



THE EFFECTS OF CONFLICT
TRANSFORMATION ON KNOWLEDGE
CREATION WITHIN ORGANIZATIONS IN THE
KINGDOM OF BAHRAIN

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Abstract

The Effects of Conflict Transformation on Knowledge Creation Within Organizations in the Kingdom of Bahrain

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Conflicts have evolved into complex structures, encompassing actors, issues and goals that are both dynamic and interweaved (Galtung and Fischer, 2013). The organization under study had been experiencing such complex forms of conflict and further investigation was called for due to the presence of continual episodes of interpersonal conflicts among its stakeholders. The non-linear, multifaceted nature of the conflict led to the selection of the conflict transformation approach as a means of addressing the issue as, according to Miall (2004), conflict transformation is a reconceptualized expansion of the more generic field of conflict resolution.

Various manifestations of organizational issues had been observed, including impaired internal functions, interruptions to business, and high staff turnaround, which increased the cost of recruitment and training. Furthermore, the general decline in the health of the organization, as a result of the persistent conflict between its stakeholders, was combined with compromised levels of knowledge creation, evidenced by its weak competitive position, and lack of agility, creativity and responsiveness. To address this situation, this research explores ways in which conflict transformation can be applied to organizational conflict in the Kingdom of Bahrain and identifies its effects on knowledge creation.

This research, which is rooted in practical relevance, was conducted in a training and consultancy firm located in the Kingdom of Bahrain, using action research in conjunction with interpretive methodology. As derived from the findings of the research, the organization under study incorporated four elements of organizational conflict transformation into its culture, namely a. communication, b. momentum, c. inclusiveness and d. reduced levels of past unaddressed organizational conflict; post-action evaluation was then conducted in four separate phases.

This research makes two distinct contributions to knowledge and professional practice. First, the research establishes that incorporating the above-mentioned four organizational conflict

transformation elements into the organizational culture is an effective means of implementing conflict transformation in organizations operating in the Kingdom of Bahrain. Second, the effect of organizational conflict transformation on knowledge creation within organizations operating in the Kingdom of Bahrain is found to be positive.

Declaration of Own Work

This is to declare that this thesis is a presentation of my original research. Every effort is made to clearly indicate any contributions made by others, including references to the literature.

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Chapter One

1. Introduction

This chapter begins with an outline of the research overview and rationale, followed by a description of the research context, question and objectives. Next, it discusses the conceptual framework designed for this research, followed by an analysis of the research methodology and paradigm, concluding with a discussion on the delimitations and assumptions.

1.1 Overview and Research Rationale

The traditional formation of conflict, characterized by various parties pursuing the same goal, is no longer common in social structures, be they communities or corporate entities. Instead, conflicts have evolved into complex constructs that encompass interlinked actors, issues and goals, which are prone to change with the passage of time (Galtung and Fischer, 2013).

The organization under study, which is interchangeably referred to as *the organization* throughout this thesis, had been experiencing continual episodes of interpersonal conflict among its stakeholders, which called for further investigation.

The conflict was rooted in the continuous need for innovation and knowledge creation, driven by the dynamic nature of the organization and the industry in which it operates. The need for stakeholders to continually collaborate to sustain such efforts created a platform that started and sustained organizational conflict, which was then further fuelled by divergent perspectives stemming from the highly diverse backgrounds of the involved parties. To add a second layer of complexity to the matter, it was apparent that, at its current level of maturity, the organization was unable to soundly address the emergent conflict. Consequently, several manifestations of it were observed, such as high staff turnaround, resulting in a constant need to recruit and train new employees, in addition to multiple interruptions to the conduct of business, some of which warranted official notices from industry regulators. Other manifestations of the organizational

conflict under discussion were two examples of lengthy absenteeism – in excess of two weeks – following intense, confrontational conflicts. In fact, unplanned absence and avoidance following conflicts had been observed at different levels of the organization, including individuals spending excessive time outside the office or abruptly availing various types of leave, including ‘sick’ leave, all of which are possible costs of organizational conflict according to Guthrie, Ciccarelli and Babic (2010). To add to the complexity of the situation, the researcher observed that various circumstances, including the economic and social conditions in the wider environment, affected the internal sense of team. The researcher further noticed that the distinct interpersonal differences, largely influenced by the diversity of the team, seemed to be readily charged by the organization’s external environment.

The general decline in the health of the organization as a result of persistent conflict between stakeholders was combined with compromised levels of knowledge creation within the organization, which was evident when observing the organization through the lens of Nonaka and Takeuchi’s SECI model (1995), as described in the theoretical framework presented in section 1.4.1. Furthermore, at the time of rationalizing the present research, the organization was not engaged in recognizable innovative activities, nor did it make use of value-adding technology. Moreover, the organization was unable to demonstrate agility in response to clients’ needs or to create new markets, all of which are characteristics of an impaired knowledge creation process, as per Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995). This, in addition to the lack of new products, approaches and perspectives in its highly consumer-driven market, resulted in the organization being overpowered by competitors and losing substantial market share.

This was amplified by the open nature of the economy, which allows foreign entities to operate in the country in competition with local companies and, to increase the vulnerability of the situation even further, the organization was dependent on two government enterprise support schemes to support wages of its employees and subsidize its services; however, such schemes are subject to revision, which, given the current position of the company, may render it obsolete. Thus, the organization faced the need to improve its knowledge creation capabilities in order to survive and continue to remain relevant to its market; this is supported by Hannah and Lester (2009), who argue that it is challenging for organizations to survive on the knowledge already

possessed by them for a long period of time, while simultaneously addressing the existing organizational conflict.

Prior to determining the topic of this thesis, the researcher thoroughly examined the fields of organizational conflict management and resolution, in addition to the field of conflict transformation, which, according to Miall (2004), is a reconceptualized expansion of the latter. According to Lederach (2014), conflict resolution is an academically and professionally well-established field that encompasses various approaches to and models of conflict handling; it may cross paths with conflict transformation as a discipline, however, the implications and meanings suggested by the concepts they represent are vastly different (Lederach, 2014).

Conflict transformation is described by Miall (2004) as a process that yields a peaceful outcome by way of engaging with and transforming discourse, interests and relationships that may potentially be implanted in conflictual patterns that, typically, surpass anxieties created by a single conflict episode. The author further states that conflict transformation acknowledges that adequate handling of conflict requires more than identifying scenarios that serve the involved parties or reframe their initial positions. Further to that, Austin, Fischer and Ropers (2004) emphasize that conflict transformation entails the alteration of mindset and thus can be applied as a preventative approach to conflict. In light of the above, it was determined that conflict transformation would be better suited for implementation within the organization than the more traditional approaches of addressing conflict, for a number of reasons. To begin with, given the organization's need to continuously engage in innovation and knowledge creation activities, it was foreseen that organizational conflict will continue to occur and thus, implementing preventative measures to addressing conflict was of value. Secondly, following the disruptive social and economic events that had influenced the social structure in the region, and subsequently the relationships maintained by various individuals, the conflict had become entrenched in the structure of relationships at both community and individual levels. Thus, although organizational conflicts may appear to be business-related, they are often embedded in a social structure that ignites and perpetuates them. This view is also supported by Kirkpatrick (2017), who emphasizes that the structural causes that led to the development of the conflict

must first be acknowledged and addressed. The centrality of relationships is further emphasized by Lederach (2014), who describes conflict transformation as a process that facilitates the alteration of the relationships between the involved stakeholders.

In addition to the practical justifications of the research, it is further justified from a literature perspective, as a satisfactory amount of literature is available on the topics of conflict transformation and knowledge creation as isolated notions; however, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, the concept of conflict transformation has not been discussed in an organizational context in the Kingdom of Bahrain; interchangeably referred to as Bahrain in the remainder of this document. Further to that, it has not been connected to the concept of knowledge creation in the said context prior to this research. Furthermore, the present research topic was identified as being suitable for implementation from an action research perspective, as it met the initial criteria set by Coghlan and Brannick (2014) for action research projects, which are discussed in detail in 4.1 Diagnosing: Framing the Organizational Issue.

Bridging the above-mentioned gaps in both practice and literature through the implementation of action research constitutes the novelty of this research.

1.2 Research Context

The organization under study is situated in the Kingdom of Bahrain, which is an archipelago of islands located on the eastern side of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The country is considered highly dense, ranking 7th in the world as per the World Population Review (2019), with a continually growing population that is expected to reach 1.592 million in 2020, as opposed to 1.216 million in 2014, as indicated by the Bahraini Ministry of Information Affairs (2019).

The strategic location of the islands was historically utilized by regional merchants who have settled in with the passage of time, creating a cosmopolitan society, which has grown to shape the country's current socio-cultural environment. According to the Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities (2015), the Kingdom of Bahrain is known for its multicultural nature, being the

only Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) state that has an active Jewish community and is host to a large group of Christian nationals, within its predominantly Muslim majority.

The Ministry of Information Affairs (2019) further highlights the country's cultural, ethnic and religious diversity, which forms a unique identity composition. Although richness in diversity presents growth opportunities, failure to adequately address it may pose challenges, as described in section 1.1 Overview and Research Rationale. Kumaraswamy (2006) highlights such challenges by arguing that all Middle Eastern countries face difficulties in collaboratively recognizing, integrating and reflecting their ethno-cultural diversity, also adding that the dynastical, religious, ethnic and ideological commitments often result in tension.

The national economy of the Kingdom of Bahrain is considered open, with a strong emphasis on investment, banking and tourism. The country signed the Free Trade Agreement with the USA in August 2006, and has made attempts to diversify its economy, despite remaining heavily dependent on exports of petroleum and aluminium, followed by construction materials (Bahrain Government, 2015). The current economic system has resulted in the country hosting a large number of immigrant workers, estimated at 666,172 non-nationals as per the 2010 census (World Population Review, 2019); this, in turn, adds the element of foreign presence to an already highly diverse local structure.

Furthermore, the influx of foreign workers adds another level of complexity due the existence of four-layers of identity in the country, namely a. national, b. *Khaliji*, i.e. fellow citizen of the GCC, c. *Arab* and d. foreigner, referred to as *Ajnabi*, as per Selaibeekh (2017), who further affirms that the circles of 'belonging' influence the nature of social interaction within the society and subsequently within its organizations. This is combined with a general perception by some nationals that the existence of foreigners saturates the market and forces them to settle into lower jobs, while expatriates may feel marginalized and unaccepted, therefore sustaining an undercurrent of tension in the marketplace (Selaibeekh, 2017). The current economic system further allows companies from the GCC to operate in the Bahraini market, which, despite the recognizable opportunities of this arrangement, is often perceived as a threat by local organizations due to the added competition brought about by external entities.

Further to the above, the research is also situated in an academic context; which is extensively discussed in 3. Literature Review, where the researcher explores the concepts of conflict transformation and knowledge creation in detail and situates the research within the existing literature and regional context.

1.3 Research Question and Objectives

The research question is ‘How can effective organizational conflict transformation in the Kingdom of Bahrain contribute to organizational knowledge creation?’ To avoid multiple interpretations of the question, it is further narrowed down to the following research objectives:

- 1- To identify how conflict transformation is applied to organizational conflict in the Kingdom of Bahrain.
- 2- To identify how conflict transformation affects knowledge creation within organizations in the Kingdom of Bahrain.

1.4 Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is defined as “the main things to be studied [...] and the presumed relationships among them”, as affirmed by Miles and Huberman (1994, p.18). Maxwell (2013) adds that a conceptual framework outlines what the researcher believes is occurring in the area of study and describes a tentative theory of what is taking place. In order to present the conceptual framework for this research, three elements proposed by Ravitch and Riggan (2017) are discussed, namely 1. theoretical framework, 2. topical research and 3. personal interest, as explained below.

1.4.1 Theoretical Framework

According to Ravitch and Riggan (2017, p.12), “theoretical frameworks may either be borrowed from other research [...] or fashioned by the researcher for the purposes of the study at hand”. In the case of the present research, the initial theorization of the link between conflict

transformation and knowledge creation evolved from the researcher's experiential knowledge and the examination of existing literature, as further detailed in this section. The initial theory describes this relationship as positive, meaning that, when conflict transformation is adequately implemented in an organization, knowledge creation in the said organization will reach fruition and thus serve the organization. To elaborate, the core processes of knowledge creation, namely socialization, externalization and internalization, are presumed to be hindered by the constant existence of conflict and the tension resulting from it, which is further amplified by coping mechanisms commonly used by members of an organization to avoid uncomfortable situations, such as avoidance. Further to that, in order for knowledge creation to take place, the individuals involved must be invested enough to directly involve their personal identity in the organization and its processes (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). Furthermore, the authors argue that moving from tacit to explicit knowledge requires the articulation of one's vision to the world. The researcher's initial theory positioned the organization as being unsafe and unwelcoming, as perceived by its members, due to the overarching tension stemming from prolonged conflict and the persistence of blame culture. The hesitation to engage in articulating one's vision to other organizational members hinders the process of articulation embedded in externalization and thus interrupts the knowledge spiral at an early stage.

1.4.2 Topical Research

An extensive literature review on the topic was conducted to identify previous research investigating the subject, as recommended by Ravitch and Riggan (2017); this is detailed in 3. Literature Review.

1.4.3 Personal Interest

According to Ravitch and Riggan (2017, p.10), the personal interests of the researcher include their "curiosities, biases and ideological commitments". The researcher is personally motivated to explore the effect of conflict transformation on knowledge creation as she shares Lederach's conviction (2014) that emerging contemporary conflicts are best addressed by looking beyond

the concerns brought to the surface by immediate needs and towards a sustainable vision that informs how relationships are to be influenced.

1.5 Research Methodology and Paradigm

The research methodology adopted in this thesis is action research, which is described by Coghlan and Brannick (2014) as a democratic and participatory process in problem-solving that generates practical knowledge while pursuing a worthwhile humane purpose.

The interpretive paradigm was selected as a governing model for this thesis, under the overarching methodology of action research. The reasons for selecting this paradigm, in addition to its epistemological and ontological position in relation to action research and the research topic, are discussed in 2.2 Methodology.

1.6 Delimitations

Simon (2011) describes delimitations as aspects narrowing the scope of the research. Several delimitations have been identified, beginning with the context of the study. More specifically, in line with the research question, the population under study must be characterized by diversity, therefore excluding fully homogenous professional teams. Furthermore, this thesis applies action research as a mode of enquiry, which delimits the scope of research and data collection to the organization under study and its stakeholders. Moreover, although the final findings are applied to the organization and the results of their application are reported in the fourth chapter, the research does not include a second cycle of action research, which is expected to commence after the submission of this thesis. In addition to this, the research confines itself to naturalistic data-collection techniques, namely observation, followed by in-depth interviews and focus groups, which are analysed using conventional content analysis to the exclusion of other types of data collection and analysis.

1.7 Assumptions

Vogt and Johnson (2011) describe research assumptions as statements that are presumed to be correct in the context of a specific state, such as constructing a theory and the conditions under which statistical techniques derive valid results. For the purpose of this study, the following assumptions were made.

First, it was assumed that the research participants being observed and questioned would be forthcoming with information and attempt to participate with honesty and integrity. Second, it was assumed that the research participants would understand the questions asked in the interviews and focus groups or seek assistance from the researcher to clarify ambiguities when needed. Third, it was assumed that the consenting participants had a genuine interest in taking part in the study and did not have any ulterior motives. Finally, it was assumed that the execution of this research and the application of its findings would contribute to the advancement of the organization and its stakeholders.

Chapter Two

2. Methodology

This chapter describes the research methodology and design applied to answer the research question ‘How can effective organizational conflict transformation in the Kingdom of Bahrain contribute to organizational knowledge creation?’, which was further broken down into two objectives, namely a. to identify how conflict transformation is applied to organizational conflict in the Kingdom of Bahrain and b. to identify how conflict transformation affects knowledge creation within organizations in the Kingdom of Bahrain. The current chapter begins with a discussion on the concept of action research as the overarching methodology that governs this research, followed by a description of interpretivism, which is the philosophy underpinning this thesis. Next, the chapter outlines both of their ontological and epistemological positions and proceeds to detail the methods of enquiry used in the research. The chapter then concludes with an overview of the research limitations and ethical considerations, in addition to a discussion on quality and rigour.

2.1 Action Research

The historical grounds of action research are rooted in the era of World War II, particularly in the work of Kurt Lewin, who is widely considered the founder of this methodology. According to Nielsen and Nielsen (2006), the evolution of action research is centred around democracy, which is rooted in critical self-reflection stemming from a historical situation characterized by highly authoritarian regimes. According to the authors, it was Kurt Lewin’s intention to integrate education and research, with the aim of mobilizing social science against authoritarianism.

Coghlan and Brannick (2014) define Action Research as a participatory and inclusive process, established with the purpose of developing practical knowledge while accomplishing a worthy humane objective, while Greenwood and Levin (2007) describe it as a highly involved type of

study that deliberately introduces change to the environment, and thus actively seeks to influence it.

According to Coghlan and Brannick (2014), action research is characterized by: 1. building collaborative partnerships; 2. executing research that is 'in' action, rather than 'about' action; and 3. delivering viable measures to resolve organizational problems. Furthermore, action research produces organizational knowledge and promotes capabilities of self-sufficiency within an organization, as affirmed by the same authors, who further add that the successful execution of action research is carried out through a. planning, b. action and c. evaluation of the action, which will then lead to d. further planning. These steps were adopted by the researcher in designing the action research conducted in the organization under study, which is detailed in 4. Story of Cycles of Action, Reflection and Sense-making.

Several approaches are included under the general term 'action research'. First, the *directed* approach moves the organization towards pre-established goals under the management's direction. Second, the *planned* approach establishes and communicates goals and vision, while the leadership confines itself to high-level involvement and refrains from interfering unless necessary. Finally, the *guided* approach provides a rough direction, while the leadership observes the process without providing direct input and allows change to occur organically (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014). Accordingly, the present action research was conducted under the 'directed' approach, to ensure that the results were observable within the timeframe allocated for action.

2.1.1 Challenges to the Application of Action Research

According to Ozanne and Saatcioglu (2008), a number of challenges commonly face researchers undertaking action research. First is the inappropriate application of enquiry methods. This was addressed by applying best practice in observation, interviewing, and facilitation of focus groups, and by conducting pilot studies to test the feasibility and applicability of the instruments, in addition to their response levels. Second, the common challenge of inadequate time spent in the field was addressed by spending more than 600 hours in observation alone and allowing one year from the start of the implementation to the final evaluation of the results. A third concern

regarding the generally low level of participation in action research was addressed by recruiting 43 participants, which, according to Dworkin (2012), is an adequate number for this type of study, as it falls within the range of five to 50. Further, the researcher ensured that all ethical issues were addressed throughout the process of obtaining consent and that participation was strictly voluntary.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 The Interpretive Paradigm

In the present context, the word 'paradigm' refers to the world view adopted by researchers, which includes their school of thought in addition to beliefs and perspectives, which ultimately inform their sense-making (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006). According to Coghlan and Brannick (2014), a natural research paradigm that is suitable for the research topic must be applied under the umbrella of action research. In this case, the interpretive methodology was selected, as justified below.

The highly contextual nature of both organizational conflict and knowledge creation requires an approach that acknowledges them as culturally derived and historically situated (Scotland, 2012). Furthermore, Gallo (2012) emphasizes the complexity of the area under study, which stresses the irrelevance of the linear reasoning employed by alternative paradigms, such as positivism. In other words, although attempts are frequently made to simplify the issue and separate the events or processes from their natural context to overcome the challenges brought about by complexity (Marshall, 1999), this compromise fails to take into consideration the true proportions of the matter under study. On the other hand, research rooted in interpretivism appreciates complexity and attempts to deepen the researcher's understanding of the phenomena as, according to Scotland (2012, p.12), the interpretive paradigm "does not question ideologies, it accepts them".

Guba and Lincoln (1994, p.108) further add that research paradigms are defined by their approaches towards three fundamental areas, namely a. ontology, b. epistemology and c. methodology, as described below.

2.2.2 Ontology

According to Ozanne and Saatcioglu (2008), the action research's view of the nature of reality is consistent with that of the interpretive paradigm in the basic assumption that reality is relevant, the world we inhabit is context-bound and co-created, and the current social reality and practices are driven by historical events and interests.

Based on the above, and in consistency with the interpretive paradigm, the research assumes a relativist ontology, which means that the situation under study is believed to include multiple realities that can be explored and understood through the interactions between the research participants and the researcher and between the research participants themselves, as affirmed by Chalmers, Manley and Wasserman (2009).

2.2.3 Epistemology

According to Scotland (2012), subjectivism is the underpinning epistemology for interpretivism. It presumes that knowledge is not limited to the observed phenomena, but encompasses subjective beliefs, understandings, reasons and values held by humans, as affirmed by Neuman (2014). The author further states that knowledge is constructed through meaning assigned to events by people. Under the interpretive paradigm, theory is context-sensitive, revisable and deemed approximate. It is further influenced by the social and cultural context of the research object and is constructed from multiple realities examined by the researcher (Neuman, 2014). Subjectivism is embedded in both interpretivism as a research philosophy and action research as a methodology applied in this research.

Furthermore, it is argued by McNiff (2017) that action research views knowledge as contextual, evolving and uncertain, thus sharing core epistemological positions with the interpretive

paradigm. In terms of causality, Fals Borda (2006) suggests that, similar to the interpretive paradigm, action research perceives both human awareness and potential as influenced by social structures, and views participants as collaborators in the same (Ozanne and Saatcioglu, 2008).

2.3 Methods of Enquiry

Methodology refers to the way in which the researcher conducts their research (Jonker and Pennink, 2010). In this respect, Neuman (2014) affirms that the role of the researcher under the interpretive paradigm is to co-create the meaning of the matter under study in collaboration with the research participants, while bringing their own subjective views and experiences into the research process.

The present research is executed through qualitative means, as evidenced by the naturalistic data-collection methods used, namely observation, in-depth interviews and focus groups. In other words, the research is conducted based on empirical evidence, defined by Collis and Hussey (2014) as evidence obtained through data-collection methods that are based on observation or experience. The authors argue that qualitative research is a 'subjective approach', which is executed through studying and comprehending human 'perceptions' to allow for further understanding of human activities and their social context and, thus, is consistent with the philosophical assumptions of the present research.

2.3.1 Participant Inclusion Criteria

The first inclusion criterion pertains to level of engagement. At the time of recruitment for the study, potential participants were required to be engaged with the organization by way of being a. a full-time employee, b. an employee on a fixed-term contract or c. a long-term client with an active engagement of a minimum of two years. Secondly, participants were required to add to the diversity of the team by possessing a distinguishing characteristic, such as cultural background, age, academic background, professional background, ethnicity, faith or another characteristic. Based on the aforementioned criteria, the majority of employees and long-term clients qualified to partake in the research, subject to their consent.

The total number of full-time and contracted employees in the organization under study at the time of recruitment was 52, out of which 43 provided their consent and thus were recruited. This number falls between five and 50, which, according to Dworkin (2012), is considered adequate for this type of study.

Cycles of data collection under the interpretive paradigm were situated within the broader cycle of action research as the overarching research methodology. Each data-collection cycle was set to include a minimum of a. 20 records of observed events, b. eight to ten interviews and c. one focus group. The researcher was able to successfully complete three data-collection cycles in a period of six months which resulted in 83 observed events, 43 interviews and three focus groups. Details of the application of the three data-collection methods used in this research and the participant recruitment process are described later in this chapter.

2.3.2 Sampling

The researcher collected data exclusively from events where *organizational conflict* occurred, to the exclusion of all others. Conflict events were considered according to Nicholson's definition (1992), namely an activity that occurs when conscious beings attempt to fulfil their needs or desires through mutually inconsistent acts. For the purpose of this research, events including one of the following elements were considered: a. physical assault; b. verbal assault; c. confrontational dialogue, characterized by a sharp tone; d. passive-aggressive behaviour; e. dialogue as a follow up to a conflict that occurred within the existing data-collection cycle; and f. events involving discord in either interests, relationships or structure. All events were recorded, from the beginning of the conflict event until either one party left, and thus terminated the event, or a mutually agreed-upon position was reached.

2.3.3 Data Collection Methods

Three data-collection methods were used in this research, namely observation, in-depth-interviews and focus groups. The rationale for their selection, in addition to their connection to one another and to the operating paradigm, is described below.

The research was executed in the field, i.e. in the research objects' natural setting. This allowed the researcher to gather 'situational' data, as described by Neuman (2014), who cites unstructured observation, interviews and focus groups as suitable data-collection methods under the interpretive paradigm. Therefore, and in line with Neuman's recommendations (2014), this research used the aforementioned methods.

Further to the above; the participant observation method was used due to its alignment with action research and the interpretive paradigm as respectively affirmed by Walsham (2006) and Kivunja and Kuyini (2017). The use of observations as data collection method was further facilitated by the researcher's 'native' position, as described by Brannick and Coghlan (2007), which naturally placed her in the participant observation category. The use of observation assisted the researcher in a number of ways, namely: a. it allowed the researcher to develop, refine and contextualize the questions later to be used in in-depth interviews and focus groups; b. it allowed the researcher a better comprehension of the context and the culture, and it furthered her understanding of the discussions to be had in subsequent data-collection methods, i.e. in-depth interviews and focus groups, all of which lent greater credence to her interpretation of the findings; and c. it gave the researcher the ability to collect different types of data, including non-verbal cues and sensitive activities.

The feasibility of observation as a data-collection method is emphasized by Marshall and Rossman (2016), who state that it is useful for documentation of events, artefacts and behaviours in a systematic manner within a social setting. DeWalt and DeWalt (2011) further note that conducting observations as a means of data collection allows the researcher the opportunity to engage their senses and present a comprehensive description of the examined events.

Interviews, on the other hand, are described by Barbour and Schostak (2011) as conversations with the purpose of exchanging in-depth information concerning a specific matter, which guide the interpretation of an event through the meaning brought to it by the interviewees. Interviews convey the personal experience of the participants and uncover their emotions, fears, sense-making, interpretations and rationalizations; therefore, are considered a key data-collection method, which provide a set of data that cannot be made available by observation or focus

groups alone. The latter being centred on examining participants' stories, experiences, beliefs and needs in a collective manner, as per Kitzinger (2005), who further argues that focus groups facilitate the researcher's understanding of "how accounts are changed, challenged, censured and articulated through social interaction within peer communication and in group norms" (Kitzinger, 2005, p.58).

The subsections below detail the mechanism, utility and challenges inherent in using each of the aforementioned methods in the present research.

2.3.3.1 Observation

The researcher commenced the observation phase after receiving the ethical approval issued by the University of Liverpool and collecting consent forms from willing participants. The duration of the observation phase was approximately six months, during which the researcher spent close to 600 hours observing the participants in the organization under study.

The researcher recorded the entire human experience, with a focus on: 1. the behaviour i.e. what research participants did; 2. the knowledge i.e. what research participants knew; and 3. the artefacts i.e. what research participants made and used. In addition to this, the researcher focused on: 4. the elements that were presumed to impact the knowledge-creation process (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995), as detailed in 1.4.1 Theoretical Framework; and, finally, 5. the contextual framework of the entire event, as recommended by Tracy (2013).

The researcher took field notes in the manner recommended by Neuman (2014); in other words, every observed event was chronologically recorded on a separate page, with time and duration specified. The researcher made every possible attempt to take comprehensive notes, including 'small talk' and routine greetings, taking into consideration all contextual aspects of the event and using pseudonyms to safeguard the participants' privacy. Dialogue accessories, as described by Tracy (2013), including the tone of voice, speed, gestures and all non-verbal communications, were also recorded as part of the observations.

For the purpose of this study, the fields of observation included the physical premises of the organization in addition to the organization's digital channels, as communication was fragmented across all platforms. For instance, as and when the researcher noticed a sign of conflict during a telephone conversation, she gently requested that the participant turns the speaker on and adjusts it to low volume. Furthermore, as a senior in the organization and for the purpose of observation, the researcher requested all participants to include her as a 'blind carbon copy' (BCC) in all internal and external email correspondence; a separate email inbox was allocated for this purpose so as not to overwhelm the researcher's work email address. Moreover, the researcher took notes of her own feelings and immediate impressions in a different-coloured ink, so as not to mix the notes. The researcher also kept an 'analytic memo', in which future actions, questions to be asked in interviews, clarifications to be made and other items detailing the researcher's thought processes were noted.

Participant observation as a data-collection method provided a number of advantages to the data-gathering process. To begin with, it allowed the incorporation of patterns, timeframes and various types of communication into the findings. Moreover, it provided the researcher with the possibility of witnessing and understanding non-verbal manifestations of attitudes and feelings and adding them to the observation report. Furthermore, through observation, the researcher was able to formulate and sharpen questions intended for subsequent data-collection methods and was provided with opportunities to understand the meanings behind certain terms used by the participants during interviews and focus groups. The researcher's constant presence also positively influenced her relationship with the participants and allowed her to further understand which organizational members were significant, in terms of leadership, social status, office politics and other aspects, in a clearer manner than when she was an employee not consciously observing the dynamics of the organization. The observation phase of data collection was of great significance to the research; however, a number of challenges were inherent in the process, as explained below.

Despite the importance of extending the field of observation to encompass electronic channels of communication, this led to a number of challenges. First, participants engaged in a conflictual conversation over the phone were often consumed by it and allocated less attention to their

surroundings including the researcher and thus were slow to turn on the speaker. A second challenge associated with electronic observation related to emails; more specifically, the researcher had requested that all participants BCC her in all communications and, for this purpose, a separate email address was circulated to the participants so as not to deluge the researcher's work email address. However, monitoring all emails was time consuming, as approximately 45 to 90 minutes had to be allocated at the end of each day for this activity, which was added to the observation time.

Third, a challenge rooted in gender norms arose in the observation stage. More specifically, as a woman in a conservative culture, the researcher was granted limited access to certain areas, such as the smoking area, where work-related dialogues frequently occurred but women would not customarily partake. DeWalt and DeWalt (2011) explain this limitation by stating that gender guides the observer towards different bodies of knowledge, settings and people. This was moderated by the researcher's long-term engagement with the organization, allowing her broader access to active areas despite the presence of some social pressures in the process. Finally, the researcher's 'human' side meant that she was bound to hold predispositions, biases and assumptions, which may have affected the interpretations of selected events. Walsham (2006, p.321) stresses this notion by arguing that "we are all biased by our own background, knowledge and prejudices". This was mitigated through the researcher's consciousness of how her gender, social class, ethnicity and previous relationships may have affected the neutrality of her position.

2.3.3.2 Interviews

According to Tracy (2013), field interviews involve the interviewer and the interviewee sharing experiences. They are recommended by Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) for their ability to provide direct explanations of human actions through spoken communication. The interview questions were designed in line with the research questions and the nature of the selected research paradigm, namely interpretivism. The interviews had a semi-structured design, thereby allowing

the interviewer to ask follow-up questions and probe the interviewees to further elaborate on points of interest.

The researcher began each interview by requesting that the participants introduce themselves, in order to confirm their demographics and further understand how they defined themselves in relation to their environment. This, in turn, gave the researcher an insight into their view of the world. The researcher then asked the questions outlined in Appendix A, in the order permitted by the flow of the interview. It is noteworthy that the sequence presented in this section is in line with the researcher's initial structure.

To begin with, the interviewees were asked to narrate the conflict event. The purpose of this was to confirm the accuracy of the researcher's understanding of the observed event and to create space to clarify any ambiguities. Furthermore, this step explored the interplay between relationships and interests, as per Miall's definition of conflict transformation (2004), in addition to the existing structure being a dominant element in Lederach's definition (2014), as elaborated upon in 3.2 Conflict Transformation. Moreover, this question explored activities that had direct implications for one of the four processes described by Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995), namely socialization, externalization, combination and internalization.

The participants were then prompted to provide a detailed account of the phase following the end of the conflict, which is of significance because, according to the literature, activities that commonly interfere with knowledge creation may occur after conflict, i.e. as a consequence of it. This includes 'avoidance', which was commonly observed in the organization under study and, in fact, is a generally used coping mechanism, as affirmed by Hocker and Wilmot (2018).

The researcher used question probes to prompt the participants to further elaborate on points of interest. For instance, when a participant stated that she had recourse to 'avoidance', the researcher asked probing questions to further understand how this specific coping mechanism interfered with each of the four processes of knowledge creation. The researcher was also interested to know the frequency of occurrence and any alternatives for the process, for instance, whether the interrupted socialization in its most basic definition was substituted by other means serving the same purpose.

Following the establishment of a collaborative understanding of the observed event, the researcher asked the participants to share their interpretations of it. This question intended to explore the participants' reflections and sense-making processes, as well as provide an opportunity for each participant to share their views on the explicit and underlying causes of the conflict and how the potential discord in relationships, interests and existing structures, and the presence of conflictual patterns shaped the conflict. In many instances, participants discussed the consequences of the conflict that disrupted the processes of knowledge creation, for example, an abrupt use of sick leave. Although in the context of this question such data was collected with the intention of providing more grounds to understand the participants' interpretations, it also served as a valuable detailed account that added to the richness of the data.

Next, the participants were probed to share both the event rationalization, i.e. what their internal thought process was during and after the event, and other aspects that could not be observed, such as their emotions, fears and sought benefits and opportunities.

The researcher further probed the participants to share action that was or would be taken based on the sense-making undergone – for example, the impact on the participant's behaviour, i.e. a coping mechanism used during or after the conflict, in addition to a shift in their internal position towards the organization and its members, including the level of commitment, the level of acceptance, the extent to which they were willing to collaborate and their willingness to remain in the organization.

In an attempt to deepen her level of understanding, the researcher then enquired about the underlying causes of the conflict. This question also provided a platform to investigate any potential discord in relationships, interests or structures, and the presence of various patterns, routines or a culture that perpetuates conflict, and to examine how it interferes with the main processes of knowledge creation. The researcher probed towards understanding the historical events that may have led to the current conflict and attempted to appreciate the complexity of the environment hosting it in terms of relationships, structures, interests, office politics, the

effects of the outside environment, newly introduced regulations, various sources of pressure, and so on.

In cases where the above question had not adequately covered the larger context that hosted the conflict, the researcher explicitly asked the participant to describe the context in which the conflict took place, i.e. the bigger picture. However, it was observed that the majority of participants covered this point as a response to the probes used in the previous question.

Following the establishment of a shared understanding of the conflict and its implications for the individual and the organization, in addition to the consequences it had on the knowledge-creation spiral within the organization by way of influencing its main processes, the researcher moved the dialogue towards the way in which the organization addressed the issue of conflict. The question posed was 'How was the conflict addressed?', with the aim of exploring the participants' personal experiences through which the existing processes in the organization were brought to the researcher's attention; for example, the exact action taken to address the conflict or, in many cases, the lack of it, in addition to the timeline, involved parties, the level of escalation and, subsequently, the effect of any of the above on the main processes of knowledge creation, which were identified following data analysis.

Next, the organization's approach was explored through the answers provided to the question 'How is conflict usually addressed in the organization?' The purpose of this question was to discover whether there were commonalities between different cases in the way in which conflict was addressed, the existing processes and the expected timeline to complete them.

The researcher moved on to enquire about the implications of conflict on both the participants and the organization, and to further investigate such implications, given the way in which the conflict was addressed, by drawing on participants' experiences in the organization under study. This question prompted the participants to share the effects of conflict on various aspects, and they were probed by the researcher to describe its effects on relationships, patterns, ability to negotiate interest and level of extended cooperation, in addition to personal coping mechanisms and their implications. This question also explored how conflict hindered or fostered the knowledge-creation sub-process. Although the participants provided data regarding how they

were affected by the conflict and their interpretation of it in their responses to earlier questions, this question sought to tap into the participants' general perspectives on the effects of organizational conflict, formulated through their experiential knowledge.

Following the above, the researcher engaged the participants in reflection and sense-making by asking them about what they had learned from the event and what they wished the organization had learned. The latter provided an indication of the gaps in the organization as seen through the employees' eyes. The participants were probed to share how they thought their learning could be conveyed to other employees as well, which would be potentially used in designing action at a later stage.

The researcher then moved the dialogue towards understanding the direction in which the participants believed the change should move, by asking them to describe their ideal working environment. This question provided an opportunity for the participants to describe their desired state and to provide an assessment of the current state of affairs. This was followed by asking the participants about the most appropriate way for the organization to handle conflict and how it compared to the existing methods. This question served to generate an understanding of the different perspectives on the level of interference, scope and other elements, in addition to highlighting missing elements in the existing methods.

All observed participants were interviewed within the data-collection cycle during which the observations took place. The researcher scheduled the interviews shortly after the observed events were finished, taking care not to hold them immediately following each conflict event, as negative emotions arising from the conflict may have hindered the mindful reflection on the event on the behalf of the participants. The majority of the interviews took place between two and four days following the end of the observed event/series of events. The process of arranging an interview was relatively direct; the researcher approached the interviewee in private and requested to arrange an interview at their convenience, suggesting that the interview took place outside work to relieve the interviewee from the tension of being at the place in which the conflict had occurred and to ensure that they were able to talk freely without feeling watched or judged by others.

A limited pilot study of three interviews, aiming to polish interview questions and establish the feasibility and usefulness of this research instrument, was conducted, as recommended by Creswell and Creswell (2018). The pilot interviews confirmed that the questions were suitable and did not need to be changed, with the exception of some linguistic expressions within the questions to aid in interviewees' understanding. Altogether, seven administration staff, 11 senior staff and 25 service delivery employees were interviewed across three data-collection cycles.

A number of challenges arose while collecting data through interviews. To begin with, the researcher noticed that some interviewees appeared to be nervous at the beginning of the interview; this was addressed following the recommendation of Walsham (2006), who recommends that the interviewer should do the majority of the talking in the first few minutes to allow the interviewee to feel at ease. Second, the interviewees who did not consent to voice recording posed a challenge for the researcher in terms of taking sufficient notes while the interview was in progress. This situation was mitigated by agreeing on a slower pace to allow the researcher sufficient time to take accurate notes.

2.3.3.3 Focus Groups

Focus groups were the last data-collection method used in the data-collection cycles. Prior to commencing focus groups, the researcher conducted a pilot focus group to test the plausibility of the instrument and to allow for the amendment of the questions to ensure that they were clearly articulated and served their intended purpose. The results from the pilot focus group were not aggregated into the analysed data, as the questions were changed after assessing their effectiveness. Following this, a total of three focus groups, involving a total of 24 participants, were conducted as part of the three data-collection cycles, following the completion of interviews in each cycle. The number of participants per focus group was set at eight, in line with the recommendations presented by Bernard (2018), who states that if a group is too small, it can be dominated by one or two of the more vocal participants, while assembling a group beyond ten or 12 can be challenging to manage. The seating arrangement adopted in the design of the

venue was circular, which allowed each participant to maintain eye contact with the other participants and the moderator, as recommended by Kitzinger (2005).

The researcher commenced each focus group with two *introductory* questions designed to break the ice and align the participants' mindsets with the topic of the discussion. The first question was 'What motivated you to participate in this focus group?', followed by 'How frequently do you partake in workplace conflicts and how do you feel about them?'

Next, the discussion moved on to *explanatory* questions, which were designed in line with the interpretive paradigm governing the research and thus were open-ended questions focusing on the participants' experiences and their interpretations. The researcher began the questions by asking the participants to describe the existing elements in the organization that were perceived as leading causes of conflict and probing them as to 'why' and 'how'. This was followed by an enquiry about what needed to be changed for the environment to be less conducive to conflict. The purpose of these two questions was to establish the existing position of the organization and to obtain the participants' perspectives on how to move away from the current problematic position. Moreover, the previous questions provided a platform to examine the existing relationships, interests, conflictual patterns, structure and other related elements.

Furthermore, the researcher asked about the main areas affected by organizational conflict and requested that the participants share how they coped with its presence. Next, the group were asked to describe how they commonly behaved during and after conflict. These questions were aimed at establishing an understanding of the patterns that either fostered or hindered the main processes of knowledge creation.

The researcher then guided the discussion towards further understanding the organizational conflict by asking about how conflict was commonly escalated in the organization and what the organization usually missed or overlooked when attempting to address conflict. The explanatory questions ended with asking the participants about the improvements needed in the processes or structures to reduce organizational conflict, in addition to their proposed methods of addressing it, for which they were encouraged to think 'outside the box' to establish an outcome that was both desirable and sustainable. These questions, as with the others, were probed with

'why', 'how' and other phrases that encouraged further depth. The *exit* questions were designed to ensure that everything was covered and that all participants had shared all the points they believed were of value to the research.

The researcher faced various challenges while moderating the sessions. The presence of a hybrid of over- and under-talkative individuals meant that the orientation of the focus group was narrowed by the opinions of the vocal participants; to mitigate this, the researcher encouraged the less talkative individuals to share further opinions and gently directed the more vocal individuals to allow for the participation of others. An added challenge was avoiding the endorsement of a particular view presented by participants by way of facial expressions or body gestures, which required constant self-awareness so as not to display even a subtle or unintentional validation.

At the end of the three data-collection cycles, the researcher commenced data analysis using the conventional content analysis method.

2.3.4 Data Analysis: Conventional Content Analysis

The collected data was analysed through *conventional content analysis*, which is defined by Hsieh and Shannon (2005, p.1278) as "a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns". Content analysis is particularly suitable for this research, as Hsieh and Shannon (2005, p.1279) argue that this method can be successfully applied to research where "existing theory or research literature on a phenomenon is limited".

Preparation of data began with the researcher's choice of data-collection methods; in other words, the researcher designed and used open-ended questions. The data analysis process began with organizing data into structured text or, as described by Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005, p.211), "intelligible products", which were then ready to be coded.

The researcher applied the Taylor-Powell and Renner's method of content analysis (2003) to the data and began the analysis by *achieving a sense of the whole*, otherwise described by Tesch

(2016) as 'achieving immersion'. The researcher followed this step by reading the text one more time to note down her initial impressions in addition to the essential themes that had surfaced. Notes taken at this point were generic, such as the overall message of the text and how the researcher felt/reacted to the various segments of it.

Next, the researcher organized the data document by placing all answers to the same question in a sequence. This was followed by a re-reading of the text with the purpose of dividing the data into *meaning units*, which can be described as the smallest part of data that bears meaning (Erlingsson and Brysiewicz, 2017); in the case of the present study, this mostly comprised partial sentences. Each meaning unit was simultaneously coded, using a label that accurately described the meaning unit in approximately one to four words. It is also noteworthy that the study applied inductive reasoning, which is described by Gill, Johnson and Clark (2010) as the generation of implications from the observation of empirical realities and events.

Due to the volume of the text, the number of codes developed at this stage was substantial. It is worth mentioning that the coding of data was not a linear process but, as described by Erlingsson and Brysiewicz (2017), a reflective one. Around halfway through the process of analysis, the researcher re-coded the data as, in addition to her deeper understanding of the data, she decided that the coding carried out in the earlier sections should be revised to ensure that the codes were representative of the data; this significantly prolonged the analysis process beyond the initially anticipated time.

The next step was to group the codes into sub-categories based on content or context similarities, i.e. grouping texts addressing similar issues together. The codes were not immediately grouped into categories as further analysis was to take place. This occurred as the researcher proceeded to abstract data to a higher level, by grouping sub-categories into categories that contained similar manifest and latent content, i.e. underlying meaning.

The categories were then organized into four themes that inductively emerged from this process, namely 1. communication, 2. momentum, 3. inclusiveness and 4. reduced levels of past unaddressed organizational conflict. However, it is important to mention that further abstraction was necessary under the theme 'communication', which led to the emergence of grand-

categories, otherwise described by Taylor-Powell and Renner (2003) as 'super-categories'. These were a. communication, b. respect, c. tolerance, d. openness and e. reduced levels of technology-mediated communication. Alongside the main themes; the grand-categories are also discussed in detail in 4.1.3 Reporting of Findings and 4.1.4 Discussion, for purposes of comprehensiveness and academic rigour.

The researcher faced a number of challenges during the course of data analysis. To begin with, the amount of time originally allocated to data analysis was not sufficient; the researcher had to allocate double the original time to complete this task. This was partly due to the substantial amount of data and the fact that, being a reflective process, the coding task was revised during the data analysis itself. Furthermore, a number of limitations are naturally inherent in being an 'insider researcher', as affirmed by Brannick and Coghlan (2007), most of which relate to predispositions, biases and assumptions that the researcher may carry; this prompted her to remain highly vigilant throughout the process, in an effort to minimize this to the greatest extent possible.

2.4 Limitations

According to Price and Murnan (2004), the dimensions of methodology and research design that influence the interpretation of findings, and are constraining to practice, generalizability or utility, are described as 'limitations'.

A number of limitations are inherent in the choice of research paradigm and research design. First, due to the nature of the 'interpretive paradigm', the sought contribution to empirical practice does not necessarily provide theoretical contributions that are as robust as those made available by research rooted in an alternative paradigm, such as positivism. Second, it is important to acknowledge that the interpretivist method means that the researcher is allowed high levels of subjectivity in data processing, thus the replication of the research design would potentially result in highly similar but not necessarily identical conclusions (Wiersma and Jurs, 2009). To add to this, generalizability is limited by the fact that the design of the research allows for the transfer of findings from the current setting to other industries but excludes fully

homogenous professional teams and blue-collar working groups. Third, data collection through observation has a number of limitations that apply to this research, including the fact that the presence of the researcher may have potentially altered the behaviour of the observed. However, this was mitigated by investing lengthy hours (circa 600) in the activity of observing, which led to organizational members being at ease with the presence of the researcher in this capacity. Fourth, a limitation arises due to the use of observation as a data-collection method as it does not provide sufficient insight into deep emotions, thought processes and other aspects of the observed, which mandated its use in conjunction with interviews and focus groups. Fifth, the use of interviews as a data-collection method meant that representation was limited compared to quantitative data analysis.

To add to the above, a sixth limitation is due to the semi-structured design of the interviews, which were intended to provide an open platform for the participants to share information. However, the interviewer may have subtly or unintentionally influenced the process, as noted by Hammersley (2008, p.100), who states that “what people say in an interview will indeed be shaped, to some degree, by the questions they are asked, [...] by what they think the interviewer wants”. Moreover, Walford and Delamont (2008, p.147) argue that “interviews alone are an insufficient form of data to study social life”; the researcher agrees with this statement and mitigated this limitation by conducting interviews as part of a comprehensive data-collection cycle, also involving observation and focus groups, which allowed the researcher to observe behaviour and then gain insight into the internal thought processes of the interviewees. Finally, the limitations presented by conducting focus groups included the inability to go in-depth with each important statement presented by participants. However, it must be noted that limitations presented by the use of each individual data-collection method were counterbalanced by the other collection methods used in the data-collection cycle.

A number of limitations are also inherent in being an ‘insider researcher’, as affirmed by Brannick and Coghlan (2007), most of which relate to predispositions, biases and assumptions that the researcher may carry, as it is inevitable that positions towards people, events, processes and other aspects of the organization are consciously or unconsciously taken by the researcher. Moreover, the researcher was aware of the risk of being “socialized to the views of the people in

the field”, as emphasized by Walsham (2006, p.322), therefore losing the necessary distance that allows for an unbiased outlook on the matter under study. This was mitigated through the researcher’s awareness of her biases and assumptions, which were used as checkpoints to ensure maximum objectivity, and by refraining from being emotionally engaged with any event occurring in her presence to the fullest extent possible, as discussed in 4.4 Reflection, Sense-making and Scholarly Development.

Limitations also arise due to the geographical location of the research, which in this case was the Kingdom of Bahrain. Although the results can be successfully transferred to other contexts, the findings are influenced by the culture and the national setting of the country, in addition to the white-collar context of the organization.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

The topic of ethics in relation to action research has received due consideration from academics such as Coghlan and Shani (2005), Brydon-Miller (2009) and Holian and Coghlan (2013). Action research assumes that participants understand the process and take significant action within it (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014). Therefore, ethics involve establishing an authentic relationship between the researcher and the participants, as affirmed by Rowan (2000). The researcher agrees with Walker and Haslett’s recommendation (2002) that ethical issues in action research must be addressed in the research cycle itself, which is designed around planning, action and reflection. In an attempt to do this, the researcher kept two questions in her mind at every step of the cycle: who will be impacted by implementing a specific action and how will they be impacted by it?

Coghlan (2015) further argues that action research integrates enquiry into daily organizational life, through emergent processes that continue to evolve through cycles of planning, action, reflection and further planning. Thus, it is not feasible to consider all ethical eventualities in advance. It is important to mention that there were a number of foreseeable ethical considerations, such as the researcher’s insider position, which are further discussed in 4.4.1 Examining Preunderstandings, Assumptions and Biases, in addition to ethical issues pertaining to the process of participants’ recruitment, which were addressed within the guidelines mandated

by the University of Liverpool and described in 2.3.1 Participant Inclusion Criteria and 4.1 Diagnosing: Framing the Organizational Issue.

Moreover, other aspects of this research have also held to the strict ethical guidelines issued by the University of Liverpool's Ethical Committee. To begin with, confidentiality and the safe handling of data were ensured across all phases of the research, and all the collected data was processed without information identifying the participants. To add to this, data remained stored securely, with the application of necessary provisions to maintain confidentiality.

Furthermore, all potential psychological, relational, legal, economic, professional, physical and other risks were fully acknowledged and considered. However, due to the nature of this research, the aforementioned risks were deemed minimal to non-existent, as participation was strictly voluntary, and participants were reassured of anonymity. Therefore, the research risks and burdens were deemed reasonable, in light of the new knowledge the research generates and the contribution it makes to empirical practice and existing literature.

2.6 Quality and Rigour

The underlying research methods in this thesis, namely action research and the interpretive paradigm, invite a redefinition of the notions of 'validity' and 'reliability', which although commonly used; are deeply rooted in the positivist perspective, as affirmed by Golafshani (2003). This is supported by Reason and Bradbury (2013), who state that action research should not be evaluated based on the quality criteria rooted within the positivist or other paradigms.

Coghlan and Brannick (2014) argue that the quality of action research is judged by the rigours and conscious execution of the action research cycle, which in the present thesis is detailed under 4. Story of Cycles of Action, Reflection and Sense-making. Towards this, Reason and Bradbury (2013) present quality checkpoints against which action research is to be evaluated; the present thesis is in full compliance with the points put forward by the authors, as described below.

Action research was conducted on a specific organizational issue that was deemed significant to the organization in which praxis of relational participation was thoroughly developed. To add to

this, the research had an interest in practical outcomes, as discussed under 5.2 Outcomes of Implemented Action. Further to that, the research was fully guided by reflection and sense-making, as described under 4.4 Reflection, Sense-making and Scholarly Development, and a theory that is usable to communities beyond those directly involved in action was generated, as described under 6.1 Emergent Theories. Finally, sustainable change was achieved by way of instituting infrastructural changes in the organization, as detailed under 5. Evaluation and Outcomes.

Neuman (2014) also mentions 'plausibility' as an indicator of validity and argues that neither the data nor any statements made about it are to be claimed exclusive, with no other possible claims, nor are they to be presented as the only truth pertaining to the research subject. This is consistent with the interpretive paradigm, which stresses the high subjectivity of the process. Further, the author highlights the importance of attaining 'authenticity', rather than placing emphasis on achieving a single version of the 'truth'. In this context, Neuman (2014) describes authenticity as presenting a balanced, fair and honest description of the event under study as viewed by those who experience it, while maintaining a "tight fit" (p.218) between the statements and the understanding formed about the social world. This was achieved by the research and validated by the participants themselves during the in-depth interviews and focus groups, where the researcher sought confirmation of her understanding of the studied events and constructed a joint understanding with the participants in order to reflect their true experiences of the social world.

Creswell and Miller (2000) also argue that, in the context of qualitative research, validity refers to whether or not the findings are deemed accurate from the standpoint of the person (entity) who conducts the research, the research participants and the reader. This was further cross-checked and accepted by research participants during a 'pre-kick-off meeting', as described in 4.2 Planning for Action; it was also accepted by the researcher and the supervisor appointed by the university as a sensible approach. The conducted process of cross-checking the emergent themes with the research subjects is described as 'member checking' by Creswell and Creswell (2018).

Further to the above and according to Creswell and Creswell (2018), 'triangulation' is a means of testing validity that can be achieved when data from different sources is examined and used to develop themes. In the case of the present research, this was achieved by drawing perspectives via three distinct data-collection methods, namely observation, in-depth interviews and focus groups. The authors also cite lengthy time spent in the field as a supporter of validity, which applies to the present research due to the length of time spent in observation being around 600 hours, supplemented by the time spent conducting 43 in-depth interviews and three focus groups. The time allocated for the execution of action research and post-implementation evaluation, through four distinct phases, further prolonged the time spent in absolute engagement with the research subjects, in addition to the time spent in the organization as a natural member. Furthermore, the research provides solid reliability measures through the exhaustive documentation of the action research process, including data collection, analysis and implementation, all of which aid in replicating the research.

On the other hand, Coghlan and Brannick (2014) describe rigour in action research as being implemented in data gathering, interpretation, implementation and evaluation, in addition to the way in which events are reflected upon and interpreted through the action research cycle. The researcher exercised rigour in the above-mentioned areas, as described in detail in 4. Story of Cycles of Action, Reflection and Sense-making. Furthermore, the assumptions held by the researcher were documented in the 'identity memo', brought into the open and discussed in the executives' forum, which brought to the surface multiple interpretations of what was happening, some of which challenged the researcher's thought processes. The way in which the assumptions were tested, and subsequently the occurred shift in mindset and behaviours, are documented in 4.4 Reflection, Sense-making and Scholarly Development.

Chapter Three

3. Literature Review

This chapter aims to situate the research within its academic context. The specialized literature was used to enhance the researcher's understanding of the examined topics and as a means of analysing and interpreting the organizational issue. In addition to that, this section seeks to identify a gap in the existing literature and indicates the present research's contribution to bridging it, thus making an original contribution to science alongside other deliverables derived from the implementation of action, all of which are discussed in the relevant chapters.

3.1 Definition of Conflict

Nicholson (1992) defines conflict as an activity that occurs when conscious beings, i.e. groups or individuals, attempt to fulfil their needs or desires through mutually inconsistent acts. The term 'inconsistent' is further stressed by Rahim (2011, p.207), who argues that conflict is an intractable process, exhibiting inconsistencies or disagreements within or between social entities. The author further adds that scholars have not yet reached an agreement on a unified definition of conflict.

A similar description is provided by Fisher, Bavinck and Amsalu (2018), who argue that conflict is a state of social tension and human dissatisfaction derived from the presence of contrary objectives. Galtung and Fischer (2013, p.61), on the other hand, view conflict as a living entity that progresses through various stages, reaches a violent or an emotional climax and then fades away. The authors further argue that conflict is centred on mutually exclusive objectives and caution that, in the case where such objectives are tied to basic needs such as survival, wellness or identity, an inward expression of emotion or an outward expression of violence may occur. In an organizational context, violence may be expressed in the form of workplace bullying, institutionalization of a culture rooted in discrimination or verbal aggression, or in other forms.

Galtung and Fischer (2013) expand on the aforementioned arguments on conflict complexity by affirming that simple conflicts in which opposing parties pursue a common objective are not common in the present day; rather, most conflicts are characterized by evolving goals, issues and actors, which render the conflict complex and difficult to map. However, in spite of its established complexities, conflict is often addressed in a linear manner, as affirmed by Pinzon and Midgley (2000). This is also mentioned by Gallo (2012), who underlines that conflict research often makes the controversial limiting attempt of simplifying the issue and isolating the process or event from its systematic context by placing less emphasis on the external influences that shape the issue (Marshall, 1999).

The above-mentioned limitations and other factors detailed in 1.1 Overview and Research Rationale directed the researcher's thinking towards conflict transformation as the most appropriate approach to the organizational issue under examination. The need to apply the most suitable conflict handling method is emphasized by Galtung and Fischer (2013), who highlight the importance of selecting the correct conflict handling method, as the use of resolution techniques in situations that mandate transformational approaches may arrive at solutions based on prevarication, adjudication or compromise, or result in further empowering an already dominant party.

3.2 Conflict Transformation

Rahim (2011) argues that conflict transformation theories are embedded in social structures, defined as ethnic groups, states, organizations or other formations. At the centre of such theories lie a range of definitions that encompass various attributes, as discussed below.

Miall (2004) describes the conflict transformation process as one that yields a peaceful outcome by way of engaging with and transforming discourse, interests and relationships that may potentially be implanted in conflictual patterns that surpass anxieties created by a single conflict episode. The author further affirms that conflict transformation acknowledges that adequate handling of conflict requires more than identifying scenarios that serve the involved parties or reframe their initial positions. The above-mentioned definition was adopted by the researcher

and served as the basis of the data collection design described in 2. Methodology. This particular definition was selected due to its applicability to organizations and to the consensus provided by other scholars on its central elements. For instance, Lederach (2014) underlines the criticality of both relationships and structures, describing the conflict transformation process as the alteration of relationships established among the parties involved in the conflict, the relationships sustained between them and components of the external environment. The author extends his argument by stating that the dynamics of a persistent conflict can transform relationships and events that had initially led to the emergence of the conflict in the first place, in addition to transforming the involved parties themselves, making this cyclical process impossible to accurately evaluate or effectively address through conventional means. Kirkpatrick (2017) expands on Lederach's argument (2014) by stressing the importance of addressing structures in the context of conflict transformation, arguing that the structural causes leading to the formation of the conflict must be acknowledged and addressed as an integral part of the process.

Moreover, Lederach (2014) describes conflict as a 'topography' consisting of 'peaks' and 'valleys', wherein peaks represent the 'specifics' of the conflict, i.e. its content, while valleys signify failures to reach acceptable resolutions. The author stresses the human inclination to emphasize the most immediate encounter as an all-inclusive picture. In order to avoid this pitfall, the researcher's observation phase was planned to take place over a prolonged period of time, which would ensure exposure to subsequent conflictual episodes. This was to be followed by in-depth interviews designed to advance the researcher's understanding of the historical roots of the discussed conflict, which would, in turn, form a comprehensive picture of the above-mentioned 'topography'. The author also emphasizes the difficulty in comprehending the true proportions of a conflict when the involved party is 'standing on a peak', in other words, when they are fixated on a small aspect of the conflict.

Lederach (2014) further affirms that the above-mentioned perspective directs the involved parties towards actions designed to relieve anxieties stemming from the most immediate conflict episode, as opposed to adopting a more comprehensive view of the experienced conflict, which is proposed to be done through three perspectives described by the author as 'lenses'.

In order to apply Lederach's aforementioned theory (2014), the author recommends examining the immediate situation through the first lens. Its context and the deeper relational and structural patterns inherent within it are to be seen through the second lens, while the third and final lens defines the framework that holds all of the above together. The researcher adapted the above approach to interpreting and analysing the organizational issues. The first lens would, therefore, examine each organizational issue at its manifest level, the second would focus on the relational patterns inherent in the situation and their conflictual context, which would be further studied in the diagnosing stage of action, while the third perspective would define the framework holding all of the above together, as discussed in 4. Story of Cycles of Action, Reflection and Sense-making.

Furthermore, and as opposed to conflict resolution, transformation of conflict does not necessarily commence following the occurrence of a specific incident; according to Austin, Fischer and Ropers (2004), the term 'conflict transformation' encompasses preventative activities as well, which is of particular relevance to the issue under study as reducing the manifestations of negative conflict is crucial to the achievement of organizational stability, as opposed to being reactive, i.e. responding to conflict following its occurrence.

Lederach (2014), building on Galtung's views (1996), states that for change to be effective it must be administered at various levels including system, organization and individual levels, which aided the researcher's interpretation of the organizational problem by prompting analysis at all said levels. At an individual level, Little (2017) further discusses the emotional aspect of the transformation, arguing that change at an individual level enhances awareness, encourages growth and often promotes ownership of change. This is in spite of the fact that emotions such as bitterness, fear, anger and disappointment may arise from the shift in position at that level, as such emotions are inherent in the dynamic progression of the process. In other words, the establishment of channels that support the outward expression of such emotions is integral to the success of the conflict transformation process (Little, 2017). This is also supported by Friedman, Arieli and Aboud-Armali (2017), who emphasize that the conflicted parties greatly benefit from expressing and reframing their emotions. Therefore, the lack of such channels in

the initial state of the organization under study understandably hindered organically formed conflict transformation elements.

3.2.1 Common Themes in the Field of Conflict Transformation

In addition to the above-described values and goals encompassed within the process of conflict transformation, several common themes are found within specialized literature.

Peace is a central theme in literature relating to conflict transformation as in addition to Miall's definition (2004), which positions peace as a sought outcome of conflict transformation, Galtung and Fischer (2013) also argue that the presence of 'positive peace' is an attribute of conflict transformation, describing it as a state where the involved parties have the ability to explore their potential without resistance, be it direct or structural, in a just and peaceful environment. The importance of peace to the process of conflict transformation is also supported by Lederach (2014), who argues that peace is rooted in quality relationships and describes it as a 'process-structure' that is dynamic, adaptive and ever-evolving, while sustaining form, purpose and shape.

In regards to the emergence of non-destructive relationships; Lederach (2014) argues that the presence of relationships implies that conflict will continue to form and thus it is not possible to argue that a conflict can end as long as a relationship is evolving; however, patterns of destructive interaction can be effectively transformed into constructive interaction. The author further argues that conflict transformation is "to envision and respond to the ebb and flow of social conflict as life-giving opportunities for creating constructive change processes [...] in response to real life problems in human relationships" (Lederach, 2014, p.14). In addition to that, Clements (2002) addresses the relationship between conflict transformation and non-destructive patterns by stating that conflict transformation is favoured by theorists and practitioners because it underlines the fact that conflicts are never entirely resolved, but only reframed, altered or changed so that non-destructive relationships can emerge.

It is important to state that, despite the association of the notion of constructive conflict with the field of conflict transformation, other areas of study such as conflict resolution and conflict

management have also highlighted its significance in altering the course of conflict. Miall (2004) quotes Bloomfield and Reilly's definition of conflict management (1998), which describes the position of the field of conflict management in relation to non-destructive relationships: "Conflict management is the positive and constructive handling of difference and divergence. Rather than advocating methods for removing conflict, [it] addresses the more realistic question of managing conflict: how to deal with it in a constructive way, how to bring opposing sides together in a cooperative process, how to design a practical, achievable, cooperative system for the constructive management of difference" (Bloomfield and Reilly, 1998, cited in Miall, 2004, p.3). Furthermore, and in relation to conflict resolution, Miall (2004) states that "Conflict resolution is about how parties can move from zero sum, destructive patterns of conflict to positive-sum constructive outcomes" (p.3).

The centrality of symmetric relationships in the process of conflict transformation is another overarching theme in the field; this was first introduced by Curle in 1971, who put forward a model that guided the movement from unbalanced to balanced power. Subsequently, Lederach (2014) built on the notions presented by Curle (1971), arguing that conflict's relational and contextual grounds must be considered prior to attempting to address it. Miall (2004) further recognizes the importance of engaging with and transforming relationships as a pathway to achieving conflict transformation.

Levels of inclusion is another dominant theme in the field of conflict transformation. As a process, conflict transformation seeks to involve all stakeholders, unlike conflict resolution or conflict management, which are more centred on the outcome than the process. In this regard, Boege (2006) asserts that inclusion of all relevant parties is a system strength in conflict transformation, a view also supported by Kriesberg (2011), who highlights that taking into consideration all conflict-related matters allows the formulation of suitable ends for all involved parties, as they provide direction for the methods used in the transformation of the conflict. This is also stressed by Galtung and Fischer (2013), who propose that 'forgotten stakeholders' are found and included as part of an effective enactment of the Transcend approach to conflict transformation.

Further to the above, length of engagement is identified as a central theme in specialized literature. Francis (2002) argues that conflict transformation can be distinguished from the more generic field of conflict resolution through the length of engagement. Several other authors have contrasted the two fields based on length of engagement, including Lederach (1995), who emphasizes that the process entails commitment to constructing and sustaining both relationships and workable structures, as opposed to focusing on immediate results. Furthermore, conflict transformation is rooted in both education and change at a cultural level, which are both long-term engagements extending beyond relieving the anxieties brought about by a single conflict episode. Ryan (1995) further argues that positive developments in conflict transformation must involve some element of education, in the broadest meaning of the term.

Structural change is identified as the final central theme in the field of conflict transformation through which Lederach (2014) argues that the broader social structures that host the conflict are central to its development. Mitchell (2002) presents a similar argument, highlighting the need for major changes in the socio-cultural and economic systems in which a conflict originated. This has also been addressed by Väyrynen (1991) in the fourth category of his model, namely structural transformation, in addition to Galtung's work (1995) on structural and cultural causes of conflict.

3.2.2 Key Debates in the Field of Conflict Transformation

Miall (2004) argues that the field of conflict transformation is a reconceptualized expansion of conflict management and resolution and, thus, debates within this field are not as developed as they are in the aforementioned more generic fields. However, a number of debates have shaped the discourse in the field, as described below.

To begin with, the basis of the emergence of the field is debated; some authors such as Galtung and Fischer (2013) in addition to Lederach (2014) argue that it has merits as a stand-alone field, while others such as Kriesberg, Northrup and Thorson (1989) assert that the discipline is a reaction to the deficiencies found in the fields of conflict resolution and conflict management. The latter authors have identified and challenged four assumptions in the field of conflict

resolution, namely: a. parties to conflict are rational; b. misperception constitutes a central cause of conflict; c. conflict resolution principles apply across social settings i.e. labour, international, interpersonal; and d. high value is placed on peaceful resolution. The authors assert that the field of conflict transformation has emerged to cater for a different perspective on the four mentioned assumptions and, thus, propose that: a. cultural context defines rationality; b. differing world views lead to the development of deep feelings and subsequent actions, which are understated through the use of the word 'misconception'; c. various settings and stages of conflict require different approaches; and, finally, d. not all parties are willing to settle and may want to remain in discord. Although the list of assumptions proposed by Kriesberg, Northrup and Thorson (1989) may not receive consensus from all practitioners in the field of conflict resolution, it does represent key assumptions that shape the field.

A number of debates also relate to the distinction between the three existing schools of thought, namely conflict resolution, management and transformation. In this regard, Miall (2004) argues that it is of benefit to recognize the three separate schools within this field to clearly position conflict transformation within the overarching discipline of conflict handling. It is noteworthy that the critical evaluation of the existing schools assisted the researcher in her efforts to select the most suitable approach for application in the organization under study.

The term 'conflict resolution' implies finding a resolution and, thus, directs the individual's thinking towards problem-solving, which in turn is focused on the content of the conflict, i.e. *who, how, why* and *when*, as opposed to its underlying structural and relational influences as per Lederach (2014), who states that this position justifies the existence of substantial academic literature on negotiation in the field.

The above-described perspective facilitated the researcher's thinking away from conflict resolution as a possible remedy for the organizational problem, as the drivers of the issue were deeply entrenched in the relationships between the stakeholders and this further intensified following emergent changes in the social structure, often rendering the content of the conflict irrelevant or 'beside the point'.

In regard to process-orientation, as discussed above, the disruption caused in the immediate relationship is the main concern of conflict resolution, as opposed to the issues underlying relational patterns, which, in turn, are the main concern for conflict transformation processes alongside attempting to resolve the issue (Lederach, 2014). This is of direct relevance to the organization under study as distorted relationships were thought to be the cause of the emerging problems, as outlined in 1.4.1 Theoretical Framework.

As far as its connection to crisis is concerned, conflict resolution is driven by the urge to achieve short-term relief by way of resolving the problem episode, i.e. is crisis driven. On the other hand, conflict transformation addresses the conceptual context and the relational patterns surrounding the issue and, thus, is crisis responsive, as asserted by Lederach (2014). In terms of an overall view of conflict, de-escalatory methods are commonly used by conflict resolution practitioners, while their counterparts from the conflict transformation field engage with the conflict at various levels, processes and functions, which may push the conflict further to the surface before de-escalating it, as affirmed by the author.

On the other hand, conflict management is defined by Afzalur Rahim, Antonioni and Psenicka (2001) as a means of maximizing the benefits of an occurred conflict and containing its negative impacts. Thus, at its most basic level, conflict management does not fully address the structural relationships or the dynamics between the stakeholders of a problem episode. Accordingly, conflict management is not the most suitable approach for the establishment and institution of sustained change, which is vital in projects undertaken by action research.

In contrast with the above, conflict transformation takes a different approach to identifying the best method through which social conflict can be addressed (Galtung and Fischer, 2013). Lederach (2014) argues that conflict transformation is concerned with resolving the problem but is equally concerned with addressing its underlying causes, the relational and structural patterns surrounding it, in addition to its context, which, as affirmed by the author, gives the process purpose and direction. Furthermore, Austin, Fischer and Ropers (2004) emphasize that conflict transformation entails the alteration of mindset and thus can be applied as a preventative measure. This perspective is of significance to the topics examined under action research as a

pragmatic methodology, as a sustainable outcome is expected to materialize and be applied to the organization under study as a result of conducting such research. This, in turn, can only be attained through an inclusive and practical approach to the issue under discussion. Based on the aforementioned, and in light of the nature of the issue under study outlined in 1.1 Overview and Research Rationale, it was concluded that conflict transformation would be better suited to address the organizational problem than conflict resolution or management.

Another key debate in the field pertains to the meanings inherent within the term conflict transformation and whether it is to be regarded as descriptive of the field of conflict handling in general and thus deemed synonymous with the term conflict resolution, or whether conflict transformation is a product of a separate emerging theory of conflict handling. Miall (2004) argues for the latter and indicates that the field is characterized by distinct elements that differentiate it from the fields of conflict resolution and conflict management. This view is also supported by Lederach (2014), who asserts that the field of conflict transformation and conflict resolution may contain various models of and approaches to conflict handling that may share core ideas; however, the meanings suggested by the concepts they represent, in addition to the implications of their application, are vastly different. Nonetheless, a number of scholars including Miall (2004) and Rupesinghe and Anderlini (1998) acknowledge that the field of conflict transformation rests upon traditions and concepts borrowed from the more generic field of conflict resolution and, thus, can be considered a reconceptualized expansion of it.

The inclusion of conflict resolution within conflict transformation models is another key debate in the field. Galtung and Fischer (2013) promote the Transcend theory, which entails transcending the conflict by dis-embedding it from its current context and embedding it into another, therefore placing less emphasis on engaging with the conflict as initially defined. On the other hand, scholars such as Väyrynen (1991) assert that there is, in fact, value to resolving conflict within the process.

Furthermore, the centrality of relationships versus structures in the transformation process is widely debated. Although there is a general consensus on the importance of both aspects, some authors such as Curle (1971) emphasize that conflict is embedded in asymmetric relationships.

On the other hand, other scholars including Kirkpatrick (2017) highlight the alternation of the structural formations that caused the conflict in the first place as a central element within the process.

3.2.3 Models of Conflict Transformation

Scholars have developed various conflict mapping models, which, in spite of their differences, share the core mechanism of outlining the conflict by way of identifying its most basic elements, such as the involved parties, inherent issues, alliances, etc. In this regard, Frazer and Ghetta (2013) argue that, in order to design a sustainable conflict transformation process, two variables must be considered, namely a. the type of change required and b. the actors involved in the conflict. Once such variables are identified, the conflict worker who is operating in the capacity of a researcher, a member of the human resources department or other, can accordingly proceed to determine the most suitable intervention.

Furthermore, Wehr (2018) presents a holistic conflict-mapping approach that encompasses the main elements of the conflict, such as its context, stakeholders, causes, goals and interests, dynamics, constraining beliefs, functions and regulation, as well as its consequences. Additionally, Johan Galtung developed the Transcend Theory, which is a conflict transformation model founded on the notion that the possibility of conflict is reduced when alternatives become more abundant, as argued by Galtung and Fischer (2013). The authors further argue that the model can be used to transcend the conflict by way of 'dis-embedding' it from its original context and 'embedding' it into a different context, i.e. allowing a new situation to form.

Further to that, Väyrynen (1991) developed a conflict transformation model that is based on interventions at multiple levels, namely: a. actor transformation, which occurs through introducing new stakeholders to the conflict event; b. issue transformation, which occurs through changing the agenda of the conflict; c. rule transformation, which occurs through improving the norms and rules governing the conflict; and d. structural transformation, which occurs through changing the relationship structure and the power dynamics surrounding the conflict. The researcher observed that the inclusivity of the dimensions presented by Väyrynen (1991) allows

for the application of various projects within its parameters. Thus, this model was considered for the application of conflict transformation within the organization under study, to be confirmed following the data-collection phase and upon reaching consensus on the nature of action.

A number of challenges are inherent in conflict modelling, as affirmed by Gallo (2012). The first challenge is the evolutionary nature of conflict, which, according to the author, calls for the continual modification of the model to reflect the ever-changing nature of its elements. The second is the elusiveness of quantification, on which a number of disciplines place a significant weight. The final challenge is the personal involvement of conflict workers or the researcher, which is an area of concern because, according to the author and as later supported by Lederach (2014), action taken by involved parties has the potential to profoundly affect the conflict, to the extent that a new model may be required.

The above challenges were studied in the context of the organizational problem and were revisited during the diagnosing and planning phases to ensure that common challenges did not hinder the progress of the action research.

3.3 Organizational Conflict Transformation in the Kingdom of Bahrain and the GCC

Organizational conflict transformation as a stand-alone field has not been widely practised or studied in the Kingdom of Bahrain or the GCC; however, aspects of the more generic types of organizational conflict handling are practised. For instance, the organizational conflict resolution scene in Bahrain is dominated by the Bahrain Chamber for Dispute Resolution (BCDR), which is considered an authority in the field and has jurisdiction over international commercial disputes and those in which one party is a financial institution.

Further to the above, although empirical studies on organizational conflict handling in the Kingdom of Bahrain are scarce, studies have been executed in other GCC states that share aspects of the socio-cultural context of Bahrain. For instance, a study conducted in Kuwait and Jordan by El-Rajabi (2007) found that the organizational and professional commitment has a significant impact on organizational–professional conflict. Additionally, the results show a negative

correlation between organizational–professional conflict and job satisfaction, and a positive correlation between job satisfaction and organizational commitment. In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Ibrahim and Al Marri (2015) found that the presence of organizational support is key to the reduction of conflict emerging from role duality among accountants in the UAE. While, another study executed in the same country by Tahir Suliman (2007) asserts that perceptions of justice by UAE employees in the workplace influence their work performance. Further to that, in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Al Zahrani (2013) examined the preference for conflict management styles among Saudi and American faculty members in a university and concluded that there were no statistically significant differences in conflict management styles. Furthermore, the author concluded that there were no significant correlations between any of the conflict management styles and job satisfaction, organizational commitment or propensity to leave the job.

On the other hand, Musallam (2004) affirms that, there are no well-defined or well-designed communication strategies for the public or private sectors in terms of managing and dealing with crises or conflicts in Kuwait. The author further concludes that the use of communication for solving crises and conflicts should be improved in organizations in both the public and private sectors.

In light of the above studies conducted in the field of organizational conflict in the GCC and with minimal examples of the application of conflict transformation as a distinct method of organizational conflict handling in the region, this research is positioned to make original contributions to both academia and organizational practice in the Kingdom of Bahrain and the region.

3.4 Organizational Conflict

Intergroup, interpersonal and intragroup conflicts are inherent in the term ‘social conflict’, as argued by Pruitt and Kim (2004), who define it as a perceived or existing discord in values, needs or interests between members of an organization. On the other hand, a safe and healthy working environment is one in which the members benefit from social, personal, physical and developmental support (Kelloway and Day, 2005). However, and despite the abundance of

occupational health and safety legislations designed to safeguard employees' wellbeing, an optimum working environment is not a default (McKenzie, 2015). Katz (2017) adds that mishandling organizational conflict invites negative impacts on the organization's main functions, such as productivity, quality, retention and recruitment. Further to that, Guthrie, Ciccarelli and Babic (2010) emphasize the high cost incurred by organizations due to conflict, which continues to grow due to deteriorated employee behaviours, lengthy absenteeism, medical and psychological care, and so on.

To add to the above, the cost and available statistics associated with workplace conflict are presumed to be underestimated at any point in time, as employees experiencing this rarely acknowledge its presence, choosing not to escalate and report, or not to file compensation claims when entitled (Caulfield et al., 2004). This is expected as, according to Dollard and Knott (2004), employees have previously indicated that they regret filing compensation claims due to the stress inherent in the process (Haines, Williams and Carson, 2006; Winefield, Saebel and Winefield, 2010), which could lead to an alleged 'social suicide'. Roberts-Yates (2003) and Lippel (2007) agree that a substantial amount of stress is inflicted by the process on organizational members.

This section of the literature review played a vital part in advancing the researcher's understanding of the organizational issue and its implications, which were highlighted in 1.1 Overview and Research Rationale. It is noteworthy that, although not all dimensions of the issue under study were clear at the outset of the research, engagement with the literature guided the researcher's conceptualization of the issue and its possible resolutions, as described in 1.4.1 Theoretical Framework.

3.4.1 Personal Conflict

Lederach and Stork (1993) argue that social conflicts – which include organizational conflict – are best addressed by methods that consider their underlying causes, frameworks and governing relationships. Personal conflicts occurring within organizations are a component of the broader social conflict. The presence of personal conflict in organizations is further intensified due to

incompatibilities found between conventional organizational structures and human nature, as affirmed by Gregorio (2014).

Poor communication is a main influencer on personal conflict, which in turn affects the flow of information within organizations and subsequently impairs its overall performance, as affirmed by Üstüner and Kis (2014), who further add that such conflicts often arise from a lack of harmony and divergent views and ideas. Personal conflict within organizations can occur at any point in a spectrum ranging from manageable disagreements to organizational violence, such as workplace bullying. In all cases, and as affirmed by Kidder (2007), conflict is accompanied by negative emotions and a probable deterioration of the organization's overall health when ineffectively addressed.

Relationships cultivated within commercial organizations, on the other hand, are among the most meaningful, as argued by Struthers, Dupuis and Eaton (2005) and agreed by Fineman (2000), who proposes that, due to the significance and proximity of such relationships, it is important to conceal intense emotions such as annoyance or attraction in order to reduce the probability of personal conflict in the organization. To expand on the above, Lutgen-Sandvik (2006) argues that organizational communication is often both 'social' and 'public', i.e. it is context-bound and not exclusive to the parties directly involved in the conflict.

Emotions in workplace relationships are addressed by Waldron (2000), who argues that relational conflicts are shaped by emotional experiences arising from the unique contextual features of workplace conflicts. Retzinger and Scheff (2000) further highlight the role played by emotions in social conflict and state that powerful emotions stemming from intense incidences such as alienation may trigger feelings of anger or shame, which, in turn, manifest in a partial or complete shift in the employees' mindset or behaviour. This is supported by Caulfield et al. (2004), who underline that organizational conflicts have deep implications at both physical and psychological levels.

To add to the above, unaddressed organizational conflicts bear negative implications for working groups, as affirmed by De Angelis (2009). For instance, passive-aggressiveness is observed when anxieties are harboured between team members; this subtle and common position may result in

compromised team creativity, the institution of an overall aggressive working environment, sabotaging of projects, increased instances of personal abuse, disruption to main functions, decreased sensitivity, interference with empathy, and the diversion of time and energy away from the organization's mission.

The discussion in this section assisted the researcher in forming a deeper appreciation of the complexity of the issue, which was to influence the prudence exercised in the various aspects of research design.

3.4.2 Intergroup Conflict

The underlying causes of conflict between different groups within organizations are, to a great extent, similar to the underlying causes of conflict occurring in other social structures; however, Fahed-Sreih (2018) adds that the conflict between groups is primarily driven by position, power and opportunity. For instance, the dependence on an individual or a department to achieve one's goals is a catalyst for conflict, especially if accompanied by abuse of power by one of the parties, as noted by the author. Fahed-Sreih (2018) further states that mutual dependence is "usually [a] common problem in companies" (p.9), which can also be a platform for conflict. On the other hand, intergroup conflict can emerge as a result of conflict between leaders within the group (Üstüner and Kis, 2014). Despite the commonly negative aftermath of conflict, positive by-products can emerge from its occurrence (Lederach, 2014); for instance, the presence of non-conforming groups or subgroups may advance the group's understanding of the deliberated issue and encourage innovation in problem-solving.

3.4.3 Intragroup Conflict

Üstüner and Kis (2014) argue that intragroup conflict occurs for various reasons, including negative emotions harboured towards other team members, competition over resources and rewards, etc. Fahed-Sreih (2018) expands on the aforementioned argument by stating that certain behaviours and attitudes are observed in competitive teams that value winning, including overlooking minor differences between members, loyalty to one's team and low tolerance to

visible deviation. Group psychology serves as an underlying cause of many organizational conflicts, as affirmed by Böhm, Rusch and Baron (2018). Therefore, an understanding of the issue's context and its structural relationships demonstrates that the true proportions of organizational conflict extend past the limits of a single problem episode (Lederach and Stork, 1993).

The organizational issue discussed in the present thesis was embedded in a culturally diverse environment, which was assumed to influence the corporate culture of the organization particularly in terms of conflict handling. This prompted the researcher to broaden her understanding of organizational culture by examining related literature. Key arguments are highlighted in the following section.

3.5 Organizational Culture

The concept of organizational culture is defined by Schein and Schein (2017, p.6) as “accumulated learning [that forms] a pattern or system of beliefs, values and behavioural norms that come to be taken for granted as basic assumptions and eventually drop out of awareness.”

A relationship exists between conflict and organizational culture, as per O'Reilly and Chatman (1996) and Johns (2006), who explain that, although individuals may have specific preferences in terms of conflict-handling styles, organizations can provide a powerful context of normative ways to manage conflict. In fact, De Dreu, Van Dierendonck and Dijkstra (2004), together with De Dreu and Gelfand (2013), agree with the aforementioned views and state that establishing an organizational culture regarding conflict handling serves to reduce individual variation.

A number of organizational culture models have been debated among academics; some are based on the premise that a comprehensive view of culture must acknowledge its hidden parts. This category involves Schein and Schein's organizational culture model (2017), detailed below, in addition to Rousseau's model, which divides organizational culture into 'outer-rings' representing the signs of culture that are more visible and 'inner-rings' representing the hidden feelings developed by it (O'Reilly, Chatman and Caldwell, 1991). In addition to that, the Iceberg model developed by Herman makes a clear distinction between the formal (overt) aspects of

culture, including technology, structures, policies and systems, and the informal (covert) aspects of it, which include perceptions, values, attitudes and beliefs (Ghinea and Brătianu, 2012).

Models based on different theoretical foundations have also been established, such as Deal and Kennedy's model (2000), which is based on risk and feedback. In addition to that, Harrison and Handy developed a typology based on hierarchy, matrix, web and scatter (Handy, 1999), while Denison and Mishra (1995) discuss the top-down vision versus a bottom-up involvement and examine consistency in relation to adaptability. Furthermore, Cameron and Quinn (2011) established the Value Framework Model, which is based on flexibility and discretion versus stability and control, in addition to internal focus and integration versus external focus and differentiation within a company.

The researcher examined the above models and acknowledged their merits. However, Schein and Schein's organizational culture model (2017) was found to be the most intriguing, as it encompasses the necessary depth and flexibility needed to understand and implement change in organizational culture and therefore, is detailed below.

3.5.1 Schein and Schein's Organizational Culture Model

Schein and Schein (2017) developed an organizational culture model that consists of three levels, namely a. artefacts and symbols, b. espoused values and c. underlying assumptions. The first element, being artefacts and symbols, refers to the overt elements of an organization, which includes corporate processes, architecture and seating arrangements, and may include subtler items such as mantras and inside jokes. The second element is espoused values, which encompasses declared norms and sets of values, which are seen in the public media, such as corporate websites, declarations or frequently used phrases in descriptions of the entity. Finally, the shared basic underlying assumptions are the central elements of the organizational culture, represented by deeply entrenched beliefs and their manifestations. This element of the culture is the most difficult to identify as it does not easily lend itself to assessment, as affirmed by Schein and Schein (2017). The three elements are illustrated in Figure 3.5.1 below. The authors further argue that the basis of culture change should be built upon conversations conducted with as

many involved individuals as possible (Mulder, 2019). They recommend that, subsequent to this, the desired culture is to be identified, which will then guide the progression from the current culture to the desired end culture.

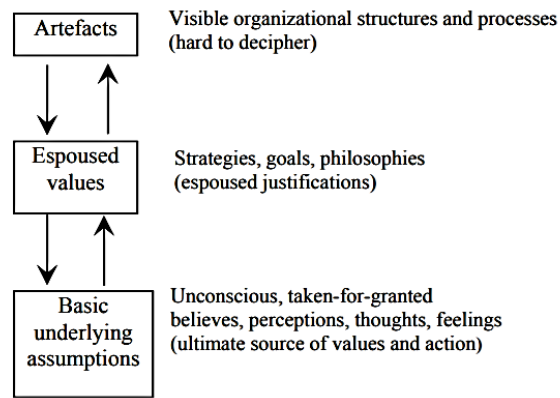


Figure 3.5.1: Schein and Schein's Organizational Culture Model (adapted from Schein and Schein, 2017, p.26)

3.5.2 Organizational Cultural Change

Opinions vary about the possibility of instituting cultural change at an organizational level, i.e. academics do not agree about the extent to which beliefs, ideas, values and meanings held by subordinates can be systematically and intentionally influenced. Alvesson and Sveningsson (2016) describe three positions outlining the change susceptibility of organizational cultures, namely: a. culture can be changed by management under certain conditions and with the presence of certain resources, an argument that was further supported by Palmer, Dunford and Buchanan (2016); b. change may occur with resourceful management in the face of various existing challenges, i.e. change can happen but with great difficulty; and c. culture cannot be influenced and is associated with various elements related to local culture, education, status and other social positions that lie beyond the reach of management. Drawing on the researcher's experiential knowledge of being employed in an organization that facilitates organizational development and change, she concurs with the notion that such endeavours involve great difficulty but are nonetheless possible, as evidenced by previous successful executions of the same.

Moreover, Alvesson and Sveningsson (2016) argue that the most popular methods of cultural change view the process as being 'technocratic', which entails moving the organizational culture from its current state to a more profitable state directed by top management. On the other hand, a second view argues that cultural change can occur through a reframing of everyday life through focus on local initiatives. Such reframing is often driven by a limited number of senior actors in an incremental and informal manner, mainly achieved by continual renegotiating of meanings.

Following the discussion on the concepts of conflict, conflict transformation and organizational culture, the researcher progressed to reviewing the existing literature on knowledge creation, this being the other main pillar of the present research.

3.6 Knowledge Creation

Probst, Raub and Romhardt (2000, p.24) define knowledge as "the whole body of cognition and skill which individuals use to solve problems, [...] it is always bound to persons. It is constructed by individuals and represents their beliefs about causal relationships." The term 'organizational knowledge' has been widely discussed in recent years, leading to the emergence of numerous related themes, such as knowledge-based organizations, knowledge creation and transfer, and organizational knowledge management systems.

Various scholars have presented theories related to the topic, such as Nonaka and Takeuchi's SECI knowledge creation model (1995), Cohen and Bacdayan's discussion (1994) on how to understand organizational routines through procedural memory, Cook and Brown's work (1999) on bridging epistemologies, which discusses organizational knowledge and organizational knowing, Weick's 'mindfulness' (1991) for operations of teams and Kogut and Zander's framework (1996) on what organizations know how to do.

Knowledge creation is described by Sasaki, Zelaya and Uchihira (2018) as the product of repetitive interaction between tacit and explicit knowledge at different levels of the organization, which, according to Jafari, Irani and Rezaei (2017), is not exclusive to organizations with knowledge management systems but occurs in all healthy organizations. The topic of knowledge creation is further discussed by Alipour, Idris and Karimi (2011), who state that understanding the concept

of knowledge creation is important for both management and employees in order to “foster competitive advantage and optimize organizational performance in the current complex and dynamic environment” (p.61).

3.6.1 The SECI Knowledge Creation Model

Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) argue that the interaction between tacit and explicit knowledge provides a platform for the generation of new knowledge, which can also be a product of a spiral of various opposing concepts, such as “tacit and explicit, chaos and order, micro and macro, [...] and so forth”, as affirmed by Takeuchi and Nonaka (2004, p.9). In this regard, Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) have developed a knowledge creation model consisting of four modes, namely socialization, externalization, combination and internalization, abbreviated to SECI, which is based on the conversion of tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge and vice versa.

3.6.1.1 Tacit and Explicit Knowledge

Tacit knowledge is, at times, referred to as sticky or embedded knowledge (Rai, 2011); according to Polanyi and Sen (2009), it is constructed from an individual’s experience and is subjective in nature. Therefore, it cannot be expressed in numbers, words or formulas, and may include beliefs, intuition, cognition, mental models and know-how (Polanyi and Sen, 2009). Furthermore, Nonaka and Konno (1998) affirm that tacit knowledge is rooted in the ideals, values, emotions and actions of a person.

On the other hand, explicit knowledge, which is occasionally referred to as leaky knowledge, is objective in nature, as per Rai (2011). According to Nonaka and Konno (1998), this type of knowledge includes guidelines, procedures, reports and so on, with the authors emphasizing the possibility of documenting and distributing explicit knowledge to others. The absence of tacit knowledge renders explicit knowledge meaningless, as argued by Nonaka, Toyama and Konno (2000), who state that knowledge can change form between tacitness and explicitness. However, some tacit knowledge cannot convert into explicit knowledge and will always maintain its initial form (Nonaka, Toyama and Konno, 2000).

3.6.1.2 The Mechanism of Nonaka and Takeuchi's SECI Model

The SECI model developed by Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995), illustrated in Figure 3.6.1.2, is founded on the principle that knowledge is first created within an individual and then transported through the spiral of knowledge creation, as described below.

First, *socialization* takes place, which is the stage at which tacit knowledge is transferred among employees via social contact, i.e. communication and interactions. This takes place through apprenticeships, sharing experiences, engaging in simulations and discussions, partaking in observations and so on. Second, *externalization* is the stage at which tacit knowledge is transformed into explicit knowledge via the use of metaphors, hypotheses, models, descriptions and concepts, which, according to Nonaka, Toyama and Konno (2000), can be achieved through the articulation of internal rules, explicit goals and so on. The conversion of tacit knowledge to readily understandable explicit knowledge prepares it to become crystallized and possibly shared with other parties, as affirmed by Byosiere and Luethge (2004). Third, the SECI model moves to the *combination* stage, at which explicit knowledge is created from the processing of other explicit knowledge. This is described by Alavi and Leidner (2001, p.116) as explicit knowledge that is “merged, categorized, reclassified, and synthesized to arrive at new knowledge”, which is also explicit in nature. This process can be aided by computerized networks or databases on a large scale, as affirmed by Nonaka, Toyama and Konno (2000). Last, *internalization* is the stage at which explicit knowledge is transformed into tacit knowledge. This process converts abstract ideas into concrete ideas, which are then internalized in the value system of the person (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). A number of conversions between different stages within the SECI model create knowledge cycles, as affirmed by Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995). However, and as asserted by the same authors, these stages do not necessarily maintain a sequential form.

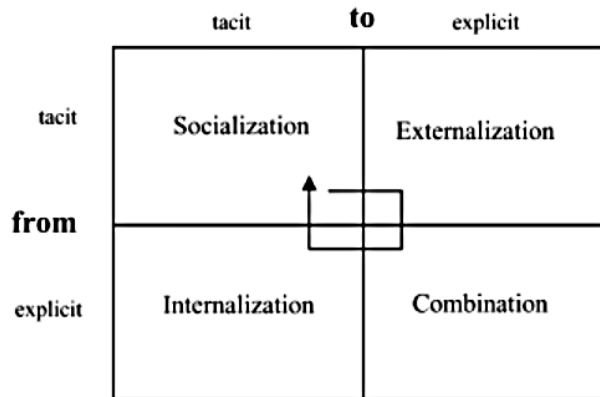


Figure 3.6.1.2: The SECI Model (adapted from Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995, p.57)

Nonaka (1994, p.20) argues that converting knowledge “amplify[ies] knowledge created by individuals and crystallize[s] it as a part of the knowledge network of the organization”. Nonaka, Toyama and Konno (2000) built on the model developed by Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) by introducing two more elements that further describe how knowledge is created within organizations, namely a. the ‘shared context’, also referred to as the ‘ba’, and b. the ‘knowledge assets’.

3.6.1.3 The ‘Ba’ and Knowledge Assets

According to Nonaka and Konno (1998, p.41), the ‘ba’ provides a “place to perform the individual conversions and to move along the knowledge spiral”. Moreover, Nonaka, Toyama and Konno (2000) explain that the ‘ba’ does not restrict the model to a physical location but rather refers to the provision of a platform for interaction. Two dimensions of interaction are identified: the first dimension examines whether interaction occurs individually or collectively, while the second examines whether interaction occurs face to face or virtually through emails, books and so on (Nonaka, Toyama and Konno, 2000). The authors further classify the ‘ba’ into four categories, while emphasizing that the relationships between the ‘ba’ and the conversion stages are not exclusive, although each ‘ba’ may correspond to one of the four conversion stages explained in the SECI model, i.e. socialization, externalization, combination or internalization (Nonaka, Toyama and Konno, 2000).

The categories of 'ba', as defined by Nonaka, Toyama and Konno (2000), are: a. 'originating ba', where face-to-face and individual interaction occurs, corresponding to the socialization stage, which offers a context for socialization to take place and is where mental models, emotions and experiences are shared; b. 'dialoguing ba', where face-to-face and collective interaction occurs, corresponding to the externalization stage, where skills and mental models are expressed and conveyed in common terms (Nonaka, Toyama and Konno, 2000); c. 'systemizing ba', where virtual and collective interaction may occur, corresponding to the combination stage, where it is relatively easy to convey explicit knowledge to a large number of audiences through different mediums, such as network modes, databanks or documents, which create a platform for a virtual environment (Nonaka, Toyama and Konno, 2000); and d. 'exercising ba', where face-to-face and individual interaction occurs, corresponding to the internalization stage or the place where the individual embodiment of explicit knowledge is facilitated through the occupancy of individual and virtual interactions, as affirmed by Nonaka, Toyama and Konno (2000). The four types of 'ba' and their media, in addition to the type of interaction to which they correspond, are illustrated in Figure 3.6.1.3.

		Type of Interaction	
		Individual	Collective
Media	Face-to-Face	Originating 'ba'	Dialoguing 'ba'
	Virtual	Exercising 'ba'	Systemizing 'ba'

Figure 3.6.1.3: The Four Types of 'ba' (adapted from Nonaka, Toyama and Konno, 2000, p.16)

On the other hand, knowledge assets are critical to the process of knowledge creation, as stressed by Nonaka, Toyama and Konno (2000), who categorize knowledge assets into four types, namely: a. *experiential knowledge assets*, which are constructed by way of sharing experiences among organizational members and between organizational members and external stakeholders; b. *conceptual knowledge assets*, which comprise images, language and other explicit and tangible assets; c. *systemic knowledge assets*, which are built from packaged explicit

knowledge, such as product specifications, documents containing information about stakeholders, patents and manuals; and d. *routine knowledge assets*, which refer to tacit knowledge that includes the know-how, the organizational culture, the organizational routine, etc.

3.6.1.4 Criticism of Nonaka and Takeuchi's SECI Model

It is important to note that, despite the above, Nonaka and Takeuchi's SECI model (1995) has received its share of criticism, albeit 'little' according to Gourlay (2006). For instance, Jorna (1998) critiques the model for dismissing previous related work, stating that the SECI model overlooks earlier discussions on tacit and explicit knowledge, in addition to work done on learning theory. Furthermore, criticism of the consequences of the model have been raised by other scholars, such as Essers and Schreinemakers (1997), who remark that the model overlooks how scientific criteria relate to corporate knowledge, and thus reveals a tendency towards a dangerous relativism. The authors further argue against the model by highlighting its shortfalls in recognizing individuals' commitment to their ideas, and what it means for management to exercise authority to resolve this in terms of innovation and creativity. Glisby and Holden (2003) also express concerns regarding the model's assumption of cultural universality. To add to this, Cook and Brown (1999) raise concerns about Nonaka and Takeuchi's position (1995) on the interplay between tacit and explicit knowledge. In contrast to Nonaka and Takeuchi's claim (1995) that tacit knowledge, being the main input for the socialization and externalization stages, represents the base for explicit knowledge generation, Cook and Brown (1999) argue that one form of knowledge cannot guarantee to be of use in acquiring another, and at times it can be considered a hindrance in obtaining other types of knowledge.

On the other hand, Gourlay (2006) states that the overall criticism received by Nonaka and Takeuchi's SECI model (1995) is unsubstantial. According to Walsham (2006), the model has succeeded in providing terminology for knowledge creation and conversion that has been internationally accepted and adapted. Choo and Bontis (2002) describe Nonaka and Takeuchi's SECI model (1995) as the most influential and best-known model on organizational knowledge,

while Easterby-Smith and Lyles (2003, p.11) emphasize that the model is indeed “highly respected”. Its pragmatic status can further be established by the number of times it was cited on extensively used search engines such as Google Scholar, which had recorded 32,175 searches as of 1st May 2019. This level of interest shown by academics signifies its importance, as confirmed by Gourlay (2006).

3.7 Organizational Knowledge and Organizational Knowing

Organizational knowing is of particular interest to practitioners as it connects knowledge to action. In this regard, Cook and Brown (1999) offer a different theoretical framework of organizational knowledge, which describes the interplay between knowledge and knowing as a potentially “generative phenomenon” (p.384). Cook and Brown’s categorization of knowledge (1999) is illustrated in Figure 3.7, in which the upper left cell hosts items that can be explicitly expressed by individuals, such as equations, rules or concepts, while the upper right cell contains items that can be explicitly expressed by groups, such as stories about success and failure or metaphors that hold a specific meaning within a group context (Cook and Brown, 1999). The lower left cell contains items that are tacitly possessed by individuals, citing the example of the ‘feel’ for proper use of a tool or a skill in applying concepts or rules (Cook and Brown, 1999). Lastly, the authors allocate the lower right cell to ‘genres’, tacitly possessed by a group and described as frames that foster understanding. Organizational genres can be defined as “useful meanings a given group attaches to its various literary artifices”, as affirmed by Cook and Brown (1999, p.399). The authors argue that this concept applies to various aspects and activities – for example, the way in which a certain meeting is to be conducted. Moreover, they assert that a continuous confirmation or modification occurs to meanings inferred as organizational genre, as ‘negotiation in practice’ takes place (Cook and Brown, 1999). Such modifications correspond to cultural changes through the reframing of everyday life, as described by Alvesson and Sveningsson (2016).

Cook and Brown (1999) further explain that these four knowledge types are central to the ‘epistemology of possession’, which presumes that any knowledge held by an individual or a

group is something they possess. However, the common understanding of knowledge does not capture the full extent of what people or organizations know. Thus, the authors introduce the concept of ‘epistemology of practice’ and explain that it refers to intuitively carrying out a task (Cook and Brown, 1999). The authors explain the notions of epistemology of possession and practice by using the oversimplified example of a bicycle: while one may possess the knowledge of how to ride a bicycle, one does not necessarily know how to ride it unless ‘knowing’ has occurred. Thus, “the act of riding a bicycle does distinct epistemic work of its own” (p.389). Cook and Brown (1999) argue that knowledge is possessed, while knowing is practised. In other words, knowledge is used in action. However, it is not considered to be part of action.

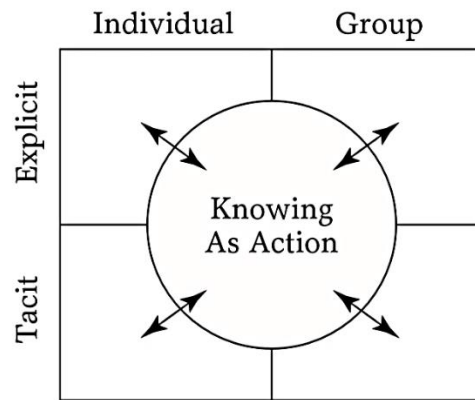


Figure 3.7: The Four Categories of Knowledge (by Cook and Brown, 1999)

3.8 Organizational Knowledge Creation in the Kingdom of Bahrain and the GCC

The application of organizational knowledge creation in the Kingdom of Bahrain has not been adequately studied to date; however, empirical studies addressing the application of knowledge management in the country have been executed. Shajera and Ahmed (2015) examined the level of knowledge management capabilities in the Supreme Council for Women in the Kingdom of Bahrain, emphasizing the importance of creating a knowledge infrastructure that is made up of appropriate technology, culture, structure and human resources. Furthermore, Al Nawakda et al. (2008) evaluated the effect of applying knowledge management in the Bahraini Ministry of Health arguing that, despite the challenges of establishing a knowledge management system in

a complex and dynamic environment, the implemented initial stages have begun a comprehensive knowledge management drive in the ministry. On the public administration side, Buqais et al. (2018) argue that knowledge collection and storage is advanced in the country due to the adequate utilization of extensive databases. Furthermore, knowledge management in the banking industry was investigated by Banta (2016), who argues that knowledge management positively impacts organizational performance in the banking industry in Bahrain.

Although empirical studies in Bahrain have focused on knowledge management, knowledge creation was investigated in the organization's wider context, i.e. the GCC region. Al Ahbabi et al. (2019) explored the relationship between knowledge creation and the perception of improving productivity and collaboration in a private multi-campus university in the UAE. While, in Kuwait, Alainati (2015) used knowledge creation and human resources management (HRM) models to explore factors affecting individuals' competency and found that HRM positively impacts individual competency and knowledge creation.

Further to the above, AlMulhim (2017) investigated the association between knowledge creation processes and organizational performance in knowledge-intensive banks in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The author added organizational creativity in order to create reliability between knowledge creation and performance and confirmed that organizational creativity is key to improving the banking sector in the Saudi Arabian market. Another study conducted on Saudi Arabian banks by Alharthy, Sohaib and Hawryszkiewicz (2018) argues that knowledge creation processes positively influence organizational resilience.

A broader perspective, covering knowledge creation capabilities in the Middle East, is provided by Younus and Al Rubai (2014), who argue that the current capacity for knowledge creation in the MENA region is weak and given the present constraints, the overall state of knowledge readiness cannot allow those countries to obtain higher ranks in the knowledge economy.

In light of the above, this research is positioned to strengthen the knowledge creation capabilities in the Kingdom of Bahrain, the GCC and the MENA region by establishing the effects of organizational conflict transformation on knowledge creation in the Kingdom of Bahrain.

3.9 Conflict Transformation and Knowledge Creation in the Kingdom of Bahrain and the GCC

The relationship between organizational conflict and knowledge creation has not been adequately studied in the Kingdom of Bahrain and the empirical work done on the two topics adjacently is scarce. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, no relationship has been established between organizational conflict transformation and knowledge creation in the existing literature or in the professional practice in Bahrain. In addition to that, the work done on this area is limited even on a broader spectrum. An approximate empirical study was conducted on the Italian healthcare system by Varriale et al. (2012), who examined the relationship between organizational conflict as a general term and knowledge creation. The study investigated the interaction between the management of various conflict styles and conflict levels on one hand, and organizational knowledge on the other. The findings of the study show that participants deemed conflict to be beneficial for knowledge creation and that there is not always a linear relationship between conflict characteristics and knowledge dimensions in the mentioned setting.

As stated above, studies investigating the two variables in Bahrain and the GCC region are scarce, thus, in addition to addressing the existing organizational problem, the researcher aims to build towards establishing understanding of the impact of organizational conflict transformation on knowledge creation in Bahrain by implementing action in the organization under study and consequently determining how conflict transformation can be applied in organizations, followed by an examination of the effect of conflict transformation on knowledge creation, both of which constitute the novelty of this research and make a significant contribution towards the existing body of knowledge.

Chapter Four

4. Story of Cycles of Action, Reflection and Sense-making

Coghlan and Brannick (2014) argue that for an action research to be described as 'good', it must comprise a good story, a rigorous reflection on the story, and an applicable knowledge that is generated from the process. Accordingly, this section chronicles the implemented action research cycle, followed by an account of the researcher's reflections, sense-making and scholarly development. In order to avoid a biased presentation of the story and to demonstrate methodological rigour, the story and the researcher's reflections upon it are presented separately.

The action research implemented in the organization under study was founded on the traditional guidelines originally developed by Kurt Lewin and later presented by Coghlan and Brannick (2014), which constitute planning, action, evaluating and planning of further action. The cycle implemented by the researcher involved the pre-steps of identifying the purpose of the project and understanding the organizational context, illustrated in Figure 4.0 and respectively discussed in 1.1 Overview and Research Rationale and 4.1.1 Overview of Organizational Context.

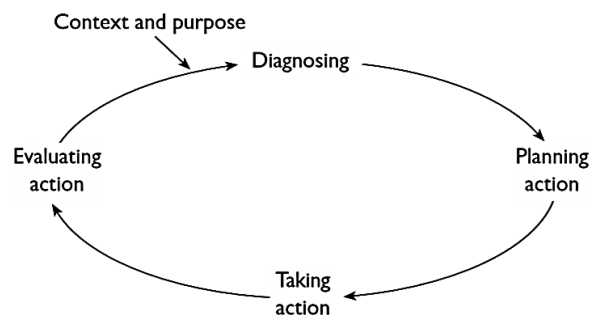


Figure 4.0: Action Research Cycle (adapted from Coghlan and Brannick, 2005, p.22)

4.1 Diagnosing: Framing the Organizational Issue

Framing the organizational issue, i.e. engaging in the heuristic process of naming and defining it, is a pre-step to commencing the action research cycle, which, according to Payne et al. (2013), has a significant impact on the interventions made at later stages of the process.

4.1.1 Overview of Organizational Context

According to Coghlan and Brannick (2005), and as illustrated in Figure 4.0, understanding the context of the research is a pre-step to diagnosing. The organization under study is located in the Kingdom of Bahrain, where the researcher is employed as a department head, therefore functioning as an insider researcher. The organization operates within the training and organizational development industry, employing more than 50 individuals and providing various services, such as training needs assessment, managerial training, executive coaching, job placement and managerial assessment, among others. The organization aims to align itself with the nation's 2030 economic vision launched in 2008, which focuses on increasing sustainability, fairness and competitiveness across various entities (Tamkeen, 2019).

The employees working in the organization constitute a highly diverse profile, encompassing various nationalities, age groups and a wide range of professional and academic backgrounds. An added level of diversity is imposed by the divergent religious views and ethnic backgrounds of local employees, in addition to that added by the expatriates operating in the organization. Furthermore, the number and nature of employees in the organization fluctuate based on the projects that the organization is working on at any given point in time. To elaborate further, the organization does not keep all trainers and consultants on its payroll but contracts them to cater for specific client needs and thus various professionals enter and exit the team throughout the year, depending on market demand.

The need for constant collaboration between this ever-evolving pool of stakeholders in a knowledge-based organization created a platform for organizational conflict, which had continually been fuelled by divergent perspectives stemming from the plurality of perspectives,

driven by the highly diverse backgrounds of the involved parties, as previously elaborated in 1.1 Overview and Research Rationale.

4.1.2 Diagnosing

A committee of seven, constituting the researcher and six senior members from various departments – training, organizational development, foreign relations and alliances, government relations, service design and administration – was assembled to collaboratively shortlist potential organizational issues. The purpose was to determine a research project that met the initial action research criteria of being useful and achievable within the available time and resources, in addition to having the potential to generate knowledge that extends beyond the immediately involved stakeholders. Following deliberations, a consensus was reached to select the organizational issue described in 1.1 Overview and Research Rationale.

The majority of identified issues were dismissed for being either too local, i.e. holding no potential to generate useful knowledge that extends beyond the immediate context of the issue, such as improvement in internal business processes and accounting systems, or not achievable within the available time and resources allocated for the research project, such as resolving fund-sourcing challenges posed by the complex ownership structure of the organization. Following deliberations, a consensus was reached to select the organizational issue described in 1.1 Overview and Research Rationale, due to its alignment with the following guidelines mentioned by Coghlan and Brannick (2014):

1. It is an existing organizational issue that requires resolution.
2. The organizational issue can be resolved within the existing resources and timeframe allocated for this research.
3. The selected topic provides an opportunity to experiment with knowledge that is new to the organization and to the fields of conflict transformation and knowledge creation.
4. The research was poised to offer learning and growth opportunities at the researcher's level, which will later be discussed in 4.4 Reflection, Sense-making and Scholarly

Development, and at the organization's level, which is evident by the research's outcomes described in 5.2 Outcomes of Implemented Action.

5. The resolution of the identified organizational issue was thought to be a contribution that had the potential to increase the researcher's profile in the organization, despite the fact that the researcher was not offered or led to expect any hierarchical or monetary gain as a result of conducting the research.

Following the identification of the organizational issue, the researcher began to further problematize it, and to examine its context, its current implications and the predicted relationships between its variables, which were respectively outlined under 1.2 Research Context, 1.1 Overview and Research Rationale, and 1.4.1 Theoretical Framework. The researcher found that the selected organizational issue was embedded in several other issues, the aggregation of which formed the basis of the literature review conducted and presented in Chapter Three.

Next, the researcher aimed to cultivate a shared interpretation of the issue and its implications in order to increase commitment and reduce forces working against the project, in anticipation of inevitable cases of conflict of interest. However, two key people within the organization were not entirely convinced by the project in its early stages. The first was a member of the project team who was neutralized with little resistance through an 'implicit' deal with the researcher, who agreed to provide support to an initiative of interest to him, in exchange for his support for the project. The other person was not part of the project team nor a member of the organization but rather a professional hired on a contractual basis to advise on specific areas of the business. However, despite his external status, he enjoyed an immense influence within the organization, particularly on the owners. He remained unsupportive of the project throughout its implementation, which will be further discussed throughout the course of this chapter.

Upon the issuance of ethical approval by the University of Liverpool, the researcher contacted the organization head, who had assumed the role of project sponsor, to re-establish his commitment to the project and advise him that data collection would shortly commence. In the present context, the term 'sponsor' refers to the facilitation and support of processes and

logistics and not monetary contribution. This was the most critical relationship that the researcher strived to manage throughout the research.

Subsequently, the researcher began conducting a series of meetings aimed at correctly positioning the research project within the organization and establishing consensus and clarity concerning her role throughout the duration of the research project. One of the initial meetings was held between the researcher, the project sponsor and a representative of the owners – who will be referred to as ‘the owner’ throughout this document. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss important aspects of the researcher’s engagement, including how the working hours soon to be missed due to the researcher’s engagement with data collection and analysis would be compensated. In response to such concerns, the researcher began by acknowledging them and proceeded to share that she had similar concerns, as the project sponsor had informed her prior to the meeting that her team’s yearly deliverables would not be revised due to her engagement with the research. The following was agreed at the meeting: a. a six-month observation period, during which the researcher would spend five hours a day, five days a week observing and recording events, was permitted to commence immediately; b. the researcher would report to the office on Saturdays, which is a non-working day in the organization; and c. the researcher would work nine hours instead of eight to ensure a minimum of four hours of productive work each working day.

Following this, an informative meeting with the organization’s seniors was conducted, followed by a town hall meeting, hosting the organization’s main stakeholders, including all employees, owners and representatives of long-term clients. The project sponsor gave an introduction and passed the floor to the researcher, who discussed the growth potential it would bring to the organization and its stakeholders. The researcher added that their contributions were vital to the success of the project and that she would arrange to meet with them to further discuss their potential role in the research project and to obtain their formal consent if they wished to partake. The researcher emphasized that participation was strictly voluntary, and that confidentiality would be upheld in the strictest manner.

Following the town hall meeting, and in accordance with the participant inclusion criteria discussed in section 2.3.1, the researcher conducted one-to-one meetings with key people in the organization, during which the research project was re-introduced and its potential to develop the organization was re-emphasized. The researcher then introduced and explained the information sheet and the consent form, also encouraging the potential participants to approach her regarding any aspect of the research. The same process was repeated with middle- and junior-level employees, in clusters of five or fewer, to ensure that all potential participants could comfortably discuss the documents and bring questions to the attention of the researcher.

4.1.3 Reporting of Findings

Following the receipt of the consent forms from all the participants, the profiles of which are detailed in Appendix B, the data-collection phase began, followed by data analysis using the Conventional Content Analysis approach, detailed respectively under 2.3.3 Data-collection Methods and 2.3.4 Data Analysis: Conventional Content Analysis. This was undertaken in pursuit of an answer to the research question ‘How can effective organizational conflict transformation in the Kingdom of Bahrain contribute to organizational knowledge creation?’, which was further broken down into two objectives, namely: a. to identify how conflict transformation is applied to organizational conflict in the Kingdom of Bahrain; and b. to identify how conflict transformation affects knowledge creation within organizations in the Kingdom of Bahrain. Engaging with the data in the aforementioned ways led to the emergence of four main themes, namely a. communication, b. momentum, c. inclusiveness and d. reduced levels of past unaddressed organizational conflict. The findings are supported by verbatim quotes from participants, as recommended by Burnard et al. (2008). In addition to that, highlights from the data are presented in terms of percentages to convey a more comprehensive portrayal of the findings.

4.1.3.1 Communication

The theme of communication encompasses the following grand-categories: a. communication, b. respect, c. tolerance, d. openness and e. reduced levels of technology-mediated communication, each of which is discussed in detail below.

Communication

The word 'communication', on a stand-alone basis, was recorded as the second most frequently used word by participants, as detected by NVivo 11 software. In this context, communication is described by Keyton et al. (2013) as a social medium used to initiate, sustain or engage in a relationship with another. Findings suggest that effective communication is negatively related to organizational conflict, as described below and supported by Üstüner and Kis (2014), with its connection to conflict transformation being positive and further detailed in the discussion in section 4.1.4.1 Research Objective One.

In addition to applying the process of content analysis to data in order to derive themes, the researcher noted that a high number of observed events were characterized by the communication of rational content combined with provocative elements of dialogue accessories, i.e. although the communicated words bore no negative meaning, the tone of voice, context and gestures were confrontational, passive-aggressive, dismissive, etc. On the other hand, events that were characterized by escalatory verbal exchanges were also observed, which immediately resulted in communication being brought to a halt by the abrupt withdrawal of one or both parties. The following is a quote from a participant who experienced difficulties in communication stemming from a discord in interests, which, according to Miall (2004) is a hindrance to conflict transformation. As seen below, the discord resulted in the impairment of one of the organization's main functions namely; business development:

"Both departments wanted ownership over this project, which is understandable. But the discussion took place at the worst possible time, right before our meeting with our partners from Kuwait. I lost my temper, started raising my voice and she started to

tear up. It was one of our most dysfunctional meetings for the quarter. The organization lost the deal and neither of us got the project.”

Data analysis from the interviews shows a direct connection between the quality of the communication and reduced organizational conflict. When discussing the observed conflict events, a number of the interviewed participants emphasized the importance of effective communication and directly connected aspects of it, such as the message intended for delivery, means of delivery and level of understanding of the delivered message, to the occurred conflicts. One participant argued that ensuring that the correct message is delivered is key to successful communication; however, according to her, it was often missed in the organization. The participant explained a common challenge in conveying the correct message between the business development team, who are client facing, and members of the service design team, who are in charge of developing the product/service in the organization:

“This is the problem, we cannot send everything in writing, so we meet and have conversations, but as elaborate as those may be, the first draft of the service outline always looks like it came from another planet! The document that is almost always unusable takes weeks to develop; during which we are chased by the client and by management. This is why I have so much anxiety in this job, I am trying to achieve my targets and it is not easy to secure meetings with clients, get them interested, make a successful pitch and so on. But we do that, and then we come back to work with other teams in the organization to complete the sale, but it seems that they don’t speak the language of the market, I cannot get the client’s message across to them.”

Furthermore, all of the focus group participants emphasized the crucial role played by communication in minimizing organizational conflict, while several stated that they faced challenges in post-conflict communication after previous events, which served to perpetuate the existing conflict position.

Keyton et al. (2013) argue that communication is a significantly valued applied skill in organizations. To exemplify the significance of communication in relation to the sound handling of conflict at a preventative stage, a participant stated how the communication of an inaccurate

message served as a catalyst within the ongoing conflict between him and the organization, ultimately affecting the relationship and creating misalignments in interests:

“Important matters were not clearly communicated. Very important matters relating to the core values of the organization [...] To avoid incidents similar to mine, the organization should have been honest with itself regarding who they were and what their real goals and intentions were, and then they should clearly communicate those goals and intentions to potential employees instead of reciting the publicly published goals. Then, they can on-board people who are in line with the company’s actual goals and objectives. This is when you will have fewer conflicts because people will be working together towards the same goals and they will have reasonable expectations of one another. I do not think I was deceived; it was just that they gave me information that was not fully true, relevant or usable, or let’s say they communicated who they wanted to be not who they really were. We did not have one ‘day of peace’ because of this misalignment.”

The above quote is in line with Bisel’s argument (2010), which states that clear communication is the essence of establishing order in all organizations. Furthermore, it was observed that participants had recourse to coping mechanisms, particularly avoidance, in order to relieve stress following conflict events or during prolonged conflicts. The majority of observed participants either immediately left the site of the conflict or became detached from the situation while being present in it, by means of avoiding eye contact, refraining from participation in further communication, remaining silent or being non-reactive to the environment. A few of the aforementioned participants continued to avoid the other party for up to three days following the occurrence of conflict. Some participants continued avoidance for longer; however, post-event observation was capped at three days. It was also observed that a few took sick leave the following day, all of which directly interfered with the core processes of the knowledge creation spiral, as per Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995), which is discussed in detail in section 4.1.4.2 Research Objective Two, alongside the positive relationship between communication and organizational knowledge creation.

The thought process behind post-conflict avoidance and its impact on communication is explained by a participant in the quote below:

“After a conflict event, I usually withdraw, I become silent and avoid talking to the person, looking at them or even responding to their emails. I need this time to recover. It is very difficult for me to get out of this phase unless someone comes and talks to me about it and helps me reintegrate. There was an instance where I stopped speaking to a senior colleague of mine for about five weeks but when he finally spoke to me, I responded in a very mild manner.”

Respect

The grand-category of respect is encompassed by the theme ‘communication’, under which important findings were derived from the analysis of words, the dialogue accessories, the context and the choice of language, in relation to the degree to which individuals felt respected by others. Respect is found to have a negative relationship with organizational conflict, while it holds a positive relationship with conflict transformation, as discussed in 4.1.4.1 Research Objective One.

In addition to applying the process of content analysis to data in order to derive themes, it was observed that the majority of conflict events involved the perception of disrespect by at least one of the participants due to an expressed behaviour on behalf of the other party. Over half of the aforementioned events had escalated due to an added verbal expression or body language sign that was deemed disrespectful by the receiving party, as later confirmed in the interviews. The observed events also included one or both participants perceiving that they had been disrespected by the other party, which resulted in the abrupt departure of one of the participants, while several conflict events involved participants who opted to be physically disengaged in the following three days, spending fewer than four hours a day at their respective workstations.

Findings from the interviews show that the degree of perceived respect among members of the organization negatively relates to organizational conflict, as the majority of the participants mentioned that they felt disrespected in the conflict event under discussion and provided a clear description of how they were disrespected. Over one third of those participants stated that, in

retrospect, the triggers may have been culturally related and not necessarily representative of the other party's intentions or character, as explained below:

“When I calmed down, I realized that I may have overreacted. After all, he is not from here and he is relatively new to the country. I know that the way we do things is not a universal law, but I felt that it was common sense and he should have been better at reading the environment that he is in.”

The above is in line with the thoughts of Boafo (2018), who stresses that behaviours used to express respect differ greatly depending on one's cultural background. Thus, it was important to distinguish between perceived respect/disrespect and the intention of respect/disrespect. The delicate aspect of culture influencing how an individual may show respect, in addition to its subsequent effects on relationships and willingness to negotiate interests, is explained in the quote below by a male participant – with relationships and interests being key elements in Miall's definition of conflict transformation (2004):

“We entered the meeting room and started the usual greetings and handshakes. She extended her hand to me, but I couldn't shake it, we don't do this here. You would know. It was an awkward moment which made everybody uncomfortable. She was passive towards me the entire meeting and we ended up negotiating unfavourable terms. In retrospect, I understand that she felt disrespected and, thus, she withdrew. I apologized immediately afterwards but it was too late.”

Respect in communication was highlighted during the analysis of the focus group data, establishing a direct connection between respect in communication and reduced organizational conflict. The analysis of the data showed that the majority of focus group participants explicitly connected respectful communication to reduced organizational conflict, some of them emphasizing the importance of displaying respect when communicating with individuals of a specific age or status, i.e. respect should be accorded in a culturally relevant manner. This is explained by an expatriate in the following quote:

“Respect is a big thing here and there are many details associated with it. I never really understood why my line manager seemed to always be impatient with me. We had a

back and forth on pipeline update in one of our meetings and he seemed to explode, saying “you do not know how to talk”. Later, I understood that I should have used a plural voice when addressing him because of his age and status, especially in meetings where other seniors are present.”

Finally, the positive relationship between respect and organizational knowledge creation is discussed under 4.1.4.2 Research Objective Two.

Tolerance

The grand-category of tolerance is encompassed by the main theme of ‘communication’ and it is to be noted that this research refers to the concept of tolerance partly as defined by the Cambridge Dictionary (2019), namely the “willingness to accept behaviours and beliefs that are different from one’s own, although they might not agree with or approve of them”; however, it also encompasses the concept of tolerance as being extended to one’s identity, interpersonal differences and position in a learning process. The findings showed that the concept of tolerance is negatively related to organizational conflict and positively related to conflict transformation, as explained in 4.1.4.1 Research Objective One.

In addition to applying the process of content analysis to data in order to derive themes, it was observed that the participants in a high number of the conflict events have expressed their perception of being subjected to some degree of intolerance by the other party. This was detected through the use of statements similar to “You continue to dismiss everything I say because I am new” or other less descriptive statements, which were further explored in the interviewing phase in combination with the context in which these phrases were used. It was observed that the course of the conflict shifted to a more escalatory position after words/gestures expressing a lack of tolerance were exchanged, thus having implications for quality of discourse, relationships and the participants’ ability to negotiate interests.

The majority of interviewees explicitly traced the roots of the conflict to aspects relating to intolerance, therefore negatively connecting tolerance to organizational conflict. Several of those interviewees mentioned that tolerance depends on the person’s mindset more than their behaviour, which is consistent with Austin, Fischer and Ropers’ argument (2004), who state that

conflict transformation and subsequently its elements are as equally a mindset occurrence as they are a process. The effect of mindset and subsequent behaviours signifying lack of tolerance to one's identity are explained in the quote below by an expatriate working in the organization under study:

"I am new here, but I am not new to the industry and I am very professional in doing my job. My input, though, continues to be dismissed because 'this is not how they do things around here'. I think part of this is because they don't want [mentions nationality] to break out of being the technical arm of the institution and start taking managerial roles, [mentions nationality] are looked down upon. This makes me angry, but I try to remain quiet most of the time to keep my job. However, in many instances we get into arguments because I want to execute my tasks in a certain way and my manager doesn't allow it and I know it is not only about work, everybody working in our team knows."

This is in line with Stetson and Conti's argument (2005) that tolerance stemming from an attitude of respect, as opposed to an attitude of judgement, entails recognition, acceptance and appreciation for both participants' positions and freedom of expression. This perspective of tolerance is rooted in an appreciation of diversity, allowing the person to be their authentic self, through promoting differences and holding a positive position towards their existence (Stetson and Conti, 2005). It is noteworthy that change at mindset level is crucial in the process of conflict transformation, as affirmed by Austin, Fischer and Ropers (2004).

An analysis of the focus group findings also shows a negative relationship between organizational conflict and tolerance towards human errors and those occurring on the natural learning curve, in addition to interpersonal differences. The majority of participants directly connected decreased organizational conflict to increased tolerance and mentioned that tolerance towards employees' errors and differences creates a safer environment for employees to co-exist, which is explained below in a statement by a junior participant:

"My current manager does not attack me when I make mistakes, he hardly mentions them. Indirectly, he opens a conversation that touches upon my errors and let me be

with my dignity, this is a very new experience to me as my previous department was quite unforgiving. It made a huge difference in my professional conduct; I am now going out for client meetings more often and I am not afraid to take him with me to see higher profile clients. I know that he will not scold me in front of anybody and he will not criticize me afterwards. We closed [name of client] together beginning of this month.”

Further to the above, several interviewed participants mentioned that they were not open to listening and internalizing speech when they perceived that they were not being treated with tolerance. This directly impacts the ‘externalization’ and ‘internalization’ processes, as described in Nonaka and Takeuchi’s SECI knowledge creation model (1995) and addressed in the discussion in section 4.1.4.2 Research Objective Two. The following quote explains the effects of intolerance to errors on junior staff and how it affects communication and the ‘externalization’ process:

“There are occasions where management is very intolerant to errors, even from people who are learning and are expected to make mistakes. I have seen them change, they became timid, inexpressive and withdrawn.”

Finally, the positive relationship between tolerance and organizational knowledge creation is discussed in 4.1.4.2 Research Objective Two.

Openness

The grand-category of openness is encompassed by the theme of communication, where the analysis of data shows that openness negatively relates to organizational conflict and is positively connected to conflict transformation, as discussed in 4.1.4.1 Research Objective One.

Communication openness is described by Ayoko (2007, p.109) as a. the ease of conversing with one another and b. the extent to which understanding takes place in a conversation. In addition to this, the participants also used the word ‘openness’ to refer to the degree in which an individual is willing, i.e. is open, to accepting new ideas and approaches.

In addition to the emergence of the theme through data abstraction during the process of content analysis, the researcher noted that some participants lacked empathy. In this context,

empathy is defined by Merriam-Webster (2019) as “the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another”, which relates to both ease of conversing and increase in understanding. This was evident through the contextual use of phrases such as “I really don’t care” or “This is not my problem”.

Interviewees emphasized the importance of openness by connecting the absence of some of its elements with organizational conflict, while a number of interviewed participants stressed that being allowed a space to speak, be heard and be understood is crucial to maintaining sound relationships and the smoothness of overall operations within the organization, as explained in the quote below:

“It has become a cycle, although I am the project manager. She does not allow me to speak or correct the statements that she makes about my project. I try to say what needs to be said at the time, while it is still relevant to the conversation and we start talking on top of each other and it escalates from there. I want to talk about the project and my role in it and she wants to show me who is the boss. The conversation is very difficult to sustain.”

Further, a high number of focus group participants indicated that lack of trust was correlated with increased organizational conflict, while several cited the perceived presence of undisclosed agendas and motives as a catalyst for conflict. This was elaborated by a participant in the statement below:

“I am not a micromanager. I generally allow my staff to do what they need to do and keep myself available for any escalation or guidance. There is only one person that I micromanage aggressively, and this has been exhausting both of us. But I don’t trust him, I know that he has been thinking of joining another company and I don’t want to be in a situation where he leaves and takes this huge account with him. Now, I know that I am making assumptions here and I don’t know how he is interpreting any of this. But, you know, this is just to be safe.”

The above is in line with Rogers' argument (1987), which equates openness with concepts such as trust, honesty, listening and supportiveness. Further, findings from the interview data analysis showed that both lack of trust and the existence of blame culture reduced employees' willingness to remain in the organization, which is consistent with Al-Omari, Qablan and Khasawneh's argument (2008). This, in turn, directly impacts the knowledge creation cycle, as commitment to the organization is a main pillar of the knowledge creation spiral, as affirmed by Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995); this is further discussed in 4.1.4.2 Research Objective Two, in the context of discussing the relationship between openness and knowledge creation.

Reduced Levels of Technology-mediated Communication

The grand-category of reduced levels of technology-mediated communication is encompassed by the main theme of communication, where conflict stemming from technology-mediated communication was repeatedly observed and a positive relationship between the two variables was identified. On the other hand, a negative relationship between conflict transformation and technology-mediated communication was established and is discussed in 4.1.4.1 Research Objective One.

In addition to the emergence of the theme through data abstraction during the process of content analysis, the researcher observed that the majority of conflict events mentioned previous digital communication, such as emails, text messaging, phone calls and application messaging, as part of the conflict progression. A few of the aforementioned events showed clear miscommunication of the core message due to technology-mediated assistance, which was dominated by the use of emails, as explained below:

"We never learn our lessons. We have a habit of CCing half of the organization in any one email thread that will then, go on for weeks and weeks. People are forced to have many phone calls and meetings just to explain what such emails intend to convey. I think the problem is that we CC people too frequently, which means they often receive a message that was not tailored for them, yet we expect that we have informed them."

To add to the above, several observed events escalated to aggressive verbal attacks, a few of which were characterized as attacking another person's self-concept rather than their arguments. Furthermore, approximately half of the interviewed participants indicated that a degree of misunderstanding occurred following the use of technology, which developed into a conflict. The following statement was made by a participant in explaining the effect of technology-mediated communication on communication and subsequently on organizational conflict:

"We have a habit of conversing over email and a thread will easily build up to 30-plus emails. Often, information will become lost in traffic, tasks will be delayed, and nobody will take responsibility. This becomes a centre for conflict, especially when people have very different interests and will interpret the situation in different ways."

It was also observed that individuals' willingness to collaborate and compromise was lowered when engaged in technology-mediated communication, which affected their ability to constructively engage with and influence both interests and relationships, therefore interfering with the process of conflict transformation as per Miall's definition of it (2004). This is supported by Meluch and Walter (2012), who state that computer-mediated communication encourages decreased amounts of collaboration and compromise compared to direct communication. It is noteworthy that the majority of conflict events mentioned emails as the primary medium of communication in the organization that caused a degree of miscommunication. To add to this, most of the focus group interviewees mentioned mobile messaging applications as a communication tool that is being used and that often affects the quality of the communicated message, despite being in discord with accepted professional conduct in the organization under study. This has been discussed by D'Urso and Pierce (2009), who cite findings showing that employees in organizations tend to utilize the internet, particularly emails, as a means of communication more than other available methods. The statement below was made by a participant addressing the use of mobile phone applications on relationships and interests in the organization under study:

“Since the WhatsApp [mobile messaging application] became common, communication became even more fragmented. Now, part of the issue is discussed in a meeting, part [of it] in an email and believe it or not, part in WhatsApp. It interrupts other business functions and more often than not, [it] is a source of frustration for my team. I am not always present in the moment with them because I cannot get off of my phone, decisions are being made! It is like existing in a meeting room. You can imagine what a situation like this does to relationships and communication. The worst part is, the people who are engaging with each other on WhatsApp often suffer misunderstanding; how much can you really convey in short instant messaging?”

As a general observation, employees using technology in communication were either less engaged with people in the organization, as explained by the above quote, or substituted direct socialization with virtual communication. The impact of this aspect on knowledge creation within the organization is addressed in 4.1.4.2 Research Objective Two.

4.1.3.2 Momentum

Momentum in resolving conflict and matters leading up to it was found to have a negative relationship with organizational conflict and a positive relationship with conflict transformation, as explained in the discussion in section 4.1.4.1 Research Objective One.

Momentum is defined by the Cambridge Dictionary (2019) as the force that either keeps an object moving or keeps an event developing. In this regard, observation showed that persistence in obtaining results, as opposed to merely working through the process, was missing from the organization. Research findings also show that the occurred conflicts persisted due to late or non-genuine intervention aimed at addressing them. A significantly low number of conflict events were solved through an initiative taken by an involved party or a third party, while most interviewed participants affirmed that they themselves did not make attempts to address conflict, but rather allowed it to fade away. The lack of momentum in addressing organizational conflict is explained in the quote below:

“They don’t usually address conflict or its causes and when they do, because of any kind of escalation, it usually becomes a matter of following a textbook procedure with the HR, with little value to the involved parties. I have a case that I raised nine months back, they called both of us for a meeting and then they scheduled something with our line managers. One of them apologized and it was supposed to be rescheduled. It was forgotten and, needless to say, no one else stepped in to aid in resolving this because it was understood that this is now with the HR. This problem made our communication harder and it affected a number of common projects that we were working on at the time; it has faded away now.”

The focus group data analysis shows that momentum in preventing and addressing conflict is negatively related to organizational conflict, with the majority of participants negatively connecting it to organizational conflict; most participants stated that events leading to the conflict were left unattended to, perpetuating the discussed conflict event, which is in line with Lederach’s topological theory (2014). On the other hand, a high number of focus group participants indicated the absence of momentum required to resolve the most immediate conflict episodes. The following is a statement from a participant in this regard:

“Force and purpose are missing from the existing way of handling conflict.”

A number of participants in observed events mentioned that they face immense challenges in closing tasks, more specifically, when follow up with other departments is required. The majority of interviewed participants confirmed the above and added that slow-down occurs when tasks move from one department to the other and then lose momentum away from the initiating body. This in turn affects both relationships and interests, which according to Miall (2004) are core to the process of conflict transformation, as explained further in the quote below:

“The majority of the tasks have to pass by a number of departments to be completed, whether for input or approval. When we forward a request, we literally have to pause everything else, follow up and send reminder emails on this one task that is in circulation. Not only does this slow down business and increase tension nearing

deadlines but it also destroys relationships. Now, most people in these department do not see eye to eye. A group of them feel ignored and the other feels pushed.”

Several focus group participants mentioned that processes are taken forward with the speed that the recipient determines, based on their own judgement of what is important and their level of interest, despite the established but unenforced ‘turnaround times’; this misalignment in interests strains both business and relationships, as explained below:

“Here we are more focused on business development and our management is justifiably impatient with anything that slows down business acquisition; however, when our requests go to [name of department] everything slows down and the documents bounces back and forth over email seeking clarification. They do not seem to understand the urgency that governs the market, they are more interested in calculating the small percentage of risk in a forgotten detail than the acquisition of the multi thousand-dinar deal. We have lost multiple deals over the slow-down that occurs in this phase of the process. Now, our management has declared that it is our responsibility to follow up and ensure a timely response, which involves applying pressure and with it comes a lot of frustration and resentment.”

Moreover, analysis of the data shows that ‘momentum’ is the second most frequently used word by focus group participants, as per the word frequency function of NVivo 11. The impact of lack of momentum on knowledge creation is discussed in 4.1.4.2 Research Objective Two.

4.1.3.3 Inclusiveness

The findings have negatively connected inclusiveness to organizational conflict, while the relationship between inclusiveness and conflict transformation is positive, as explained in the discussion in section 4.1.4.1 Research Objective One.

Participants in the majority of observed events mentioned an element that was not factored into the conversation early enough to change the course of the discourse, which was later confirmed as significant during the course of interviews. This was further supported by most of the

interviewed participants, who stated that full information was often not taken into consideration at the right stage, leading to discord in the later stages, as explained below:

“Those details were available but were not communicated to me. Based on the information that I had, it was a clear call. I had to reject the project and for that I entered into some pretty rough conversations with the product team who had begun to develop the product.”

Furthermore, a few interviewees confirmed that circumstances were not factored into the conflict under discussion. In fact, they were often dismissed as unimportant, especially after passage of time, which provided an incomplete picture to the involved stakeholders, as elaborated by one of the research participants below:

“Although I have informed them of the reason why I was not able to attend that client event and my manager agreeing that it was a legitimate family emergency, he [the line manager] did not raise this in the performance calibration meeting and needless to say, I was furious when I was told why my appraisal was [low grade] and that my absence from that event was discussed without a single word from my manager. When I spoke to him about it he apologized and said he had forgotten what had happened at the time but it is now too late to make any changes to the grade. I feel very unmotivated.”

Moreover, findings from the analysis of focus group data showed that the word ‘inclusive’ was the most frequently used word within the focus groups. Focus group participants unanimously mentioned that inclusiveness and paying due attention to two specific aspects of the context were conducive to reducing the frequency of organizational conflict. The two aspects mentioned were: 1. attention to the details surrounding the conflict event, including a. hidden causes, b. previous unresolved conflicts and c. the involvement of outside parties; and 2. attention to the contributions of junior members of the organization. The importance of taking an inclusive approach to conflict and its effect on relationships and interests and subsequently to organizational functions is stressed in the following quote:

“We don’t always listen to certain groups, younger people, support staff, sometimes women. Last month, we progressed with the deal from Oman only to leave it halfway through, after exhausting significant resources. It was my bad, I was not including the [name of staff] in our meetings and when I finally did, we had to pull out because it made no business sense given the information she provided. Of course, the Omanis did not appreciate our indecisiveness, and this affected the relationship and our future prospects with them.”

Moreover, a high number of observed events contained references to known managerial/administrative issues that should have been considered in the discussion of a transaction but were excluded up to the point of the event. On the other hand, two thirds of focus group participants labelled some issues as ‘sensitive’, stating that they are difficult to discuss and thus go by unaddressed, creating a gap in the understanding of the issue and hindering resolution. An example of that is an error made by a senior member in the organization as explained below:

“She forgot to send the email containing the requested quotations and as a result of that, the client thought we were not interested in doing business with them. In the discussion on why we lost the deal, no one dared to mention this one detail and they ended up with irrelevant conclusions and action plans.”

Furthermore, the majority of interviewees mentioned that discussions, decisions and processes are often not factored into the learning or the know-how generated from previous occurrences, as explained below:

“Every occurrence is treated like an isolated island. Whatever we learned, did or concluded in the past does not find its way to the present and, needless to say, we make the same mistakes over and over again and we consume as much time and resources addressing each instance. This builds up frustration, especially when a group of employees try to include the previously gained knowledge in the resolution of the current situation and others resist.”

The implications of inclusiveness and lack thereof for the process of knowledge creation are discussed in 4.1.4.2 Research Objective Two.

4.1.3.4 Reduced Levels of Past Unaddressed Organizational Conflict

The relationship between past unaddressed organizational conflict and current organizational conflict was found to be positive, while the relationship between past unaddressed organizational conflict and conflict transformation was found to be negative, as discussed in 4.1.4.1 Research Objective One.

Observed events often contained a reference to previous unresolved organizational conflicts in the course of the observed event, which given the context of the reference indicated that the dynamics of current conflicts are influenced by the actors' positions towards previous conflicts. This is consistent with Lederach's argument (2014) regarding conflicts occurring within social constructs, namely that such conflicts can be represented as a position within a series of ebbs and flows, where the series represents the dynamics of conflict.

A significant number of interviewed participants mentioned that the conflicts they experienced seemed to be a progression of an initial conflict that was not addressed and rather allowed to fade away, as explained by the following quote:

"It seems as though we never have a clean slate with anyone anymore. We are always aggregating small conflicts on top of each other and then the most powerful person wins."

Furthermore, focus group participants identified unresolved conflicts as the most prominent factor in sustaining ongoing tension. This is explained by the quote below, in which a participant explains the effect of unaddressed past conflicts on current conflicts, his ability to maintain constructive discourse and his relationship with his manager:

"When we are in a conflictual situation, my boss will dig open old graves [meaning that he will reopen old conflicts], going back to the time I was working in the quality department. This made it impossible to create a good relationship with him. We get

into a cycle where his behaviour sparks resentment in me and I admit, I am not my most constructive self in these situations.”

The above quote is supported by Miller, Roloff and Malis (2007), who argue that past unresolved conflicts can remain present in the form of arguments stemming from the unaddressed matters, which may inevitably affect the quality of relationships and discourse, and the willingness to negotiate interests.

Further to the above, the majority of interviewees mentioned that an uncompleted task or an unfinished conversation is often associated with past unresolved conflicts, which in turn diverts time and resources away from the currently discussed issue needing to be resolved. Furthermore, interviewees also emphasized that unresolved conflicts tend to take place with people who are not easy to converse with. Two categories were identified, namely a. individuals characterized by difficult or aggressive personalities and b. individuals with high social or hierarchal status, as explained below:

“I find people higher up in the organization the most difficult to talk to. Sometimes I feel that they have too much ego and don’t take feedback constructively, so I leave the conversation unfinished and, of course, the matter we are discussing remains unresolved. But these things, they find a way to resurface in future conversations.”

To add to the above, a number of focus group participants identified strained relationships as the main contributor to unresolved conflict, as explained below:

“When relationships are under pressure conflicts tend to remain unresolved and this, in turn, puts more pressure on relationships. It is a vicious circle.”

The presence of unaddressed past conflict has implications for knowledge creation, which are discussed in detail in 4.1.4.2 Research Objective Two.

4.1.4 Discussion

This section outlines how the findings address the research objectives, namely a. how conflict transformation is applied to organizational conflict in the Kingdom of Bahrain and b. how conflict transformation relates to knowledge creation within organizations in the Kingdom of Bahrain. Furthermore, the findings of this research build on the existing literature, which is also outlined below. The achievement of the above objectives constitutes the researcher's original contribution to both literature and professional practice, alongside satisfying the objectives of action research.

4.1.4.1 Research Objective One: To Identify How Conflict Transformation is Applied to Organizational Conflict in the Kingdom of Bahrain

Miall (2004) argues that conflict transformation is a reconceptualized expansion of the field of conflict resolution, the latter being a broad term that includes various approaches and models, some of which cross paths with the concepts inherent in the notion of conflict transformation (Lederach, 2014).

Scholars have presented several definitions of the term conflict transformation. According to Miall (2004), conflict transformation is a process that entails engaging with and transforming discourse, interests and relationships in order to achieve a peaceful outcome. In other words, according to the same author, transformed conflict is a state in which conflict is replaced by a peaceful outcome through engagement with the aforementioned instruments. Alternatively, Kirkpatrick (2017) argues that conflict transformation addresses the structural formation that caused the conflict in the first place. Other scholars, such as Lederach (2014) and Galtung and Fischer (2013), have formulated differently focused definitions, emphasizing the centrality of relationships, communication, patterns and structures, as elaborated upon in 3.2 Conflict Transformation.

According to the findings of the present research, the organizational conflict transformation elements identified and discussed in 4.1.3 Reporting of Findings – namely a. communication, b.

momentum, c. inclusiveness and d. reduced levels of past unaddressed organizational conflict – were found to be negatively related to organizational conflict. In order to apply conflict transformation in the organization under study, the aforementioned elements were incorporated into the organizational culture, which, in turn, served to introduce conflict transformation to the organization, beginning with a prevention state, i.e. through transforming relationships and addressing structures leading to its presence as, according to Austin, Fischer and Ropers (2004), the term ‘conflict transformation’ encompasses activities including conflict prevention, resolution and beyond. A description of the way in which each element serves to answer the first research objective is presented below.

a. Communication

A negative relationship is found between adequate communication and organizational conflict, while the relationship between communication and conflict transformation is positive, as it is an applicable means of engaging with and transforming relationships and negotiating interests, as per Miall (2004). This is further supported by the literature, as Lederach (2014) indicates that communication is key to the relational aspect of conflict transformation, alongside interdependence, power, expression and interactivity. The author adds that, at a relational level, transformation of conflict manifests through communication-enhancing interventions, which maximize mutual understanding, partially by way of overtly addressing stakeholders’ fears, hopes and goals (Lederach, 2014), which, according to Little (2017), is integral to the holistic transformation.

Further, respect, tolerance, openness and reduced levels of technology-mediated communication are encompassed within the theme of ‘communication’ and are discussed below.

Perceived respect, tolerance, openness and reduced levels of technology-mediated communication are found to hold a negative relationship with organizational conflict and a positive connection to conflict transformation. Respect, tolerance and openness facilitate and enhance the process of engaging with and subsequently positively influencing relationships and interests, and thus constitute a means of applying conflict transformation as per Miall’s definition (2004). Furthermore, instituting such value-based elements within an organizational culture

serves to establish what is referred to by Galtung and Fischer (2013) as 'positive peace', which, according to the authors, is achieved through increasing respect and understanding in relationships in addition to establishing equality. This is a step beyond the non-existence of conflict and is a core concept in conflict transformation.

Moreover, findings show that respect increases the effectiveness of communication and is used to enhance relationships, discourse and negotiation of interests. This is also supported by Lederach (2014), who argues that relationships are central to the process of conflict transformation and primarily depend on respect, which is shown to be vital in shaping the direction of the conflict. In other words, respect is a dominant element within conflict transformation due to its centrality to building trust among related parties, in addition to establishing and maintaining relationships. Lederach (2014) further argues that respect provides an 'entry' into the other party, thus providing an opportunity to change the direction of the conflict and its resolution.

Further to the above, Frazer and Ghetts (2013) had previously addressed the relationship between respect and conflict transformation by affirming that showing due respect to other people's views is crucial in creating healthy environments conducive to purposeful dialogues. A healthy and safe working environment is defined by Kelloway and Day (2005) as one in which the members of the organization benefit from social and developmental support in addition to personal and physical security. Frazer and Ghetts (2013) also stress the importance of communicating respect prior to addressing a conflict, while Körppen, Schmelzle and Wils (2008) emphasize that a successful conflict transformation process cannot be achieved unless mutual respect has been established between all involved parties.

On the other hand, findings from the present research show that tolerance is another key implementer of conflict transformation, particularly due to the way in which it influences relationships, discourse and individuals' ability to negotiate interests, as emphasized by Miall (2004). Stetson and Conti (2005) argue further that tolerance stemming from an attitude of respect, as opposed to an attitude of judgement, entails recognition, acceptance and appreciation for both participants' positions and freedom of expression. In other words,

tolerance directly relates to the quality and sustainability of relationships, which are central to the process of conflict transformation, as argued by Lederach (2014).

In regard to openness, not only does the data indicate its negative relationship with organizational conflict but it has also been widely studied in the context of conflict transformation, where a positive relationship has been established between the two. This is supported by Frazer and Ghetta (2013), who state that openness to new ideas, brought about by a foundation of trust and facilitating conversations, is fundamental to progressive dialogue, which in turn forms the foundation of conflict transformation. Körppen, Schmelzle and Wils (2008) also agree with this view, stressing the importance of openness in the process of conflict transformation, as openness in dialogue and in conveying and accepting new ideas is required for developing viable solutions. The authors underline the necessity of openness as a characteristic of leaders of the conflict transformation process by stating that the presence of openness is essential in order for the systematic approach to conflict transformation to be successful. To add to that, Lederach (2014) and Galtung and Fischer (2013) all emphasize the importance of facilitated verbal communication within the process of conflict transformation. To build on the importance of the 'ease of conversing' aspect of openness, as defined by Ayoko (2007), the aforementioned authors have each devised a mediation procedure in order to facilitate conversation.

Literature and practice confirm that offering respect and exercising tolerance and openness are core to implementing conflict transformation in social structures. In other words, findings show that the incorporation of the aforementioned elements in the culture of a commercial organization is a viable means of applying conflict transformation. Moreover, it is noteworthy that, building on Lederach's argument on the necessity of intervention towards enhancing communication effectiveness at a relational level, Väyrynen's model of conflict transformation (1991) was adopted as described later in this chapter, which mandated transformation at various levels; in the present research, this resulted in the establishment of the described employees' and executives' forums where communication and its underlying elements were enforced.

In terms of reduced levels of technology-mediated communication, and in accordance with the research findings, the use of technology-mediated communication is positively related to organizational conflict, whereas its relationship with conflict transformation is negative, drawing on its compromising effect on relationships, discourse and negotiating interests as a central means of establishing conflict transformation, as per Miall (2004). This claim is supported by Meluch and Walter (2012), who state that computer-mediated communication promotes decreased levels of collaboration and compromise compared to face-to-face communication, therefore affecting the negotiation of interests and relationships. This is further amplified by its availability and convenience, which prompt employees to overuse it, as argued by D'Urso and Pierce (2009), who suggest that employees tend to utilize the internet, particularly emails, as a means of communication more than other available means.

Furthermore, conflict transformation places weight on authentic human communication in the sound handling of conflict, as underlined by Lederach (2014) and Galtung and Fischer's emphasis on mediation (2013), i.e. a face-to-face conversation with the full involvement of all parties. More specifically, the emphasis on face-to-face dialogue was stressed by Galtung and Fischer (2013), who describe it as meeting 'at the table'. To add to the above, conflict episodes are accompanied with negative emotions, as affirmed by Kidder (2007), while face-to-face communication around them allows for the sound processing of such emotions, as argued by Waldron (2000). The latter author adds that the highly contextual nature of organizational relationships impacts a fundamental component of relational conflict, namely the experienced emotions.

b. Momentum

Participants identified momentum in handling organizational conflict as having a negative relationship with it, while being positively connected to conflict transformation, as it is the aspect that serves to move all other elements through the process. In fact, the Cambridge Dictionary (2019) defines momentum as the power that keeps an event progressing after it has started. In the present context, however, 'momentum' is positioned as the persistence of an individual or a system to arrive at the desired outcome of the conflict, as opposed to merely working through the process. Organizations may have processes in place to address conflict, by appointing

individuals within business units or establishing a centralized system in the human resources department; however, such individuals, according to Kriesberg (2011, p.63), “often stress the process [...] more than the outcome”.

Lederach (2014) further emphasizes the importance of momentum by stating that the required momentum is built at the early stages of the conflict transformation process and is significant for successful conflict handling. Galtung and Fischer (2013) use the concept of momentum as a tool for the delivery of conflict transformation, arguing that arriving at a consensus on common issues at the beginning of the process provides the necessary momentum that can carry the process to the end. Reyhler (2015, p.156) agrees with this, stating that “creating and maintaining the right momentum is a key issue in conflict transformation”.

c. Inclusiveness

Inclusiveness and paying due attention to all matters relevant to the context of the conflict, such as the contributions of junior members and details surrounding the conflictual event, are negatively related to organizational conflict, as per the findings of the research. However, inclusiveness is positively related to conflict transformation, as the hidden causes of the conflict, such as subtle or unseen triggers or the involvement of outside parties, are essential for a correct diagnosis, implementation and evaluation of the process. Inclusiveness as a concept is inherent in all conflict transformation models, as elaborated in 3.2.3 Models of Conflict Transformation.

Furthermore, Kriesberg (2011) explains the importance of taking into consideration all conflict-related matters by stating that due attention has to be given to the formulation of suitable ends for all involved parties, as they provide direction for the methods used in the transformation of the conflict. Unger and Wils (2007) suggest that a lack of inclusiveness in a conflict-handling process is a key weakness that may hinder the success of the initiative. Boege (2006, p.11) expands on the topic and stresses the importance of inclusiveness in conflict transformation approaches by stating that “comprehensive inclusion and participation” is a system strength. The author also explains that all the parties responsible for the occurrence of the conflict and the elements present around it have to be included in the transformation process. This is also stressed in the Transcend Theory developed by Galtung, which goes to the extent of including

the 'forgotten stakeholders' (Galtung and Fischer, 2013). Moreover, Zartman (1999, p.161) holds a similar position, stating that inclusiveness of all parties in their own domain takes into consideration the non-linear nature of negotiation and conflict transformation, and "confirms the multiplicity of the levels at which it takes place".

d. Reduced Levels of Past Unaddressed Organizational Conflict

Research has found that the presence of unaddressed past conflicts fosters present organizational conflict, thus establishing a positive relationship between the two. Furthermore, the presence of past unaddressed conflicts is negatively related to organizational conflict transformation due to its effects on relationships, discourse and interests, affecting the current and future position, explained as follows.

Gayle and Preiss (1998) argue that unresolved conflict in the workplace forms the basis for recurring conflict, bearing negative implications for relationships and quality of discourse. Floyd (2017) presents views in line with Gayle and Preiss (1998) by noting that conflict tends to be exacerbated when one of the parties tries to avoid addressing it.

The high number of unresolved conflicts in the organization under study corresponds to the findings of Benoit and Benoit's study (1987), which found that 40% of participants in the conducted study left conflict unresolved, through leaving, ending the conversation or simply changing the topic. The authors add that the quality of a relationship may deteriorate due to the presence of unresolved conflict, which is a major concern for the application of conflict transformation. In addition to hindering the process, as per Miall's definition (2004), the above creates disruption to the notion of 'positive peace' as part of the conflict transformation process, which is concerned with prevention and is rooted in sound and healthy relationships among stakeholders, as affirmed by Galtung and Fischer (2013).

Furthermore, Hocker and Wilmot (2018) argue that the consequences of avoiding conflict can be summarized as either escalation of conflict or risk of spiralling into further avoidance, which may perpetuate more conflict. Unresolved conflict can, therefore, continue to exist in the form of repeated arguments founded on unresolved matters (Johnson and Roloff, 2000). El-Sheikh,

Buckhalt and Reiter (2000) also note that individuals are found to be less angry and exhibit traits of being happier following the resolution of a conflict – a state that has positive implications for relationships, discourse and overall harmony within the organization.

4.1.4.2 Research Objective Two: To Identify How Conflict Transformation Effects Knowledge Creation Within Organizations in the Kingdom of Bahrain

The findings of this research have revealed a clear connection between organizational conflict transformation and knowledge creation, which supports the theoretical framework presented in 1.4.1 Theoretical Framework. Conflict transformation effects knowledge creation in a number of ways, which are explained below.

The research findings, supported by the existing literature, show that the existence of prolonged and frequent conflict in the organization under study was hindering the activities of knowledge creation and thus negatively affecting knowledge creation as a process. The explanations below outline the effect of organizational conflict on the knowledge creation modes described by Nonaka and Takeuchi's SECI knowledge creation model (1995) and their respective 'ba's, as discussed by Nonaka, Toyama and Konno (2000), who provide a conceptualized extension of the knowledge spiral, arguing that the existing knowledge assets are processed through the SECI spiral that occurs in the 'ba', leading to the creation of new knowledge, which then serves as the basis of a new knowledge creation spiral.

Lederach (2014) affirms that the presence of prolonged, inappropriately addressed conflict has negative impacts on relationships, which are central to the socialization stage, as explained by Nonaka, Toyama and Konno (2000), who stress the importance of maintaining positive relationships among organizational members, by stating that "fostering love, care, trust and commitment amongst organizational members is important as it forms the foundation of knowledge creation" (p.28). This is amplified by the common coping mechanisms used to remove one's self from uncomfortable situations, such as 'avoidance', which is evident in the organization under study. Avoidance and absenteeism directly interfere with the socialization stage, as they worsen the deterioration of the relationship, as per Benoit and Benoit (1987), and often remove

individuals from the act of face-to-face socialization all together. This causes disruption to the 'originating ba', which corresponds to the socialization stage defined by Nonaka, Toyama and Konno (2000, p.16) as "individual and face-to-face interaction" and, thus, hinders the commencement of the knowledge creation spiral.

Moreover, the presence of inappropriately addressed conflict and its consequences interrupt the knowledge creation process at all levels, particularly by hindering the 'externalization' process through which tacit knowledge is converted to explicit knowledge. According to Nonaka, Toyama and Konno (2000), this process is sustained by the use of analogies, models and metaphors that take place in the 'dialoguing ba', which is characterized by a collective face-to-face interaction and thus is heavily dependent on the mutual presence of organizational members and the quality of sustained relationships among them. The authors further argue that, during the externalization mode, part of the knowledge is brought back through reflection, hence leading to further externalization. Furthermore, this process entails the articulation of one's vision to the world, which requires a safe platform, as emphasized by Nonaka, Toyama and Konno (2000, p.28), who argue that management should "create an atmosphere in which organization members feel safe sharing their knowledge". In addition to that, employees' willingness to be outwardly expressive is a prerequisite as it signifies commitment to the organization's wellbeing, the importance of which is described by the authors, who state that management must "cultivate commitment amongst organization members to motivate the sharing and creation of knowledge".

The negative effects of inadequately addressed conflict are, however, less visible in the 'combination' mode, as this commonly entails the usage of computerized communication. Nonetheless, the deteriorated position of relationships and the use of coping mechanisms such as avoidance and absenteeism hinder specific components from this mode, such as collectively breaking down concepts into smaller sub-concepts – for instance, breaking down the organization's vision into processes or the activity of disseminating the newly formed knowledge to others – which again is a collective process, highly reliant on the quality of relationships and mutual presence in the 'systemizing ba'.

Finally, the presence of organizational conflict negatively affects the ‘internalization’ process as a core mechanism by influencing communication, as argued by Nonaka, Toyama and Konno (2000, p.11), who state that organizational members “try to understand management visions and values through communications with fellow members of the organization”. This is in addition to engaging in simulation and experimentation, both of which require sound relationships and, in some instances, mutual presence in the space, defined by the authors as ‘exercising ba’, although this ‘ba’ is not entirely dependent on face-to-face communication and aspects of it can be executed through virtual communication.

The application of the four identified elements, namely a. communication, b. momentum, c. inclusiveness and d. reduced levels of past unaddressed organizational conflict, serves to negate the effects of conflict, as further described in 4.1.4.1 Research Objective One, in addition to positively impacting the knowledge creation cycle through the identified elements of organizational conflict transformation, as explained below.

To begin with, the presence of adequate communication, respect, tolerance, openness, momentum and reduced levels of past unaddressed organizational conflict directly impact the quality of relationships, which, as explained in 4.1.4.1 Research Objective One and the first part of this section, are crucial to all knowledge-creation modes. This is stressed by Nonaka, Toyama and Konno (2000, p.8), who emphasize that “knowledge is created through the interactions amongst individuals or between individuals and their environment”. Quality of relationships is further emphasized in the socialization and externalization modes, which correspond to the originating and dialoguing ‘ba’ respectively, as the authors argue that “close physical interaction is important in sharing the context and forming a common language among participants” (p.15), where trust is created and shared, feeding back to the process of conflict transformation.

Nonaka, Toyama and Konno (2000) stress the importance of establishing a relationship through which an individual can ‘self-transcend’ by connecting and empathizing with another in socialization mode, be able and willing to commit to a larger group in the externalization mode and engage in self-transcendence in the internalization mode, where the individual will find

themselves part of a larger entity. The authors also stress that sympathizing and empathizing with others is core to the socialization activity.

Secondly, technology-mediated communication disrupts the socialization and externalization stages as, according to Nonaka, Toyama and Konno (2000), the 'originating ba' and the 'dialoguing ba', which respectively correspond to the socialization and externalization modes, are driven by face-to-face interaction (refer to Figure 3.6.1.3), while 'exercising ba' and 'systematizing ba', which respectively correspond to the combination and internalization modes, can be carried out in a virtual space.

To add to the above, inclusiveness as a concept is integral to the process of knowledge creation, as affirmed by Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995), who state that knowledge is not meant to be passed down from top management but meant to be generated by all employees, including juniors or those with non-executive positions.

The effect of conflict transformation on 'ba', namely the context of knowledge creation, has been examined in the sections above. However, another dimension of it is the mental space that it creates for the organizational members, which is described by Nonaka, Toyama and Konno (2000, p.14) as "the place where information is interpreted to become knowledge". Therefore, it is susceptible to being influenced by the shift in culture, through the incorporation of conflict transformation elements and by the nature of conflict transformation itself, namely it being a mindset as well as a process (Austin, Fischer and Ropers, 2004). On the other hand, all categories of knowledge assets are impacted by the conduct of conflict transformation, as it begins with experiential knowledge and takes various forms across the spiral. Experiential knowledge assets comprise tacit knowledge that is shared by way of interaction, such as the tacit knowledge shared by the leaders who embody the four identified elements. Next, the knowledge asset is converted through conceptual and systemizing assets, which consist of explicit assets that will be finally converted to routine knowledge assets embedded in action and culture.

4.2 Planning for Action

The researcher scheduled three meetings, in which the details of the findings were communicated to the management through a digital presentation. The researcher allowed the team a period of five working days to ponder upon the findings and arranged a meeting for the following week to agree on action, based on the findings. As a consensus was not reached in the first meeting, three subsequent meetings were scheduled, in which, after lengthy deliberations, it was mutually agreed that the four identified organizational conflict transformation elements, namely a. communication, b. momentum, c. inclusiveness and d. reduced levels of past unaddressed organizational conflict, were to be incorporated into the organizational culture. The intervention at a cultural level is in line with the work of Austin, Fischer and Ropers (2004), who argue that conflict transformation encompasses various phases including conflict prevention, which then guides the process towards resolution.

Prior to agreeing on this course of action, the researcher examined this proposition from both academic and practical perspectives. A number of scholars, such as Alvesson and Sveningsson (2016), confirm that intentional transformation from one cultural position to another is possible. Further, as per Nonaka, Toyama and Konno (2000), patterns of thinking and, subsequently, of action can be shared and reinforced among members of an organization through continual exercise. Thus, changing the culture influences change in behaviour. This, combined with the experiential knowledge of the cultural transformation present in the organization, solidified the researcher's conviction that the choice of action was beneficial and achievable within existing means.

Following a conclusive decision on the course of action, the management then requested that the researcher communicate the position to all staff in a town hall meeting. This meeting, internally labelled 'pre-kick-off', was held with the purpose of informing the staff that their contributions to the data provision had been successful, providing them with high-level information about the findings in addition to announcing the official 'kick-off' meeting date and, most importantly, validating the findings with them. This was important as Creswell and Miller (2000) argue that, in the context of qualitative research, which governs the present thesis,

validity refers to whether or not the findings are deemed accurate from the standpoint of the person (entity) who conducts the research, the research participants and the reader. A subsequent series of six meetings was held to draft, finalize and reach consensus on the implementation plan to incorporate the four identified elements into the organizational culture, inspired by Alvesson and Sveningsson's presentation of cultural change (2008) and the process of leading the knowledge-creating change put forward by Nonaka, Toyama and Konno (2000), and also grounded in the organization's experiential knowledge, as follows:

- Step one: Announcing the project commencement.
- Step two: Conducting a series of four workshops for the project team.
- Step three: Conducting a monthly workshop/discussion forum for the employees.
- Step four: The establishment of the employees' forum.
- Step five: The establishment of the executives' forum.

Furthermore, in order to execute action with due rigour, the above plan had to be designed within an established conflict transformation model. For this purpose and building on Lederach's argument (2014) on the necessity of intervention to increase communication effectiveness at a relational level, Väyrynen's model (1991) was selected to implement conflict transformation in the organization under study. First, actor transformation would be achieved by empowering new players to participate in conflict transformation through the establishment of the executives' and employees' forums, which would serve as the main platforms for decision-making in the organization in addition to hosting various other processes. The second process is issue transformation, which entails finding common ground and would also be achieved through the introduction of the executives' and employees' forums, serving as platforms to continuously negotiate organizational issues. Furthermore, although actions were concerned with resolving the current issue, the main focus of conflict transformation through incorporating the four conflict transformation elements was on addressing the underlying causes, structures and relationships supporting it, i.e. the issue in focus was altered. The third process is rule transformation, which establishes improved and transformed rules and norms to govern the conflict; this was to take place through discussions held in the executives' and employees'

forums. Last but not least, the power distribution and relationship structure are transformed through structural transformation. This was to be addressed at this stage by outlining the desired state of culture and through deliberations that were to take place in the executives' and employees' forums. Changes at all the levels mentioned by Väyrynen (1991) are discussed in 5.2.1 Outcomes as per Väyrynen's Model of Conflict Transformation.

Moreover, it was necessary to align all aspects of the organizational culture with the proposed change in order to harmonize the process. Towards this end, the researcher proposed adopting Schein and Schein's organizational culture model (2017), which calls for the addressing of a. artefacts and symbols, b. espoused values and c. underlying assumptions. The aim was to ensure that all three levels were aligned with the intended change in order to take solid and unified steps towards the transformation. To achieve this, basic assumptions were brought to the surface and challenged in the executives' and employees' forums, with the same platforms being used to discuss and reflect upon organizational values. Finally, change in artefacts was managed through both decisions made in the executives' forum, which built on the outcomes resulting from the employees' forum, particularly in regard to ceremonies, architecture, technology and physical artifices, and decisions made by the project team at the outset of the project, as part of the future desired state of the organization, as discussed below.

While management reached consensus that action to be taken was to incorporate the four identified elements into the organizational culture, the end result was yet to be envisioned, i.e. what the culture would look like when the action was completed, which was designed by the project team to be in line with and in support of the expected outcomes from implementing action, and not a limiting frame to them. Section 5. Evaluation and Outcomes details the actual outcomes of the research project. To discuss this in more concrete terms, the cultural web by Johnson (1992), which is predominantly used as a diagnostic tool but can also be used to sketch the desired end culture, was employed, as illustrated in Figure 4.2.

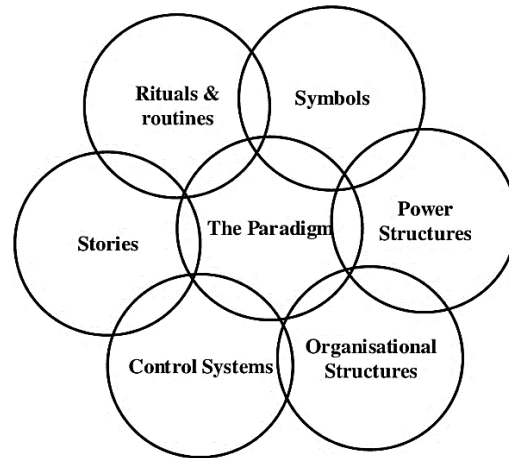


Figure 4.2: The Cultural Web (adapted from Johnson, 1992, p.31)

The following was agreed upon by the core project team and used as a compass to direct change, as part of the application of the action as detailed later in this chapter.

Rituals and routines refer to events that emphasize what is most important to an organization and the daily behaviour of the people within it. In this regard, it was agreed that, by the end of the research project period, all employees were to meet once a month in a town hall setting and for the purpose of both discussing items that could benefit from further deliberation at this level and providing a venue to socialize for team-building purposes and to fuel the collaborative knowledge-creation modes. In addition to this, Eid celebrations were to be grand and inclusive, and a 30-minute midday coffee break for all employees was to be carried out at the same time to enhance socialization and improve the sense of team.

Regarding symbols, as the organization's recognizable expressions, it was agreed that respectful and appreciative language should be used with all members of the hierarchy. In addition to this, the organization's town hall seating arrangement used for employee assembly was to change from personalized seating according to office ranking, being sofas at the front for executives and regular chairs for other employees, to identical seating.

The organizational structure, which is the hierarchical composition of the organization, was to remain unchanged. However, open lines of bottom-up communication to reach all members of the hierarchy were to be established.

Furthermore, the power structure, represented by the real power pockets in the organization, was to be changed through the allocation of more power and decision-making autonomy to individuals engaged in service delivery, as recommended by Nonaka (1994). To add to this, it was decided that temporary external employees should not be allowed to gain dominance or significant power.

In addition to the above, control systems, which refer to the way in which the organization is controlled and managed, were to be changed in terms of giving rewards based on behaviour and not only achievements and management recognizing good quality communication and teamwork.

Finally, stories and myths, being stories that are constantly told by existing employees and passed on to new employees and told by people outside the organization, were considered. Such stories may or may not be true but demonstrate what a company chooses to immortalize. In this regard, management envisioned that employees spoke about wanting to continue working with the organization and, subsequently, other people would want to join the organization for the same reason. In addition to this, the organization holds a competitive position in the market, which was to be frequently talked about inside and outside the organization. To describe this, one of the project team members used the term 'to eat the market' in a description of how the narration would ensue.

Following the decision to incorporate the four identified elements into the corporate culture, there was a need to examine the literature on organizational culture and organizational change, despite the presence of this know-how in the organization. Various elements of the same were examined at the outset of the research and are highlighted in 3.5 Organizational Culture.

4.3 Implementation of Action

As explained in the planning section, the changes were applied within Väyrynen's conflict transformation model (1991) using a multitrack approach, as called for by Rupesinghe and Anderlini (1998), who support Väyrynen's views (1991) on the positive implications of meaningful

intervention and assert the importance of implementing conflict transformation using a multitrack approach, as described below.

Step One: Announcing the Project Commencement

The core project team emphasized the need for a powerful launch of the change project. The importance placed on this step comes from the organization's experiential knowledge, drawn from multiple transformations carried out on various aspects of organizational culture as part of the services provided to its clients. For this purpose, a prestigious external hall was booked, and the main stakeholders were invited, including all employees. The project commencement announcement, or what was internally known as the 'kick-off meeting', embodied elements from the desired end culture. For the first time, the customary arrangement of the chairs, which had previously been personalized according to ranking within the organization – sofas at the front for high-ranking executives and guests and regular chairs at the back – were changed to round tables, with no predefined seating arrangements.

The head of the organization, i.e. the project sponsor, gave a presentation and emphasized the following aspects. First, the project was completely owned by the employees, was designed based on their input and would be executed by them under the direction of management. The purpose of this was to position action research in the way in which it was intended: a democratic and participatory process. Second, a sense of urgency for the successful implementation of the project was inferred; he explained that the current internal state of affairs in the organization impacted its main functions and affected its overall financial health, in addition to its market share. Third, he explained the implementation plan, its expected timeframe and the desired culture. Finally, the floor was open for questions, which were mainly addressed by the researcher and another member of the project team. A number of questions sought clarification of the process, while others showed scepticism regarding the overall approach.

Step Two: Conducting a Series of Four Workshops for the Project Team

As per the implementation design, the project team were to partake in workshops on the identified four elements and then cascade the learning to their teams, by way of conducting internal workshops in their own departments. However, the material for such workshops was

not available in the organization, nor were all members of the project team capable of delivering training. Thus, the organization contracted a collaborating training company to design the training material on the four identified elements and deliver it to the potential trainers (in three workshops), with the purpose of building a comprehensive understanding of the identified elements and their application to business. They were also contracted to deliver the training session where the training manuals designed for this purpose were explained and tools were given (the fourth workshop).

An emphasis was placed on embodying the identified elements, as workshops discussed behaviours associated with each element and stressed that leaders should take visible steps to manifest the change and support it. This was upheld by all members, with the exception of the occasional failure of one member. This was discussed in the executives' forum multiple times, but no action was taken, as no specific measuring tool was developed for behaviours modelled by project leaders, which was a shortfall in the process. As a reflective action, the researcher, in collaboration with the partner company, developed measures that were introduced by mid-third quarter.

Step Three: Conducting a Monthly Workshop/Discussion Forum for the Employees

As planned, the project team members, who are also senior executives in the organization, facilitated monthly workshops for their respective teams. Initially, the workshops centred around enhancing understanding of the four identified elements, and the material used for six months was developed by the company that conducted the initial workshops for the core project team. Through this workshop series, the four identified elements were introduced to and reinforced for organizational members by way of discussion, case studies and brainstorming, while other institutional changes were made in support of that, as discussed in 5.2 Outcomes of Implemented Action. It is noteworthy that, as requested by the researcher, the workshop material was founded on Schein and Schein's organizational culture model (2017), in which a. artefacts and symbols, b. espoused values and c. underlying assumptions are addressed. The agenda of these workshops; particularly the second six months were no solid material was provided by the partner company was discussed and then recommended in the employees' forum and their outcomes were further

deliberated in the executives' forum to ensure that the entire organization was moving at the same pace and in the same direction.

A number of challenges arose during the execution of these workshops. Firstly, it was apparent that some employees were not comfortable discussing certain aspects in the presence of their manager, who was the facilitator of the workshop. This was discussed in the executives' forum and a recommendation was made to swap facilitators, i.e. project team members were not to deliver workshops for their own teams but rather to employees who did not report to them. No consensus was reached, and the problem persisted; this is further reflected upon in 4.4 Reflection, Sense-making and Scholarly Development. Another challenge was that, despite the normal development of the initial workshops as scheduled, the momentum began to diminish and some workshops were cancelled, some employees were absent, or the two-and-a-half-hour time slot allocated for the workshops was not fully utilized. To address this, the researcher requested the support of the project sponsor to re-establish order and boost momentum.

Step Four: The Establishment of the Employees' Forum

The employees' forum was scheduled every six weeks in the town hall, with the purpose of exchanging success stories, challenges, insights, techniques and reflections, in addition to providing a platform for socialization and wider discussion, and allowing the organization to move together as one unit. This forum was used to bring forward issues concerning the employees and their attitudes towards this process, concerns that had not been directly raised with management and other matters that they deemed fit for discussion at this level. Input from the employees' forum was often discussed in the executives' forum. Only selective sessions were attended by top management, including the project team. The purpose of this was to allow employees a platform to exchange ideas and thoughts without feeling obliged to adopt a specific position. A facilitator from among them was selected each time, along with someone who took minutes, which were then communicated to the researcher for deliberation in the executives' forum.

Step Five: The Establishment of the Executives' Forum

The purpose of establishing the weekly executives' forum was to provide a venue for the management to collaborate in directing the change in a process-orientated manner. The main items discussed in the executives' forum included: a. the unified agenda of monthly intra-departmental workshops; b. ways to maintain high momentum; c. the concerns and recommendations regarding the process raised by employees, particularly from the employees' forum; d. the development and reinforcement of new knowledge surrounding the four identified elements, through presentations from members of the project team that usually occurred in the first 20 minutes of the forum; e. the strategy, structure and other control systems that needed to be altered to be in alignment with the changes to the culture; f. obstacles and resistance; and g. the identification of short-term wins and rewards to aid in controlling the process.

The executives' forum was scheduled every Thursday at a predetermined hour, and at times the executives were joined by the head of the organization and the owner. However, a number of challenges were inherent in the process. Firstly, although the core project team took part voluntarily and had made significant contributions throughout the process, momentum dropped towards the third month after the establishment of the forum; this manifested itself in occasional late attendances, calls to reschedule the forum, less-than-thorough presentations and a lack of substantial input in some instances. Secondly, the external professional who was contracted to execute a number of tasks within the organization was displeased at not being involved in the executives' forum and, at this point, attempted to undermine the process by minimizing the efforts of the organization, questioning the methodology with junior staff and lobbying the owner to terminate the project, arguing that it had shifted the focus of the organization away from the most important operational items necessary for survival. The researcher had recourse to the project sponsor to assist in both boosting momentum and, as far as possible, neutralizing the external professional. Alongside the process discussed above, the researcher conducted three meetings with upper management, namely the board of directors, to provide updates on the application of action.

4.4 Reflection, Sense-making and Scholarly Development

Kudesia (2017) states that sense-making as a perspective and process is heavily intertwined with action research, as it is built on the recursive connection between action and knowledge. Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld (1999) define sense-making as a process through which people take notes of certain information, then use them to make tentative yet plausible interpretations, finally acting on such interpretations to make their environment more orderly and understandable. On the other hand, McGill and Brockbank (2010) argue that reflection connects interpretation and action. Action research combines reflection, sense-making and action together as, according to Coghlan and Brannick (2014), action research is a continuous process of action and reflection.

Sense-making, reflection and scholarly development took place throughout the DBA journey. However, engaging in the action research cycle offered a platform to deeply engage in the aforementioned intellectual activities and thus guide the implementation of action and develop the researcher’s learning as a scholar-practitioner. This learning was conducted through action research and could be broken down into four processes, namely a. experiencing the research project as a participant and main researcher, b. reflecting on the experience, c. interpreting the experience and building understanding and, finally, d. action. This process took place at every stage of the action research cycle, as explained by Coghlan and Brannick (2005) and illustrated in Figure 4.4.

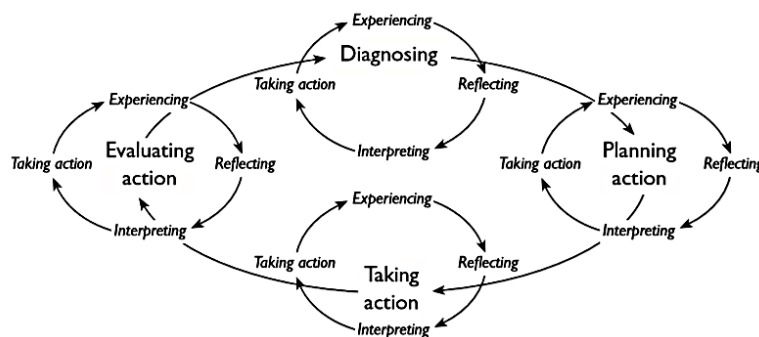


Figure 4.4: The Experiential Learning Cycle (adapted from Coghlan and Brannick, 2005, p.35)

As recommended by Coghlan and Brannick (2005), the researcher created a venue to bring her reflections and assumptions to the surface, to be discussed and challenged by others. For this

purpose and in order to gain a deeper insight into how her knowledge was constructed, in addition to addressing any biases or preconceptions carried in her interpretation, the researcher addressed many items from her 'identity memo' in the executives' forum for discussion and reflection.

It is noteworthy that significant learning at operational and managerial levels occurred on behalf of the researcher and the organization, which is highlighted throughout this document, and the results of their application through engaging in reflective action are outlined in 5. Evaluation and Outcomes. However, the main shift occurred in the mindset and the thinking process of the involved parties, which, in the view of the researcher, carried the most weight. This learning and development impacted the researcher's personal and professional life, as described in the section below.

4.4.1 Examining Preunderstandings, Assumptions and Biases

"Preunderstanding refers to [...] people's knowledge, insights and experience before they engage in a research programme" (Gummesson, 2000, p.57). The preunderstandings of the researcher encompassed her explicit knowledge regarding organizational roles, business processes, procedures and protocols, in addition to the tacit knowledge base that she had constructed over the years, her interpretation of organizational dynamics, her personal experiences and other aspects. Her preunderstandings were further influenced by her position as an 'insider' of the organization, which inevitably helped to shape her understanding of the organizational culture, informal practices, hidden structures, norms, power dynamics, traditions and, in many instances, emotions harboured by other members.

The presence of such elaborate preunderstandings, however, posed a number of challenges to the researcher. First, it was challenging to distance herself from the organization in order to soundly examine and critique it. Second, the researcher had to resist the assumption that she already had substantial information and remained conscious of the need to probe the participants for more elaborate responses, resisting the thought that she knew the answers. Third, the preunderstandings of the researcher were challenged by the appointment of an

external consultant, who quickly assumed a major role in determining the strategic and operational direction of the organization. The presence of this newly added element created a disruption to the overall process and the cultural dynamics of the organization, rendering some of the researcher's preunderstandings obsolete.

Throughout the research, the researcher examined her preunderstandings, biases and assumptions by way of journaling in an 'identity memo', described by Maxwell (2013, p.225) as a technique that involves "reflecting on, and writing down, the different aspects of [the researcher's] experience that are potentially relevant to [the] study". The executives' forum was frequently used as a venue to discuss items from the 'identity memo' in order to challenge the researcher's preunderstanding, biases, thoughts and feelings, allowing her the opportunity to reflect on the gap between what she thought she knew and what was actually the case, in addition to critiquing her own sense-making process and thinking patterns.

The researcher used a hybrid of three techniques in reflection and sense-making processes. First, and as recommended by Argyris (2004), the 'right hand, left hand technique' was used, in which the researcher noted down the details of an encounter on one side of the paper and on the other side she noted her private thoughts. Reflection at this basic level aided in uncovering attributions and inferences. Second, the 'content, process, premise' reflection method recommended by Mezirow (1991) was applied, in which 'content' refers to the content of the problem or, in the context of this research, the content of the encounter, where the researcher examined her current knowledge of the event and its visible aspects. To a large extent, this step coincided with the above-mentioned reflection method suggested by Argyris (2004). According to Mezirow (1991, p.107), at this step, we "are not attending to the grounds or justification for our beliefs but are simply using our beliefs to make an interpretation". Next, process reflection was applied, in which the researcher questioned the effectiveness of the strategies used in the encounter, and, finally, premise reflection was applied, which involved a critique of the underlying assumptions and perspectives. The previously described methods of reflection were applied to all items in the 'identity memo' and served as the researcher's main reflection mechanism. However, a third layer of reflection was applied to the encounters that were most challenging to the researcher and required a deeper reflection, namely Schein's ORJI model (1999), which

involved mapping reflection through a. observation, b. reaction, c. judgement and d. intervention.

It must be acknowledged that the adaption of the latter mental process profoundly changed the researcher's reactions to various matters, including her engagement in the research cycle and her professional practice. The researcher was often not aware of her emotional reaction towards triggers but moved directly to judgement and intervention. For instance, the researcher observed a conversation between two employees and the first intellectual transaction that she was aware of was her thought that 'this is not logical', which is a judgement, thereby skipping the emotional reaction as a driver of judgement and subsequent behaviour. It was a daunting process as it involved deep self-reflection, which brought the researcher face to face with some of her flawed thinking patterns. This level of self-awareness was new to the researcher and can be considered a personality development milestone, achieved as a result of undergoing this research. The researcher's learning did not come from any of these activities in isolation but rather was generated from the experience as a whole, as the researcher developed skills in each activity – learning to de-associate, pose reflective questions and conceptualize answers – and attempted to correct the course of action accordingly.

4.4.2 Reflections from Various Stages of the Action Research Cycle

There have been reflections and incurred growth from a scholar-practitioner perspective at every stage of the project. However, due to constraints on the length of this section, only the main items are discussed.

4.4.2.1 Managing Unsupportive Stakeholders

As described earlier, two individuals were initially unsupportive of the research project, which caused the researcher to experience strong feelings of rejection as, at that time, she believed that the research project was clearly of benefit to the organization. Therefore, not supporting it must have meant that there were personal issues involved. The researcher documented this in

the 'identity memo' as an assumption that needed to be tested prior to taking action. Next, she proceeded to apply the previously mentioned levels of reflection to the incidents.

The first individual was a member of the core project team, with whom the researcher had enjoyed an amiable relationship. She spoke to him directly and he explained his reasons for not supporting the project, with the reasons he cited being deeper than those he had initially revealed in the meeting. The researcher managed to neutralize him by promising to cultivate organizational support for the main project in his department. This arguably simple encounter had profound implications for the researcher's growth as a scholar-practitioner because she would not normally push herself to test assumptions, especially if this involved a degree of confrontation. Following this, the researcher continued to test all assumptions during the course of the research and incorporated this mechanism into other professional and personal areas of her life.

The second individual who was unsupportive of the project was the previously discussed contracted professional, whose scope of work was to deliver consultancy services to the organization in specific areas. The initial assumption was that the person had personal issues with the researcher, as his objection to the implementation of the project lacked grounds. In order to test this assumption, the researcher enquired with the owner who had contracted this professional. The reason the researcher did not speak to the contracted professional directly was because the owner had previously stated that she would manage him herself. However, no useful response was obtained towards validating or changing the assumption held by the researcher. As the need to manage this person remained, the researcher discussed this with two other members of the core project team, who both described the situation as entailing jurisdictional issues. The researcher considered the fact that the contracted professional felt that this project trespassed on his area of work and might threaten his presence in the organization and, thus, his livelihood. Although this assumption was not tested with unarguable means, as pushing this further would have been politically unwise, the researcher's reframing of the situation provided her partial relief.

4.4.2.2 Data Collection

One of the earliest challenges faced by the researcher in data collection, particularly in the observation stage, was remaining mindful of the correct definition of conflict while observing events. For the purpose of this research, conflict events were selected based on Nicholson's definition (1992) and other criteria detailed in 2.3.2 Sampling. However, the researcher initially labelled all unpleasant encounters as conflict because, although she was clear about the distinction between an unpleasant encounter and a conflict, as per the academic definition, her unconscious mind categorized all sharp encounters as conflict. Needless to say, all such records were later discarded, with reflection on this aspect also forcing the researcher to examine whether the definition of other terms may have been subject to similar 'cognitive distortion', which, according to Coghlan and Rashford (1990), occurs when a person potentially distorts their perception of reality. Remaining mindful of cognitive distortion was a growth milestone for the researcher and was projected into other areas of her personal and professional lives.

4.4.2.3 Data Analysis

The researcher immersed herself in the data using the conventional content analysis method, an exercise that was fulfilling but concurrently time-consuming and overwhelming. By the end of the analysis, four organizational conflict transformation elements had been identified, namely a. communication, b. momentum, c. inclusiveness and d. reduced levels of past unaddressed organizational conflict. Being engaged in the code-to-theme progression allowed the researcher to observe the inductive and organic formulation of themes, and thus she was not surprised by the outcomes. However, once the data analysis was finished and the researcher allowed herself time to ponder upon the findings, her initial reaction was discontent.

The emerging themes seemed obvious and almost common-sense, which required the researcher's deeper reflection and sense-making, leading to the following realizations: a. the research remained true to the data, which was rigorously collected and analysed; b. the findings made significant contributions to empirical practice and academic literature while bridging existing gaps in the latter, the implications of which are discussed under 6.3 Research

Implications, in addition to being poised to resolve the organizational problem on which this research is centred; and, most importantly, c. findings presented in this research, as is the standard in DBA research, carried two components, namely the knowledge itself, i.e. the findings, and knowledge of how to apply the knowledge in an existing organizational setting, i.e. a tested method of how to apply a specific action in an organizational setting.

4.4.3 Reflection on Political Considerations Relating to the Execution of Action Research

Punch (2014) argues that a number of political considerations are to be taken into account when conducting research in an organization, which is supported by Alvesson and Sveningsson (2008, p.17), who argue that “organisational process is the result of political processes”. The researcher had every interest in managing the political aspects of conducting research in the organization, as Coghlan and Brannick (2014) stress that unmanaged politics might undermine the research.

The underlying philosophy of action research stresses democratic engagement and challenges authoritarian systems; it emphasizes listening to marginalized groups, including junior staff and forgotten stakeholders, and encourages change, all of which are highly political in any setting, as they threaten the existing norms and promote power shifts. The researcher was very aware of the need to be politically astute, or what Buchanan and Badham (2008) describe as being a ‘political entrepreneur’, which implies adopting a range of political strategies carried out in a reflective and self-critical practice.

In order to comprehensively address the political issues that arose from conducting the research, six guidelines presented by Kakabadse (1991) were considered and applied as follows.

First, the researcher identified all the stakeholders who had an interest in the project and its outcomes. At various points, she worked to establish consensus on the importance and relevance of the research project with each one of them. Second, the researcher ensured that the research was reasonably positioned within the stakeholders’ comfort zone by ensuring that the research matched the values, behaviours and ideas accepted by the organization in its current state of maturity, as, according to Kakabadse (1991), the members of the organization would show low resistance to other changes if such variables were not *outwardly* challenged. In the context of

the present research, the researcher ensured that the existing hierarchical positions were not challenged, nor were power dynamics changed by way of limiting the liberties of certain members; instead, the implementation of action gave autonomy to other members and empowered them to widen their scope of influence. More dominant changes were expected to organically evolve as a result of enhancing the organizational culture. Third, the researcher focused on networking and leveraging relationships, as described above. Fourth, the researcher made implicit deals, for instance, with the senior member who was not initially on board, as he believed that the organization was not in an economically sound position to warrant investing resources in endeavours other than those that would result in a direct increase in revenue. The researcher 'cut a deal with him' to assist in building organizational support for the main project in his department, in exchange for his endorsement of the action research. Although he remained not fully supportive of the project following the researcher's endeavours to facilitate his project, he did not lobby against it, which was an acceptable settlement for the researcher.

Moreover, fifth, the researcher ensured that information was delivered at the correct time and in the correct way; she refrained from using the 'withhold and withdraw' technique recommended by Kakabadse (1991), as it was not consistent with her personal values. Finally, the author's final recommendation is to have a backup plan ready for the time where 'none of the above worked'. The researcher did not need to resort to this option; however, she considered that, if everything else failed, she would seek the support of a pre-identified person who could strongly influence the owners of the organization.

4.4.4 Reflection on Role Duality

According to Ashforth, Kreiner and Fugate (2000), a role boundary is defined by the scope of a certain role assumed by an individual. The duality of roles manifested in the researcher's parallelly assumed positions of manager and researcher engaged in action created a number of challenges that needed to be managed in a politically astute manner. For instance, as a senior manager within the organization, the researcher was obliged to fully partake in organizational life, particularly when there was a conflict, as it is habitual for senior management to step in and

de-escalate. However, as a researcher engaged in data collection through observation, she had to remain true to the role assumed at that time, which was often misunderstood by participants, who thought that the researcher was abandoning her managerial role in favour of her research; this was conveyed to the researcher by a number of employees. This also warranted some commentary by other senior managers that the researcher should have made some exceptions and interfered when conflict escalated. Furthermore, the participants engaged in the conflict tended to ask the researcher questions and encourage her to take sides during the conflict itself. This was quickly resolved by the researcher's persistence in remaining neutral by signalling 'no' with her hand and touching her chest as a sign of sincerity.

Further to the above, the researcher negotiated with management that she would observe the participants for five hours a day, five days a week over a period of six months, which meant that she would work for four hours on working days in addition to Saturdays. However, as the operations of the organization continued, many urgent requirements arose, and it was difficult for organizational members to witness a senior member engaged in matters other than resolving urgent issues. This invited very unappreciative perspectives from the participants, which made the researcher uncomfortable and, at times, feel consumed by guilt. However, the researcher decided to continue maintaining a clear distinction between the two roles by not giving in to the pressure to engage in organizational matters during the times allocated for observation, as making frequent exceptions would have easily weakened the observation efforts.

Further to the above, the way in which the researcher was perceived during the research was mildly affected by her unconscious use of academic frames and references in organizational meetings and dialogues, which was a result of her deep immersion in the academic side of the research at that period of time. This invited a number of wrong perceptions, including a perception by the listener that the researcher was detached from corporate realities and was adapting a theoretical approach to business, and a general feeling that the researcher was being presumptuous and inviting attention to her academic engagement. Both assumptions were documented in the 'identity memo', discussed in the executives' forum and subsequently tested. In addition, due to the agility and responsiveness of the researcher in her role as a manager,

similar expectations were built and she was pressured to deliver quick findings to the organization at a time that was perceived by the researcher to be premature, which she resisted. Access was an unexpected challenge. It was the researcher's initial understanding that she would be allowed unlimited access, due to her senior position in the organization, the support she enjoyed from the organization head and the amicable relationships she had maintained with the organizational members. However, and as argued by Coghlan and Brannick (2014), a researcher may be granted primary access but not necessarily be allowed secondary access. The researcher found initial resistance when entering employees' offices for observation, when a confrontational encounter was taking place or when requesting that participants use speaker phones. Further to that, unwelcoming facial expressions were noticed at times, although these eased with the passage of time. The researcher feared being viewed as intrusive or impolite, or even as a person who liked to be involved in office politics and gossip. This issue was addressed by speaking to the participants afterwards and re-explaining the researcher's role. This being said, the researcher was requested to leave two conflictual events, which she did as it was not possible to negotiate her presence in such an escalatory situation. Needless to say, these events were excluded from the data.

Chapter Five

5. Evaluation and Outcomes

This chapter begins by outlining the evaluation conducted following the end of the implementation period, by way of a. interviewing management and b. conducting focus groups with employees. Next, it proceeds to detail the outcomes experienced by the organization, as per Väyrynen's model of conflict transformation (1991) and Johnson's cultural web (1992).

5.1 Evaluation

Eden and Huxham (1996) argue that the success of action research is not measured by the success of organizational change, i.e. its outcomes. Instead, it is evaluated by appropriate management of the transition and by the applicability of the generated theory to communities beyond those directly involved, which are respectively discussed in 4. Story of Cycles of Action, Reflection and Sense-making and 6.3 Research Implications.

The implemented action was designed based on Coghlan and Brannick's four steps for the successful execution of action research (2014), which encompass a. planning, b. action and c. evaluation of the action, which then prepares the organization for d. further planning. Planning, action and reflection on action have been discussed under 4. Story of Cycles of Action, Reflection and Sense-making. In the current section, we discuss the evaluation of action and outline the empirical outcomes of the research for the organization under study.

The final and main evaluation of action was carried out 12 months after the commencement meeting or, as it was internally referred to, the 'kick-off' meeting. However, during this period, the implemented action was also evaluated in quarterly intervals, i.e. a total of four evaluations took place during the year. The purpose of these consecutive evaluations was to allow the researcher the opportunity to observe any immediate change in the organization following the implementation of reflective action and to go beyond that to examine the change patterns, which

allowed the researcher the opportunity to predict the future direction of the change by drawing on its existing direction and patterns. The results of the evaluation were not discussed in the executives' forum so as not to affect the organic progress of the process. Instead, feedback from employees was captured from the discussions in the employees' forum and from workshops conducted within departments. The instruments used to conduct the evaluations were a. interviews with management and b. focus groups with employees.

Evaluation of action was carried out in order to address two components, one broad and one specific: firstly, the broad evaluation entailed evaluating the degree to which the research fulfilled its objectives and answered the research question, which, in turn, assessed the adequate implementation of conflict transformation and examined its effects on both organizational conflict and knowledge creation; and, secondly, the specific evaluation considered the impact of each of the organizational conflict transformation elements on the organization. Although, in the researcher's opinion, the first component of evaluation, i.e. addressing the impact of action as a whole, was adequately comprehensive, it stood to be fortified by evaluating the significance of each of the elements in isolation in order to ensure that all elements in the model were viable.

Given the general consistency of participants' reports in the four quarters and in spite of the presence of some discrepancies, which are discussed in the course of this chapter, it was established that incorporating the four identified organizational conflict transformation elements – namely a. communication, b. momentum, c. inclusiveness and d. reduced levels of past unaddressed organizational conflict – into the organizational culture served to implement conflict transformation within the organization under study. Subsequently, this impacted the process of knowledge creation, as described in 4.1.4 Discussion and below. The amount of data collected in the four evaluation processes leading to the above conclusion was substantial and is highlighted below with the support of verbatim quotes from participants, mentioning *all* discrepant accounts recorded during the four evaluation phases.

5.1.1 Evaluative Management Meetings and Focus Groups

The first part of this section discusses accounts addressing the degree to which the research question and objectives were fulfilled, conflict transformation was applied and, subsequently, knowledge creation within the organization was influenced.

At the end of each quarter, a meeting was held with five members of management and a focus group was held with eight employees to understand their views regarding the changes that had occurred. The aggregate responses of management and focus group participants are detailed in the evaluative questions below. It is noteworthy that, in the final evaluation, only employees who had previously indicated that they were looking for outside opportunities to leave the organization were selected. Below are accounts from the management interviews and employees' focus groups from the main evaluation phase, the end of Q4, i.e. following 12 months of action. However, extracts from earlier evaluations are also included and marked with their respective periods, as outlined below, based on the evaluative questions.

1. To what extent were interpersonal conflicts reduced?

This question was asked with the purpose of evaluating the degree to which the organizational issue was addressed through the implementation of designed action, i.e. to validate the fulfilment of research objective one. In the focus group, the employees reported a reduction in the number of overall interpersonal conflicts experienced by both themselves and others, with the exception of two discrepant reports. The first was cited in phase three of the evaluations, i.e. the end of the third quarter (Q3), in which a participant stated that she had witnessed a reduction in interpersonal conflict between two members of the organization that had, at a later point in time, reverted back to the way it had been prior to the implementation of action. The second report was mentioned in phase four of the evaluations, i.e. the end of Q4, in which one participant stated that she herself felt the urge to address conflict in the old way, as her colleagues were not responsive to the newly introduced culture.

It is worth mentioning that, despite the presence of a discrepant report in Q3 and another in Q4, i.e. two out of 16 members, a consensus was present in Q1 and Q2, from which the quote below is shared:

“My manager and I are better at reading each other now. It seems that he understands that I do not mind working additional hours, but I need them to be requested [...] with due consideration to the sacrifices I am making in terms of family time and personal life. There have been instances when he went back to his ‘old habits’ and it is unreasonable for me to expect anything else at this point. However, like I said, he is conscious about my subtle reactions and is trying hard. I appreciate that.”

The same question was addressed to management, where four out of five confirmed that a noticeable drop in the number of conflicts following the implementation of action – including those that were not escalated to HR – was immediately noticed, while one out of five confirmed that change occurred towards the end of the implementation period, from the third quarter onwards. This claim by the majority of management contradicted the researcher’s expectation that change builds up incrementally and therefore, called for a deep reflection, detailed in this section.

Further to noting management’s views, the researcher requested HR to submit records of escalated conflicts that occurred during the implementation period, as benchmarked against the average number of conflicts from six months prior to action, as detailed in Table 5.1.1.

The number of escalated conflicts was recorded at an average of 2.3 per month in the period preceding action implementation; this dropped to 1.7 in Q1, dropped further to 1.3 and remained stable at this level throughout Q2 and Q3, and then dropped to 1 per month in Q4, as demonstrated in the table below.

Table 5.1.1: Number of Conflicts Escalated to HR Over the Course of 12 Months

Description	Total number	Average per month
Recorded conflicts in the six months preceding action implementation	14	2.3
Recorded conflicts in Q1 – the three months following action implementation	5	1.7
Recorded conflicts in Q2 – the six months following action implementation	4	1.3
Recorded conflicts in Q3 – the nine months following action implementation	4	1.3
Recorded conflicts in Q4 – the 12 months following action implementation	3	1

As mentioned above, this warranted further reflection by the researcher, who considered a number of explanations for the immediate drop in observed conflicts. Firstly, the project commenced with momentum and enthusiasm, with a strong emphasis on it being owned by the participants. In other words, during the early stages of implementation, commitment was high. The second quarter witnessed a decrease in momentum, which was a legacy from the previous culture, thus leading to a drop in the number of escalated conflicts in a manner slower than Q1. Secondly, employees understood that they were expected to manage conflict at their level, rather than escalate it. This assumption was tested by the researcher through conversations with her own team when enquiring about why certain issues were not brought to her attention.

2. What is the level of transformation that has occurred in relationships and interests in the organization?

The researcher posed the above question in management interviews and focus groups for the purpose of evaluating the level to which conflict transformation had been instituted in the organization under study. The answers were then evaluated against the descriptions from three scholars: Miall (2004), who describes conflict transformation as engaging with and transforming discourse, interests and relationships that may be rooted in patterns characterized by conflict and discord, in order to achieve a peaceful end state; Lederach (2014), who views conflict transformation as a process through which altering relationships between the conflict's stakeholders and their broader environment is facilitated; and finally Kirkpatrick (2017), who emphasizes that it is important to address the structural foundation that perpetuated the conflict in the first place.

In this regard, seven out of eight participants in the final focus group confirmed that their relationships, in addition to their ability to negotiate interests with other employees, had subsequently improved. However, one participant indicated that, although he was witnessing improved relationships, he believed that it was not due to the implemented action but due to the fact that management were heavily involved in the day-to-day aspects of the employees' work during this period, and thus employees felt observed. Three out eight participants mentioned that interests being negotiated were not as divergent as they used to be and one of them attributed this to improved quality of communication. It is noteworthy that, in the focus groups conducted at the end of Q1 and Q2, the number of participants who referred to relationships and interests favourably was below four; this increased to five at the end of Q3 and seven at the end of Q4.

On the other hand, management asserted the presence of improvements in the quality of relationships and the ability to negotiate interests among employees. It is important to note that, although the number of escalated conflicts dropped in Q1, remained static throughout Q2 and Q3, and dropped further in Q4, as detailed in Table 5.1.1, management confirmed that the witnessed improvements in relationships and ability to negotiate interests improved in an

incremental manner. The change in structure was noted and appreciated by three out of five members of management. However, two management members indicated that providing too many liberties for employee discussion and input would render the organization difficult to manage. In fact, one of the concerned managers used the term 'over-empowerment' and 'we will feed it till it bursts'.

The slow and incremental improvements in the quality of relationships and employees' ability to negotiate interests, as described by both management and employees, was expected, as these are manifestations of the newly introduced elements to the culture. Moreover, the evaluative interviews contained several cases that supported the management's positions cited above. For instance, management presented a case where a department dominated by a specific nationality was unwelcoming to other nationalities/ethnic groups, which posed challenges in transferring employees to the department. During the early stages of implementing action, and with management's directed approach, a young local employee was transferred to this department and reported being comfortable and productive. Similar feedback was taken from existing employees in said department. At the end of Q4, the previously transferred local employee was still in the same post and was productive, according to the appraisals completed by her direct manager. Although one of the conflicts escalated to HR in Q3 was traced to this department, the number of escalated conflicts originating from different ethnic groups interacting with said department dropped from three to one over the period of one year.

The implementation of conflict transformation in the organization under study was further evaluated by examining the transformation at all relevant levels occurring in the organization, as per Väyrynen's conflict transformation model (1991), which is discussed in detail under 5.2 Outcomes of Implemented Action.

3. How does the current position of the company differ from that of pre-implementation? Think of its internal and external environments.

Next, evaluations proceeded to discuss aspects relating to the effect of the applied action on knowledge creation within the organization under study. As the management and employees did not understand the components of knowledge creation and its connection to conflict

transformation as deeply as the researcher, the above question was posed, followed by probes that directed the participants to reveal more insight into points of interest – a technique similar to that used in the data-collection interviews and focus groups.

Management confirmed that the organization had developed more effective routines in terms of product design and delivery, which was acknowledged by regulators during assessment visits in Q3 and Q4 of the project. This position, following a number of warrants from regulators in the previous year, served to enhance the organization's position in the market and improve its chances of receiving a favourable rating from government agencies. Further to this, it was stated that improved routines had also been developed in the administration department, which was appraised by beneficiary departments within the organization as it had improved their ability to meet their targets. However, two interviewees from the management raised a concern that such changes may be short-lived, and that further development of routines and processes may not continue beyond the duration of implementation, as quoted:

“It will fade away as does every other initiative in this organization.”

The researcher noted this as feedback in its own right and thus it is reported in this section. However, following the end of the evaluation session, she explained that she agreed with his concern, as initiatives tend to fade away; therefore, the instituted changes were not carried out in the form of an initiative but rather in the form of permanently instituted structures and platforms that were not tied to the duration of action.

Moreover, one of the focus group participants stated that two distinctly creative ideas had been generated and proposed to the organization's foreign partners to be incorporated in a joint product, one of which had been accepted and was in the process of being materialized. This is worth mentioning because, during previous years, the organization had focused on creating value for its partners through opening its own geographical market, concentrating less on product design and delivery, which is its core business. This, in turn, has enabled the organization to favourably reposition itself in the market. Furthermore, and in line with the enhanced creative attributes of the organization, a value-adding technology was approved to be added to product delivery, which is forecasted to enhance the competitive position of the organization in the

market. The researcher believes that the shift in mindset that facilitated the above is, in its own right, an accomplishment for the organization.

Further to the above, one management interviewee confirmed that occurrences that interrupted the externalization process, such as 'avoidance' as a coping mechanism, withdrawal and employees' reduced willingness to be expressive, in addition to the level of displayed commitment to the organization, had improved in comparison to the pre-action phase. However, one of the managers gave a discrepant report, stating that, although interruptive coping mechanisms such as absenteeism and avoidance had noticeably decreased, this might be attributed to employees' understanding of what was expected from them, feeling observed and thus modelling more favourable behaviours. The researcher noted this as a valid part of evaluation and is therefore reporting it in this section; however, it was also treated as an assumption worth testing and further investigating. Upon reflection, it was viewed that avoidance behaviour had not changed, which was expected, as action was not directed to that level; however, an environment conducive to conflict transformation had been created and a cap of seven days was placed on unaddressed conflict, which served to reduce the time of avoidance.

Furthermore, on the topic of 'coping behaviour following a conflict episode', four out of eight employees in the focus group reported the persistence of old coping mechanisms such as avoidance and passive-aggressiveness. However, the employees asserted that placing a seven-day cap on the time within which a conflict was to be addressed reduced the number of days in which such behaviour persisted:

"I knew I had to resolve this issue within a week and thought I might as well address it now."

On the topic of 'degree of change witnessed in operations of main functions in the organization', which intended to evaluate the effect of action on knowledge creation within the organization, the responses emphasized that the delivery of products was enhanced, as evidenced by affirmative communication from regulators, with the exception of two notices, which were warranted for logistical misconduct. An interviewed manager remarked:

“We did not receive a single letter from [name of regulator] in Q3 and Q4. This in itself is a significant improvement of our position; you know that it impacts the final rating by [name of regulator].”

Following confirmation of the organization’s position in terms of the implementation of conflict transformation and its implications for knowledge creation, the researcher proceeded to evaluate the occurred change in each of the four organizational conflict transformation elements that had been incorporated into the organizational culture, namely a. communication, b. momentum, c. inclusiveness and d. reduced levels of past unaddressed conflict. It is important to state that following a year of being engaged in a cultural transformation, all interviewees were familiar with the terms and the concepts encompassed by them.

4. How do you evaluate change in ‘communication’ in the organization?

The above question was posed in management interviews and focus groups and individuals were probed to further explore the grand-categories encompassed by this theme, namely respect, tolerance, openness and technology-mediated communication. Management members indicated significant improvement in communication and cited a number of examples in support of this claim, as explained below. However, when asked which element of communication had improved most noticeably, three out of five were unable to name specific aspects. Of the remaining two, one interviewee stated that conversations flowed in an easier manner and that she had noticed less resistance while giving instructions, and the other argued that he had noticed employees were applying more acuity in terms of respect and that tolerance to errors by junior employees had been constructively extended beyond its initial position. The same challenge was faced by three out of eight focus group members, who found it difficult to articulate the occurred changes in this specific theme.

Upon reflection, it is the researcher’s understanding that the change occurred in a subtle and incremental manner, and that the interviewees’ knowledge of its dynamics remained tacit, rendering it difficult to define. Nonetheless, a number of clear examples were cited. For instance, in regard to reduction in technology-mediated communication, as a component of communication, the employees reported an enhancement in overall employee collaboration,

especially when the use of technology was reduced, as management had placed restrictions on the use of emails as a conversational means between staff:

“As challenging as it was to leave the comfort of hiding behind my ID, I started having discussions with my colleagues, rather than sending them email requests supported by justifications. The level of collaboration has improved. Especially in that they tend to commit themselves to doing the work within a specific timeframe in the conversation.”

Management also indicated a reasonable level of compliance towards reducing the use of technology in communication, which was evident in Q1, with the exception of the use of emails, which was reduced but not to satisfactory levels during the first quarter, as confirmed by management. This was improved but remained below satisfactory levels in Q2 and Q3, although this was reformed by the involvement of management in Q4.

According to all interviewed managers, the levels of collaboration and compromise were higher than during the pre-action phase, measured by the number of times employees requested their line managers’ support to obtain approval from other departments or to facilitate the flow of transactions. However, it was indicated that clearer protocols were needed to regulate the use of technology, as many instances were subject to individual judgements and were at times viewed as arbitrary. The effect of the reduced use of technology-mediated communication on collaboration and compromise is explained in the quote below:

“I can notice the improvement in relationships and my team’s ability to negotiate their affairs with others from the number of times I am called to intervene or facilitate; I don’t like to bring things up to my level often. This has noticeably dropped, although there are instances where I am called to resolve issues.”

5. How do you evaluate change in ‘momentum’ in the organization?

The above question was asked to address momentum, which was the only topic received with a unanimous position by the interviewed management and focus group participants, affirming that momentum had improved from the pre-implementation period. However, it was also received

with scepticism by one out of five managers and two out of eight focus group employees, raising concerns that momentum may drop when the research project was finished and the organization went back to business as usual, as in the quote below:

“I worry when I see things going too well; we have patterns in the organization and this is not part of them, I am worried that this is due to the close involvement of yourself and management.”

6. How do you evaluate change in ‘inclusiveness’ in the organization?

In terms of inclusiveness, the above question was asked to management, who indicated improvements in the organization in terms of inclusivity of both people and issues. Five out of five management interviewees credited the discussions taking place in both the executives’ forum and the employees’ forum for this change, as explained in the following quote:

“There has been a slight shift in mindset in terms of who should be listened to and what is to be taken into consideration, but we tend to forget, we are too old to re-wire ourselves [meaning learn new ideas]. But the agenda in the executives’ forum aligns our perspectives with the organization’s new direction.”

On the other hand, six out of eight focus group members indicated that they had experienced a positive change in the inclusiveness of both people and issues; one participant remarked:

“Conversations are broader and more time-consuming now, but we have found that we have to do them less frequently.”

However, two focus group participants indicated that they continued to feel isolated and discriminated against; one of them referred to this as a general sentiment and was not able to mention specific occurrences, while the other mentioned that she was disadvantaged when dealing with a member of a specific nationality, who, according to her, always favoured her colleagues who shared his ethnic background. She quoted:

“When both of us apply for leave at the same time, which we tend to do because we both have children in school, he finds a way to approve her leave instead of mine; she always obtains higher appraisals, and this has not changed.”

7. How do you evaluate change in ‘numbers of past unaddressed conflicts’ in the organization?

In regard to reduced numbers of unaddressed conflicts, one manager cited her appreciation of the seven-day cap on unaddressed conflict, stating that it shortened the number of days where no communication was taking place. However, another manager criticized this approach by stating that, in his department, this had turned into a waiting game in which conflicted individuals waited for the other party to initiate conversation prior to the expiry of the allocated time. At the end of Q4, eight out of eight focus group members reported a reduction in past unaddressed conflicts, which was expected due to the implementation of the cap since the first quarter. Below is a quote from the first evaluation conducted at the end of Q1:

“I used to have conflicts with my manager. They had been unresolved for a very long time, particularly because my concerns were pertaining to the way he addressed me and not related to work, and this was difficult to articulate to anybody including him. But this underlying issue was a catalyst for many more conflicts that could have been avoided. We are now trying to address issues within a timeframe of seven days after their occurrence, as management encouraged. There were incidents where I felt disrespected by him, which made me resist many of the tasks at work. He wanted to get the work done while I wanted to win something for my dignity. I tried to share how I felt, and, to my surprise, his reaction was generally positive. He explained that, when he focused on a specific task, he usually focused less on the way he communicated around it. This helped me understand his personality and greatly reduced my resentment. I now wait for him to be less engulfed in his tasks before I go and talk to him. The relationship is in a much healthier place.”

It is worth mentioning that, at the end of Q2, one focus group participant stated that she was unable to implement the seven-day cap at the management’s request as, according to her, it required a shift in social competency that she did not believe she could attain.

8. What are the areas for improvement in the current process?

Finally, the above question aimed at evaluating the shortcomings in the administration of the change, which would serve as guidelines in planning the second action research cycle.

In terms of respectful and appreciative language towards all members of the hierarchy, which was emphasized in the workshops, three out of eight employees mentioned that, due to the lack of clear and measurable behaviours attached to this point, there were instances in which they or others would revert to habitual expression patterns. Further, although seating had changed from a personalized arrangement according to office ranking – where frontline sofas were assigned to executives and regular chairs to other employees – to identical furniture, junior employees still felt the need to remain within the geographical location mandated by their hierarchical status, remarking that this was a spill-over from the larger culture that hosted the organization, i.e. what was accepted in society. To add to this, all employees partaking in the focus groups mentioned that, although the intranet featured a tab that linked to the organization head's email, with a message encouraging employees to write to him directly, none of them had used this option to date. It was remarked upon that their level of personal relationship with him did not allow direct communication; in fact, in many instances, his secretary would hold back the communication depending on the urgency of the matter. Moreover, employees stated that power and decision-making autonomy were partially given to individuals, but not as much as they would like to see. Furthermore, employees raised the issue that not all possible rewarded behaviours and quality standards were clearly communicated, and therefore remained largely subject to the interpretation of line managers and at times were perceived to be arbitrary.

5.2 Outcomes of Implemented Action

The outcomes for the organization were assessed by evaluating the sustainable structural changes instituted in the organization, as per Väyrynen's model of conflict transformation (1991) and Johnson's cultural web (1992).

5.2.1 Outcomes as per Väyrynen's Model of Conflict Transformation

In this section, the outcomes of the research project are presented in terms of the occurred conflict transformation based on Väyrynen's conflict transformation model (1991), which guided the implemented change, as described in 4. Story of Cycles of Action, Reflection and Sense-making.

a. Actor transformation: This was accomplished by empowering new players to participate in conflict transformation by way of permanently instituting two platforms, namely the employees' forum and the executives' forum, which closely influenced and were influenced by the monthly workshops conducted inside departments, which may be regarded as a third, more confined forum. This transformation empowered all the employees to a level higher than their initial position prior to action, in terms of jurisdiction and level of involvement. It is worth mentioning that the contract of the external professional, who enjoyed dominance and authority in the organization, was terminated in an amiable manner; the message communicated by management to employees was that no further external services were required.

b. Issue transformation: This focused on creating common ground, which was also achieved through the introduction of the executives' forum and the employees' forum, serving as platforms to continuously negotiate organizational issues in a manner consistent with the concept of conflict transformation, i.e. with a focus on underlying issues, structures, the four elements, etc. Such items were continually discussed at the monthly workshops, which served to keep the employees in similar mindsets. Moreover, the incorporation of the four organizational conflict transformation elements shifted the focus from the immediate anxieties caused by conflict to a more holistic approach, inclusive of drivers of conflict, structures and relationships supporting it – in other words, the issue in focus was altered.

c. Rule transformation: Through this, the rules and norms governing the conflict were transformed and improved. In this regard, management decided to alter the organization's vision, and it remains under revision as of the date of submission of this thesis. This step intended to incorporate the newly adopted organizational conflict transformation elements into all aspects

of the organization in a more robust manner, and subsequently create more alignment in terms of rule transformation. In addition to this, a number of processes (rules) have been introduced in the HR department that serve to govern a number of main functions in the organization. First, newly recruited employees will be screened for compatibility with the corporate culture that has been introduced. Screening will take place during both the recruitment and the probation phase. Second, an introductory workshop addressing the eight identified elements is to be conducted for newly recruited employees to ensure that they are in line with the particular culture instituted in the organization. Third, no escalation is accepted within a period of seven days, during which employees are expected to address the conflict among themselves. If an employee were to escalate, he or she would be queried about the steps taken to address the conflict at their level, except for conflict cases relating to honour or fraud.

d. Structural transformation: Through this, the power distribution and relationship structure have been transformed. The nature of relationships has been heavily influenced by the implementation of action, as confirmed in the evaluations. Furthermore, the establishment of both forums has created a shift in the power distribution, and more liberties have been given to service delivery employees. In addition to this, a new position of ‘Transformation Manager’ is under creation within HR, to take ownership of this process and ensure that it is adequately sustained, although the title may be amended to be in line with governing bodies.

It is worth establishing that the aforementioned transformations are not static; as is the case with the process of action research, conflict transformation and knowledge creation are subject to further reflection by both employees and executives in the respective forums as business progresses.

5.2.2 Outcomes as per Johnson’s Cultural Web

Further outcomes are stated below, outlined within the cultural web by Johnson (1992).

1. Rituals and routines: Employees meet at the employees’ forum every six weeks, as part of the organizational routine. This is a close deviation from the initial objective established in the outset of the project, being a once in four weeks meeting – a period considered too short by employees

to build new experiences and reflections to share. Further to this, it was agreed that Eid celebrations were to be grand, inclusive and in line with the spirit of the occasion. Additionally, the organization conducted an inclusive 'Ghabga' gathering for all stakeholders in the holy month of Ramadhan and decided to make it an annual occasion. Finally, a 30-minute midday break is now allowed and encouraged for all employees, which has been well received. It was also observed that one of the executives began purchasing fresh fruit to be served in this break, and at times employees share homemade confectionaries, which has served to strengthen various aspects of the transition.

The organization has organically developed other routines that had not been pre-established in the organization's vision for its future state. Some are explicit and standardized, such as the establishment of more effective routines in the service design and delivery departments, through deliberation in the employees' forum and calibration in the executives' forum; other routines are more subtle and constitute an incremental improvement in the way things are done in various departments.

2. Symbols: The organization has mandated the use of respectful and appreciative language with all members of the hierarchy, including junior members of the organization and support staff. It is not common to use last names or to address one another using Mr/Ms; however, guidelines for respectful communication are emphasized in the workshops. In this regard, it is important to note that a change in the level of respectful communication has been acknowledged by the employees, as shared in the evaluation stage. Furthermore, the organization's former 'town hall' seating has changed from personalized seating according to office ranking, i.e. sofas in the front row for the executives and regular chairs for other employees, to identical furniture and identical hospitality.

3. Organizational structure: The initial outline of the cultural web did not make recommendations to change the hierarchy, and thus it has remained unchanged. On the other hand, open lines of bottom-up communication to reach all members of the hierarchy have been established. For this purpose, the email address of the head of the organization has become available on the intranet, with a message that encourages employees to email him directly. The evaluations showed that

employees are hesitant to use this function despite its availability due to the level of personal relationship they share with him; thus, management is currently working on strengthening that in an effort to better activate the platform.

4. *Power structure*: The organization decided to allocate more power and decision-making autonomy to service delivery employees working on the ground, which is supported by Nonaka, Toyama and Konno's argument (2000, p.26) that "autonomy increases the chances of finding valuable information and motivating organization members to create new knowledge". This has been achieved through a revision of the approval process and permitting on-the-job deviation from the pre-approved plan when deemed necessary. However, the established objective of 'not allowing external individuals who join the organization to serve a specific purpose in a confined time to gain significant power' is yet to be implemented and tested. Although the most recent external professional has now departed, the way in which the organization will handle new recruits is yet to be tested.

5. *Control systems*: In terms of the way in which the organization is managed, it was agreed that behaviours are to be recognized and rewarded at the discretion of the head of each department, who is also to identify 'small wins', where behaviours associated with the four identified elements are acknowledged and rewarded.

6. *Stories and myths*: The management envisioned a state where employees want to work in the organization. To evaluate this point, the researcher recruited eight employees who had previously expressed their intention to leave the organization to partake in the final evaluative focus group. Six out of eight indicated that they were no longer looking for other opportunities, while one affirmed that he remained adamant about this decision and the other clarified that he was considering leaving to return to his home country.

Chapter Six

6. Conclusions and Implications

This chapter outlines the theories emerging from this research, describes their implications for academia and professional practice, and ends with recommendations for future research.

6.1 Emergent Theories

Theory produced within the interpretive paradigm is focused on furthering understanding rather than exclusively providing an 'explanation', as affirmed by Charmaz (2014), who stresses that theory in this realm allows for 'indeterminacy' rather than the establishment of strict relationships under linear reasoning. However, Maxwell (2004) argues that, traditionally, establishing relationships under research executed within the qualitative paradigm has not been accepted, due to philosophically outdated concepts. He affirms that today both qualitative and quantitative researchers are accepting of the legitimacy of establishing relationships being identified under qualitative research.

The findings and discussion resulting from this research have led to the formulation of the theories presented below, which constitute the original contribution to knowledge made by this research. First, the incorporation of the four identified organizational conflict transformation elements – namely a. communication, b. momentum, c. inclusiveness and d. reduced levels of past unaddressed organizational conflict – into organizational culture, serves to implement conflict transformation in organizations in the Kingdom of Bahrain. Second, the implementation of organizational conflict transformation positively impacts knowledge creation processes within organizations operating in the Kingdom of Bahrain.

6.2 Actionable Knowledge

A framework of actionable knowledge was produced as a result of engaging with action research in the organization under study. The framework connects knowledge to action and thus, provides know-how for organizations on how to implement conflict transformation processes and, subsequently, positively impact knowledge creation processes within them.

Stakeholders and Frequency	Implementation Mechanism	Outcomes
<i>Step one: Announcing of project commencement.</i>		
Main stakeholders including all employees. Frequency of Occurrence: One time.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduce the change and its mechanisms. 2. Answer questions and clear ambiguities. 3. Embody elements from the sought culture. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Clarify the aims of the introduced change. 2. Explain implementation mechanism.
<i>Step two: Conducting a series of four workshops for the project team.</i>		
Department heads. Frequency of Occurrence: Four times.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Three training sessions to convey the organizational conflict transformation elements (OCTE) to department heads. 2. One 'train the trainer' session for department heads. 3. Training material to be developed based on an established corporate culture model such as Schein and 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Enhancement of the department heads' understanding and capability of engaging with OCTE. 2. Empower department heads to instil OCTE within their subordinates. 3. Produce training materials and toolbox to

	<p>Schein’s organizational culture model (2017) or other suitable models.</p> <p>4.Embodiment of OCTE by leadership/department heads.</p>	<p>cover a period of six months.</p> <p>4.Design a measuring tool for adequate leadership embodiment of OCTE.</p>
<p><i>Step three: Conducting a monthly workshop/discussion forum for the employees.</i></p>		
<p>Employees within their respective departments.</p> <p>Frequency of Occurrence: Monthly.</p>	<p>1.Department heads to engage with and deliver OCTE-related material to respective employees.</p> <p>2.OCTE to be delivered through discussion, case studies, brainstorming and workshops.</p>	<p>1.Enhancement of department employees’ understanding and capability of engaging with OCTE.</p> <p>2. Outcomes to be deliberated in the executives’ forum.</p>
<p><i>Step Four: The establishment of the employees’ forum.</i></p>		
<p>All employees, except for department heads and upper management.</p> <p>Selective sessions to be attended by top management.</p> <p>Frequency of Occurrence: Once in six weeks.</p>	<p>1.Assembly with the purpose of exchanging success stories, challenges, insights, techniques and reflections, in addition to providing a platform for socialization, wider discussion and allowing the organization to move together as one unit.</p> <p>2.Discussion of issues concerning the employees and their attitudes towards the ongoing process, concerns that</p>	<p>1.Input from the employees’ forum to be discussed in the executives’ forum.</p>

	<p>had not been directly raised with management and other matters that they deemed fit for discussion at this level.</p>	
<p><i>Step Five: The establishment of the executives' forum.</i></p>		
<p>Heads of department. Selective sessions to be attended by higher management and owners. Frequency of Occurrence: Weekly.</p>	<p>1.Assembly with the purpose of discussing a. a unified agenda of the monthly intra-departmental workshops; b. ways to maintain high momentum; c. concerns and recommendations regarding the process raised by employees, from the employees' forum; d. the development and reinforcement of new knowledge surrounding the four identified elements, through presentations from department heads (recommended to occur in the first 20 minutes of the forum); e. the strategy, structure and other control systems that needed to be altered to be in alignment with the changes to the culture; f. obstacles and resistance; and g. the identification of short-term wins and rewards to aid in controlling the process.</p>	<p>1.Arrive at consensus on the discussed topics and disseminate to relevant platforms. 2.Manage the change in a participatory and process-orientated manner.</p>

6.3 Research Implications

6.3.1 Implications for Professional Practice

Wankel and DeFillippi (2000) affirm that a key objective of a professional doctorate is its contribution to managerial practice. Thus, this research offers two original contributions to professional practice: a. the way through which conflict transformation can be applied to organizations is identified; and b. the effect of organizational conflict transformation on knowledge creation is established.

To begin with, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, conflict transformation has not been applied to organizations or corporate entities in Bahrain to date, nor have its effects on knowledge creation been identified. The identification of the organizational conflict transformation elements and their incorporation into the organization provide know-how that is entirely new to the practice of management and organizational conflict.

Furthermore, the application of conflict transformation to organizations is significant because, as affirmed by Galtung and Fischer (2013), the application of unsuitable modes of conflict handling to organizational situations is, according to the authors, counterproductive, particularly when conflict resolution is proposed in a situation that requires conflict transformation. According to the authors, this will likely lead to the prevalence of the stronger party or, at best, the realization of a solution that is based on adjudication, prevarication or compromise, leading to a vicious cycle of different manifestations of the same conflict. Expanding on the views offered by Galtung and Fischer (2013), Linvill, Mazer and Boatwright (2016) affirm that aggression and withdrawal result from engaging individuals in conflict resolution processes that are perceived as 'unjust', both of which are contributors to failure in communication within organizations.

In addition to the above, the application of conflict transformation to organizations serves to reduce the cost associated with ineffective handling of conflict. Caulfield et al. (2004) state that substantial costs are reported by organizations sustaining unresolved conflicts, despite the reported costs being underestimated. They argue that "the financial costs of work-related stress

reported by organizations [...] are likely to be quite conservative” (p.150). This is supported by Guthrie, Ciccarelli and Babic (2010), who expand on the argument presented by Caulfield et al. (2004) by stating that the cost borne by organizations due to the presence of unattended conflict is steadily growing and can be manifested in indirect ways, such as employee behaviour, lengthy absenteeism and the need for medical or psychological care.

On the other hand, Kiecolt-Glaser et al. (2005) state that individuals subjected to long-term stress experience various physiological symptoms, such as a slow-down in the body’s ability to heal wounds, in addition to a notable increase in stress hormones, the cost of which is borne by the individual, the organization and the community as a whole. Although it is difficult to calculate the cost of organizational conflict on employees’ wellbeing and the organization’s profitability with great accuracy, scholars such as Sias (2009) and others have arrived at a consensus that it greatly undermines the various resources of the organization. To expand on the notion presented by Sias (2009), it is noteworthy that an improvement in the wellbeing of organizations and the individuals who work within them will inevitably improve the overall health of the community, as an aggregate of individuals and institutions. This, in turn, manifests itself in the overall health of the social and economic position, which, although it is subject to incremental effect, contributes to the significance of this research.

Moreover, in cases where the needs being denied to the employee are basic, affecting for instance one’s identity or wellness whether physical or mental, conflict is regarded as violent, as per Galtung and Fischer’s definition (2013), and thus warrants urgent interference and the establishment of transformational processes to prevent the abuse from continuing.

The proposed method of handling conflict further invites its associated benefits to the organization. Lederach (2014) affirms that soundly transformed conflict provides an opportunity for enhanced understanding of the position of all parties, and thus contributes to the length and quality of the relationship. Furthermore, Folger, Poole and Stutman (2018) and Floyd (2017) argue that overcoming conflict strengthens interpersonal relationships by releasing tension and preventing escalations.

To add to the above, establishing the relationship between conflict transformation and knowledge creation provides managerial insight into the significance of applying conflict transformation into organizations by way of incorporating the aforementioned elements into the organizational culture. The successful incorporation of the organizational conflict transformation elements into the corporate culture serves to enhance knowledge creation, as discussed under 4.1.4 Discussion.

The benefits of applying knowledge creation to organizations are many, including enhancing organizational power and sustaining its competitive advantage, as per Nonaka, Toyama and Konno (2000), who affirm that the correct application of knowledge creation leads to fostering innovation which, according to Hulpke (2019), is key to the success of commercial organizations. The concept of innovation in business has been connected with an increase in organizations' competitive advantage by Ionescu and Dumitru (2015) who further add that innovation is a main influencer of profitability and growth.

Nonaka, Toyama and Konno (2000) also credit knowledge creation with agility, increase in organizational responsiveness and other qualities, all of which, in tight markets, define the difference between survival and termination.

6.3.2 Implications for Existing Literature

Guetzkow, Lamont and Mallard (2004, p.190) describe originality as “studying a new topic; doing research in an understudied area; or producing new findings”. In line with this definition, two significant original contributions to knowledge are made by this research, through the identification of a. the method through which conflict transformation can be applied to organizations, and b. the effects of conflict transformation on knowledge creation within organizations.

A significant body of literature is available on the more generic fields, namely conflict resolution and conflict management, while the field of conflict transformation has been relatively understudied in comparison, as affirmed by Kriesberg (2011, p.60), who states that “conflict

transformation as a narrow field is not as independently institutionalized as conflict resolution". Furthermore, and to the best of the researcher's knowledge, the application of conflict transformation in organizations and corporate entities in Bahrain is entirely absent from both the literature and empirical practice; subsequently, the effect of conflict transformation on knowledge creation within organizations is also entirely absent, rendering both the contributions made by this research original.

6.4 Recommendations for Future Research

The limitations of this study, in addition to the outcomes that have emerged, prompt the researcher to recommend a number of future research areas that, further to their stand-alone value, will serve to further develop the ideas presented in this thesis.

First, four components of organizational conflict transformation have been identified and incorporated into the culture of the organization under study. The researcher calls for the identification of further organizational conflict transformation elements and assessment of their viability. Second, the researcher encourages further research on the integration of organizational conflict transformation into established organizational culture models. Third, research aimed at understanding the wider implications of applying organizational conflict transformation within the economy, communities and individual psychology is recommended. Finally, this research was applied to a corporate entity by way of action research; the application of the same to other types of organizations, such as non-governmental organizations or the government sector, will increase the empirical evidence and extend our understanding of the way in which conflict transformation can be applied to organizations and how it relates to the notion of organizational knowledge creation.

Appendices

Appendix A – Interview Questions

- (1) Kindly introduce yourself.
- (2) What is your narration of the conflict event?
- (3) What is your interpretation of the conflict event?
- (4) In your opinion, what were the underlying causes of the conflict event?
- (5) Describe the context of the conflict.
- (6) How was this conflict addressed?
- (7) How is conflict usually addressed in the organization?
- (8) Drawing on your working experience in the organization, what are the implications of conflict at an individual and at an organizational level? What are the implications of the currently used coping mechanisms?
- (9) What did you learn from the occurrence of this conflict event and the way in which it was addressed? What did you wish the organization had learned? And how can this knowledge be conveyed to other employees?
- (10) In your opinion, what is the ideal working environment?
- (11) What is the best way to facilitate conflict within the organization? How does it compare to the existing methods?

Note: Commonly used probes under each question are discussed in 2.3.3.2 Interviews.

Appendix B – Participants’ Profiles

Below is a description of the recruited participants’ profiles. However, in order to safeguard their anonymity, their names have been omitted, their specific job titles have been replaced with their job functions and their nationalities have been replaced with either national or expatriate.

Furthermore, and for descriptive purposes; participant’s professional experience, which is an aggregation of years of work experience inside and outside the organization under study, is divided into three categories, namely a. less than five years, between five and 10 years and in excess of 10 years. To add to that, the gender of the participants is indicated by ‘M’ for male participants and ‘F’ for female participants and, finally, the age group of the participants is indicated in terms of their decade.

	Position	Professional Experience	Gender	Age Group	National vs Expatriate
1	Service Delivery – Training Department	Between five and 10	F	30–39	National
2	Administration	Less than five	M	20–39	National
3	Department Head / Higher Management	In excess of 10	M	40–49	Expatriate
4	Service Delivery – Training Department	Less than five	F	20–29	National
5	Service Delivery – Consultancy Department	Between five and 10	F	30–39	National
6	Service Delivery – Consultancy Department	Between five and 10	M	30–39	Expatriate
7	Department Head / Higher Management	In excess of 10	F	40–49	National
8	Administration	Less than five	F	20–29	Expatriate
9	Department Head / Higher Management	In excess of 10	M	40–49	National
10	Service Delivery – Consultancy Department	Between five and 10	M	30–39	National
11	Service Delivery – Training Department	Between five and 10	F	20–29	Expatriate
12	Service Delivery – Training Department	Less than five	M	20–29	National

13	Service Delivery – Consultancy Department	Between five and 10	M	30–39	Expatriate
14	Department Head / Higher Management	Between five and 10	F	40–49	Expatriate
15	Administration	Between five and 10	M	30–39	Expatriate
16	Service Delivery – Training Department	Less than five	M	20–29	National
17	Department Head / Higher Management	In excess of 10	F	40–49	National
18	Service Delivery – Consultancy Department	Between five and 10	M	30–39	Expatriate
19	Service Delivery – Training Department	Between five and 10	M	30–39	National
20	Service Delivery – Training Department	Between five and 10	F	20–29	Expatriate
21	Department Head / Higher Management	In excess of 10	M	40–49	National
22	Service Delivery – Training Department	Between five and 10	F	30–39	National
23	Service Delivery – Consultancy Department	Between five and 10	M	40–49	National
24	Department Head / Higher Management	In excess of 10	F	40–49	Expatriate
25	Administration	Between five and 10	F	20–29	Expatriate
26	Service Delivery – Training Department	Between five and 10	F	30–39	National
27	Service Delivery – Consultancy Department	In excess of 10	M	40–49	National
28	Administration	Between five and 10	F	20–29	Expatriate
29	Department Head / Higher Management	Between five and 10	M	30–39	National
30	Service Delivery – Training Department	Less than five	M	20–29	National
31	Department Head / Higher Management	In excess of 10	M	40–49	Expatriate
32	Service Delivery – Consultancy Department	In excess of 10	F	50–59	Expatriate

33	Service Delivery – Training Department	In excess of 10	F	40–49	National
34	Service Delivery – Consultancy Department	Between five and 10	F	30–39	Expatriate
35	Service Delivery – Training Department	Between five and 10	M	20–29	National
36	Department Head / Higher Management	In excess of 10	M	40–49	National
37	Service Delivery – Consultancy Department	In excess of 10	F	40–49	Expatriate
38	Department Head / Higher Management	In excess of 10	M	40–49	National
39	Service Delivery – Training Department	Between five and 10	M	20–29	Expatriate
40	Service Delivery – Training Department	Between five and 10	M	30–39	National
41	Administration	Less than five	M	20–29	Expatriate
42	Service Delivery – Training Department	Between five and 10	M	30–39	National
43	Administration	Less than five	F	20–29	Expatriate

Appendix C – Focus Group Questions

Introductory Questions

- (1) What motivated you to take part in this focus group?
- (2) How frequently do you partake in workplace conflicts and how do you feel about them?

Exploration Questions

- (3) Describe existing elements in the organization that promote conflict.
- (4) What would you change in the organization to make it less conducive to conflict?
- (5) What are the main areas affected by organizational conflict? How do you cope with that?
- (6) Describe your usual behaviour during and after conflict.
- (7) How does conflict usually escalate in the organization?
- (8) What do organizations usually miss or overlook when attempting to address conflict?
- (9) What should the organization improve in terms of processes or structures to reduce organizational conflicts?
- (10) How would you propose to address organizational conflict?

Exit Questions

- (11) Has anything been missed?
- (12) Is everything clear?

Appendix D – Evaluation Questions

- (1) To what the extent were interpersonal conflicts reduced?
- (2) What is the level of transformation that has occurred in relationships and interests in the organization?
- (3) How does the current position of the company differ from that of pre-implementation?
Think of its internal and external environment.
- (4) How do you evaluate change in communication in the organization?
- (5) How do you evaluate change in momentum in the organization?
- (6) How do you evaluate change in inclusiveness in the organization?
- (7) How do you evaluate change in numbers of unaddressed conflicts in the organization?
- (8) What are the areas of improvement in the current process?

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