goal conflict, or process conflict are novel concepts to elders desiring to practice God-honoring CM, but simply the ability to recognize and articulate the specific type of conflict bypasses many of the complicating potentialities associated with miscommunication.

**Dual-concern matrix (P).** Like the concept of goal conflict, an understanding and use of the dual-concern matrix received a mean consensus of congruence and benefit of 94 percent across the three rounds. Unlike the previously mentioned concepts, the dual-concern matrix was a practice, meaning the questions of congruence and benefits specifically included use as opposed to simply a knowledge of the item (see appendix 6).

Of the six practices, this item was the highest rated across all three rounds. In one sense, this seems predictable considering it was the tool which should guide the use

of the other practices. But in another sense, this is surprising considering two of the practices it contains, the avoiding and dominating styles of CM, did not meet the minimum rating of congruence in the first round, scoring 40 percent and 50 percent respectively. The fact that the dual-concern matrix contained the avoiding and dominating styles seems to be what caused Panelist 9 to rate its use as incongruent in round two. When asked for a rationale for his incongruent rating, he responded, “If the elder is operating in the ‘dominating’ or ‘avoiding’ style, he would appear to be acting in self-interest.”<sup>8</sup>

When considering use of the dual-concern matrix and the five styles of CM it contains, the practice seems to align with the wise selection between various responses to conflict suggested in Scripture. For example, in some situations, believers are called to manage conflict in ways that align with the practice of avoiding or obliging by turning the other cheek (Luke 17:27–30) or overlooking the offence (Rom 12:19:21). In other situations, Scripture encourages believers to directly engage in conflict in ways that align well with the practices of integrating or even dominating, as with instances of church discipline (Matt 18:15–17) or when Solomon reasons that an open rebuke is better than artificial peace (Prov 27:5–6). In light of these examples, the high rating for use of the dual-concern matrix is understandable.

**Integrating style of CM (P).** Of the five practices contained in the dual-concern matrix, the integrating and compromising styles of CM scored the highest mean levels of consensus for both congruence and benefit across the three rounds, both earning a 92 percent approval rating by panelists (see figure 6). The integrating style is associated with the highest concern for the input of others and the input of self.

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<sup>8</sup> Panelist 10 also offered a rationale for his second-round rating of incongruent, but his response that “the chart is not very beneficial to me in regard to church leadership dealing with conflict,” was difficult to discern considering in the same survey he rated use of the dual-concern matrix as “beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.”

The high levels of consensus approval by the panelists may have resulted from the framing of their use by elders in situations where they were interacting with their fellow elders. One of the fundamental distinctions between the biblical design for church leadership and other leadership teams is the understanding that the church elders are designed to lead as a council of equals. Strauch describes the team as “a collective form of leadership in which each elder shares equally the position, authority, and responsibility for the office.”<sup>9</sup> This does not mean there may not be times for obliging in deference to one elder’s respective expertise, as will be discussed in the section addressing obliging, but the biblical model of a plurality of elders does not rank authority or create a leadership pyramid within the group by which the integrating style could be avoided.<sup>10</sup>

**Compromising style of CM (P).** Receiving a three-round mean consensus of congruence and benefit of 92 percent, the compromising style of CM was among the eight items reaching a consensus approval by the panelists (see figure 6). The compromising style includes a balanced concern for the input of self and others and is characterized by a give-and-take approach to managing conflict.<sup>11</sup>

In the context of use by elders amongst their fellow elders, the compromising style may have appealed to panelists because it was described as being appropriate for use in situations where none possess the authority to compel submission from those with whom they are disagreeing. Unlike the integrating style of CM, compromising is necessary when some aspect or aspects of the preferred goal or process of those involved is mutually exclusive. Considering the variety of topics about which elders within a local church may disagree, the use of compromise offers a way toward conflict resolution that

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<sup>9</sup> Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 39.

<sup>10</sup> One rationale was offered regarding the incongruence of the integrating style. In the second round, Panelist 1 said, “Others should come first, not equal to yourself.”

<sup>11</sup> M. Afzalur Rahim, *Managing Conflict in Organizations*, 3rd ed. (Westport, CT: Quorum Books, 2001), 54.

values the input of all, while recognizing the need to move beyond the impasse.<sup>12</sup>

**Obliging Style of CM (P).** The obliging style of CM was the lowest rated practice to achieve consensus approval, though it still scored an 89 percent mean on measures of congruence and benefit through the three rounds (see figure 6). The obliging style is characterized by a high concern for the input of others and a low concern for the input of one's self. In contrast to the dominating style which occupies the exact opposite quadrant in the dual-concern matrix and was eliminated after round one, the obliging style is described as being seen as generous, selfless, and gracious.

The description of the obliging style in each survey stated it “may be best suited for those lacking expertise or familiarity with topics pertinent to choices around which the conflict is centered. This style is also appropriate for those involved in conflict who lack the authority or standing to participate in a conflict” (see appendix 4). At first glance, these statements seem to contradict the practice of shared leadership among a plurality of elders as described by Strauch in the discussion of the practice of integrating above. Strauch said the biblical practice of shared leadership is one in which “each elder shares equally the position, authority, and reasonability for the office.”<sup>13</sup> This seems to be the sentiment behind Panelist 2's rationale for rating obliging as incongruent in round two, saying, “If an elder, all must participate in reaching a decision. By not putting out the self-input, the elder is not complying with his obligations as an elder.” But Strauch goes on to offer nuance to the practice of biblical eldership with the concept he calls, “First among a council of equals.”<sup>14</sup>

Strauch cautions that misunderstanding and over emphasizing the equal

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<sup>12</sup> One rationale was offered for the incongruence of the compromising style. Panelist 1 said, “Low concern for others is not congruent with Bible principles.”

<sup>13</sup> Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 39.

<sup>14</sup> Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 45.

authority of elders can lead to ineffectiveness. The “first among equals,” principle states, “Although elders act jointly as a council and share equal authority and responsibility for the leadership of the church, all are not equal in their giftedness, biblical knowledge, leadership ability, experience, or dedication.”<sup>15</sup> Strauch points to several biblical examples and concludes that proper application of the principle “allows for functional, gift-based diversity within the eldership team without creating an official, superior office over fellow elders.”<sup>16</sup> In light of this principle, the practice of obliging seems to fit perfectly within the biblical practice of a plurality of elders as described by Strauch.

**Conflict of Interests (C).** The concept of a conflict of interest received an 88 percent mean rating for congruence and benefit across the three rounds. The concept of a conflict of interest is likely most often used in relation to the intrapersonal level of conflict, where an individual possesses within himself a desires or obligation that conflict with another one of his own desires or obligations. The description of conflicts of interests used in this research focused on interpersonal conflict, as when “a local chief of police and fire captain disagree over which department should receive limited grant money for the purchase of new equipment” (see appendix 4). Certainly, there are times when church elders are faced with difficult decisions, as when multiple good options conflict with one another. These conflicts may range from financial choices regarding how to distribute missionary funding, to disagreements over which ministry group will get to use the church van on Saturday.

Across the three rounds, the mean benefit rating for a knowledge of conflict of interests was 93 percent (see figure 5), but the mean three-round rating for congruence was ten percentage points lower at 83 percent (see figure 4). Panelist 5 offered a rationale

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<sup>15</sup> Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 45.

<sup>16</sup> Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 48.

for his rating the concept incongruent in the second round, saying, “The Bible teaches that conflict of interests do exist, but the biblical principle is that we should be looking out for the interests of others first, thus it is not a good or beneficial type of conflict.” This rationale seems to indicate Panelist 5 was rating congruence based on whether or not the conflict should occur. Panelist 5 still rated a knowledge of the concept as beneficial to elders. His comment echoed Rainer’s summation of Philippians 2:1–4: “Whenever local churches are mentioned in the New Testament, they are always exhorted to be other-centered. Paul told the church at Philippi to look after the interests of others even as it considered its own.”<sup>17</sup> Being aware of the potential for a conflict of interests among church elders may help remind them to keep their efforts other-centered.

**Relational Conflict (C).** The concept of relational conflict was the lowest rated item meeting the round by round threshold for congruence. With a mean rating for congruence and benefit across all rounds of 85 percent (see figure 6), relational conflict, as with all other concepts approved by consensus, was rated higher on the measure of benefit, 93 percent (see figure 5) than for congruence 77 percent (see figure 4).

Panelist 7 pointed out that the Bible is full of examples of relational conflict, and when left unresolved, it can have devastating effects on individuals, families, and even entire nations. An awareness of the concept of relational conflict and an ability to recognize may help avoid the negative effects which include reduced team performance, diminished ability to accomplish tasks, and increased rates of job burnout.<sup>18</sup> Relational

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<sup>17</sup> Thom S. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive* (Nashville: B&H, 2014), 38.

<sup>18</sup> Carsten K.W. De Dreu and Annelies E.M. Van Vianen, “Managing Relationship Conflict and the Effectiveness of Organizational Teams,” *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 22, no. 3 (2001): 309–28, <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.71>; Carsten K. W. De Dreu and Laurie R. Weingart, “Task Versus Relationship Conflict, Team Performance, and Team Member Satisfaction: A Meta-Analysis,” *Journal of Applied Psychology* 88, no. 4 (2003): 741–49, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.88.4.741>; Jehn, “A Multimethod Examination of the Benefits and Detriments of Intragroup Conflict”; Razia Shaukat, Amna Yousaf, and Karin Sanders, “Examining the Linkages Between Relationship Conflict, Performance and Turnover Intentions: Role of Job Burnout as a Mediator,” *International Journal of Conflict Management* 28, no. 1 (2017): 4–23.

conflict may also be one of the items about which panelists reached a consensus due to the propensity for many other types of conflict to become relational. As the concept of transforming conflict illustrated, even instances of beneficial and healthy substantive conflict can shift into subjective, personal, and emotional relational conflict. Especially in these instances, a knowledge of the concept of relational conflict and an awareness of its negative effects would benefit church elders.

### **Non-Consensus Items**

Of the nine items which did not reach a consensus of approval, eight were disqualified on the basis of incongruence with biblical principles alone. The only exception to this pattern came for misattributed conflict which reached the third round in which congruence and benefit were paired for rating. Among the nine items, three primary themes emerged explaining their disqualification, (1) the belief that biblically qualified elders would not be troubled by inherently foolish or sinful sources of conflict, (2) the rationale that some styles of CM fundamentally contradict the importance and equality of each elder, and (3) potential confusion regarding the congruence of concepts.

**Qualified elders are called to be beyond reproach.** The first and strongest theme that emerged from an analysis of disqualified items was a belief that certain sources of conflict are so closely related to foolishness or sin, that truly qualified elders would not be troubled by them when working within their elder groups. Based on a review of panelists' comments, six (possibly seven) of the nine items are thought to have been eliminated for this reason.<sup>19</sup> Those items include (1) conflict of values, (2) realistic versus nonrealistic conflict, (3) transforming conflict, (4) misattributed conflict, (5) structural conflict, (6) retributive conflict, and possibly (7) retributive conflict.

The list of biblical qualifications for church elders is as stringent as it is long

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<sup>19</sup> No comments were given regarding retributive sources of conflict.

(see table 1). The apostle Paul aptly summarizes the list of qualifications in his first letter to Timothy saying and elder “must be above reproach” (3:2a). In light of the qualification requirements for elders, Panelist 2 justified his belief that conflict of values was incongruent, saying, “If all are believers and are well versed in the Bible, there really should be no conflict of values because all should hold the same values as dictated by the Bible.”

Relating to realistic versus nonrealistic conflict, Panelist 2 reasoned similarly, saying, “If all are versed in the Bible and its teachings, there should be no nonrealistic conflicts.” In offering a rationale for his view that realistic versus nonrealistic conflict was incongruent, Panelists 9 said, “Such a non-realistic conflict appears to stem from one party's focus on self-aggrandizement at the personal level or at the conceptual level, thereby placing that individual's purposes at odds with the good of the larger group.”

In each instance, the panelists framed the sources of conflict within the elder group itself, reasoning in light of the high qualifications for biblical eldership that the respective sources should not reasonably occur at all. This emerged as the primary theme for rating concepts as incongruent throughout the first round. After a review of the three comments related to sources of conflict rated as incongruent, each reasoned that the men God qualified and called to serve local churches as elders would not, or should not, be susceptible these sources of conflict. In light of these explanations, it is interesting to note that each of the panelists who used this reasoning still rated substantive and process conflicts as congruent. One could infer from this, that even amongst biblically qualified elders, there was a potential for these types of conflict. This inference seems to be confirmed based on the fact that across all three rounds, substantive and process conflict were receive the highest rating for congruence and benefit.

The same reasoning was applied to the concept of misattributed conflict, which was the only item included in all three rounds that failed to achieve final consensus. Misattributed conflict reached the minimum level of congruence rating in the first and

second rounds, 60 percent and 70 percent respectively, but failed to achieve the minimum level of congruence in the third round. In commenting on why misattributed conflict was incongruent with biblical principles, Panelists 9 reasoned, “Taking such a position without regard for the whole truth shows a certain willful ignorance.” In this case, it seems that Panelist 9 does not believe misattributed conflict should qualify as a legitimate source of conflict considering the category could be eliminated if one took the time to discover the true root of the conflict, which he clearly expects biblical qualified elders would do.

**The equality and importance of each elder.** The second theme that emerged for items eliminated from the study applied to the two practices of CM, the dominating style and the avoiding style. The elimination of the two practices concurs with the biblical model Strauch highlights as he observes, “By definition, the elder structure of government is a collective form of leadership in which each elder shares equally the position, authority, and responsibility of the office.”<sup>20</sup> Panelist 2’s motivation for rating the dominating and avoiding style seemed to hinge on this understanding. Regarding the avoiding style, he says, “As an elder, one is obligated to discuss and come to a consensus. Avoiding an actual conflict is antithetical to the duties of an elder.” This rationale clearly draws upon the equality and fundamental importance of each elder within the leadership team. Continuing to draw upon the same themes, Panelists 2 concludes the dominating style of CM is incongruent with biblical principles stating, “If [elders] have love for others (as the Bible commands), I fail to see how the dominating style would ever be God honoring.”

As with the disqualified sources of conflict, the practices are distinctly framed within the context the elder team. Panelist comments did not comment on the use of the

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<sup>20</sup> Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 39.

dominating style or avoiding style in other contexts, within the elder team the two practices were rated as incompatible with biblical principles.

**Potential confusion regarding the congruence of concepts.** Though it is difficult to know with certainty that this was the specific cause for any item to be disqualified from the research study, comments by one panelist formed a third theme among the potential reasons for item elimination. During the second round, Panelists 1 offered a rationale for rating the concept of misattributed conflict as incongruent, saying, “There's not a good understanding of what you're looking for as ‘congruent with biblical principles.’” Similarly, in the second round, Panelist 1 rated displaced conflict as incongruent and commented, “Very hard to understand what you mean by ‘agrees with principals of the Bible.’” These two comments by Panelist 1 were the only comments that fit this theme related to non-consensus items.

The questions related to congruence of concepts were intended to be different from questions related to the congruence of practices. Questions related to congruence of concepts concerned the concept itself, as an idea or truth claim. Conversely, questions related to congruence of practices sought to discover which practices elders should or should not actively employ. Despite the separation of the sections related to concepts and practices and the distinct questions related to each, one panelist’s comments indicated a confusion on how a concept by itself could be incongruent.

For the sake of clarity, this point may be best understood using a hypothetical concept. Imagine that one of the concepts gleaned from secular models of CM was called “conflict with perfection,” and the description of this source of conflict went as follows: “Researchers have determined that in every group there exists one person who is perfect in all ways, with no admixture of flaw, error, or sin. This person is known as “the perfection.” Conflict, therefore, will arise when other members of the group or team do not recognize the identity of “the perfection,” resulting in their failure to defer to him or her in all matters whatsoever.” When asked about the congruence of the concept called “disagreement with perfection,” the researcher would expect panelists to reason and answer as follows: “The Bible says all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and I know that Jesus was the only perfect one. But this concept claims one member in each group is perfect;

therefore, this concept fundamentally contradicts Scripture. Thus, it must be rated as incongruent.”<sup>21</sup>

Again, it is difficult to discern whether or not a confusion regarding congruence lead directly to the elimination an item, but in each of the specific instances where Panelist 1 expressed his difficulty in understanding concept congruence, his individual rating was not the deciding factor. The first comment reporting confusion was related to misattributed conflict in the second round, but the concept passed through the second round in spite of the incongruent rating by Panelist 1 (see table 16). The second comment reporting confusion was related to displaced conflict, also in the second round, but even if Panelist 1 would have rated displaced conflict as congruent, the item would not have met the 70 percent threshold of congruence needed to be included in the third round.

In light of these comments, the researcher noted a potential for confusion regarding the congruence of concept among the weakness of the research design (see chapter 4).

### **Research Implications and Applications**

In this section, the implications and potential applications of the results of the research will be discussed.

#### **Implications of Congruence**

This research was conducted in order to discover which, if any, are the concepts and practices from secular models of CM congruent with biblical principles and beneficial to elders practicing shared leadership within a local church. According to the research design, a total of nine items, five concepts and four practices from secular models of CM reached a consensus approval by measures of both congruence with

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<sup>21</sup> The researcher first thought of this imaginary example when analyzing the results of the study, he would have included this example in the survey instructions if he had thought of it when creating the surveys.

biblical principles and benefit to elders practicing shared leadership within a local church.

Though both measures were applied equally throughout the study in search of a consensus, the formation of the research question and the ordering of the research surveys intentionally placed congruence before benefit. In this way, congruence acted as a gatekeeper; as a result, of the nine items removed from the research, all nine were eliminated by the measure of incongruence alone. No items would have been removed by the measure of benefit alone (see table 22).<sup>22</sup> This is important to note considering the researcher's commitment to the inerrancy, authority, and sufficiency of Scripture.

In what may be the best-selling<sup>23</sup> book on CM for Christians, Ken Sande conveys his concerns regarding the replacement of biblical practices of CM with those derived from secular sources, saying,

Unfortunately, many believers and their churches have not yet developed the commitment and ability to respond to conflict in a gospel-centered and biblically faithful manner. This is often because they have succumbed to the relentless pressure our secular culture exerts on us to forsake the timeless truths of Scripture and adopt the relativism of our postmodern age. . . . I hope this book will help you see this clash of cultures more clearly and identify some of the ways that you and your church may have been led away from a firm reliance on God and his Word, especially when it comes to resolving conflict.<sup>24</sup>

As was stated previously, the author of this thesis wholeheartedly agrees that Christians should not abandon, reinterpret, or judge Scripture by any other source. This research has *not* been conducted seeking to cause Christians, especially those called to be elders, to ignore or replace biblical principles and practices concerning CM.

Items considered for use in the present study were first selected by the researcher in light of Powlison's epistemological priorities for evaluating non-canonical

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<sup>22</sup> Misattributed conflict alone was eliminated after round three where measures of congruence and benefit were measured as a single question, but its three-round mean for benefit (83 percent) was twenty percentage points greater than the three-round mean for congruence (63 percent).

<sup>23</sup> Ken Sande's, *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict* has sold over five-hundred thousand copies according to the publisher's note on the front cover of the revised and updated edition.

<sup>24</sup> Sande, *The Peacemaker*, 6–7.

truth claims.<sup>25</sup> Then, of the two considerations used in conducting this research, congruence with biblical principles was the first measure applied to evaluate concepts and practices from secular models of CM. The measure of biblical congruence was intended to eliminate from consideration any item which conflicted with Scripture. As a result, those items which reached a consensus of approval through this Delphi study are not novel concepts or practices at all, but instead, should be considered helpful classifications and descriptions of potentially uncategorized prior existing truths.<sup>26</sup>

### **Implications of Benefit**

While the measure of congruence acted as a gatekeeper for consensus, the true value of the research is realized through the benefit of the items identified. For example, if the study would have included the practice of drinking coffee during elders' meetings, the practice would likely be rated as congruent, but it is doubtful whether drinking coffee would yield any real benefit in managing conflict. Thus, any items rated as congruent should be evaluated as to how they may benefit elders practicing shared leadership; wherein the benefit of a knowledge or practice of the items identified leads to the potential benefit of the study itself.

The results of the study imply elders practicing shared leadership within a local church would benefit from a knowledge of and ability to recognize the following five concepts from secular models of CM: (1) substantive conflict, (2) process conflict, (3) goal conflict, (4) conflict of interests, and (5) relational conflict. The results of the study also imply elders practicing shared leadership within a local church would benefit from use of the following four practices from secular models of CM: (1) the dual-concern

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<sup>25</sup> David Powlison, "Cure of Souls and the Modern Psychotherapies," in *The Biblical Counseling Movement: History and Context* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2010), 277.

<sup>26</sup> Therefore, let no reader imply from the results of this study that the author questions in any way whatsoever the inerrancy, authority, or sufficiency of Scripture. Those who challenge the inerrancy, authority, or sufficiency of Scripture will not have been encouraged to do so by the implications of this research.

matrix, (2) the integrating style of CM, (3) the compromising style of CM, and (4) the obliging style of CM. In the following section, recommendations for practice are derived from the research application.

### **Research Applications**

Three potential applications for the results of the study will be recommended and briefly discussed, (1) elder training, (2) precision and clarity in Christian discussions of conflict and CM, and (3) inclusion of the items in further Christian research on CM. The first two items will be discussed in this section while the third will be separated as it relates specifically for recommendations for further research which will be addressed in the next section.

**Elder training.** The first, and likely the most obvious potential application of the research is elder training. Though the results of this study only initiate the possibility of discovering ways in which elders could benefit from a knowledge of the five concepts, and use of the four practices achieving consensus, the potential benefit through elder education is clear. There could be a great benefit if, when first noticing a sign of conflict, elders were able to pause and categorize the conflict as a group.

For example, consider a group of elders in their monthly meeting. Matthew does not vote to approve next year's budget for the outreach ministry program. Peter asks, "Matthew, it seems we have a disagreement on the current plan for outreach, is there a reason you voted against next year's budget?" Matthew responds, "I'm not sure guys, I just don't think we're on the same page here." Peter then asks some categorically precise questions related to the conflict, "Matthew, would you say we have a *conflict of goals* or a *conflict of interests*? Is your concern related to the evangelistic *goals* of the outreach team, or is there a *conflict of interests* because you think the money would be better spent in support of our missionaries?" After recalling the recent workshop, the elders attended as a team, Matthew responds, "Its' not a *conflict of interests*, I think we

have adequate funding for this program and our missionaries. And its not *goal conflict*, I want to see our community evangelized... but I'm not convinced the current outreach program is effective. Thinking of the sources of conflict, I believe this is related to *process conflict* because I do not think paying to staff and stock the local food pantry is the most effective way to reach our community.” Though idealized for sure, this example illustrates potentially beneficial applications of the research findings.

Similarly, the styles of CM could be employed in ways that help elders maintain God-honoring unity when working through conflict, without grinding every discussion to a halt. For example, of the five elders serving together in a local church, two are paid staff pastors, one is an educator by occupation, one is a computer programmer, and one a lawyer. As the elder team walks through a bi-annual review of church policies and procedures, the lawyer recommends overhauling the “child protection policy.” The other four elders do not believe the policy needs attention, especially in light of the several sections all agree need to be updated in the already long-running meeting. Furthermore, the suggestions include background checks, additional staffing for all classrooms, and annual mandatory child-worker training. The other elders believe these added regulations would be burdensome and may lead to fewer volunteers for an already thin group of Sunday school teachers. Tensions rise, until one of the four who do not prefer to overhaul the child-protection policy recalls a recent article he read that discussed CM and included the dual-concern matrix. He encourages his fellow elders that, though all are of equal authority and importance, the lawyer has an expertise in this area to which they should defer. The conflict style that may be best move the group toward God-honoring unity and effectiveness in leadership could very well be obliging. Again, the scenario seems simplistic, even intuitive, but simply possessing a common knowledge of the distinct styles of CM may benefit elders as in this example.

**Precision and clarity in elders' discussions outside the elder team.** Similar to the potential benefits to the group of elders as a team, possessing an enhanced ability to classify and discuss conflict and CM may enable elders to better shepherd their local churches. Elders clearly do not interact only with other elders; their primary concern should be for the good and growth of the flock. Elders offering counsel, preaching, teaching Sunday school, facilitating small group discussions, and refereeing the youth softball tournament may all benefit from an understanding of the concepts and use of the practices of CM identified.

### **Recommendations for Practice and Further Research**

Considering the exploratory nature of the research, an immediate recommendation for elder training is cautioned without first conducting further research. Thus, the only immediate recommendation is for further research itself. Three specific recommendations for further research are offered, (1) a replication study, (2) an experimental study testing the benefit of the items, and (3) an expanded study including additional concepts and practices from secular models of CM.

#### **Replication Study**

So far as the researcher is able to discern from a review of the Christian and secular literature surrounding CM, this is the first study intended to discover items from secular models of CM which could specifically benefit elders practicing shared leadership within a local church. As such, the research was exploratory and greatly limited in generalizability. Therefore, it is recommended that further research be conducted replicating the research in order to expand the generalizability and discover the external reliability of the results.

#### **Experimental Research Testing the Benefit of the Items to Groups of Elders**

This Delphi study was well suited to the exploratory research and thus was

able to offer initial insights into what “could be.”<sup>27</sup> A Delphi study though, is not able to determine the amount of benefit, if any would be gained by having a group of elders receive training related to the concepts and practices about which this study reached a consensus. In order to test the benefit of the nine items identified in the present study, it is recommended a program for education be developed that included the nine. Then, research be conducted which identifies instances and magnitude of conflict within an elder group both before and after the elders have been trained. This type of experimental research may yield further insights into whether or not those items rated as congruent within the present study are truly beneficial to elders practicing shared leadership.

### **Expanded Research Including Additional Items from Secular Models of CM**

Finally, the length of the surveys limited the number of items which could be used in the present study. Therefore, it is recommended that modified replication studies be conducted, which replicate the research design but include different potentially congruent and beneficial concepts and practices from secular models of CM.

### **Conclusion**

The problem of conflict exists among church elders, and over the course of two millennia it does not seem to be getting better with time. From the establishment of His church, Christ has called for a plurality of qualified men to act as His undershepherds among their local congregations, but qualified as they may be, conflict within elder groups continues with devastating results. The researcher earnestly desires to see all churches led by redeemed, qualified, and sanctified men who are well equipped to manage conflict in ways which honor God and best serve His church. Based on the results of this study, the following concepts and practices are offered for further research

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<sup>27</sup> Larry E. Miller et al., “Determining What Could/Should Be: The Delphi Technique” (Annual Meeting of the Mid-Western Educational Research Association, Columbus, OH, 2006).

and as items with which church elders may want to be familiar: (1) relational conflict, (2) substantive conflict, (3) process conflict, (4) goal conflict, (5) conflict of interests, (6) the integrating style of CM, (7) the obliging style of CM, (8) the compromising style of CM, and (9) use of the dual-concern matrix.

## APPENDIX 1

### AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to discover which, if any, are the concepts and practices from secular models of conflict management both congruent with biblical principles and beneficial to elders practicing shared leadership within a local church. This research is being conducted by John Lookabaugh for purpose of completing the capstone thesis in the Doctor of Education program at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY. In this research, you will be asked to complete three rounds of surveys. In each round you will be asked to review selected concepts and practices from secular models of conflict management and evaluate their congruence with biblical principles of conflict management along with their potential benefit for church elders.

Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.* By your completion of these surveys, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

## APPENDIX 2

### INTRODUCTION AND INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH STUDY EMAIL

**Subject: Improving Conflict Management Among Church Elders**

You are receiving this email because someone recommended you as a potential research participant. This research is designed to discover which, if any, are the concepts and practices from secular models of conflict management that are both congruent with biblical principles and beneficial to elders practicing shared leadership within a local church.

The research is being conducted by John Lookabaugh in an effort to enable church leaders to better manage conflict in ways that honor God and benefit the church. This research is part of the capstone thesis requirement in the Doctor of Education program at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY. If selected to participate, you will be asked to complete three rounds of surveys similar to the qualification survey linked below. In each round you will be asked to review selected concepts and practices from secular models of conflict management and evaluate their congruence with biblical principles of conflict management along with their potential benefit for church elders.

If you know of any other potential participants (possibly elders/pastors with whom you serve), please send them the link to the survey below or forward them this email before Sunday, June 26, 2022. The window for participation will close if the qualifying survey has not been completed by 11:45PM on Sunday, June 26, 2022.

If you have any questions feel free to email me at [redacted]@gmail.com or call/text me at 330-[redacted].

Thank you! John Lookabaugh

## APPENDIX 3

### PRELIMINARY SURVEY TO DETERMINE QUALIFICATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH STUDY

#### **Introduction**

You are receiving this survey because someone recommended you as a potential research participant. This research is designed to discover which, if any, are the concepts and practices from secular models of conflict management that are both congruent with biblical principles and beneficial to elders practicing shared leadership within a local church.

This research is being conducted by John Lookabaugh in an effort to enable church leaders to better manage conflict in ways that honor God and benefit the church. This research is being conducted as a part of the capstone thesis requirement in the Doctor of Education program at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY. If selected to participate, you will be asked to complete three rounds of surveys similar to this survey. In each round you will be asked to review selected concepts and practices from secular models of conflict management and evaluate their congruence with biblical principles of conflict management along with their potential benefit for church elders.

#### **Confidentiality and Consent**

Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. By your completion of these surveys, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

The following questions are intended to determine your qualification for participation as an expert panelist. Please read and respond to the questions below to determine your eligibility.

#### **Qualifications**

1. Do you currently serve as an elder/pastor/overseer at your church?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
2. Has your current church been led by a plurality of elders/pastors/overseers for two years or more?
  - a. Yes

- b. No
3. Does your church require elders/pastors/overseers to be qualified according to the lists for elder qualifications found in Scripture (1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9)?
    - a. Yes
    - b. No
  4. Have you at any point experienced conflict to any extent within a group of elders/pastors/overseers in a local church? This would include, but is not limited to differences of opinion, disagreements, disputes, etc.
    - a. Yes
    - b. No
  5. Does your church’s statement of faith/doctrinal statement accord with essential elements of biblical Christianity as summarized in articles I-IV of the *Baptist Faith and Message 2000* regarding Scripture, God, man, and salvation?
    - a. Yes
    - b. No
    - c. Read *Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, Articles I-IV

[*Display Baptist Faith and Message 2000 Articles I-IV... If Does your church’s statement of faith/doctrinal statement accord with... = C*]

### ***Baptist Faith and Message 2000 Articles I-IV***

**The Scriptures** The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God’s revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. It reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation. Exodus 24:4; Deuteronomy 4:1–2; 17:19; Joshua 8:34; Psalms 19:7–10; 119:11,89,105,140; Isaiah 34:16; 40:8; Jeremiah 15:16; 36:1–32; Matthew 5:17–18; 22:29; Luke 21:33; 24:44–46; John 5:39; 16:13–15; 17:17; Acts 2:16ff.; 17:11; Romans 15:4; 16:25–26; 2 Timothy 3:15–17; Hebrews 1:1–2; 4:12; 1 Peter 1:25; 2 Peter 1:19–21.

**II. God** There is one and only one living and true God. He is an intelligent, spiritual, and personal Being, the Creator, Redeemer, Preserver, and Ruler of the universe. God is infinite in holiness and all other perfections. God is all powerful and all knowing; and His perfect knowledge extends to all things, past, present, and future, including the future decisions of His free creatures. To Him we owe the highest love, reverence, and obedience. The eternal triune God reveals Himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with distinct personal attributes, but without division of nature, essence, or being.

**A. God the Father** God as Father reigns with providential care over His universe, His creatures, and the flow of the stream of human history according to the purposes

of His grace. He is all powerful, all knowing, all loving, and all wise. God is Father in truth to those who become children of God through faith in Jesus Christ. He is fatherly in His attitude toward all men. Genesis 1:1; 2:7; Exodus 3:14; 6:2-3; 15:11ff.; 20:1ff.; Leviticus 22:2; Deuteronomy 6:4; 32:6; 1 Chronicles 29:10; Psalm 19:1-3; Isaiah 43:3,15; 64:8; Jeremiah 10:10; 17:13; Matthew 6:9ff.; 7:11; 23:9; 28:19; Mark 1:9-11; John 4:24; 5:26; 14:6-13; 17:1-8; Acts 1:7; Romans 8:14-15; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Galatians 4:6; Ephesians 4:6; Colossians 1:15; 1 Timothy 1:17; Hebrews 11:6; 12:9; 1 Peter 1:17; 1 John 5:7.

**B. God the Son** Christ is the eternal Son of God. In His incarnation as Jesus Christ He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. Jesus perfectly revealed and did the will of God, taking upon Himself human nature with its demands and necessities and identifying Himself completely with mankind yet without sin. He honored the divine law by His personal obedience, and in His substitutionary death on the cross He made provision for the redemption of men from sin. He was raised from the dead with a glorified body and appeared to His disciples as the person who was with them before His crucifixion. He ascended into heaven and is now exalted at the right hand of God where He is the One Mediator, fully God, fully man, in whose Person is effected the reconciliation between God and man. He will return in power and glory to judge the world and to consummate His redemptive mission. He now dwells in all believers as the living and ever present Lord. Genesis 18:1ff.; Psalms 2:7ff.; 110:1ff.; Isaiah 7:14; Isaiah 53:1-12; Matthew 1:18-23; 3:17; 8:29; 11:27; 14:33; 16:16,27; 17:5; 27; 28:1-6,19; Mark 1:1; 3:11; Luke 1:35; 4:41; 22:70; 24:46; John 1:1-18,29; 10:30,38; 11:25-27; 12:44-50; 14:7-11; 16:15-16,28; 17:1-5, 21-22; 20:1-20,28; Acts 1:9; 2:22-24; 7:55-56; 9:4-5,20; Romans 1:3-4; 3:23-26; 5:6-21; 8:1-3,34; 10:4; 1 Corinthians 1:30; 2:2; 8:6; 15:1-8,24-28; 2 Corinthians 5:19-21; 8:9; Galatians 4:4-5; Ephesians 1:20; 3:11; 4:7-10; Philippians 2:5-11; Colossians 1:13-22; 2:9; 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18; 1 Timothy 2:5-6; 3:16; Titus 2:13-14; Hebrews 1:1-3; 4:14-15; 7:14-28; 9:12-15,24-28; 12:2; 13:8; 1 Peter 2:21-25; 3:22; 1 John 1:7-9; 3:2; 4:14-15; 5:9; 2 John 7-9; Revelation 1:13-16; 5:9-14; 12:10-11; 13:8; 19:16.

**C. God the Holy Spirit** The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God, fully divine. He inspired holy men of old to write the Scriptures. Through illumination He enables men to understand truth. He exalts Christ. He convicts men of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. He calls men to the Saviour, and effects regeneration. At the moment of regeneration He baptizes every believer into the Body of Christ. He cultivates Christian character, comforts believers, and bestows the spiritual gifts by which they serve God through His church. He seals the believer unto the day of final redemption. His presence in the Christian is the guarantee that God will bring the believer into the fullness of the stature of Christ. He enlightens and empowers the believer and the church in worship, evangelism, and service. Genesis 1:2; Judges 14:6; Job 26:13; Psalms 51:11; 139:7ff.; Isaiah 61:1-3; Joel 2:28-32; Matthew 1:18; 3:16; 4:1; 12:28-32; 28:19; Mark 1:10,12; Luke 1:35; 4:1,18-19; 11:13; 12:12; 24:49; John 4:24; 14:16-17,26; 15:26; 16:7-14; Acts 1:8; 2:1-4,38; 4:31; 5:3; 6:3; 7:55; 8:17,39; 10:44; 13:2; 15:28; 16:6; 19:1-6; Romans 8:9-11,14-16,26-27; 1 Corinthians 2:10-14; 3:16; 12:3-11,13; Galatians 4:6; Ephesians 1:13-14; 4:30; 5:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:19; 1 Timothy 3:16; 4:1; 2 Timothy 1:14; 3:16; Hebrews 9:8,14; 2 Peter 1:21; 1 John 4:13; 5:6-7; Revelation 1:10; 22:17.

**III. Man** Man is the special creation of God, made in His own image. He created them male and female as the crowning work of His creation. The gift of gender is thus part of the goodness of God's creation. In the beginning man was innocent of sin and was endowed by his Creator with freedom of choice. By his free choice man sinned against God and brought sin into the human race. Through the temptation of Satan man transgressed the command of God, and fell from his original innocence whereby his posterity inherit a nature and an environment inclined toward sin. Therefore, as soon as they are capable of moral action, they become transgressors and are under condemnation. Only the grace of God can bring man into His holy

fellowship and enable man to fulfill the creative purpose of God. The sacredness of human personality is evident in that God created man in His own image, and in that Christ died for man; therefore, every person of every race possesses full dignity and is worthy of respect and Christian love. Genesis 1:26–30; 2:5,7,18–22; 3; 9:6; Psalms 1; 8:3–6; 32:1–5; 51:5; Isaiah 6:5; Jeremiah 17:5; Matthew 16:26; Acts 17:26–31; Romans 1:19–32; 3:10–18,23; 5:6,12,19; 6:6; 7:14–25; 8:14–18,29; 1 Corinthians 1:21–31; 15:19,21–22; Ephesians 2:1–22; Colossians 1:21–22; 3:9–11.

**IV. Salvation** Salvation involves the redemption of the whole man, and is offered freely to all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, who by His own blood obtained eternal redemption for the believer. In its broadest sense salvation includes regeneration, justification, sanctification, and glorification. There is no salvation apart from personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord. A. Regeneration, or the new birth, is a work of God's grace whereby believers become new creatures in Christ Jesus. It is a change of heart wrought by the Holy Spirit through conviction of sin, to which the sinner responds in repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Repentance and faith are inseparable experiences of grace. Repentance is a genuine turning from sin toward God. Faith is the acceptance of Jesus Christ and commitment of the entire personality to Him as Lord and Saviour. B. Justification is God's gracious and full acquittal upon principles of His righteousness of all sinners who repent and believe in Christ. Justification brings the believer unto a relationship of peace and favor with God. C. Sanctification is the experience, beginning in regeneration, by which the believer is set apart to God's purposes, and is enabled to progress toward moral and spiritual maturity through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in him. Growth in grace should continue throughout the regenerate person's life. D. Glorification is the culmination of salvation and is the final blessed and abiding state of the redeemed. Genesis 3:15; Exodus 3:14–17; 6:2–8; Matthew 1:21; 4:17; 16:21–26; 27:22–28:6; Luke 1:68–69; 2:28–32; John 1:11–14,29; 3:3–21,36; 5:24; 10:9,28–29; 15:1–16; 17:17; Acts 2:21; 4:12; 15:11; 16:30–31; 17:30–31; 20:32; Romans 1:16–18; 2:4; 3:23–25; 4:3ff.; 5:8–10; 6:1–23; 8:1–18,29–39; 10:9–10,13; 13:11–14; 1 Corinthians 1:18,30; 6:19–20; 15:10; 2 Corinthians 5:17–20; Galatians 2:20; 3:13; 5:22–25; 6:15; Ephesians 1:7; 2:8–22; 4:11–16; Philippians 2:12–13; Colossians 1:9–22; 3:1ff.; 1 Thessalonians 5:23–24; 2 Timothy 1:12; Titus 2:11–14; Hebrews 2:1–3; 5:8–9; 9:24–28; 11:1–12:8,14; James 2:14–26; 1 Peter 1:2–23; 1 John 1:6–2:11; Revelation 3:20; 21:1–22:5.

c. Return to Survey [*Selecting this option returns respondents to question five.*]

[*Display following section... If all five proceeding questions = A*]

According to the responses provided, you qualify to serve as an expert panelist for this research. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to complete three surveys over the next two months. Each survey will allow you to start, pause, and return to complete it at a later time, but each survey will only be open for a total of 10 days. Each survey will ask 15 to 40 questions and may take 10–45 minutes to complete.

Again, any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses.

Are you willing to participate in the three rounds of surveys required for this research?

a. Yes

b. No

*[Display Thank You for your willingness... If Are you willing to participate in the three rounds of surveys... = A]*

**Thank you for your willingness to participate!**

Please provide your email address below. This will be the email address to which each survey will be sent. Your email address will not be sold, shared, or used by the researcher for purposes other than the distribution of surveys and information related to their completion.

**Recommendations**

Do you know of any other potentially qualified church elders/pastors/overseers who may be willing to help with this important research? If so, please consider sharing the link to this survey with them before Sunday, June 26, 2022.

## APPENDIX 4

### CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AMONG CHURCH ELDERS SURVEY: ROUND 1 OF 3

Thank you in advance for your willingness to participate in this research project. In pilot testing this survey required an average of 17 minutes. This is the first and longest of three surveys required for this research project. Each subsequent survey will be shorter and require less time. Please note that completion of all three rounds will be needed for your answers to be used in this research study.

This research is being conducted by John Lookabaugh in an effort to enable church leaders to better manage conflict in ways that honor God and benefit the church. This research is being conducted as a part of the capstone thesis requirement in the Doctor of Education program at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY.

Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. By your completion of these surveys, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

Email Please type in the same email used in the qualifying survey in order to verify your ability to participate in this research.

#### **Instructions:**

In this survey, you will be presented with concepts and practices from secular models of conflict management. Each concept or practice will be briefly described followed by two questions.

The first question will ask, "Do you believe this concept/practice is congruent with biblical principles of conflict management in so far as it does not conflict with known biblical principles or prescribed practices of conflict management?" Please note clarification: This question is *not* asking if the *source* of conflict is biblical or not, rather it is asking about the *concept itself*. For example, if you were presented with the idea that *all have sinned*, and you were asked if this concept is congruent with biblical principles, you would respond "Yes." While *sinning* is not congruent with known biblical principles, the *concept of sin* is congruent with biblical truth.

The second question will ask, "Do you believe church elders would be better prepared to manage conflict in God-honoring ways if they knew about this concept/practice."

This group of questions will present a potential source of conflict. Not all conflict is the same, some sources of conflict have been shown to be generally helpful while

others are nearly always detrimental. In an effort to enable productive conflict and diminish harmful conflict, researchers separate conflict into twelve categories differentiated by the respective sources of the conflict.

The ability to recognize and categorize conflict according to its source may benefit church elders by enabling them to distinguish potentially beneficial conflict from generally detrimental conflict. Each source of conflict will be briefly described followed by two questions related to each.

### **Sources of Conflict:**

**Relational 1** Relational Conflict involves hurt feelings which may stem from real or perceived personal attacks, criticism, distrust, or cynicism. Relational conflict occurs when group members have interpersonal clashes characterized by anger, frustration, and other negative feelings and is almost always detrimental to group unity and team performance. Relational conflict also increases the likelihood of job burnout.

Relational 2 Do you believe the concept of Relational Conflict is congruent with biblical principles of conflict management in so far as it does not conflict with known biblical principles or prescribed practices of conflict management?

*Please note clarification:* This question (and those similar to follow) is *not* asking if the *source* of conflict is biblical or not, rather it is asking about the *concept* itself. For example, if you were presented with the concept that all have sinned, and you were asked if this concept is congruent with biblical principles, you would respond "Yes." While sinning is not congruent with known biblical principles, the *concept* of sin is congruent with biblical truth.

No

Yes

Relational 3 Do you believe church elders would be better prepared to manage conflict in God-honoring ways if they knew about the concept of Relational Conflict?

No

Yes

[*Display Question 4... If Do you believe the concept of Relational Conflict is congruent with biblical principles of... = No And Do you believe church elders would be better prepared to manage conflict in God-honoring ways if... = No*]

Relational 4 You have indicated that the concept of Relational Conflict is not congruent with biblical principles and is not beneficial to elders. If you would like to, please provide a brief rationale explaining your responses. If you prefer not to, please skip to the next question.

**Substantive 1** Substantive Conflict results from a difference in opinions on the best path forward stemming from dissimilar ideas, logic, critical thinking, data, or evidence. Substantive conflict among leadership teams has been shown to produce enhanced outcomes as team members debate, discuss, collaborate, and push one

another forward. Leadership teams that embrace substantive conflict while avoiding relationship conflict perform better, share a higher level of consensus, and produce outcomes with greater quality.

Substantive 2 Do you believe the concept of Substantive Conflict is congruent with biblical principles of conflict management in so far as it does not conflict with known biblical principles or prescribed practices of conflict management?

No

Yes

Substantive 3 Do you believe church elders would be better prepared to manage conflict in God-honoring ways if they knew about the concept of Substantive Conflict?

No

Yes

*[Display Question 4... If Do you believe the concept of Substantive Conflict is congruent with biblical principles of ... = No And Do you believe church elders would be better prepared to manage conflict in God-honoring ways if... = No]*

Substantive 4 You have indicated that the concept of Substantive Conflict is not congruent with biblical principles and is not beneficial to elders. If you would like to, please provide a brief rationale explaining your responses. If you prefer not to, please skip to the next question.

**Transforming 1** Transforming Conflict occurs when substantive conflict shifts, or transforms into relational conflict, as when a meeting starts with a seemingly objective discussion but becomes emotional and personal. In leadership teams, when substantive conflict is perceived as personal criticism, intended or not, the benefits of substantive conflict transition to the detriments of relational conflict.

Transforming 2 Do you believe the concept of Transforming Conflict is congruent with biblical principles of conflict management in so far as it does not conflict with known biblical principles or prescribed practices of conflict management?

No

Yes

Transforming 3 Do you believe church elders would be better prepared to manage conflict in God-honoring ways if they knew about the concept of Transforming Conflict?

No

Yes

*[Display Question 4...If Do you believe the concept of Transforming Conflict is congruent with biblical principles of conf... = No And Do you believe church elders would be better prepared to manage conflict in God-honoring ways if... = No]*

Transforming 4 You have indicated that the concept of Transforming Conflict is not congruent with biblical principles and is not beneficial to elders. If you would like to, please provide a brief rationale explaining your responses. If you prefer not to, please skip to the next question.

**Process 1** Process Conflict is related to substantive conflict but focuses on the *process* of accomplishing a previously agreed upon goal. Instead of the conflict centering on the overall task or objective, process conflict stems from disagreements about logistical and delegation issues such as what should be done first and who is responsible for what.

Process 2 Do you believe the concept of Process Conflict is congruent with biblical principles of conflict management in so far as it does not conflict with known biblical principles or prescribed practices of conflict management?

No

Yes

Process 3 Do you believe church elders would be better prepared to manage conflict in God-honoring ways if they knew about the concept of Process Conflict?

No

Yes

*[Display Question 4... If Do you believe the concept of Process Conflict is congruent with biblical principles of ... = No And Do you believe church elders would be better prepared to manage conflict in God-honoring ways if... = No]*

Process 4 You have indicated that the concept of Process Conflict is not congruent with biblical principles and is not beneficial to elders. If you would like to, please provide a brief rationale explaining your responses. If you prefer not to, please skip to the next question.

**Goal 1** Goal Conflict involves incompatible preferred outcomes. By comparison, those involved in *process* conflict agree on the desired outcome but team members fail to agree on how best to attain the stated outcome, while those involved in *goal* conflict cannot agree on what the desired outcome should be.

Goal 2 Do you believe the concept of Goal Conflict is congruent with biblical principles of conflict management in so far as it does not conflict with known biblical principles or prescribed practices of conflict management?

No

Yes

Goal 3 Do you believe church elders would be better prepared to manage conflict in God-honoring ways if they knew about the concept of Goal Conflict?

No

Yes

*[Display Question 4...If Do you believe the concept of Goal Conflict is congruent with biblical principles of conflict man... = No And Do you believe church elders would be better prepared to manage conflict in God-honoring ways if... = No]*

Goal 4 You have indicated that the concept of Goal Conflict is not congruent with biblical principles and is not beneficial to elders. If you would like to, please provide a brief rationale explaining your responses. If you prefer not to, please skip to the next question.

**Interests 1** Conflict of Interests is similar to goal conflict but involves the groups or individuals involved directly competing for limited resources, as when a local chief of police and fire captain disagree over which department should receive limited grant money for the purchase of new equipment.

Interests 2 Do you believe the concept of Conflicts of Interest is congruent with biblical principles of conflict management in so far as it does not conflict with known biblical principles or prescribed practices of conflict management?

No

Yes

Interests 3 Do you believe church elders would be better prepared to manage conflict in God-honoring ways if they knew about the concept of Conflicts of Interest?

No

Yes

*[Display Question 4...If Do you believe the concept of Conflicts of Interest is congruent with biblical principles of conf... = No And Do you believe church elders would be better prepared to manage conflict in God-honoring ways if... = No]*

Interests 4 You have indicated that the concept of Conflict of Interests is not congruent with biblical principles and is not beneficial to elders. If you would like to, please provide a brief rationale explaining your responses. If you prefer not to, please skip to the next question.

**Values 1** Conflict of Values stems from incompatible moral, ethical, or ideological positions held by individuals or groups. Conflict of Values can occur when both groups claim the moral high ground due to differing values, perspectives, and underlying beliefs, such as in conflicts between pro-life and pro-choice advocates.

Values 2 Do you believe the concept of Conflicts of Values is congruent with biblical principles of conflict management in so far as it does not conflict with known biblical principles or prescribed practices of conflict management?

No

Yes

Values 3 Do you believe church elders would be better prepared to manage conflict in God-honoring ways if they knew about the concept of Conflicts of Values?

No

Yes

*[Display Question 4... If Do you believe the concept of Conflicts of Values is congruent with biblical principles of ... = No And Do you believe church elders would be better prepared to manage conflict in God-honoring ways if... = No]*

Values 4 You have indicated that the concept of Conflict of Values is not congruent with biblical principles and is not beneficial to elders. If you would like to, please provide a brief rationale explaining your responses. If you prefer not to, please skip to the next question.

**Structural 1** Structural Conflict occurs between different groups within the same organization. Structural conflict can occur between groups on the same authoritative level, or groups on different authoritative levels within the same organization.

Structural 2 Do you believe the concept of Structural Conflict is congruent with biblical principles of conflict management in so far as it does not conflict with known biblical principles or prescribed practices of conflict management?

No

Yes

Structural 3 Do you believe church elders would be better prepared to manage conflict in God-honoring ways if they knew about the concept of Structural Conflict?

No

Yes

*[Display Question 4... If Do you believe the concept of Structural Conflict is congruent with biblical principles of ... = No And Do you believe church elders would be better prepared to manage conflict in God-honoring ways if... = No]*

Structural 4 You have indicated that the concept of Structural Conflict is not congruent with biblical principles and is not beneficial to elders. If you would like to, please provide a brief rationale explaining your responses. If you prefer not to, please skip to the next question.

**Real 1** In Realistic verses Nonrealistic Conflict, *realistic conflicts* stem from disagreements about goals, processes, or values related to relevant content. *Nonrealistic conflict* is manufactured and unrelated to the context of the true conflict. For example, a political candidate for mayor of a small town in South Dakota might continually decry his opponent's lack of focus on boarder security

with Mexico in order to strengthen his position in the polls even though the issue is wholly unrelated to the office for which they are running.

Real 2 Do you believe the concept of Realistic versus Nonrealistic Conflict is congruent with biblical principles of conflict management in so far as it does not conflict with known biblical principles or prescribed practices of conflict management?

No

Yes

Real 3 Do you believe church elders would be better prepared to manage conflict in God-honoring ways if they knew about the concept of Realistic versus Nonrealistic Conflict?

No

Yes

*[Display Question 4 If Do you believe the concept of Realistic versus Nonrealistic Conflict is congruent with biblical p... = No And Do you believe church elders would be better prepared to manage conflict in God-honoring ways if... = No]*

Real 4 You have indicated that the concept of Realistic versus Nonrealistic Conflict is not congruent with biblical principles and is not beneficial to elders. If you would like to, please provide a brief rationale explaining your responses. If you prefer not to, please skip to the next question.

**Retributive 1** Retributive Conflict is an especially strong form of relational conflict where an individual or group possesses such deeply-held animosity toward another individual or group that each party determines its gains, in part, by the harm done to the other party.

Retributive 2 Do you believe the concept of Retributive Conflict is congruent with biblical principles of conflict management in so far as it does not conflict with known biblical principles or prescribed practices of conflict management?

No

Yes

Retributive 3 Do you believe church elders would be better prepared to manage conflict in God-honoring ways if they knew about the concept of Retributive Conflict?

No

Yes

*[Display Question 4...If Do you believe the concept of Retributive Conflict is congruent with biblical principles of ... = No And Do you believe church elders would be better prepared to manage conflict in God-honoring ways if... = No]*

Retributive 4 You have indicated that the concept of Retributive Conflict is not congruent with biblical principles and is not beneficial to elders. If you would like

to, please provide a brief rationale explaining your responses. If you prefer not to, please skip to the next question.]

**Misattributed 1** Misattributed Conflict stems from incorrectly assigning the source of conflict to individuals or groups not responsible for the situation which led to the conflict, as when employees experience relational conflict against management for removing their privileged parking spots only to later learn that the city required the action as a part of a project to widen the sidewalks.

Misattributed 2 Do you believe the concept of Misattributed Conflict is congruent with biblical principles of conflict management in so far as it does not conflict with known biblical principles or prescribed practices of conflict management?

No

Yes

Misattributed 3 Do you believe church elders would be better prepared to manage conflict in God-honoring ways if they knew about the concept of Misattributed Conflict?

No

Yes

*[Display Question 4... If Do you believe the concept of Misattributed Conflict is congruent with biblical principles of ... = No And Do you believe church elders would be better prepared to manage conflict in God-honoring ways if... = No]*

Misattributed 4 You have indicated that the concept of Misattributed Conflict is not congruent with biblical principles and is not beneficial to elders. If you would like to, please provide a brief rationale explaining your responses. If you prefer not to, please skip to the next question.

**Displaced 1** Displaced Conflict occurs when involved parties focus on secondary or tertiary issues instead of addressing the primary sources of the conflict.

Displaced 2 Do you believe the concept of Displaced Conflict is congruent with biblical principles of conflict management in so far as it does not conflict with known biblical principles or prescribed practices of conflict management?

No

Yes

Displaced 3 Do you believe church elders would be better prepared to manage conflict in God-honoring ways if they knew about the concept of Displaced Conflict?

No

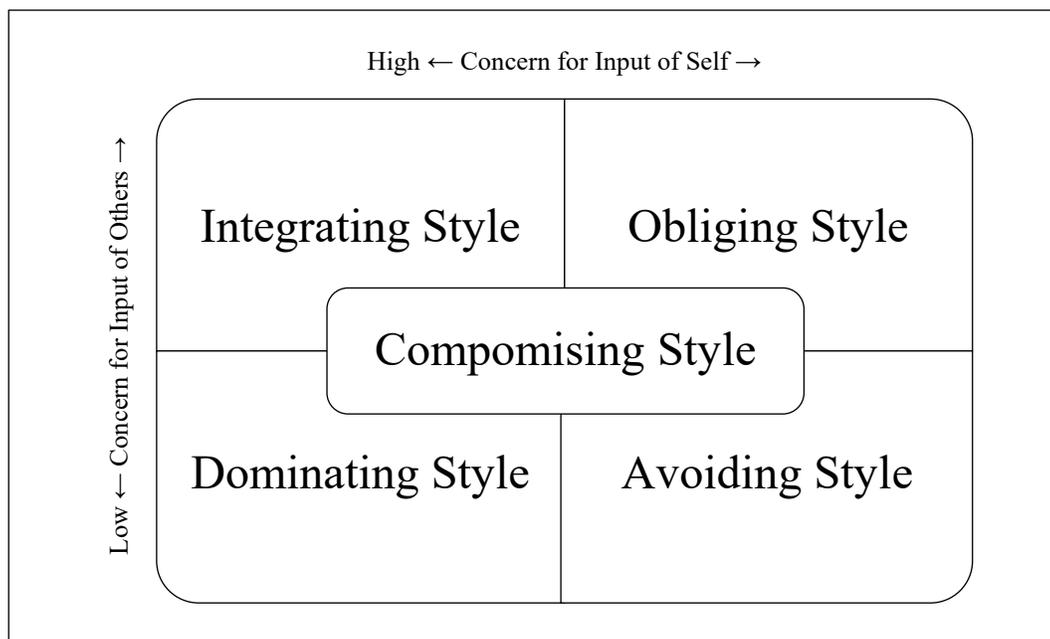
Yes

*[Display Question 4... If Do you believe the concept of Displaced Conflict is congruent with biblical principles of... = No And Do you believe church elders would be better prepared to manage conflict in God-honoring ways if... = No]*

Displaced 4 You have indicated that the concept of Displaced Conflict is not congruent with biblical principles and is not beneficial to elders. If you would like to, please provide a brief rationale explaining your responses. If you prefer not to, please skip to the next question.

Styles Introduction: Almost finished! Just a few more questions.

**Five Styles of Conflict Management:**



**Introduction** A knowledge of the five styles of conflict management, (1) integrating, (2) obliging, (3) compromising, (4) dominating, and (5) avoiding, may be helpful considering no single style will best suit every situation. Properly understanding each style is important considering the connotations associated with terms like dominating, compromising, and avoiding. For example, a dominating style of conflict management is often associated with aggression or abuse of power, but sometimes its use may stem from benevolent good-will or kindness. The mother who requires her child to eat nutritious meals as opposed to candy alone may have employed the dominating style at meal time, but few would assume she has abused her power for self-serving purposes.

The final questions will focus on five distinct styles of conflict management including (1) integrating, (2) obliging, (3) compromising, (4) dominating, and (5) avoiding. Please look over the dual-concern conflict management style selection chart below before proceeding to the final questions.

**Integrating 1** The Integrating Style is characterized by high concern for self-input and high concern for the input of others. It involves the exchange of information, examination of differences, and collaboration to solve the conflict in a way agreed upon by both parties. Integrating style is a process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible. One of the keys to the integrating style is open and clear communication.

**Integrating 2** Do you believe the practice of the Integrating Style of conflict management in certain situations is congruent with biblical principles of conflict management in so far as it does not conflict with known biblical principles or prescribed practices of conflict management?

No

Yes

**Integrating 3** Do you believe church elders would be better prepared to manage conflict in God-honoring ways if they practiced the Integrating Style of conflict management in certain situations?

No

Yes

*[Display Question 4... If Do you believe the practice of the Integrating Style of conflict management in certain situations... = No And Do you believe church elders would be better prepared to manage conflict in God-honoring ways if... = No]*

**Integrating 4** You have indicated that the practice of the Integrating Style of conflict management is not congruent with biblical principles and is not beneficial to elders. If you would like to, please provide a brief rationale explaining your responses. If you prefer not to, please skip to the next question.

**Obliging 1** The Obliging Style involves a low concern for self-input and a high concern for the input of others. The obliging style may be best suited for those lacking expertise or familiarity with topics pertinent to choices around which the conflict is centered. This style is also appropriate for those involved in conflict who lack the authority or standing to participate in a conflict.

**Obliging 2** Do you believe the practice of the Obliging Style of conflict management in certain situations is congruent with biblical principles of conflict management in so far as it does not conflict with known biblical principles or prescribed practices of conflict management?

No

Yes

**Obliging 3** Do you believe church elders would be better prepared to manage conflict in God-honoring ways if they practiced the Obliging Style of conflict management in certain situations?

No

Yes

*[Display Question 4... If Do you believe the practice of the Obliging Style of conflict management in certain situations is... = No And Do you believe church elders would be better prepared to manage conflict in God-honoring ways if... = No]*

Obliging 4 You have indicated that the practice of the Obliging Style of conflict management is not congruent with biblical principles and is not beneficial to elders. If you would like to, please provide a brief rationale explaining your responses. If you prefer not to, please skip to the next question.

**Dominating 1** The Dominating Style has a high concern for self-input and a low concern for the input of others. The dominating style of conflict management ignores the desires of the other party. The dominating style may be most beneficial for use in situations where expertise and authority are involved and when there is a potential for negative or harmful consequences resulting from the input of unqualified people.

Dominating 2 Do you believe the practice of the Dominating Style of conflict management in certain situations is congruent with biblical principles of conflict management in so far as it does not conflict with known biblical principles or prescribed practices of conflict management?

No

Yes

Dominating 3 Do you believe church elders would be better prepared to manage conflict in God-honoring ways if they practiced the Dominating Style of conflict management in certain situations?

No

Yes

*[Display Question 4... If Do you believe the practice of the Dominating Style of conflict management in certain situations... = No And Do you believe church elders would be better prepared to manage conflict in God-honoring ways if... = No]*

Dominating 4 You have indicated that the practice of the Dominating Style of conflict management is not congruent with biblical principles and is not beneficial to elders. If you would like to, please provide a brief rationale explaining your responses. If you prefer not to, please skip to the next question.

**Avoiding 1** The Avoiding Style has a low concern for self-input and a low concern for the input of others. Often the one practicing the avoiding style of conflict management will refuse to even acknowledge the conflict openly. This style may be best when the potential negative effect of confronting the other party outweighs the benefits of the resolution of conflict. This is often recommended to deal with trivial or minor issues or when a cooling-off period is needed before a complex problem can be effectively dealt with.

Avoiding 2 Do you believe the practice of the Avoiding Style of conflict management in certain situations is congruent with biblical principles of conflict

management in so far as it does not conflict with known biblical principles or prescribed practices of conflict management?

No

Yes

Avoiding 3 Do you believe church elders would be better prepared to manage conflict in God-honoring ways if they practiced the Avoiding Style of conflict management in certain situations?

No

Yes

*[Display Question 4... If Do you believe the practice of the Avoiding Style of conflict management in certain situations is... = No And Do you believe church elders would be better prepared to manage conflict in God-honoring ways if... = No]*

Avoiding 4 You have indicated that the practice of the Avoiding Style of conflict management is not congruent with biblical principles and is not beneficial to elders. If you would like to, please provide a brief rationale explaining your responses. If you prefer not to, please skip to the next question.

**Compromising 1** The Compromising Style involves a moderate concern for self-input and a moderate concern for the input of others and involves seeking a middle ground through a give-and-take approach. The compromising style provides a middle-way by which each party involved in the conflict moves toward the position of the other without obliging or dominating. Compromising style is best suited for situations when neither party alone possesses the authority or expertise to compel those with whom they have conflict to submit, and the goal of each party is mutually exclusive. When such an impasse is reached the compromising style of conflict management may avoid lengthy delays and may provide mutually acceptable outcomes to complex situations.

Compromising 2 Do you believe the practice of the Compromising Style of conflict management in certain situations is congruent with biblical principles of conflict management in so far as it does not conflict with known biblical principles or prescribed practices of conflict management?

No

Yes

Compromising 3 Do you believe church elders would be better prepared to manage conflict in God-honoring ways if they practiced the Compromising Style of conflict management in certain situations?

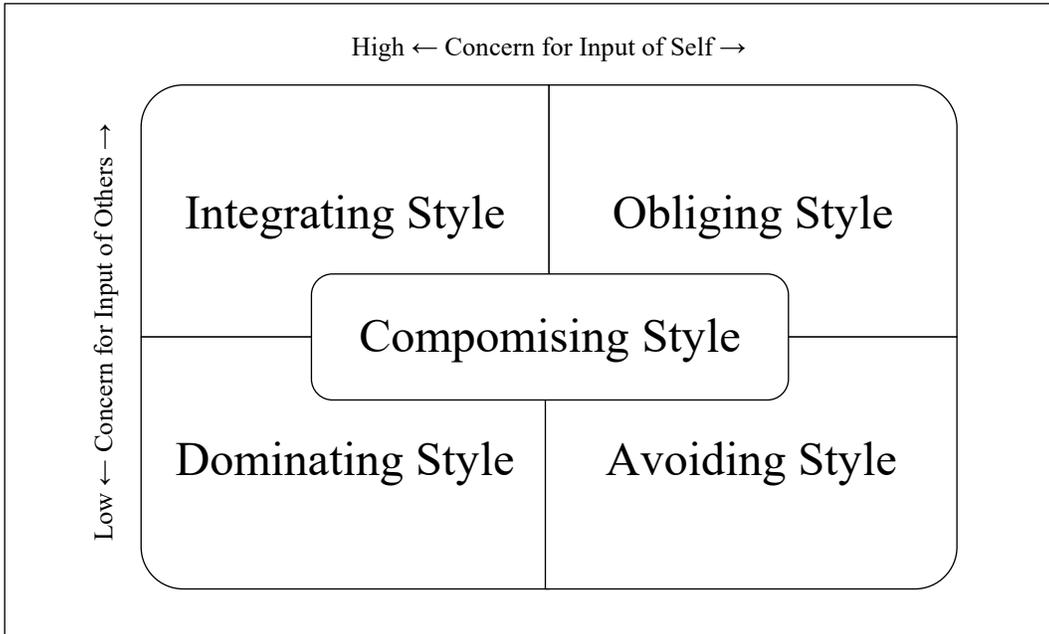
No

Yes

*[Display Question 4... If Do you believe the practice of the Compromising Style of conflict management in certain situation... = No And Do you believe church elders would be better prepared to manage conflict in God-honoring ways if... = No]*

Compromising 4 You have indicated that the practice of the Compromising Style of conflict management is not congruent with biblical principles and is not beneficial to elders. If you would like to, please provide a brief rationale explaining your responses. If you prefer not to, please skip to the next question.

**Dual-Concern 1 Dual-Concern Conflict Management Style Selection Chart**



Dual-Concern 2 Do you believe use of the Dual-Concern Conflict Management Style Selection Chart is congruent with biblical principles of conflict management in so far as it does not conflict with known biblical principles or prescribed practices of conflict management?

- No
- Yes

Dual-Concern 3 Do you believe church elders would be better prepared to manage conflict in God-honoring ways if they made use of the Dual-Concern Conflict Management Style Selection Chart in certain situations?

- No
- Yes

*[Display Question 4... If Do you believe use of the Dual-Concern Conflict Management Style Selection Chart is congruent... = No And Do you believe church elders would be better prepared to manage conflict in God-honoring ways if... = No]*

Dual-Concern 4 You have indicated that use of the Dual-Concern Conflict Management Style Selection Chart is not congruent with biblical principles and is not beneficial to elders. If you would like to, please provide a brief rationale explaining your responses. If you prefer not to, please skip to the end of the survey.

## APPENDIX 5

### CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AMONG CHURCH ELDERS SURVEY: ROUND 2 OF 3

#### **Introduction:**

Thank you in advance for your willingness to participate in this research project.

This is the second of three surveys required for this research project. Please note that completion of all three rounds will be needed for your answers to be used in this research study.

This research is being conducted by John Lookabaugh in an effort to enable church leaders to better manage conflict in ways that honor God and benefit the church. This research is being conducted as a part of the capstone thesis requirement in the Doctor of Education program at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY.

Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. By your completion of these surveys, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

Please type in the same email used in the qualifying survey in order to verify your ability to participate in this research.

#### **Instructions:**

In this survey, you will be presented with only those concepts and practices from secular models of conflict management which 60 percent of respondents rated as being both congruent and beneficial in round one.

Please note clarification on questions of Congruence:

Some concepts or practices may not be mentioned in Scripture at all and therefore may be discerned only through related biblical principles. For example, imagine you were asked, "Do you think the concept of Darwinian evolution is congruent with biblical truth in so far as it does not conflict with known biblical principles?" Though Darwinian evolution is not mentioned in the Bible, other related passages may inform your answer.

Similarly, imagine you were asked, "Do you think the practice of attending a Keith and

Kristen Getty Christmas Concert is congruent with biblical truth in so far as it does not conflict with known prescribed practices from the Bible?" Again, attending a concert may not be directly mentioned in the Bible, but other biblical principles may inform your answer.

**Sample Question 1:**

Daylight Saving Time involves adjusting clocks forward one hour from the standard time in the summer months and adjusting them back one hour in the winter months. The goal is to maintain a more consistent time at which the sun rises by delaying the time at which the sun rises in the summer months, then advancing the time at which the sun rises in the winter months. This allows people to make better use of natural daylight by gaining an extra hour of daylight in the evening of summer months, and an extra hour of daylight in the morning in the winter months.

Please rate the concept of Daylight Savings Time according to the choices below. Clarification: The question of congruence throughout this survey is not a question of whether or not the concept is mentioned in Scripture. Daylight Savings Time may or may not be mentioned in Scripture, but other principles or passages from Scripture may lead one to conclude that the concept itself conflicts with biblical truth or is congruent with biblical truth.

Fully Congruent – This concept, as described, does not conflict with biblical principles.

Not Fully Congruent – This concept, as described, conflicts with biblical principles.

Please rate the concept of Daylight Savings Time according to the choices below.

Highly Beneficial – A knowledge of this concept would be highly beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

Beneficial – A knowledge of this concept would be beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

Slightly Beneficial – A knowledge of this concept would be slightly beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

Not Beneficial – A knowledge of this concept would provide no benefit to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

**Sample Question 2:**

Innate Human Goodness is the concept that all humans are born naturally pre-disposed toward goodness, cooperation, and sharing resources. The concept of innate human goodness teaches that humans must be taught how to be bad, self-focused, and selfish.

Please rate the concept of Innate Human Goodness according to the choices below. Clarification: The question of congruence throughout this survey is not a question of whether or not the concept is mentioned in Scripture. Innate Human Goodness may or may not be mentioned in Scripture, but other principles or passages from Scripture may

lead one to conclude that the concept itself conflicts with biblical truth or is congruent with biblical truth.

Fully Congruent – This concept, as described, does not conflict with biblical principles.

Not Fully Congruent – This concept, as described, conflicts with biblical principles.

Please rate the concept of Innate Human Goodness according to the choices below.

Highly Beneficial – A knowledge of this concept would be highly beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

Beneficial – A knowledge of this concept would be beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

Slightly Beneficial – A knowledge of this concept would be slightly beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

Not Beneficial – A knowledge of this concept would provide no benefit to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

### **Introduction to Concepts:**

This group of questions will present a potential source of conflict. Not all conflict is the same, some sources of conflict have been shown to be generally helpful while others are nearly always detrimental. In an effort to enable productive conflict and diminish harmful conflict, researchers separate conflict into twelve categories differentiated by the respective sources of the conflict.

The ability to recognize and categorize conflict according to its source may benefit church elders by enabling them to distinguish potentially beneficial conflict from generally detrimental conflict. Each source of conflict will be briefly described followed by two questions related to each.

**Relational 1** Relational Conflict involves hurt feelings which may stem from real or perceived personal attacks, criticism, distrust, or cynicism. Relational conflict occurs when group members have interpersonal clashes characterized by anger, frustration, and other negative feelings and is almost always detrimental to group unity and team performance. Relational conflict also increases the likelihood of job burnout.

Relational 2 Please rate this concept according to the choices below.

Fully Congruent – This concept, as described, does not conflict with biblical principles.

Not Fully Congruent – This item, as described, conflicts with biblical principles and practices of conflict management.

Relational 3 Please rate this concept according to the choices below.

Highly Beneficial – A knowledge of this concept would be highly beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

Beneficial – A knowledge of this concept would be beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

Slightly Beneficial – A knowledge of this concept would be slightly beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

Not Beneficial – A knowledge of this concept would provide no benefit to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

*[Display This Question: If Please rate this concept according to the choices below. = Not Fully Congruent – This item, as described, conflicts with biblical principles and practices of conflict management.]*

Relational 4 Briefly explain the reason you rated this concept as incongruent with biblical principles and practices of conflict management or skip to the next question.

**Substantive 1** Substantive Conflict results from a difference in opinions on the best path forward stemming from dissimilar ideas, logic, critical thinking, data, or evidence. Substantive conflict among leadership teams has been shown to produce enhanced outcomes as team members debate, discuss, collaborate, and push one another forward. Leadership teams that embrace substantive conflict while avoiding relationship conflict perform better, share a higher level of consensus, and produce outcomes with greater quality.

Substantive 2 Please rate this concept according to the choices below.

Fully Congruent – This concept, as described, does not conflict with biblical principles.

Not Fully Congruent – This item, as described, conflicts with biblical principles and practices of conflict management.

Substantive 3 Please rate this concept according to the choices below.

Highly Beneficial – A knowledge of this concept would be highly beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

Beneficial – A knowledge of this concept would be beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

Slightly Beneficial – A knowledge of this concept would be slightly beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

Not Beneficial – A knowledge of this concept would provide no benefit to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

*[Display This Question: If Please rate this concept according to the choices below. = Not Fully Congruent – This item, as described, conflicts with biblical principles and practices of conflict management.]*

Substantive 4 Briefly explain the reason you rated this concept as incongruent with biblical principles and practices of conflict management or skip to the next question.

**Process 1** Process Conflict is related to substantive conflict but focuses on the *process* of accomplishing a previously agreed upon goal. Instead of the conflict centering on the overall task or objective, process conflict stems from disagreements about logistical and delegation issues such as what should be done first and who is responsible for what.

Process 2 Please rate this concept according to the choices below.

Fully Congruent – This concept, as described, does not conflict with biblical principles.

Not Fully Congruent – This concept, as described, conflicts with biblical principles.

Process 3 Please rate this concept according to the choices below.

Highly Beneficial – A knowledge of this concept would be highly beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

Beneficial – A knowledge of this concept would be beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

Slightly Beneficial – A knowledge of this concept would be slightly beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

Not Beneficial – A knowledge of this concept would provide no benefit to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

*[Display This Question: If Please rate this concept according to the choices below. = Not Fully Congruent – This item, as described, conflicts with biblical principles and practices of conflict management.]*

Process 4 Briefly explain the reason you rated this concept as incongruent with biblical principles and practices of conflict management or skip to the next question.

**Goal 1** Goal Conflict involves incompatible preferred outcomes. By comparison, those involved in *process* conflict agree on the desired outcome, but team members fail to agree on how best to attain the stated outcome, while those involved in *goal* conflict cannot agree on what the desired outcome should be.

Goal 2 Please rate this concept according to the choices below.

Fully Congruent – This concept, as described, does not conflict with biblical principles.

Not Fully Congruent – This concept, as described, conflicts with biblical principles.

Goal 3 Please rate this concept according to the choices below.

Highly Beneficial – A knowledge of this concept would be highly beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

Beneficial – A knowledge of this concept would be beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

Slightly Beneficial – A knowledge of this concept would be slightly beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

Not Beneficial – A knowledge of this concept would provide no benefit to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

*[Display This Question: If Please rate this concept according to the choices below. = Not Fully Congruent – This item, as described, conflicts with biblical principles and practices of conflict management.]*

Goal 4 Briefly explain the reason you rated this concept as incongruent with biblical principles and practices of conflict management or skip to the next question.

**Interests 1** Conflict of Interests is similar to goal conflict but involves the groups or individuals involved directly competing for limited resources, as when a local chief of police and fire captain disagree over which department should receive limited grant money for the purchase of new equipment.

Interests 2 Please rate this concept according to the choices below.

Fully Congruent – This concept, as described, does not conflict with biblical principles.

Not Fully Congruent – This concept, as described, conflicts with biblical principles.

Interests 3 Please rate this concept according to the choices below.

Highly Beneficial – A knowledge of this concept would be highly beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

Beneficial – A knowledge of this concept would be beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

Slightly Beneficial – A knowledge of this concept would be slightly beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

Not Beneficial – A knowledge of this concept would provide no benefit to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

*[Display This Question: If Please rate this concept according to the choices below. = Not Fully Congruent – This item, as described, conflicts with biblical principles and practices of conflict management.]*

Interests 4 Briefly explain the reason you rated this concept as incongruent with biblical principles and practices of conflict management or skip to the next question.

**Structural 1** Structural Conflict occurs between different groups within the same organization. Structural conflict can occur between groups on the same authoritative level, or groups on different authoritative levels within the same organization.

Structural 2 Please rate this concept according to the choices below.

Fully Congruent – This concept, as described, does not conflict with biblical principles.

Not Fully Congruent – This concept, as described, conflicts with biblical principles.

Structural 3 Please rate this concept according to the choices below.

Highly Beneficial – A knowledge of this concept would be highly beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

Beneficial – A knowledge of this concept would be beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

Slightly Beneficial – A knowledge of this concept would be slightly beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

Not Beneficial – A knowledge of this concept would provide no benefit to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

*[Display This Question: If Please rate this concept according to the choices below. = Not Fully Congruent – This item, as described, conflicts with biblical principles and practices of conflict management.]*

Structural 4 Briefly explain the reason you rated this concept as incongruent with biblical principles and practices of conflict management or skip to the next question.

**Real 1** In Realistic verses Nonrealistic Conflict, *realistic conflicts* stem from disagreements about goals, processes, or values related to relevant content. *Nonrealistic conflict* is manufactured and unrelated to the context of the true conflict. For example, a political candidate for mayor of a small town in South Dakota might continually decry his opponent's lack of focus on boarder security with Mexico in order to strengthen his position in the polls even though the issue is wholly unrelated to the office for which they are running.

Real 2 Please rate this concept according to the choices below.

Fully Congruent – This concept, as described, does not conflict with biblical principles.

Not Fully Congruent – This concept, as described, conflicts with biblical principles.

Real 3 Please rate this concept according to the choices below.

Highly Beneficial – A knowledge of this concept would be highly beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

Beneficial – A knowledge of this concept would be beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

Slightly Beneficial – A knowledge of this concept would be slightly beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

Not Beneficial – A knowledge of this concept would provide no benefit to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

*[Display This Question: If Please rate this concept according to the choices below. = Not Fully Congruent – This item, as described, conflicts with biblical principles and practices of conflict management.]*

Real 4 Briefly explain the reason you rated this concept as incongruent with biblical principles and practices of conflict management or skip to the next question.

**Misattributed 1** Misattributed Conflict stems from incorrectly assigning the source of conflict to individuals or groups not responsible for the situation which led to the conflict, as when employees experience relational conflict against management for removing their privileged parking spots only to later learn that the city required the action as a part of a project to widen the sidewalks.

Misattributed 2 Please rate this concept according to the choices below.

Fully Congruent – This concept, as described, does not conflict with biblical principles.

Not Fully Congruent – This concept, as described, conflicts with biblical principles.

Highly Beneficial – A knowledge of this concept would be highly beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

Beneficial – A knowledge of this concept would be beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

Misattributed 3 Please rate this concept according to the choices below.

Slightly Beneficial – A knowledge of this concept would be slightly beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

Not Beneficial – A knowledge of this concept would provide no benefit to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

*[Display This Question: If Please rate this concept according to the choices below. = Not Fully Congruent – This item, as described, conflicts with biblical principles and practices of conflict management.]*

Misattributed 4 Briefly explain the reason you rated this concept as incongruent with biblical principles and practices of conflict management or skip to the next question.

**Displaced 1** Displaced Conflict occurs when involved parties focus on secondary or tertiary issues instead of addressing the primary sources of the conflict.

Displaced 2 Please rate this concept according to the choices below.

Fully Congruent – This concept, as described, does not conflict with biblical principles.

Not Fully Congruent – This concept, as described, conflicts with biblical principles.

Displaced 3 Please rate this concept according to the choices below.

Highly Beneficial – A knowledge of this concept would be highly beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

Beneficial – A knowledge of this concept would be beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

Slightly Beneficial – A knowledge of this concept would be slightly beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

Not Beneficial – A knowledge of this concept would provide no benefit to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

*[Display This Question: If Please rate this concept according to the choices below. = Not Fully Congruent – This item, as described, conflicts with biblical principles and practices of conflict management.]*

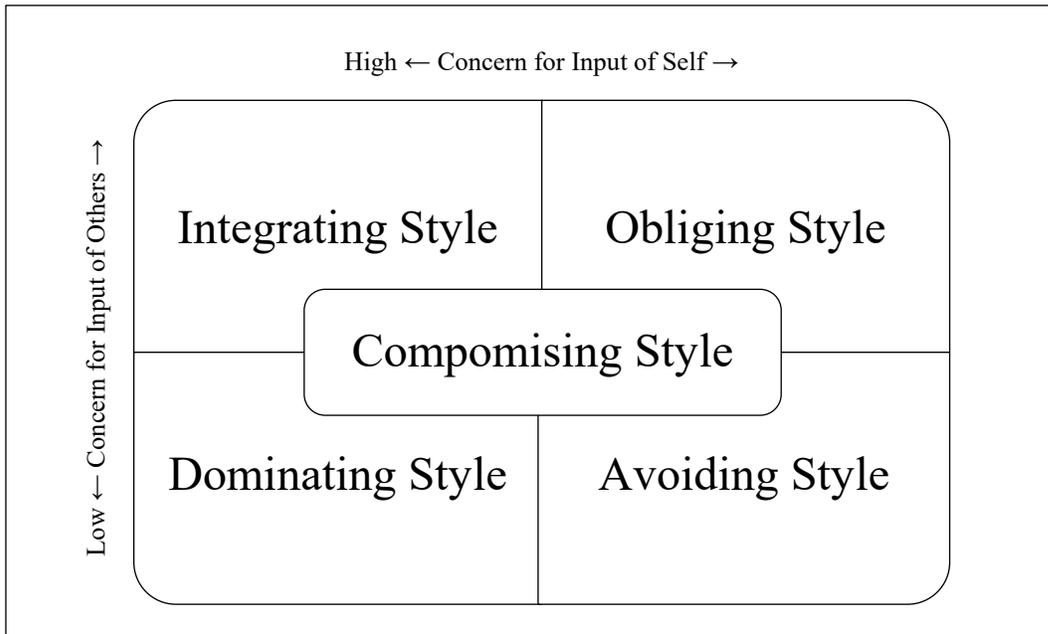
Displaced 4 Briefly explain the reason you rated this concept as incongruent with biblical principles and practices of conflict management or skip to the next question.

Almost finished! Just a few more questions.

### **Dual-Concern Matrix, Practices of Conflict Management**

The final questions will focus on three distinct styles of conflict management including integrating, obliging, and compromising. Please look over the dual-concern conflict management style selection chart below before proceeding to the final questions.

## Dual-Concern Conflict Management Style Selection Chart



**Integrating** The Integrating Style is characterized by high concern for self-input and high concern for the input of others. It involves the exchange of information, examination of differences, and collaboration to solve the conflict in a way agreed upon by both parties. Integrating style is a process through which parties who see different aspects of style is open and clear communication.

Integrating 2 Please rate the use of the Integrating Style by church elders among fellow church elders according to the choices below.

Fully Congruent – This practice, as described, does not conflict with biblical principles.

Not Fully Congruent – This practice, as described, conflicts with biblical principles.

Integrating 3 Please rate the use of the Integrating Style by church elders among fellow church elders according to the choices below

Highly Beneficial – Use of this style of conflict management at appropriate times would be highly beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

Beneficial – Use of this style of conflict management at appropriate times would be beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

Slightly Beneficial – Use of this style of conflict management at appropriate times would be slightly beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

Not Beneficial – Use of this style of conflict management at appropriate times would provide no benefit to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

*[Display This Question: If Please rate this concept according to the choices below. = Not Fully Congruent – This item, as described, conflicts with biblical principles and practices of conflict management.]*

Integrating 4 Briefly explain the reason you rated this concept as incongruent with biblical principles and practices of conflict management or skip to the next question.

**Obliging 1** The Obliging Style involves a low concern for self-input and a high concern for the input of others. The obliging style may be best suited for those lacking expertise or familiarity with topics pertinent to choices around which the conflict is centered. This style is also appropriate for those involved in conflict who lack the authority or standing to participate in a conflict.

Obliging 2 Please rate the use of the Obliging Style by church elders among fellow church elders according to the choices below.

Fully Congruent – This practice, as described, does not conflict with biblical principles.

Not Fully Congruent – This practice, as described, conflicts with biblical principles.

Obliging 3 Please rate the use of the Obliging Style by church elders among fellow church elders according to the choices below.

Highly Beneficial – Use of this style of conflict management at appropriate times would be highly beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

Beneficial – Use of this style of conflict management at appropriate times would be beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

Slightly Beneficial – Use of this style of conflict management at appropriate times would be slightly beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

Not Beneficial – Use of this style of conflict management at appropriate times would provide no benefit to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

*[Display This Question: If Please rate this concept according to the choices below. = Not Fully Congruent – This item, as described, conflicts with biblical principles and practices of conflict management.]*

Obliging 4 Briefly explain the reason you rated this concept as incongruent with biblical principles and practices of conflict management or skip to the next question.

**Compromising 1** The Compromising Style involves a moderate concern for self-input and a moderate concern for the input of others and involves seeking a middle ground through a give-and-take approach. The compromising style provides a middle-way by which each party involved in the conflict moves toward the position of the other without obliging or dominating. Compromising style is best suited for situations when neither

party alone possesses the authority or expertise to compel those with whom they have conflict to submit, and the goal of each party is mutually exclusive. When such an impasse is reached the compromising style of conflict management may avoid lengthy delays and may provide mutually acceptable outcomes to complex situations.

Compromising 2 Please rate the use of the Compromising Style by church elders among fellow church elders according to the choices below.

Fully Congruent – This practice, as described, does not conflict with biblical principles.

Not Fully Congruent – This practice, as described, conflicts with biblical principles.

Compromising 3 Please rate the use of the Compromising Style by church elders among fellow church elders according to the choices below.

Highly Beneficial – Use of this style of conflict management at appropriate times would be highly beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

Beneficial – Use of this style of conflict management at appropriate times would be beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

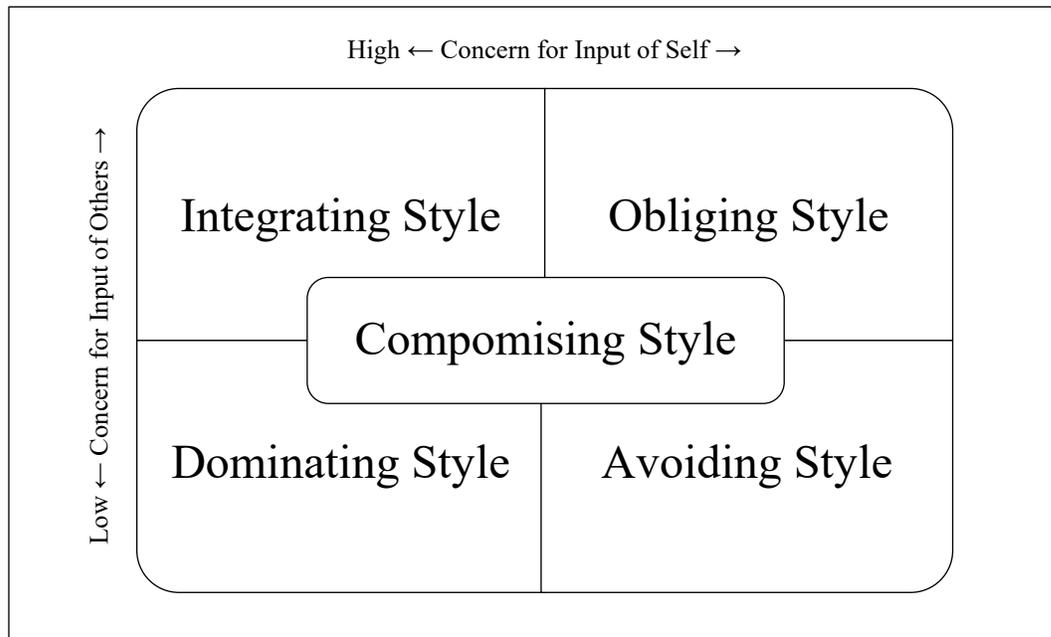
Slightly Beneficial – Use of this style of conflict management at appropriate times would be slightly beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

Not Beneficial – Use of this style of conflict management at appropriate times would provide no benefit to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

*[Display This Question: If Please rate this concept according to the choices below. = Not Fully Congruent – This item, as described, conflicts with biblical principles and practices of conflict management.]*

Compromising 4 Briefly explain the reason you rated this concept as incongruent with biblical principles and practices of conflict management or skip to the next question.

## Dual-Concern 1 Dual-Concern Conflict Management Style Selection Chart



Dual-Concern 2 Please rate the use of the Dual-Concern Chart by church elders among fellow church elders according to the choices below.

Fully Congruent – This practice, as described, does not conflict with biblical principles.

Not Fully Congruent – This practice, as described, conflicts with biblical principles.

Dual-Concern 3 Please rate the use of the Dual-Concern Chart by church elders among fellow church elders according to the choices below.

Highly Beneficial – Use of this chart for selecting a situationally appropriate style of conflict management would be highly beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

Beneficial – Use of this chart for selecting a situationally appropriate style of conflict management would be beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

Slightly Beneficial – Use of this chart for selecting a situationally appropriate style of conflict management would be slightly beneficial to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

Not Beneficial – Use of this chart for selecting a situationally appropriate style of conflict management would provide no benefit to elders seeking to practice God-honoring conflict management.

*[Display This Question: If Please rate this concept according to the choices below. = Not Fully Congruent – This item, as described, conflicts with biblical principles and practices of conflict management.]*

Dual-Concern 4 Briefly explain the reason you rated this concept as incongruent with biblical principles and practices of conflict management or skip to finish the survey.

## APPENDIX 6

### CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AMONG CHURCH ELDERS SURVEY: ROUND 3 OF 3

#### **Introduction**

Thank you in advance for your willingness to participate in this research project. This is the final survey. Please note that completion of all three rounds will be needed for your answers to be used in this research study.

This research is being conducted by John Lookabaugh in an effort to enable church leaders to better manage conflict in ways that honor God and benefit the church. This research is being conducted as a part of the capstone thesis requirement in the Doctor of Education program at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY.

Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. By your completion of these surveys, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

Email: Please type in the same email used in the qualifying survey in order to verify your ability to participate in this research.

#### **Instructions**

In this survey, you will be presented with only those concepts and practices from secular models of conflict management which 70 percent of respondents rated as being both congruent and beneficial or highly beneficial in round two.

Please note clarification on Questions of Congruence regarding Concepts:

The first six questions regarding the congruence of concepts are *not* asking if church elders, or anyone *should* experience these types of conflict. Rather, the question of congruence is seeking to eliminate concepts which fundamentally contradict reality as determined by the Canon of Scripture.

For example, in the previous survey's sample questions, 100 percent of respondents said the concept of Daylight Savings Time was congruent with biblical principles. Conversely, 0 percent of respondents said the concept of the Inherent Goodness of Mankind was congruent with biblical principles; these responses demonstrate an accurate understanding of the question of a concept being congruent or

not. Please maintain this understanding when answering questions of congruence for the following concepts.

### **Concepts**

This group of questions will present a potential source of conflict. Not all conflict is the same, some sources of conflict have been shown to be generally helpful while others are nearly always detrimental. In an effort to enable productive conflict and diminish harmful conflict, researchers separate conflict into twelve categories differentiated by the respective sources of the conflict.

The ability to recognize and categorize conflict according to its source may benefit church elders by enabling them to distinguish potentially beneficial conflict from generally detrimental conflict.

Each source of conflict will be briefly described followed by the statement, "This concept is both congruent with biblical principles of conflict management and a knowledge of it would be beneficial to elders practicing shared leadership within a local church," to which you will be asked to select either, "I agree." or, "I disagree."

**Relational 1** Relational Conflict involves hurt feelings which may stem from real or perceived personal attacks, criticism, distrust, or cynicism. Relational conflict occurs when group members have interpersonal clashes characterized by anger, frustration, and other negative feelings and is almost always detrimental to group unity and team performance. Relational conflict also increases the likelihood of job burnout.

Relational 2 This concept is both congruent with biblical principles of conflict management and a knowledge of it would be beneficial to elders practicing shared leadership within a local church.

I agree.

I disagree.

**Substantive 1** Substantive Conflict results from a difference in opinions on the best path forward stemming from dissimilar ideas, logic, critical thinking, data, or evidence. Substantive conflict among leadership teams has been shown to produce enhanced outcomes as team members debate, discuss, collaborate, and push one another forward. Leadership teams that embrace substantive conflict while avoiding relationship conflict perform better, share a higher level of consensus, and produce outcomes with greater quality.

Substantive 2 This concept is both congruent with biblical principles of conflict management and a knowledge of it would be beneficial to elders practicing shared leadership within a local church.

I agree.

I disagree.

**Process 1** Process Conflict is related to substantive conflict but focuses on the *process* of accomplishing a previously agreed upon goal. Instead of the conflict centering on the overall task or objective, process conflict stems from disagreements about logistical and delegation issues such as what should be done first and who is responsible for what.

Process 2 This concept is both congruent with biblical principles of conflict management and a knowledge of it would be beneficial to elders practicing shared leadership within a local church.

I agree.

I disagree.

**Goal 1** Goal Conflict involves incompatible preferred outcomes. By comparison, those involved in *process* conflict agree on the desired outcome but team members fail to agree on how best to attain the stated outcome, while those involved in *goal* conflict cannot agree on what the desired outcome should be.

Goal 2 This concept is both congruent with biblical principles of conflict management and a knowledge of it would be beneficial to elders practicing shared leadership within a local church.

I agree.

I disagree.

**Interests 1** Conflict of Interests is similar to goal conflict but involves the groups or individuals involved directly competing for limited resources, as when a local chief of police and fire captain disagree over which department should receive limited grant money for the purchase of new equipment.

Interests 2 This concept is both congruent with biblical principles of conflict management and a knowledge of it would be beneficial to elders practicing shared leadership within a local church.

I agree.

I disagree.

**Misattributed 1** Misattributed Conflict stems from incorrectly assigning the source of conflict to individuals or groups not responsible for the situation which led to the conflict, as when employees experience relational conflict against management for removing their privileged parking spots only to later learn that the city required the action as a part of a project to widen the sidewalks.

**Misattributed 2** This concept is both congruent with biblical principles of conflict management and a knowledge of it would be beneficial to elders practicing shared leadership within a local church.

I agree.

I disagree.

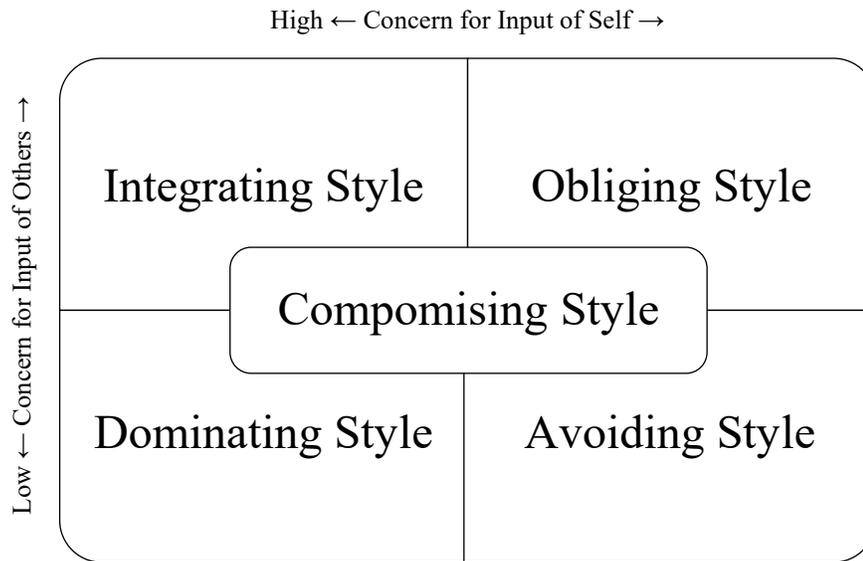
Introduction Almost finished! Just a few more questions.

**Instructions** Part 2 Please note clarification on questions of congruence regarding practices:

The following questions regarding the congruence of practices *is* asking if church elders *should* employ these specific methods of conflict management in certain situations. The question of congruence is seeking to eliminate concepts which fundamentally contradict reality as determined by the Canon of Scripture, but it is also seeking to understand if you believe church elders should employ these practices.

**Dual Concern Matrix** The final questions will focus on three distinct styles of conflict management including (1) integrating, (2) obliging, and (3) compromising. Please look over the dual-concern conflict management style selection chart below before proceeding to the final questions.

Dual-Concern Conflict Management Style Selection Chart



**Integrating** The Integrating Style is characterized by high concern for self-input and high concern for the input of others. It involves the exchange of information, examination of differences, and collaboration to solve the conflict in a way agreed upon by both parties. Integrating style is a process through which parties who see different aspects of a



problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible. One of the keys to the integrating style is open and clear communication.

Integrating 2 This practice is both congruent with biblical principles of conflict management and a use of it in certain situations would be beneficial to elders practicing shared leadership within a local church.

I agree

I disagree

**Obliging 1** The Obliging Style involves a low concern for self-input and a high concern for the input of others. The obliging style may be best suited for those lacking expertise or familiarity with topics pertinent to choices around which the conflict is centered. This style is also appropriate for those involved in conflict who lack the authority or standing to participate in a conflict.

Obliging 2 This practice is both congruent with biblical principles of conflict management and a use of it in certain situations would be beneficial to elders practicing shared leadership within a local church.

I agree

I disagree

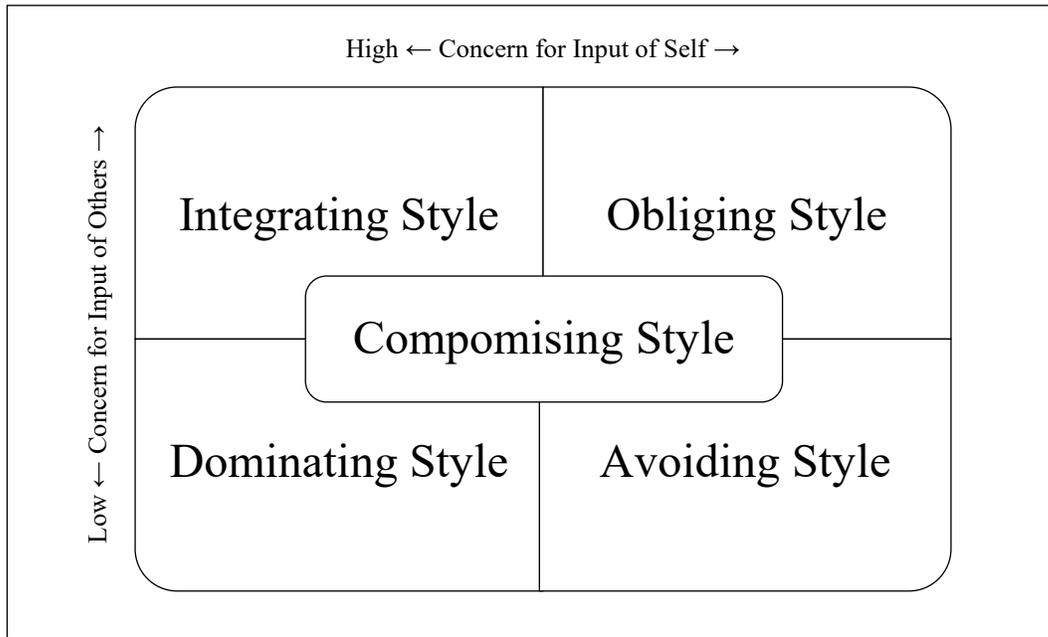
**Compromising 1** The Compromising Style involves a moderate concern for self-input and a moderate concern for the input of others and involves seeking a middle ground through a give-and-take approach. The compromising style provides a middle-way by which each party involved in the conflict moves toward the position of the other without obliging or dominating. Compromising style is best suited for situations when neither party alone possesses the authority or expertise to compel those with whom they have conflict to submit, and the goal of each party is mutually exclusive. When such an impasse is reached the compromising style of conflict management may avoid lengthy delays and may provide mutually acceptable outcomes to complex situations.

Compromising 2 This practice is both congruent with biblical principles of conflict management and a use of it in certain situations would be beneficial to elders practicing shared leadership within a local church.

I agree

I disagree

**Dual-Concern 1 Dual-Concern Conflict Management Style Selection Chart**



Dual-Concern 2 An understanding and use of this chart is both congruent with biblical principles of conflict management and beneficial to elders practicing shared leadership within a local church.

- I agree
- I disagree

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## ABSTRACT

### CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AMONG CHURCH ELDERS: A DELPHI STUDY

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This Delphi study was conducted in an effort to enhance church elders' ability to manage conflict amongst themselves in ways that honor God and benefit the church. With a firm commitment to building upon the biblical foundation for Christian conflict management, this study sought to discover which, if any, are the concepts and practices from secular models of conflict management congruent with biblical principles of conflict management and beneficial to elders practicing shared leadership within a local church?

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the biblical model for church leadership known as a plurality of elders and introduces some challenges associated with shared leadership, namely, conflict. Chapter 2 establishes a biblical foundation for understanding peace, conflict, and conflict management and surveys both Christian and secular models and practices of conflict management. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology for testing concepts and practices of conflict management from secular models for both congruence with Scripture and benefit to church elders. The study employed a three-round Delphi study with ten purposefully selected panelists who serve as elders in theologically orthodox churches which practice a shared leadership model. Chapter 4 describes the findings of the research and chapter 5 analyzes the results of the study and offers suggestions for application of the findings and recommendations for further research.

Of the items selected for consideration in the study, five concepts and four practices from secular models of conflict management achieved consensus approval as being congruent with biblical principles and beneficial to elders sharing leadership within a local church. Panelists reached a consensus approval of the congruence and benefit of a knowledge of the concepts of substantive conflict, process conflict, goal conflict, conflict of interests, and relational conflict. Panelists also reached a consensus approval of the congruence and benefit of use of the dual-concern matrix, along with the integrating, compromising, and obliging styles of conflict management.

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