Personality and Conflict Style:
Effects on Membership Duration in Voluntary Associations

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Abstract

Voluntary organizations, which differ from other organizations in the way they reward and retain members, can easily suffer setbacks from a loss of membership. Poorly managed conflict is often a source of attrition. This study examined the relationship between personality, conflict styles, and membership duration of people ($N = 431$) who attend or have attended churches (primarily Protestant churches), the most common form of voluntary association in America. Most of the Big 5 personality traits significantly predicted conflict styles and/or membership duration. Extraversion predicted higher preferences for collaboration and lower preferences for avoidance. Agreeableness predicted higher preferences for collaboration and accommodation, lower preferences for competition, and longer membership durations. Conscientiousness predicted higher preferences for collaboration and lower preferences for avoidance. Neuroticism predicted higher preferences for avoidance and lower preferences for collaboration and competition. Openness predicted shorter membership durations. The relationships between conflict styles and membership duration were less clear.

Personality and Conflict Style Effects on Membership Duration in Voluntary Associations

Local churches, neighborhood food pantries, amateur softball teams, Elks clubs, PTAs, American Legion posts and countless other volunteer organizations have long played an important role in the social fabric of America. Similar volunteer organizations are found throughout the world. They all have in common two important qualities: The vast majority of their members are volunteers, serving without pay, and the degree to which they accomplish their goals depends on their ability to attract new members while retaining existing ones.

Voluntary organizations (also known as voluntary associations) would thus greatly benefit by understanding how to better retain their membership. Some factors influencing membership retention are structural, based on the organization's nature, goals, and programs. Other factors are based on individual differences of the members (Omoto & Snyder, 1995); not all members respond in the same way to the various situations that occur in their organizations due to individual differences such as personality and conflict style preference which are examined in this study. Whereas personality changes very little over the lifespan (McCrae & Costa, 2003), conflict style is a learned behavior and can more easily be changed (Rahim, 2001, 2002). This study seeks to explore if alterable conflict styles may be adjusted in light of relatively stable personality characteristics in order to maximize the likelihood of continued participation in a voluntary organization.

The Nature of Voluntary Organizations

Voluntary associations provide a number of services in modern societies including resource distribution, social support, promotion of social change, and the expression of political, moral and religious values. Membership in voluntary associations (vs. membership in no

voluntary associations) is correlated with higher self-esteem, lower alienation, and greater political involvement (McPherson, 1981). The majority of voluntary associations have benevolent (or at least benign) goals and are considered an important source of social capital (the benefit one obtains from having social networks) for their members and for those who receive their services (Coleman, 1988; Macionis, 2005; Van Til & Williamson, 2001).

Voluntary associations can be distinguished from large, nonprofit organizations in that the majority of services are rendered by volunteers and not by professionals (Harris, 1998a). In America, which has a very long history of voluntary associations (de Toqueville, 1840), there are more than 1.5 million voluntary associations and approximately 70% of the population are members of at least one association (Anheier, 2001; Curtis, Grabb, & Baer, 1992). The majority of these memberships are in churches (Curtis et al., 1992). In other countries, the percentage of the population that participates in voluntary associations (that can be formally identified) is positively correlated with material and political development. Approximately half of the population in developed countries participates in volunteer organizations (Anheier, 2001).

Reward Structure. Etzioni (1975) proposed a threefold classification of formal organizations, identified by the reasons people participate in them. Utilitarian organizations include businesses and large nonprofits which accomplish their goals primarily through paid employees. People join these utilitarian organizations primarily because they are offered a salary (although a person who has several job offers might use other criteria to choose between them). Coercive organizations have members who have joined involuntarily, such as non-self-referred patients in a mental hospital or a conscripted army. The members of these organizations are forced to join, or are threatened with a less preferable option if they refuse to join. The third type of organization, what Etzioni calls normative organizations, is the voluntary organization. These

organizations attract and retain members primarily through granting symbolic rewards to members such as gratitude, status, social networking, and value confirmation. In contrast to utilitarian and coercive organizations, normative organizations are severely limited in their ability to attract and retain members through monetary rewards or physical threats. These limited means of motivation need to be considered when addressing such issues as attrition and leadership development in voluntary organizations.

The Problem of Attrition. Attrition can be a source of problems in a voluntary organization. High turnover makes it more difficult for an association to accomplish its goals due to the loss of leadership, the difficulty involved in socializing new members, and the decreased ability to coordinate its efforts (McPherson, 1981; McPherson, Popielarz, & Drobnic, 1992). Turnover in voluntary organizations has been reported to be from 5% to 20% per year (Cress, McPherson, & Rotolo, 1997; McPherson et al., 1992; Wilson & Musick, 1999). One mechanism by which membership loss can decrease organizational effectiveness is through the loss of transactive memory in the organization. Transactive memory is the total set of memory belonging to individuals in a system and the communication that occurs between these individuals (Wegner, 1986). When individuals learn and work together in an organization, they develop knowledge about one another which enables them to access more information than is accessible to any one single member of the organization. They share an awareness of who has knowledge about specific topics. However, in turnover, when an individual leaves an organization and another enters, the shared knowledge of the entering individual, even if he or she is as equally skilled and capable as the outgoing member, reduces the organization's transactive memory, thus lowering its efficiency (Argote & Ingram, 2000; Liang, Moreland, &

Argote, 1995). This potential loss of organizational effectiveness justifies the study of attrition and what can be done to decrease it.

Attrition and turnover in voluntary associations often occur because people move out of an area due to a change of work situation (T. W. Lee & Mitchell, 1994; Mitchell, Holtom, & Lee, 2001). Participation is also influenced by life cycle transitions such as marriage, having children, and growing older (Rotolo, 2000). Attrition in organizations is also associated with psychological factors such as unmet needs and expectations, stress and pressure on the individual coming from within the organization, unsatisfactory physical conditions, and poorly managed interpersonal conflict (Harman, Lee, Mitchell, Felps, & Owens, 2007; T. W. Lee & Mitchell, 1994). Lack of membership homogeneity can also be a stressor that motivates members to join other organizations (McPherson, 1981, 1983; McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001; Popielarz & McPherson, 1995). These pressures can play an especially large role in voluntary organizations because of the rewards given to motivate their members to continue and overcome these difficulties are limited (Etzioni, 1975).

Two of the best predictors of organizational retention (and thus negative predictors of attrition) are organizational satisfaction (Hom & Griffeth, 1995; Judge, 2000) and organizational commitment (Judge, 2000; T. W. Lee & Mitchell, 2000). Organizational satisfaction is a measure of an individual's attitude toward the organization in which he or she participates. Meyer and Allen's (1991) three component model of organizational commitment conceptualizes commitment along 3 dimensions. The first dimension is *continuance commitment*, the cost of changing organizations. This includes all that one would lose by leaving the present organization and the effort required to rejoin another. The second dimension is *affective commitment*, the strength of the desire to stay in the organization. This includes perceived

agreement with the organization's goals and values and compatibility with other members. The third dimension is *normative commitment*, the feeling of obligation to stay in the organization. This includes pressure from others and a sense of responsibility to those in one's social network. Whereas attrition can only be measured directly after it occurs, these predictors of attrition can be measured at any time. All three dimensions of organizational commitment have been found to predict a reduction in the likelihood of attrition (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

Cress, McPherson and Rotolo (1997) observed a counterintuitive phenomenon concerning membership in voluntary associations: Members who participate the most often in an association's activities have shorter membership durations, i.e. the time between their joining an association and leaving it is shorter. They argue that increased participation in an association causes increased stress from other aspects of life that compete for the member's time (such as family, occupation, and other associations). This stress due to competition is greatest on those who participate most, resulting in withdrawal from the organization.

However, this explanation of membership duration decreasing with involvement is less than satisfying. An alternative explanation for greater attrition among those most involved would be that those who are the most involved in an organization are those most likely to be involved in poorly managed interpersonal conflicts. Such conflicts may be severe enough to cause the person to withdraw from the organization even before competition-induced stressors reach higher levels (Gottman, Murray, Swanson, Tyson, & Swanson, 2002; Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993; Thom, 1972). One of the most potent causes of human misery is poor relationships caused by poorly managed conflict (Berscheid & Reis, 1998; Reis & Gable, 2003). As proximity and repeated, regular exposure is propitious to the development of relationships (Festinger, Schachter, & Back, 1950), those who only participate irregularly in an association are less likely to develop strong

ties with other members. As ties become stronger, interdependence increases which can either become positive, leading to cooperation, or negative which can lead to conflict which, in turn, can lead to separation if poorly managed (Deutsch, 1973). A painful, emotionally charged conflict could potentially cause a rupture from the organization if the conflict is not handled constructively. So those who are most involved in an organization would be those most likely to have these types of conflicts which lead to attrition. This proposed study is designed to examine the relationship between one's choice of conflict style and membership duration, especially taking personality into consideration.

Personality

Individual differences play an important role in understanding a person's behavior. Kurt Lewin (1951) proposed that two factors that predicted behavior were the person (including his or her personality) and the environment ($B=f(P,E)$). Personality traits do not predict momentary behavior in individuals, but they are very effective in predicting trends and general patterns of an individual's behavior averaged over longer periods of time (Fleeson, 2004). Individuals tend to seek out situations that correspond to their personalities (Snyder & Ickes, 1985); just as a person's environment influences his or her behavior, a person's personality influences his or her choice of environment in such a way as to maximize the congruence between his and her natural disposition and the environment.

Personality can be measured and described using scales to compare one person's personality to that of others (Allport, 1962). The five factor model (FFM, sometimes called the Big Five) consisting of five dimensions of personality, all of which are relevant to one's choice of conflict style and membership duration (Costa, McCrae, & Dye, 1991; Digman, 1990; McCrae & Costa, 2003) were used in this study. The *extraversion* dimension reflects the degree

to which one displays warmth, gregariousness, assertiveness, excitement seeking, and positive emotions; people high in extraversion tend to be talkative and socially poised. The *openness to experience* dimension is a measure of several areas including imagination, aesthetics, experiencing one's own feelings, and openness to new actions, ideas, and values; people high in openness tend to value intellectual matters, be rebellious and introspective, and have unusual thought processes. The *agreeableness* dimension measures trust, straightforwardness, altruism, compliance, modesty, and tender-mindedness; people high in agreeableness tend to be sympathetic, considerate, warm, compassionate, and likeable. The *conscientiousness* dimension measures orderliness, dutifulness, desire for achievement, self-discipline, one's sense of competence, and deliberateness; people high in conscientiousness tend to behave ethically, have high levels of aspiration, and be dependable, responsible, and productive. The *neuroticism* dimension measures hostility, anxiety, depression, self-consciousness, impulsiveness, and vulnerability; people high in neuroticism tend to worry, have self-doubts, and experience frequent negative emotions. Since all five dimensions measure traits that can influence all of an individual's interpersonal interactions to some degree (McCrae & Costa, 2003), they can potentially influence how a person responds to conflict (his or her conflict style) as well as the length of time the person stays a member in a voluntary association. For example, a person high in neuroticism might be too worried about his or her self-image to address a person with whom he or she is experiencing a conflict. Similarly, a person high in conscientiousness might feel the duty to remain in an organization even when continued participation is costly or painful.

Not only do the 5 primary dimensions of the FFM of personality provide a measure of individual differences that can influence a person's choice of conflict styles as well as membership duration in voluntary organizations, but the interactions of these dimensions can

also potentially be related to the behaviors associated with one's conflict style and membership duration. Studies (Hofstee, de Rad, & Goldberg, 1992; Piedmont, 1998) of the interactions of the five dimensions based on a circumplex approach, an approach similar to examining interactions measured by the multiplicative product of two relatively independent dimensions (Judge & Erez, 2007), indicate that many traits are associated primarily with a combination of scores on the primary dimensions, being present to a degree greater than would be expected from adding the independent contributions from the two dimensions. For example, a person who is high on introversion and high on openness is also relatively likely to be viewed as contemplative. A person who is high on neuroticism and low on conscientiousness is likely to be viewed as inconsistent or impulsive. So the specific interactions of the various dimensions of personality can potentially influence conflict style and membership duration in voluntary organizations.

Conflict Style

The Dual Concern Model of Conflict Styles. Conflict styles are patterns of responding to conflict describing a person's focus and concerns. Four styles are often described by positions along two axes, which is called the dual concern model of conflict style (Druckman, 2005; Forsyth, 1999; Kraybill, 2005; Pruitt & Kim, 2004; Rahim, 2002; Van de Vliert, 1997; Wilmot & Hocker, 2001). The four styles are represented by four quadrants formed by two axes, based on the managerial grid of Blake and Mouton (1964). Figure 1 is a typical representation of the dual concern model. I have chosen to use the quadrant labels (collaboration, competition, avoidance, and accommodation) used by Wilmot and Hocker (2001) and the axes labels (concern for self and concern for other) used by Kilmann and Thomas (1977). The axis *concern for self* measures the degree to which a person is concerned with his or her own goals. The axis *concern for other* measures the degree to which the person is concerned with the other party's goals. Collaboration

(high concern for self, high concern for other) is the style in which a party seeks a mutually beneficial solution to a perceived conflict. Competition (high concern for self, low concern for other) describes a conflict style where a party is primarily concerned with his or her own goals and less concerned with the goals of the other party; this style is often characterized by the use of threats or force. Avoidance (low concern for self, low concern for other) is a style characterized by withdrawing from the conflict and avoiding the issues by reducing communication. Accommodation (low concern for self, high concern for other) describes a style that puts a high priority on avoiding potentially negative interactions by acquiescing to the goals of the other party.

Figure 1. Conflict styles and their defining axes (Blake & Mouton, 1964; Druckman, 2005; Kraybill, 2005; Pruitt & Kim, 2004; Rahim, 2002; Van de Vliert, 1997; Wilmot & Hocker, 2001).

People tend to have a preferred conflict style that they use across a range of conflict situations (Sternberg & Dobson, 1987), but they also use different conflict styles at different times, even in the same conflict (Rahim, 2002; Wilmot & Hocker, 2001). Each style may be appropriate and most effective under certain conditions (depending on what the person's goals are: efficiency, trust development, creativity, etc.); however a collaborative style is most likely to lead to a mutually satisfying resolution of a conflict, especially when the conflict is complex (Deutsch, 1973; Druckman, 2005; Kraybill, 2005; Rahim, 2001, 2002; Van de Vliert, 1997). Collaboration is essentially a win-win perspective, where behavior is based on the belief that the two parties can maximize their joint outcome through creativity and perspective taking. Competition and accommodation often reflect a belief that a given conflict is a zero-sum game where any concession made by one party is equal to the gain achieved by the other. This belief is also known as the fixed pie perspective (de Dreu, Koole, & Steinel, 2000). When at least one of the parties has a fixed pie perception and believes that their desired outcomes are diametrically opposed, collaboration (also known as the expanding pie perspective) is especially difficult. Nevertheless, individuals can learn to use a collaborative style even if it is not their natural preferred style (Costantino & Merchant, 1996; Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 1991; Rahim, 2002).

Conflict Style and Personality. Several correlational studies have examined the relationship between preferred conflict style and the five factor model of personality traits. Sandy et al. (2000), in a study of 165 graduate students with no training in conflict management, found that extraversion and conscientiousness were positively correlated to a preference for collaboration. A combination of low openness, low agreeableness, and low conscientiousness predicted a preference for competition. A combination of low openness, low conscientiousness,

high neuroticism, and high agreeableness predicted avoidance as a conflict style. Antonioni (1998), in a study of 351 students and 110 managers, found similar results (extraversion, conscientiousness, openness, and agreeableness were positively correlated with a collaborating style; extraversion was positively correlated and agreeableness and neuroticism were negatively correlated with a competitive style.). He also found that some of the relationships changed with age or role. For example, students demonstrated a strong negative correlation between avoiding and extraversion, openness, and conscientiousness. But for managers, the avoiding style was most closely related to high agreeableness. Moberg (1998) studied uniquely managers and obtained results similar to Antonioni's, focusing on the validity of the five-factor model for predicting conflict style.

Research Question and Hypotheses

The research question addressed by this exploratory study is "What is the relationship between personality, conflict style, and membership duration in voluntary associations?" The correlations between the various dimensions of personality and conflict style and membership duration were examined for direction, strength, and statistical significance. The correlations between personality dimensions and conflict styles were also examined. These three groups of constructs had not yet been studied together in the context of voluntary associations. By examining the 3 groups of constructs together, the goal was to go beyond a simple correlational study by examining how the influence of personality style (which is relatively stable) on membership duration is affected by one's choice of conflict style (which is malleable), possibly leading to the detection of any potential mediating role that conflict style may play.

The study was to be limited to the most common form of voluntary associations in America, churches (Curtis et al., 1992). Harris (1998b) analyzed a group of churches from a

sociological perspective and concluded that they share most organizational features with other voluntary associations but they differ in two significant ways. Churches differ from many other forms of voluntary organizations in that generally they have goals which are based on extremely overarching religious values which are not easily changed. In addition, they usually have at least one paid, high status staff member in the midst of a mainly volunteer community, the minister. Both of these factors are intended to have a stabilizing effect on the organization.

As I have spent close to 20 years in pastoral ministry, I have both a strong interest in the functioning of churches and a natural point of access to pastors and other leaders in churches who allowed me to do research in their churches. However, my interest and experiences are not limited to churches; I believe that the dynamics and relationships explored in this study are generally valid for many other types of voluntary associations beyond churches.

Personality and Conflict Style

The first set of hypotheses concerns the relationship between personality dimensions (openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism) and preferred conflict style (collaboration, competition, avoidance, and accommodation). It was hypothesized that the results of Sandy et al. (2000), Antonioni (1998), and Moberg (1998) would be supported in a sample of members of churches. Collaboration would be positively correlated with openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, and agreeableness and would be negatively correlated with neuroticism. Competition would be positively correlated with extraversion and negatively correlated with agreeableness. Avoidance would be positively correlated with neuroticism and negatively correlated with openness and extraversion. Accommodation would be positively correlated with agreeableness and neuroticism, and negatively correlated with extraversion. These hypotheses are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1*Hypotheses Concerning Personality Traits and Preferred Conflict Styles*

	Cooperation	Competition	Avoidance	Accommodation
Openness	+		-	
Conscientiousness	+			
Extraversion	+	+	-	-
Agreeableness	+	-		+
Neuroticism	-		+	+

Note: + = Positive correlation. - = Negative correlation. No hypotheses are made for other correlations.

Personality and Membership Duration

As the collaborative conflict style is generally considered the most productive, it was hypothesized that the personality traits correlated with a preference for cooperation would have correlations similar in direction and magnitude with membership duration. Openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, and agreeableness would be positively correlated with membership duration and neuroticism would be negatively correlated as shown in Table 2 (Antonioni, 1998; Moberg, 1998).

Table 2*Hypotheses Concerning Personality Traits, Conflict Styles and Membership Duration*

Personality trait or conflict style	Membership Duration
Openness	+
Conscientiousness	+
Extraversion	+
Agreeableness	+
Neuroticism	-
Collaboration	+
Competition	-
Avoidance	-
Accommodation	+

Note. + = Positive correlation. - = Negative correlation.

As membership duration is not possible to measure precisely except when a membership spell is over, the relationship between personality and known predictors of membership duration,

organizational satisfaction and organizational commitment, was also examined. It was hypothesized that the correlations between these constructs and personality would be the same as those between membership duration and personality. This is in line with a meta-analysis (Judge, 2002), has shown correlations with job satisfaction to be -.29 for neuroticism, .25 for extraversion, .02 for openness to experience, .17 for agreeableness, and .26 for conscientiousness. However, past research for organizational commitment is not as clear. Naquin and Holton (2002) found the same correlation directions for personality and affective commitment, but opposite correlations for all 5 dimensions of personality and continuance commitment.

Personality Interactions

I also hypothesized that several interactions of personality dimensions might predict conflict style and membership duration. Witt, Burke, Barrick, and Mount (2002) found that the conscientiousness $\times$ agreeableness interaction was a good predictor of job performance beyond the main effects of either dimension, especially for employees who had frequent interactions with others. Since members of voluntary organizations often have frequent interaction with one another, this interaction might play a role in conflictual situations. Judge and Erez (2007) found that the interaction between extraversion and neuroticism also predicted job performance beyond the main effects of either dimension. The low openness, high conscientiousness combination is reported to be very frequent in voluntary organizations (Keirsey, 1998; Oswald & Kroeger, 1988). The interaction of these two dimensions is associated with traditionalism (Hofstee et al., 1992), reliability (Keirsey, 1998) and rigidity (Piedmont, 1998), all of which could affect preferred conflict style or membership duration. These three interactions were to be examined to

see if they significantly predict conflict style or membership duration beyond the main effects of the five dimensions of the FFM.

Conflict Style and Membership Duration

When one leaves an organization, one leaves behind, at least to some degree, the relationships that one had with other members. Even if one were to join an association with a similar sociodemographic composition, one would most likely have few established relationships in this new association relative to the number of relationships established in the former association. The cost of losing one's social network due to leaving an organization would be an especially high price to pay for people who value relationships very highly. It was therefore hypothesized that conflict styles that reflect a higher value on one's relationships (collaboration and accommodation) will be positively correlated with membership duration (see Table 2), as well as with organizational satisfaction and commitment, two predictors of membership duration.

These hypotheses were made without a strong conviction. They assume that the choice of conflict styles which place a high value on relationships plays more of a role in predicting membership duration than the choice of conflict styles which emphasize such things as status and power. Studies examining these relationships would be warranted in the future.

Possible Mediation

It was possible that there would be a partial mediation (Baron & Kenny, 1986) of the effects that personality has on membership duration by conflict style. Significant correlations of personality and conflict style with membership duration justified examining conflict style as a possible mediator of the relationship between personality and membership duration. As the various dimensions of personality are considered relatively stable traits, and conflict style a relatively malleable choice, it is logical to view personality as acting upon one's choice of

conflict style rather than the other direction. A visual representation of the potentially mediating role of conflict style for predicting membership duration, organizational satisfaction, and organizational commitment from personality is shown in Figure 2. If mediation were found, it would reinforce the importance placed on consciously choosing an appropriate conflict style for the situation.

Figure 2. The hypothesized mediating role of conflict style in predicting membership duration, organizational satisfaction, and organizational commitment from personality.

Methods

The general approach of this study was to collect and analyze internet based surveys completed by people who have had experience in churches, primarily protestant churches in California.

Participants

Participants were recruited through a number of avenues. The first source was two churches that desired to participate in the study ($N = 120$). Upon receiving an e-mail invitation to participate in this survey, one Northern California church ($N = 45$) and one Southern California church ($N = 75$) responded that they would like to participate and receive results for their

churches concerning conflict style preferences, membership duration intentions, and organizational satisfaction and commitment. Church literature or representatives made announcements in various adult groups within these churches asking people to participate in an anonymous survey to help the author and the church better understand how people in churches deal with conflicts. The author asked churches to make the announcements only to adult groups. The announcements provided an internet address (churchconflicts.com) which led to a site which asked participants to click on the name of their church to begin the survey. Thus the completed surveys were identifiable as to organizational source while assuring the confidentiality of the individual participants.

Other participants ($N = 199$) represented a broad range of individuals who have attended American evangelical churches. These individuals were recruited through e-mail announcements made to the author's personal network of 177 people met in churches (primarily from California and, to a lesser degree, New York) who have exchanged e-mail addresses with him. They were not aware of the purpose of the study (other than the information contained in the disclaimer, namely that the purpose of the study was to understand how conflict in churches is influenced by people's personalities and preferred conflict styles; see Appendix A). The 177 who received an invitation from the author to participate in the study were asked to forward the invitation to anyone else who might be willing to participate.

A third source of participants ($N = 112$) consisted of readers of the internet site Craigslist.com (recruited through the rubric Volunteers) and a Christian forum in Livejournal.com. The author posted an announcement asking people who have had experience in churches to participate in a survey on church conflicts.

In total, 431 participants began the survey (i.e. they completed at least the first section on personality; no count was available for those who might have visited the survey site but did not complete at least one section). Three hundred twenty of these participants (74.2%) completed the survey. Of the 111 participants who did not complete the survey, 48 (43.2%) came from CraigsList.com, the only source where an announcement was made to a general audience rather than an audience that could be clearly identified as Christian. The completion rate among all other sources combined was 81%. It is possible that some participants from Craig's List who did not have much or any church experience started the survey out of curiosity but abandoned it once their curiosity was satisfied or because they could no longer answer questions concerning church involvement.

Summary characteristics for the participants who completed the survey are shown in Table 3. As is common in volunteer organizations (Dym & Hutson, 2005), the majority of participants were female, although men were in the majority after age 60 (54.3%, perhaps due to elderly males having a greater sense of ease with internet based surveys than elderly females; Bimber, 2000). The distribution of ages ($M = 51.5$ years, $SD = 16.7$ years) ranged from 18 to 90 years, but was fairly even between the ages of 20 and 80 (an average of 4.2 participants per year), with an increase of the number of participants between the ages of 45 and 55 (an average of 7.0 participants per year). The high educational level of the participants (over 96% had completed some education beyond high school) most likely reflects both the educational level of the author's network of contacts and the educational level of internet users. The church affiliations of the participants were vastly protestant as anticipated; the second largest group consisted of those who no longer attended any church.

Table 3*Characteristics of the Sample (N = 320)*

Variable	Proportion
<i>Gender</i>	
Male	38.1%
Female	61.9%
<i>Highest education completed</i>	
Some high school	.9%
High school graduate	2.8%
Some college/Trade or technical school	25.3%
College graduate	40.9%
Masters degree	25.6%
Doctorate	4.4%
<i>Present church</i>	
Protestant	87.2%
Catholic	1.9%
Other	.9%
None	10.0%

Procedure

The survey contained sections on personality, conflict style, experiences in a previously attended church, experiences in the church presently attended, and demographic information. Depending on their experiences, the participants completed various parts of the survey. All participants were presented with the parts of the survey assessing personality, conflict style, and demographics. They could complete the sections on past and present church experiences depending on past and present conflicts and problems that they might have experienced.

The survey was hosted on SurveyMonkey.com. Paper versions of the surveys were also prepared (see Appendix A) to distribute to people without internet access in the Southern California church. However, only two such surveys were completed. They were collected anonymously and the data were recopied manually into internet based surveys.

Measures

Personality. The first part of the survey measured the dimensions of the five-factor model of personality with the 10-item version of the Big Five Inventory (BFI-10; Rammstedt & John, 2007). This short version was chosen in order to keep the questionnaire to a reasonable length. The BFI-10 asks only 2 Likert questions per dimension (1 = Disagree strongly, 7 = Agree strongly), such as “I see myself as someone who is reserved” (extraversion, reverse scored) or “I see myself as someone who gets nervous easily” (neuroticism). Following the recommendation of Rammstedt and John (2007), three questions were used to measure agreeableness (making a total of 11 questions).

The scores for each of the five dimensions were computed by averaging the responses for each of the corresponding questions (after reverse scoring certain items). Because the questions used in the BFI-10 were chosen to tap into different sub-scales of the 5 principle traits (e.g. the two questions about openness concerned artistic interests and having an active imagination, each relating to a different subscale found in the longer Big Five inventories), the correlations between the questions were not strong. However, all the correlations within a dimension were significant ($N=431$, $r_s > .14$, $p_s < .01$).

Conflict Styles. The second part of the survey asked questions based on the Adult Personal Conflict Style Inventory (Kraybill, 2005) to tap the participant’s use of 4 principle conflict styles (i.e., collaboration, competition, avoidance, and accommodation). Each of the 4 primary conflict styles was measured by 4 questions. The participants indicated the degree to which they agreed with a description of themselves under two conditions, “When I first discover that differences exist” and “If differences persist and negative feelings escalate” (1 = Disagree strongly, 6 = Agree strongly). These descriptions included “I make sure that all views are out in the open and treated with equal consideration, even if there seems to be substantial

disagreement” (collaboration) and “I interact less with others and look for ways to find a safe distance” (avoidance). The responses to the 4 questions for each of the 4 styles were averaged to create a single score for each of the styles, with higher scores indicating that the participant believes that the style is more characteristic of his or her response to conflict. The reliability coefficients (Cronbach’s α) ranged from .564 to .747 (see Table 4).

Each participant’s 4 conflict style scores were compared and the conflict style that received the highest score was identified as the *preferred conflict style*. If 2 or more conflict styles received the highest and identical scores, no preferred conflict style was identified. Of the 376 participants who completed information on conflict styles, 95 did not have a preferred score.

In the third part of the survey, participants described up to 2 experiences in which they had encountered conflict in churches, a *past church conflict* and a *present church conflict*. They first described a past church conflict if they answered yes to the question “Have you ever stopped attending a church for any reason other than moving, family issues (sickness, divorce, difficulty in getting the family to come, etc.), or a work schedule which did not permit you to attend?” If they had only left a church because of the enumerated reasons or had never left a church, they were not asked to describe a past church conflict. Those who had left a church because of a past church conflict were asked to briefly describe why they left. Several generic examples of conflicts or problems were presented in the survey (e.g. “insufficient programs,” “lack of friends,” “a change in leadership”). In their free responses, participants often used these generic examples to describe the principle conflict or problem.

Similarly, participants presently involved in a church were asked to describe a present church conflict, the most difficult problem or situation that they have encountered in their

present church. They were provided with the same generic examples as for the past church conflict and asked to give a free response.

Membership Duration Indicators. Three indicators of membership duration were included in the survey. The first of these indicators, *old church membership duration*, was available for only those who had left a church. Specifically, participants indicated how long they attended their previous church before they left by choosing the number of years that they attended from a drop down menu with options ranging from less than 1 year to 70+ years in intervals of 1 year.

The second indicator of membership duration, the *present church membership duration*, was simply the total amount of time (up to the time when the survey was taken) that the participant has been attending his or her present church. This was determined by one question, “Approximately how many years have you attended your present church?” The participants selected a response from a drop down menu with options ranging from less than 1 year to 70+ years (in intervals of 1 year). An additional option was “I do not presently attend a church.” No data for the present church experience was collected for participants who chose this latter option.

The third indicator of membership duration was created by tapping several indicators of membership duration. *Present church commitment* was measured by averaging the responses to three questions, each measuring one dimension of organizational commitment to a present church (Meyer & Allen, 1991, 1997; Meyer et al., 1993): “How much would you and your family have to give up in order to leave this church?” (Continuance commitment) with response choices ranging from “nothing” to “more than we could ever imagine,” “How much do you appreciate this church?” (affective commitment) with response choices ranging from “not at all” to “more than I could ever appreciate another church”, and “How strongly do you believe you

should stay in this church?” (normative commitment) with response choices ranging from “not at all” to “I believe with everything I have that I should stay.”

Present church satisfaction was measured by averaging responses to 2 questions. In one question participants chose one face from a series of faces that varied from very sad to very happy responding to the question, “All things considered, how satisfied are you with this church overall?” (Kunin, 1955; Scott & Taylor, 1985). The second question was, “Which statement best describes how much this church meets your expectations?” with a list of 5 ordinal choices ranging from “This church meets few of my expectations” to “This church meets and exceeds all of my expectations.” The correlation between these 2 items was .587.

Membership duration intentions were measured by averaging responses to 4 questions in which participants reported how long they believed they would continue participating in their present church. These questions included “If you do not move, how long do you think you will stay in this church?” (with 5 choices: less than 1 year, 1-2 years, 2-5 years, 5-10 years, more than 10 years) and “How likely is it that you will be in this church 5 years from now (assuming you do not move)?” (with 5 choices ranging from “definitely staying” to “definitely leaving;” reverse scored).

The third indicator of membership duration, *present satisfaction*, was based on the scores of *present church commitment*, *present church satisfaction*, and *present church membership duration intentions*. These three measures were standardized and summed with listwise deletion to keep the mean equal to 0, creating an index which had scores ranging from -3.32 to 1.87 ($N = 272$). The intercorrelations and coefficients of reliability for the measures contributing to present satisfaction are shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Intercorrelations, Reliability Coefficients, and Descriptive Statistics for Variables Contributing to Present Satisfaction

	<i>Pr Ch Comm</i>	<i>Pr Ch Satis</i>	<i>Pr Ch MD Intent</i>	<i>Present Satisfaction</i>
<i>Membership Duration</i>				
Pr Ch Comm	.793	.610**	.675**	.874**
Pres Ch Satis		.684	.637**	.858**
Pr Ch MD Intent			.888	.885**
Present Satisfaction				.843
Mean	3.47	3.17	16.4	0.00
Standard Deviation	.82	.87	3.7	2.62
Scale range or units	1-5	1-5	2-20	sum of zs
<i>N</i>	285	281	276	272

NOTE: ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level. Pr Ch Comm = Present church commitment.

Pr Ch Satis = Present church satisfaction. Present Ch MD Intent = Present church membership duration intentions.

Coefficients of reliability are shown on the diagonal in bold.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Personality. Extraversion and agreeableness were both normally distributed with slightly positive skew. Neuroticism was distributed normally and negatively skewed. However, openness and conscientiousness were distributed less normally. Conscientiousness was very negatively skewed, apparently due to a restriction of range producing a ceiling effect. Openness was negatively skewed and had the highest standard deviation of all the scales, possibly due to the miscomprehension of a reversed scored question by a significant portion of the sample.

The descriptive statistics and intercorrelations ($N = 431$) of the personality variables are shown in Table 4. The strongest positive correlation among the personality measures was between conscientiousness and agreeableness ($r = .152, p < .01$). Extraversion was positively correlated with other socially desirable traits (agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness; $r_s > .09, p_s < .05$). Neuroticism was significantly negatively correlated with extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness ($r_s < -.22, p_s < .01$). All of the intercorrelations were in the directions previously reported (DeYoung, Quilty, & Peterson, 2007; Gosling, Rentfrow, &

Swann, 2003), except for the non-significant relationship of agreeableness and openness ($r = -.07, p = .133$); this is perhaps due to the difficulties mentioned in measuring openness.

The participants who did not complete the survey tended to be higher in neuroticism than those who did, $t(429) = 1.99, p = .048, d = .22$. This difference reflects general differences between the Craig's List participants (who had a lower completion rate) and the participants recruited through churches. Participants recruited through churches tended to be higher in conscientiousness, lower in neuroticism and lower in openness than those recruited through internet sites.

Conflict Styles. All 4 conflict styles were normally distributed. Of the 281 participants with a preferred conflict style (74.7% of those who completed this part of the survey), 44.1% preferred collaboration, 17.1% preferred competition, 14.2% preferred avoidance, and 24.6% preferred accommodation.

The intercorrelations and coefficients of reliability (Cronbach's alpha) for the 4 conflict styles are shown in Table 4. All of the intercorrelations were significant. As expected, there were strong positive correlations between the styles characterized by low concern for self, accommodation and avoidance ($r = .472, p < .001$), and between the styles characterized by high concern for self, collaboration and competition ($r = .211, p < .001$). Collaboration and accommodation (the two styles characterized by high concern for other) were also significantly correlated ($r = .112, p = .039$). The strongest negative correlations were between the pairs of conflict styles which are theoretically opposite of each other (see Figure 1): competition and accommodation ($r = -.340, p < .001$) and collaboration and avoidance ($r = -.189, p < .001$). In addition, avoidance was negatively correlated with competition ($r = -.125, p = .021$). These correlations support the validity of the theory behind the dual interest model of conflict styles. In

addition, they indicate that avoidance is more strongly associated with accommodation than with competition, a relationship not addressed by the model.

The majority (64.0%) of the participants who answered questions about their past church experiences ($N=337$) indicated that they had left a church because of conflict or similar problems. Similarly, the majority (58.8%) of participants who answered questions about their most difficult experience in their present church ($N=291$) indicated that they had experienced conflict or some related problem in their present church that could be associated with a single person. After reviewing the listed conflicts (across both the present church conflict and past church conflict), the author classified approximately 20% as problems with the pastor or other church leadership. Approximately 10% involved lack of friendships and another 10% were about changes in worship styles that the churches had undertaken. Most descriptions of the conflicts were too vague to easily classify, e.g. “I had a conflict with someone” or “a decision with which I did not agree.” Some participants only responded about their past church conflict, others about a problem in their present church, and some responded about their experiences in both churches.

Membership Duration Indicators. Old church membership duration varied from less than 1 to 70 years ($N=204$) with a mean membership duration of 10.8 years ($SD=10.2$). The distribution was heavily positively skewed, but only 2 of the responses were over 50 years (analyses were performed with logarithmic and reciprocal transformations of membership duration to reduce this skew, but there were no noticeable differences in patterns of correlation). The participants were asked to choose from a drop down menu the exact number of years they had attended the church. Clusters of scores occurred at less than 1 year to 2 years (19.6% of the responses) and at 5 to 8 years (23.0%). Other frequent responses were 10 years (11.3%) and 15

years (6.4%); all other responses were less than 4.5% of the responses. This is perhaps because many of the responses were rounded estimates, perhaps due to the inability to recall precise details from the past. However, when the frequency distribution was examined with class intervals sufficiently large to compensate for rounding estimates (i.e. at least 5 years), it became clear that it approximated a negative exponential distribution with a decay rate of approximately 10% per year. This indicates that, regardless of whether or not attrition occurs at a regular rate, a large part of the attrition associated with conflicts and problems occurs during the first few years of a person's participation in a church (e.g. 35% of the participants left at or before their 5th year in the church; 63% at or before their 10th year).

Present church membership duration varied from less than 1 to 50 years ($N = 289$) with a mean membership duration of 12.0 years ($SD = 12.4$). The frequency distribution approximated a negative exponential distribution, equivalent to a distribution with an attrition rate of approximately 10% per year; 42% of the respondents indicated that they were in their present church 5 years or less.

Present church commitment, present church satisfaction, and present church membership duration intentions were all negatively skewed with a ceiling effect on the higher scores, indicating that in general people felt quite committed to and satisfied with their church and that they intended to stay for many years. However, there were important differences depending on the church the participant attended. For example, in the Southern California church, only 2% of the participants believed they would continue in the church for 2 years or less; in the Northern California church, 29% of the participants believed that they would stay for 2 years or less.

The three principle measures of membership duration (old church membership duration, present church membership duration, and present satisfaction) were not strongly related to each

other. Only the relationship between present church membership duration and present satisfaction was significant ($r = .209, p = .001$).

Tests of the Hypotheses

Personality Predictors of Conflict Style. Ten of the 13 hypothesized relationships between personality and conflict styles were supported by the data. As hypothesized, *collaboration* was predicted by higher extraversion, higher agreeableness, higher conscientiousness, lower neuroticism, and higher openness, $|rs| > .102, p < .05$ (see Table 5). As hypothesized, *competition* was predicted by lower agreeableness, $r = -.257, p < .01$; contrary to the hypotheses, competition was not significantly correlated with higher extraversion (Competition was also significantly correlated with lower neuroticism which was not hypothesized). As hypothesized, *avoidance* was predicted by lower extraversion, higher neuroticism, and lower openness, $|rs| > .092, p < .05$ (Avoidance was also significantly correlated with lower conscientiousness which was not hypothesized). As hypothesized, *accommodation* was predicted by higher agreeableness, $r = .304, p < .01$; contrary to the hypotheses, accommodation was not significantly correlated with either lower extraversion or higher neuroticism. Thus, most of the relationships between personality and conflict styles were as expected. However, extraversion had fewer significant correlations than expected (not predicting competition or accommodation), conscientiousness had more significant correlations than expected (predicting lower avoidance), and neuroticism had different significant correlations than expected (predicting lower competition but not higher accommodation).

Table 5
Intercorrelations, Reliability Coefficients, and Descriptive Statistics for Personality, Conflict Style, and Membership Duration Indicators

	<i>E</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>Collab</i>	<i>Comp</i>	<i>Avoid</i>	<i>Accom</i>	<i>Old MD</i>	<i>Present MD</i>	<i>Present Satisfaction</i>
<i>Personality</i>												
Extraversion (E)	.645	.082	.134**	-.221**	.098*	.311**	.006	-.260**	.045	.052	-.027	-.004
Agreeableness (A)		.476	.152**	-.280**	-.073	.143**	-.257**	.040	.304**	.212**	.163**	.134*
Conscientiousness (C)			.478	-.223**	.029	.262**	.067	-.185**	.032	.135†	-.009	.078
Neuroticism (N)				.519	.070	-.276**	-.117*	.216**	-.043	-.159*	-.108†	-.107†
Openness (O)					.233	.102†	-.011	-.092†	-.062	-.045	-.122*	-.145*
<i>Conflict Styles</i>												
Collaboration						.605	.211**	-.189**	.112*	.038	-.075	-.032
Competition							.664	-.125*	-.340**	-.002	-.016	.033
Avoidance								.564	.472**	-.036	.052	-.016
Accommodation									.747	.092	.075	.057
<i>Membership Duration</i>												
Old MD										-	.026	.014
Present MD											-	.209**
Present Satisfaction												.843
Age												
Mean	4.38	5.23	5.41	3.57	5.00	4.26	3.63	3.80	4.02	10.8	12.0	0.00
Standard Deviation	1.54	.98	1.23	1.43	1.31	.75	.91	.82	.86	10.2	12.4	2.62
Scale range or units	1-7	1-7	1-7	1-7	1-7	1-6	1-6	1-6	1-6	years	years	sum of z's
<i>N</i>	431	431	431	431	431	339	339	339	339	204	289	272

NOTE: * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

† Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed, only shown for hypothesized relationships).

Old MD = Old church membership duration. Present MD = Present church membership duration.

Coefficients of reliability (when applicable) are shown on the diagonal in bold.

A regression analysis predicting conflict style from personality traits was performed using stepwise entry of all five personality traits in order to find a model with only the traits that significantly contributed to the model. The significant predictors are shown in Table 6. All of the predictors with significant zero order correlations remained in the regression equations except for the equation for collaboration from which both agreeableness and openness were excluded because they were no longer significant.

Table 6

Regression Analysis of Conflict Styles Predicted by Personality

<i>Dependent Variable Conflict Style</i>	<i>Predictor Personality Trait</i>	<i>R² for the Model</i>	<i>Standardized Coefficient B</i>
Collaboration		.172	
	Extraversion		.238**
	Conscientiousness		.194**
	Neuroticism		-.171**
Competition		.108	
	Agreeableness		-.323**
	Neuroticism		-.216**
Avoidance		.123	
	Extraversion		-.207**
	Neuroticism		.127**
	Conscientiousness		-.141**
	Agreeableness		.134**
Accommodation		.093	
	Agreeableness		.304**

NOTE: ** β is significant at the 0.001 level. Only the significant predictors are included in the models.

Three interactions of personality dimensions were hypothesized to be significantly related to conflict style beyond the main effect of their components: agreeableness $\times$ conscientiousness, extraversion $\times$ neuroticism, and openness $\times$ conscientiousness. These interactions were tested by a linear regression analysis, adding the interactions after their components. None of the interactions significantly increased R^2 (all β s $< .80$, all ΔR^2 s $\leq .018$, *ns*). No evidence was found that these personality interactions predict conflict styles beyond the main effects; no support was found for the hypotheses.

Personality Predictors of Membership Duration Variables. Higher extraversion, higher agreeableness, higher conscientiousness, lower neuroticism, and higher openness were all hypothesized to predict longer membership duration.

The hypothesis concerning *extraversion* received no support. The correlations between extraversion and the membership duration variables did not reach significance (see Table 4).

The hypotheses concerning *agreeableness* and *neuroticism* were well supported. Agreeableness predicted longer old church membership duration, present church membership duration, and higher present satisfaction, $r_s > .134, p < .01$. Neuroticism predicted shorter old church membership duration, shorter new church membership duration, and lower present satisfaction.

The hypothesis concerning *conscientiousness* was only partially supported. Conscientiousness only predicted longer old church membership duration, $r = .135, p < .05$.

The hypothesis concerning *openness* predicting longer membership duration was not supported. In fact, it appears that the contrary may be true, namely, that openness is a predictor of shorter membership durations. Openness was unrelated to old church membership duration, but predicted shorter present church membership duration and lower present satisfaction, $r_s < -.122, p < .01$.

Personality Interactions as Predictors of Membership Duration Variables. Three interactions of personality dimensions were hypothesized to predict membership duration beyond the main effects of their components: agreeableness $\times$ conscientiousness, extraversion $\times$ neuroticism, and openness $\times$ conscientiousness. Using linear regression analysis where the two personality measures were centered and entered in the first step and the interaction was entered in the second step, the only significant interaction was agreeableness $\times$ conscientiousness when

predicting old church membership duration ($\Delta R^2 = .019$, $p = .043$). People high in both agreeableness and conscientiousness had longer old church membership durations than expected by simply taking the main effects into account. Figure 3 displays the slopes analysis of this interaction. Higher conscientiousness principally leads to longer membership duration in the presence of higher agreeableness. The average old church membership duration for most people was in the 9 to 13 year range. However, those who were both high in agreeableness and conscientiousness tended to have an average old church membership duration in the 14 to 16 year range. Nevertheless, this agreeableness $\times$ conscientiousness interaction did not reach levels of significance for the other membership duration variables.

Figure 3. Simple Slopes for Old Church Membership Duration on Conscientiousness at 3 Values of Agreeableness

As a summary of the results, linear regression models of the membership duration variables are shown in Table 7. The model for old church membership duration includes

agreeableness, conscientiousness, and their interaction, although the main effects due to agreeableness and conscientiousness are no longer significant once the agreeableness $\times$ conscientiousness interaction is entered. This indicates that the interaction is a better predictor than either of its components. For the models predicting present church membership duration and present satisfaction, only the predictors that significantly contributed to R^2 were retained in the models presented.

Table 7
Regression Analysis of Membership Duration Variables Predicted by Personality

<i>Dependent Variable</i>	<i>Predictor</i>	<i>R² for</i>	<i>Standardized Coefficient</i>	
<i>Membership Duration</i>	<i>Personality Trait</i>	<i>the Model</i>	<i>β</i>	<i>Significance</i>
Old Church Membership Duration		.076		.001
	A		-.436	.173
	C		-.584	.094
	A X C		1.006	.043
Present Church Membership Duration		.023		.006
	A		.163	.006
Present Satisfaction		.041		.006
	O		-.139	.021
	A		.123	.034

Note. The models presented are composed of all the predictors listed for the dependent variable. A = agreeableness, C = conscientiousness, O = openness.

Conflict Style Predictors of Membership Duration Variables. It was hypothesized that higher collaboration and accommodation would predict longer membership duration and that higher competition and avoidance would predict shorter membership duration. These hypotheses were not supported. All correlations between conflict styles and the three measures of membership duration (old church membership duration, present church membership duration, and present satisfaction) failed to reach significance ($|rs| < .10$, *ns*). If conflict style and membership duration are related, the relationship was too weak to be detected.

Conflict Style as a Mediator in Predicting Membership Duration from Personality. It was hypothesized that conflict style would mediate the relationship between personality and

membership duration indicators (Figure 2). However, this hypothesis was not supported. The relationships between conflict style and the membership duration variables were not significant. Thus, an essential condition was not present for meeting the criteria necessary to identify a mediating relationship (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Personality is related to both conflict style and membership duration. However, any mediating role played by conflict style in the relationship between personality and membership duration that might exist was too weak to detect.

Additional Analyses

Differences in Personality by Demographic Characteristics. Several personality traits varied with demographic characteristics. Age was positively correlated with extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness; $r_s \geq .132$, $p \leq .05$, $N = 269$. Neuroticism was negatively correlated with age; $r = -.211$, $p < .001$, $N = 269$. These relationships were unusual in that extraversion usually is negatively correlated with age (McCrae et al., 1999) and neuroticism more strongly correlated with age than reported elsewhere (Bergeman et al., 1993; McCrae et al., 1999). This was perhaps due to the younger Craigs List and LiveJournal population being higher (beyond the effects of age) in neuroticism and introversion than the older church related populations. Another possible factor is that neuroticism reduction in members is an important goal in evangelical churches; worry is often presented as the antithesis of hope or faith and thus is something that the individual should avoid.

Neuroticism was higher in females than in males ($M = 3.70$ versus 3.14 , $d = .34$, $p < .001$, $N = 320$) as was openness ($M = 5.09$ versus 4.72 , $d = .27$, $p = .015$, $N = 320$). These results were in line with other studies, but it should be noted that the direction and magnitude of gender differences in openness varies greatly with the instrument and the population being examined (Bergeman et al., 1993; Gosling et al., 2003).

These relationships between personality and demographic characteristics present a picture of a sample that is fairly typical of an adult population but reflect some peculiarities explainable by the origins from which the participants were recruited.

When the categories of educational level were converted into numerical values using the typical number of years to reach a level or the midpoint of the range covered by an interval (e.g. “some high school completed” was converted into 10 years), the only significant correlation was with conscientiousness; conscientiousness increased with education ($r = .139$, $p = .013$, $N = 320$). This result is consistent with the finding that conscientiousness is the best predictor of success in many performance based domains of life, such as educational achievement (Judge, Higgins, Thoresen, & Barrick, 1999).

Differences in Conflict Styles by Demographic Characteristics. Several conflict style scores varied with demographic characteristics. Females had a lower preference for competition ($M = 3.52$ versus 3.84 , $d = -.37$, $p = .003$, $N = 320$) and a higher preference for avoidance ($M = 3.53$ versus 3.84 , $d = .46$, $p < .001$, $N = 320$) and accommodation ($M = 3.80$ versus 4.17 , $d = .42$, $p < .001$, $N = 320$) compared to males (see Terhune, 1970). Higher levels of education predicted lower preferences for avoidance ($r = -.209$, $p < .001$, $N = 320$) and accommodation ($r = -.203$, $p < .001$, $N = 320$). Age was not significantly correlated with any conflict style score, but there was a near significant relationship between age and avoidance ($r = -.102$, $p = .095$, $N = 269$). All of these relationships confirm findings that diffuse status (status which comes from one's social category, such as age, gender, education, etc.) is associated with assertiveness. People who are perceived to have greater power or privilege tend to use the assertive styles, competition and collaboration, more than those who have lower status, who tend to use the less

assertive styles, avoidance and accommodation, (Berger, Cohen, & Zelditch, 1972; M. T. Lee & Ofshe, 1981).

Differences in the Relationships Between Conflict Styles and Membership Duration Variables by Gender. No relationships were found between conflict styles and membership duration variables in the sample as a whole. However, when the relationships between conflict styles and present satisfaction were analyzed separated by gender, several correlations became significant. In men, competition predicted higher present satisfaction ($r = .285, p = .003, N = 105$). However, in women, this relationship was in the opposite direction and nearly significant ($r = -.113, p = .147, N = 166$). Similar relationships were found with collaboration and with the components of present satisfaction; many of the correlations were in opposite directions for males and females. See Table 8 for all the relationships.

Table 8

Correlations Between Collaboration and Competition and Present Satisfaction and Its Components by Gender

	<i>Collaboration</i>		<i>Competition</i>	
	<i>Females</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Males</i>
<i>Pr Ch Comm</i>	-.105	.195*	-.126	.190*
<i>Pres Ch Satis</i>	-.167	.040	.034	.260**
<i>Pr Ch MD Intent</i>	-.173*	.081	-.175*	.261**
<i>Present Satisfaction</i>	-.128	.131	-.113	.285**

NOTE: * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level. ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

Pr Ch Comm = Present church commitment. Pr Ch Satis = Present church satisfaction. Present Ch MD Intent = Present church membership duration intentions.

The meaning of this gender difference is not obvious; it perhaps indicates that men with assertive conflict styles and women with less assertive conflict styles appreciate organizational membership more than others. This may be a peculiarity of evangelical churches which may tend to encourage some traditional gender differences and evaluate them positively (such as male leadership and female nurturing); it is not clear that this relationship would be found in other types of organizations where differences in gender roles may be discouraged.

Discussion

This study examined the relationship between personality, conflict style, and membership duration in voluntary associations. The participants were primarily members of churches, the most common form of voluntary association in America. Most of these churches were evangelical churches.

The study tested the general hypotheses that personality predicts both conflict style and membership duration and that conflict style also predicts membership duration. Furthermore, this study tested the general hypothesis that conflict style mediated the relationship between personality and membership duration. To summarize the results, support was found for the general hypotheses that personality predicts conflict style and membership duration. In fact, most of the specific hypotheses predicting correlations between particular personality traits and different conflict styles and membership duration were supported. However, little support was found for the general hypothesis that conflict style predicts membership duration. Consequently, little support was found that conflict style mediates the relationship between personality and membership duration. In fact, none of the conflict styles were related to the measures of membership duration in this sample as a whole. Only when the sample was analyzed separately by gender were there significant relationships between conflict styles and some aspects of the measures of membership duration.

Personality and Conflict Style

This study supported the general hypothesis that personality predicts preferences for conflict styles, with 10 of the 13 specific hypotheses concerning Big 5 traits and preferences for conflict styles receiving support. The significant correlations between the Big 5 dimensions of personality and conflict styles are summarized in Table 9.

Table 9
*Significant Relationships Between Personality
 Dimensions and Measures of Conflict Styles*

Conflict style	Personality Trait
Collaboration	Higher extraversion Higher agreeableness Higher conscientiousness Lower neuroticism Higher openness
Competition	Lower agreeableness Lower neuroticism
Avoidance	Lower extraversion Lower conscientiousness Higher neuroticism Lower openness
Accommodation	Higher agreeableness

Collaboration, the conflict style that generally is associated with the most positive outcomes for organizations dealing with complex problems (Deutsch, 1973; Rahim, 2002), is predicted by all five of the personality dimensions. Higher extraversion, higher agreeableness, higher conscientiousness, lower neuroticism, and higher openness all predict collaboration which is important because this style may contribute the most to the good of the organization (Blake & Mouton, 1964; Fisher et al., 1991; Rahim, 2001, 2002).

Likewise, avoidance is predicted by four personality traits in directions opposite of those which predict collaboration: lower extraversion, lower conscientiousness, higher neuroticism, and lower openness. These personality tendencies are associated with avoidance which sometimes helps organizations avoid destructive conflicts, but which does little to help them resolve important problems in complex situations (Rahim, 2001, 2002; Wilmot & Hocker, 2001).

Two personality dimensions were especially associated with the fundamental dimensions of the dual concern model of conflict style (Figure 1). Higher agreeableness predicted both of the conflict styles characterized by high concern for other (collaboration and accommodation). This was as expected because agreeableness is closely linked to getting along with other people and

taking into consideration what they are thinking and feeling. Similarly, lower agreeableness was associated with the styles characterized by low concern for other (competition and avoidance).

Lower neuroticism predicted the two conflict styles that are characterized by high concern for self (competition and collaboration). This was as expected because lower neuroticism is associated with higher self esteem and self confidence; those with higher self esteem would find greater justification for asserting their own desires (Judge, Erez, Bono, & Thoresen, 2002). Similarly, higher neuroticism was significantly correlated with avoidance, one of the conflict styles associated with low concern for self. Surprisingly, the correlation between neuroticism and accommodation (the other conflict style associated with low concern for self) was not significant, perhaps because accommodation is a highly valued means of achieving unity in evangelical churches (Bloesch, 1983; Dunaetz, 2008b); it is possible that the variance in accommodation associated with a commitment to achieving unity is far superior to the variance in accommodation association with neuroticism, making a significant correlation between neuroticism and accommodation impossible to detect in this sample.

A recent meta-analysis (six studies with a total of 1687 participants; Dunaetz, 2008a) of the relationship between personality and preferred conflict style in non-student, adult populations indicates that the correlations in the present study are very similar to the patterns found in other studies, both in direction and magnitude. The only significant difference between the results of this study and the meta-analysis is that this study found that lower neuroticism predicted competition, while in the meta-analysis, this relationship failed to reach significance.

Finding the same personality predictors of conflict style as the meta-analysis is, at least, evidence of the validity of the study's measures of personality and conflict style. The short, simple instruments used in this study to measure personality (Rammstedt & John, 2007) and

conflict styles (Kraybill, 2005) do not appear to have been used in previous studies concerning personality and conflict styles. Yet, the use of these instruments yielded very similar results to those obtained using longer or more complex instruments, supporting their validity.

Nevertheless, some doubts about the methodology remain, especially concerning the openness scale. The instrument used to measure personality (the BFI-10; Rammstedt & John, 2007) only asked 2 questions for most of the scales. The responses for the two items measuring openness (one concerning artistic interests and one concerning having an active imagination) had a correlation of only .14. As explained earlier, it is possible that one of the items was misunderstood by some of the participants. If this were the case, the openness to experience scale possibly reflects only what was measured by the question that was not misunderstood: a person's active imagination. Imagination is a component or subscale of the trait of openness, but it does not reflect the breadth of what is usually included in openness scales (DeYoung, Peterson, & Higgins, 2005; John & Srivastava, 1999). This potential lack of validity and reliability (due to the lack of internal consistency of the two items in the scale) may limit the value of the openness measurements found in this study. A more valid and reliable measure of openness should be used in future studies.

This study has supported the hypothesis that personality predicts conflict styles. It appears to be the first study to confirm these relationships in the context of voluntary associations. In light of the reward structure of voluntary organizations (Etzioni, 1975), one in which the primary benefits that members receive for their participation are symbolic, the relationships between measures of personality traits and conflict styles provide might justify further studies examining how members of voluntary organizations might be motivated through the use of symbolic rewards to use a more cooperative conflict style, the style most likely to

produce beneficial outcomes for the organization (Rahim, 2001). Changing people's adult personality is very difficult (McCrae & Costa, 2003), but changing people's conflict style is possible with appropriate training (Kifer, Lewis, Green, & Phillips, 1974; Shell, 2001). Perhaps symbolic rewards can be found that would be appropriate to a person's personality to motivate them to be more cooperative in spite of the conflict style that would be predicted by their personalities.

Personality and Membership Duration

This study hypothesized that personality would be significantly correlated with membership duration, specifically, that higher extraversion, higher agreeableness, higher conscientiousness, lower neuroticism, and higher openness would all predict longer membership durations. This study demonstrated that personality does indeed predict membership duration, although not all the specific hypotheses were supported. Three measures of membership duration were used: old church membership duration (duration in a previous church that was left because of conflict), present church membership duration (the time that a person has spent in his or her church up to the time of the study), and present satisfaction (a composite index based on organizational commitment, organizational satisfaction, and intentions to remain in the organization). The personality traits significantly correlated with these membership duration variables are shown in Table 10.

Table 10

Significant (and Nearly Significant) Relationships Between Personality Dimensions and Measures of Membership Duration

Measure of membership duration	Personality Traits
Old church membership duration	Higher agreeableness Higher conscientiousness Lower neuroticism Agreeableness × Conscientiousness
Present church membership duration	Higher agreeableness Lower neuroticism Lower openness
Present satisfaction	Higher agreeableness Lower neuroticism Lower openness

Old church membership duration is especially important to examine because it is the only measure of duration of a membership spell from beginning to end. Higher agreeableness, higher conscientiousness, the interaction of agreeableness and conscientiousness, and lower neuroticism all predicted old church membership duration as hypothesized. Although hypothesized to predict old church membership duration, extraversion and openness did not.

The causal element behind these correlations is far from clear. It might be argued that personality causes longer membership duration because personality traits are stable over time. However, it is possible that membership duration influences personality. The traits that predict longer old church membership duration (higher agreeableness, higher conscientiousness, and lower neuroticism) correspond to behaviors in evangelical churches that are highly valued, promulgated as norms, and are viewed as expected domains of personal development (Gill, 1999; Grenz, 2000). For example, love can be associated with agreeableness, faith in and obedience to God with conscientiousness, and hope with lower neuroticism. Thus it could be argued that extended membership durations in organizations promoting these traits could likely influence adult personality development.

On the other hand, there is reason to believe that the personality traits of agreeableness, conscientiousness, and lower neuroticism themselves lead to longer membership duration. Individuals displaying such traits correspond to the prototype of the evangelical church member. Individuals who do not display such traits might not be held in high regard. Those who “walk the talk” are given increased status that may promote longer membership duration (Hogg & Terry, 2000). Similarly, pro-social behaviors are associated with these traits which may lead to stronger relationships with others and lower attrition (Maertz, 2004). It is possible that several processes are at work, creating a feedback system that promotes and rewards members who are by nature or through personal growth more agreeable, conscientious, and emotionally stable. This could also explain why the conscientiousness $\times$ agreeableness interaction so significantly contributes to membership duration; people higher on both traits are visibly the prototypes of the organizational members and receive status from others which motivates them to remain in the organization while at the same time leading to behaviors that build stronger ties to others making attrition less likely.

The other personality dimensions (extraversion and openness) are not especially promoted or upheld as norms in either direction (e.g. neither high nor low extraversion is expected of members) in evangelical churches (Francis & Robbins, 2002; Stagg, 1976). Members of evangelical churches thus receive little or no encouragement or instruction to develop their personalities along such traits. In other organizations, this might not be the case. In this study, extraversion and openness did not predict longer membership duration.

Nevertheless, two hypotheses were made concerning openness. First, it was hypothesized that people higher in openness would have longer membership durations because they would be more open to creative solutions that could resolve conflicts and other problems they encounter in

organizational life. Yet it was also hypothesized that the openness $\times$ conscientiousness interaction would also predict longer membership duration; specifically, people who were lower in openness and higher in conscientiousness should stay longer, because this combination of traits is associated with resistance to change. Neither of these hypotheses was supported by the study.

Higher openness (or active imagination, depending on what the openness scale actually measured, as discussed above) actually predicted shorter present membership duration and lower present satisfaction. There was no significant interaction with conscientiousness. There are several possible interpretations to these results. It perhaps indicates that lower openness predicts resistance to change even in the absence of conscientiousness. Another interpretation is that those who are lower in imagination (which is perhaps what this scale measured) would be unlikely to envision leaving their present church; considering the option of moving to a different organization might come later to them, resulting in longer membership durations. Another possible interpretation is that people who remain in churches (i.e., people who stay in a church or leave one church to join another) might be lower in openness than those who quit going to church altogether. However, a comparison between presently active church members and those who no longer report attending a church indicates that the difference in openness was not significant in the present study, $t(337) = 1.240, p = .216$. This possible explanation can only be examined by a study that includes more attention to the processes associated with openness and perhaps by using a more reliable and valid measure of openness.

Although other studies have linked personality to remaining in organizations (Maertz, 2004), this appears to be the first study showing that personality (especially conscientiousness, agreeableness, and neuroticism) predicts membership duration in voluntary associations. In the

context of very limited resources which characterizes many voluntary organizations, this information can be useful in leadership selection and training. Conscientiousness, agreeableness, and lower neuroticism have been found to contribute to organizational performance in general (Barrick & Mount, 2000; Witt et al., 2002). This current study has shown that people higher in these traits are also likely to have longer membership durations. Leadership training for such individuals is thus likely to have higher long term payoffs due to lower attrition rates than such efforts would have for other individuals (in addition to any other benefits that might come from such training). Allocating resources (such as authority and training) appropriately in light of these findings (e.g., specifically selecting people with higher conscientiousness, agreeableness, and/or lower neuroticism) may potentially lead to greater organizational efficiency by reducing the likelihood of attrition for members placed in key positions.

Conflict Style and Membership Duration

No significant relationships were found in this study between the preferences for conflict styles and the membership duration variables in the aggregated sample. This indicates that conflict style, in itself, is not a reliable predictor of membership duration. Although personality predicted both conflict style and membership duration, no relationship was found between conflict style and membership duration. Consequently, this study found no support for the hypothesized mediating role of conflict style.

There are several possibilities for this lack of relationship. It is possible that participants' expression of their preferred conflict style does not accurately correspond to their actual behavior in the critical situations that lead to the termination of organizational membership. This possibility needs to be seriously examined. Using a survey such as the one used in this study, participants could be asked in future studies to describe their actual behavior in the specific

conflicts that played a crucial role in their departure from the organization. Such a study could uncover correlations between actual conflict behavior and membership duration, perhaps providing evidence that conflict behavior plays a mediating role in the relationship between personality and membership duration. A more elaborate study could include the observation of actual conflict behavior rather than simply relying on self-reported data.

Another possible reason for this lack of relationship is that factors other than conflict style and personality may be more important in determining membership duration. Many other contextual variables also contribute to membership duration. These contextual variables may include dyadic interactions, group processes, or the entire organizational context. It is quite possible that conflict styles (as well as personality traits) interact with some of these contextual variables to influence membership duration. For example, an especially emotional outburst by either of the parties in a conflict might have more influence on individuals with certain conflict styles, or the influence on membership duration that such an outburst might have may vary by gender. Future studies concerning membership duration could examine additional measures such as perceptions of the other's behavior during the conflict episodes, the diffuse (based on social category membership) and organizational (based on hierarchical position) status of self and other, the emotional intensity of the conflict, and the psychological effects of the conflict.

The relationships found in this study between personality and membership duration variables broken down by sex are shown in Table 11. These gender differences could be due to biological differences and/or to the cultural context of evangelical churches which tends to uphold traditional sex roles (Bartkowski, 2001; Gallagher, 2003). In any case, these results indicate that measures of conflict style may interact with other variables to impact membership duration. Based on the current results, for example, men may be more satisfied and committed

to organizational situations when they have an assertive preferred conflict style (collaboration or competition). Women, however, had greater intentions to stay in organizations when they were lower in assertive conflict styles. It appears that the degree to which people are assertive is related to their feelings toward their organizational participation. Males appear to have more positive feelings when they report higher preferences of the assertive conflict styles and females appear to have more positive feelings when they report lower preferences for the assertive styles, although this study provides no indication of causal direction. Since assertiveness is an essential quality or behavior of leaders (Hogan, Curphy, & Hogan, 1994; Ridgeway, 2001), this difference may indicate one reason why males tend to have the majority of leadership roles in evangelical churches. Men may simply enjoy leading more than women.

Table 11
Significant (and Nearly Significant) Relationships Between Personality Styles and Membership Duration Variables by Gender

Membership Duration Variable	Conflict Styles in Males	Conflict styles in Females
Present church commitment	Higher collaboration Higher competition	(none)
Present church satisfaction	Higher competition	(none)
Present church membership duration intentions	Higher competition	Lower collaboration Lower competition
Present satisfaction	Higher competition	Lower collaboration Lower competition

Limitations

This study sought to examine the relationship between personality, conflict styles, and membership duration in the context of voluntary organizations. A number of limitations should be recognized. First of all, the personality measures used were extremely brief (two questions each) which might limit their accuracy. Secondly, conflict styles were based on self-reports which may or may not correspond to how people actually behave in actual conflict situations; it

is known that people tend to report their own conflict behaviors as being more cooperative than their opponents' (Nauta & Kluwer, 2005). Thus the study may be based on very limited information on how people have actually responded in the crucial conflict episodes that led to attrition. Thirdly, membership duration is a relatively difficult construct to measure. People's memory may not be precise concerning past memberships and the measure of present membership duration in this study may not ultimately relate to how long people remain in their church. Similarly, the indirect predictors of membership duration such as organizational satisfaction and intentions to remain may be very limited in their ability to predict membership duration. Fourthly, this study was conducted using a cross section methodology; a longitudinal study might have revealed different relationships. Finally, this study was primarily limited to members of U.S. evangelical churches. The relationship between personality, conflict styles, and membership duration may be different in other forms of voluntary organizations.

Conclusion

This study examined the relationships between personality, conflict styles, and membership duration in voluntary organizations, specifically evangelical churches. The relationships between personality traits and preferred conflict styles were clear and in line with other studies. The relationships between individual differences (personality traits and conflict styles) and membership duration were less clear. Personality predicted membership duration, but the causal direction of the correlations is questionable, especially in the context of evangelical churches. The only relationships between conflict style and membership duration variables were found when the data was separated by gender. Future studies should examine other contextual variables (such as actual conflict behavior of each of the participants, status differences,

organizational involvement, and perceptions of the conflict) to see if any new relationships can be uncovered.

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Appendix A

Church Conflict Survey