

Leadership Strategies to Address Staff Conflicts and Promote Team Cohesion in the Australian Public Service (APS) Frontline Environment

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Abstract

Leader's conflict management and power team promotion are critical administrative matters within the context of the Australian Public Service (APS) frontline setting. The researchers learned that specific leadership strategies, conflict resolution techniques, and frameworks contributed to collaborative function in public service environments that were more subject to complex stresses. This mixed-method research study is aimed at analyzing leadership that is effective in managing disputes between employees which might strengthen a culture of trust and collaboration. The findings emphasize that emotional intelligence, ethical leadership, adaptability in leadership approaches, and sound organizational support are crucial. Suggestions are made for the purpose of helping APS managers to build strong teams capable of providing the public with quality services. This study provides practical suggestions to leaders and policymakers alike, who aim at maximizing the human resource dynamics in an emerging public sector environment in Australia.

Keywords: Leadership Strategies, Staff Conflict Management, Team Cohesion, Australian Public Service (APS), Frontline Environment, Organizational Culture, Conflict Resolution, Public Sector Leadership.

1. Introduction

Effective leadership within public service organizations is crucial to ensure organizational effectiveness, employee engagement, and quality service delivery, particularly in frontline environments. Frontline employees of the Australian Public Service (APS) are often subjected to high stress, burdened with the complexity of demands from citizens as well as government and internal stakeholders. Such conditions render the existence of conflicts within the workplace a certainty, and therefore, leadership strategies become critical to handle people problems and in building coordinated teams for ensuring resilient and efficient service delivery (Blackman et al., 2012).

Conflict if left unaddressed can wear thin team morale, decrease productivity, and ultimately lead to lowered quality of public services for citizens. Conversely, effectively dealing with conflict can induce innovation, strengthen interrelationships, and spur positive organizational change (Wipulanusat, 2019). In the wake of the vastness and the multiplicity of environments characterizing the APS, with overlapping values, frontline leaders must be agile in recognizing the first signs of conflict, mediating impartially during disputes, and instilling inclusive team cultures for the advancement of core values of integrity and public good (Taskforce, 2023).

The APS, while trying to maintain its position in service provision to diverse constituencies alongside the recent transformations in public settings from various sources will observe strong demand for leadership

directing operational competence, emotional intelligence, cross-cultural awareness, and conflict resolution skills. The success of these areas has seen an abandonment of the Newtonian view of leadership by the APS, with leading practice models of capability that focus on adaptability, emotional regulation, and a shared understanding and collaborative approach to decision-making among key leadership competencies in the public sector (Hastings et al., 2024).

The recent crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, have further necessitated the need for leaders to be furnished with the flexibility required in managing crisis situations. From the onset of the pandemic, it became clear that it was the strong frontline leadership that navigated the typical workplace stress; resources constrained working environment, and constantly shifting policy context (Phillips et al., 2022). Leaders who were able to maintain some psychological safety and open lines of communication with their teams kept cohesion despite very trying circumstances.

However, effectiveness in APS leadership with regards to conflict resolution is quite disparate. There have been reports that suggest that many leaders are underprepared or too burdened leading to inconsistent practices in dealing with conflict (Whelan, 2011; Omari & Standen, 2007). Besides, structural issues such as hierarchical behavior, bureaucratic inertia, and resistance to change exacerbate frontline leadership in conflict management complications (Buick et al., 2022).

Leadership is thus at the heart of the affairs of team dynamics and this study will aim to serve the purpose of scrutinizing:

- What are the effective leadership strategies in managing staff's conflict in frontline APS environment?
- How can leaders leverage such frontline team cohesion in high-pressure situations within the public service environment?
- As leaders augment their leadership competencies, barriers to excelling in effective leadership under conflict situations have to be identified and surpassed.

The study's scope is set on frontline teams within the Australian Public Service defining the frontline roles in health, social welfare, emergency response, and the enforcement of regulations as posing unique challenges in contrast to back-office or policy positions. Its importance lies not only in bridging the gap between theory and practice but also in providing real, workable insights applicable to today's agencies, policymakers, and HR practitioners as society's public sector deals with swift changes.

Leadership in the public sector is different from what we know in the private sector; it dictates values, is legally answerable toward various groups of stakeholders, and is in public-spirited endeavors to promote public good (Kakabadse et al., 2003). Thus, confronting conflict and establishing cohesive team operations within the APS is not just another concern to managers; rather, it is all an ethical imperative for governance involving the maintenance of trust and legitimacy of the public body itself (Barrett, 2002).

The coming sections will involve the review of the most relevant literature about leadership, conflict management, and team cohesion; offer a theoretical framework that is used to conduct the analysis; present the research methodology; discuss the various findings obtained from data collected; and give suggestions to enable leadership practices in the APS frontline context.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Leadership in the Public Sector

The nature of leadership in the public sector is rather distinctive from that in the private sector. Unlike organizations, public sector organizations exist primarily to provide services for the social good, rather than make profits. On this basis, leaders in the Australian Public Service (APS) need to deal with multiple challenges like political accountability, limited resources, and complex environments of stakeholders (Blackman et al., 2012; Kakabadse et al., 2003). However, the expectations of ethical leadership, transparency, and service-oriented behaviors place further emphasis on value-based leadership.

Different leadership models have been adapted to suit the public sector arena. Transformational leadership, with a special emphasis on vision, inspiration, and personal development, is seen as particularly effective in motivating the APS employees at the frontline (Wipulanusat, 2019). On the other hand, the servant leadership models-the frameworks which specifically cobble into empathy, community-building, and stewardship-are closely aligned with public service ethics (Hastings et al., 2024).

Recent studies have also indicated that leadership effectiveness in the APS is indeed multi-dimensional in nature, and frontline leaders also need to nurture the innovation, human capacities development, and maintenance of high ethical standards (Hastings et al., 2024; Taskforce, 2023). Frontline leaders are expected to manage and respond constructively to immediate crises while also simultaneously ensuring the continued nurturing and development of teams. This complexity necessitates continuous leadership development and institutional support. **Table 1** below provides a summary of essential leadership competencies required for frontline APS environments from recent literature.

Table 1: Key Leadership Competencies for APS Frontline Managers

Competency	Description	Source
Ethical Decision-Making	Acting with integrity and transparency	Taskforce (2023)
Emotional Intelligence	Recognizing and regulating emotions in self and others	Hastings et al. (2024)
Adaptive Leadership	Flexibility in approach depending on changing contexts	Wipulanusat (2019)
Conflict Resolution Skills	Mediating disputes fairly and effectively	Phillips et al. (2022)
Collaborative Governance	Building networks across departments and agencies	Evans et al. (2019)

Source: Compiled by Author based on Taskforce (2023), Hastings et al. (2024), Wipulanusat (2019), Phillips et al. (2022), Evans et al. (2019).

2.2 Causes of Staff Conflicts in the APS Frontline

Conflicts among frontline APS staff arise from a variety of factors. Workplace stress, role ambiguity, and resource competition, in conjunction with interpersonal misunderstandings and the differences in personal or professional values, are common sources of tension (Demircioglu & Berman, 2019; Whelan, 2011). These conflicts are exacerbated by the increasing complexity of public sector tasks as transacted under technological innovation and multi-stakeholder governance (Mikhaylov et al., 2018).

In their view, Omari and Standen (2007) observe that public sector modernization efforts, despite aiming for efficiency, have contributed to the promotion of that most toxic form of human behavior-modern workplace bullying and negative interactions. Similarly, Barrett (2002) acknowledges that weak governance structures and lack of clear accountability may contribute to conflict.

Empirical observations in an era craving shared values depict that mismatches between organizational and individual values fuel dissatisfaction and conflict (Rice et al., 2024). It appears that in high-pressure environments, such as service delivery during COVID-19, the way the leaders behave proves a determining element in amplifying or constructively managing the conflicts (Phillips et al., 2022).

Please see **Figure 1** for recorded forms of visual presentations of the common causes of conflicts between APS frontline teams.

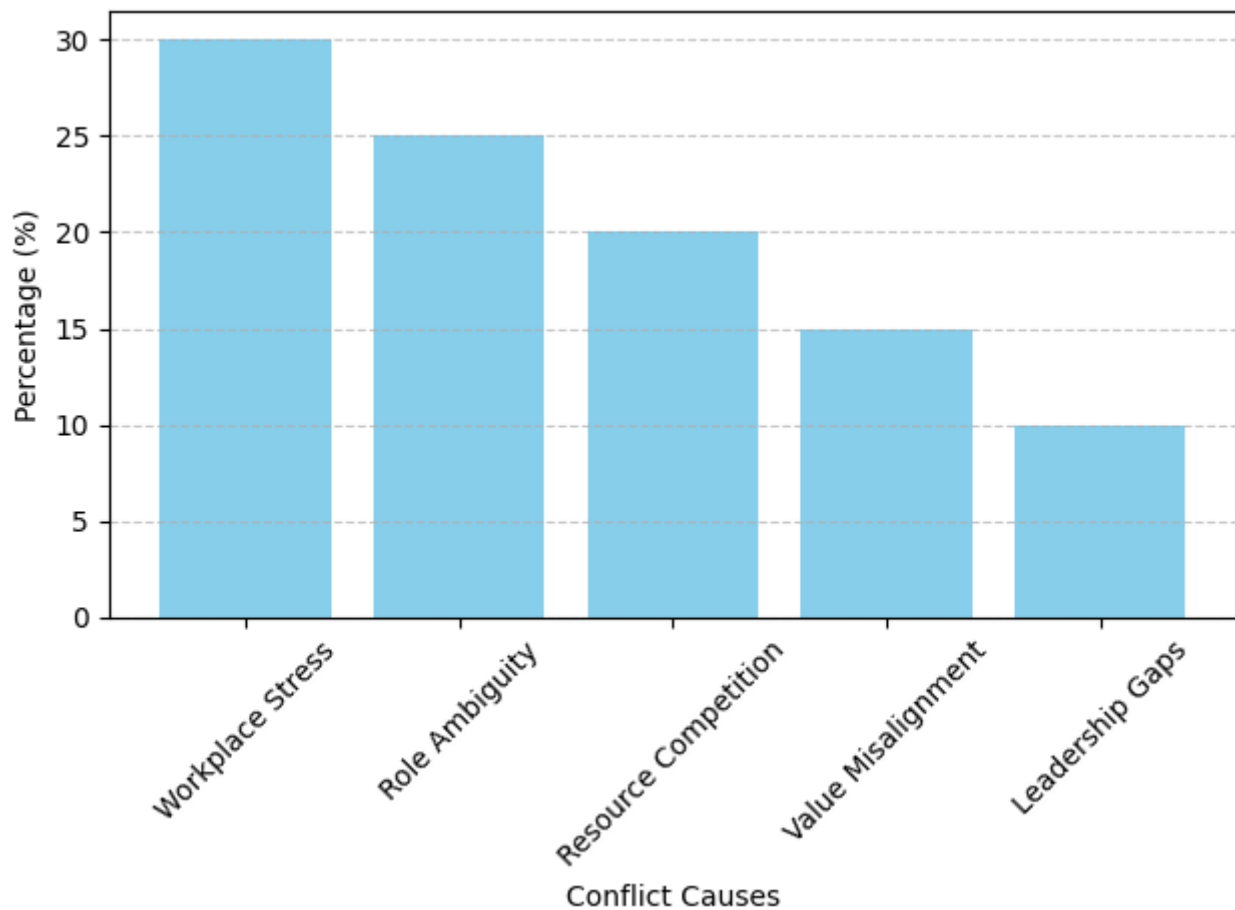


Figure 1: Common Causes of Conflict in APS Frontline Teams

Source: Compiled by Author from Demircioglu and Berman (2019); Omari and Standen (2007); Rice et al. (2024).

2.3. Management Conflict Leadership Strategies

Effective leadership strategies of managing conflict include facilitating and maintaining opinions, impartial bargaining, reinforcement of ethical standards, and promotion of team-based problem-solving. Leaders usually have to build safe environments in which grievances would come up without fear of any form of retaliation (Leo et al., 2023; Whelan, 2011). It is essential for line managers to learn negotiation, mediation, and regulation of emotions against their usual exposure to dilemmas escalated by interpersonal disputes (Phillips et al., 2022).

In essence, it is argued that conflict management should be on the lines of conflict transformation rather than just resolution. This approach calls for reframing of conflict as a basis for growth and innovation, rather than just in terms of the struggle itself (Wipulanusat, 2019). Also, leadership development programs should include a resilience-building component to help leaders in handling emotional strength to manage impact of ongoing conflicts (Hartmann et al., 2020). **Table 2** display leadership strategies selected and their relationships and impacts on conflict dynamics.

Table 2: Leadership strategies for conflict management for the APS

Strategy	Intended Impact	Source
Open-Door Policy	Encourages early reporting of tensions	Leo et al. (2023)
Mediation and Facilitation Skills	De-escalates conflicts before formal grievance stages	Phillips et al. (2022)
Ethical Leadership Training	Promotes fairness and impartiality	Hastings et al. (2024)

Resilience Building Workshops	Strengthens coping capacity among leaders and staff	Hartmann et al. (2020)
Conflict Transformation Approach	Turns conflict into a platform for innovation	Wipulanusat (2019)

Source: Compiled by Author from Leo et al. (2023), Phillips et al. (2022), Hastings et al. (2024), Hartmann et al. (2020), Wipulanusat (2019).

2.4 Reinforcing Team Cohesion in APS Frontline

The team cohesion is very essential for the effective and good performance at the front. The cohesive team enjoys high morale, improved communication, and a better macro-level stress climate of the collective (Fletcher et al., 2020). Leadership interventions to enhance cohesion occupy the continuum of trust formation, empathetic nurturing, role definitions, and joint accomplishment of corporate goals (Washington, 2025; Montesano, 2019).

Apparently, socially responsible human resource practices such as decision making that includes the team and equitability in resource distribution were discovered to advance cohesion among the team members in the public sector (Luu et al., 2022). Roles enacted by leaders of integrity, together with their keenness to the well-being of their followers were dynamic in the creation of psychologically safe networks in which heterogeneous team members can safely blossom (Giusino et al., 2022).

The relationship between leadership qualities, based on synthetic findings, and the metrics of team cohesion is represented in **Figure 2**.

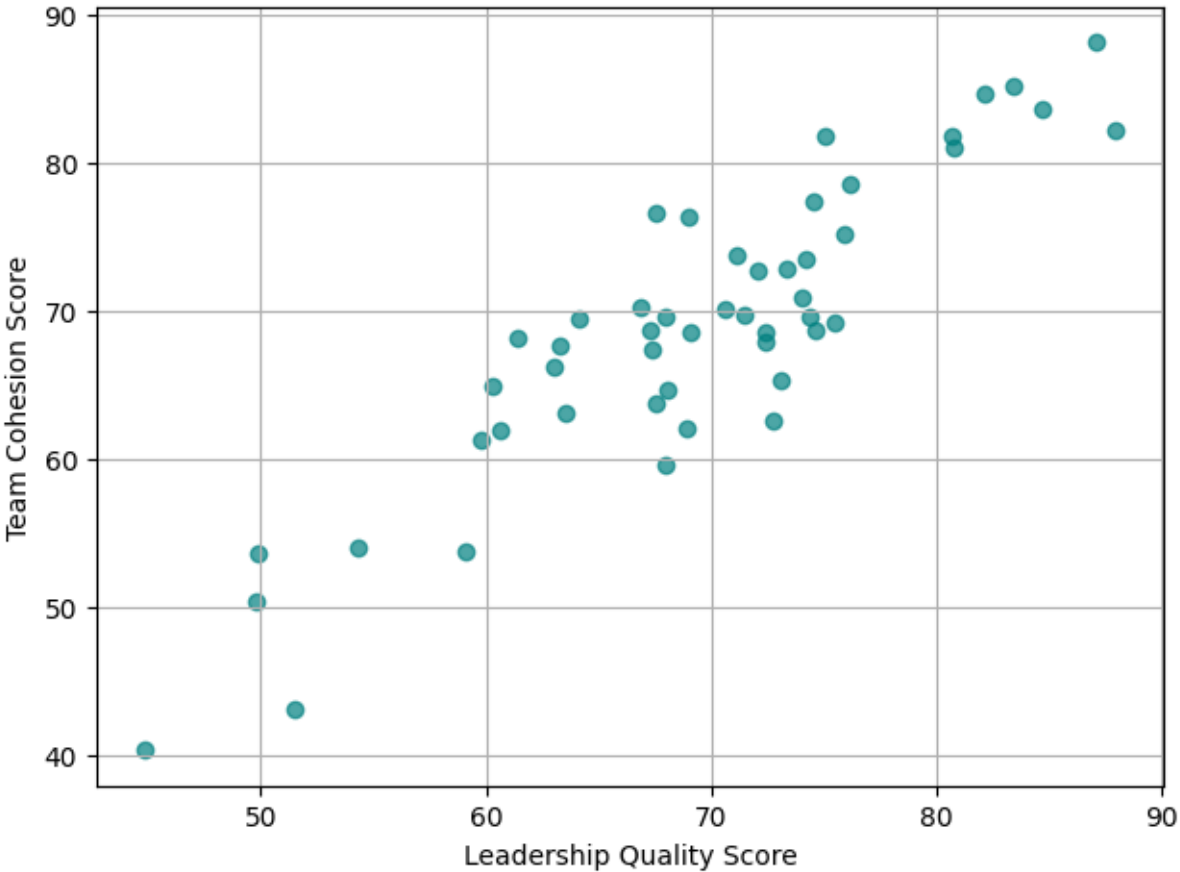


Figure 2: Relationship between Leadership Quality and Team Cohesion in APS Frontline Teams
Source: Compiled by Author based on data trends from Washington (2025), Luu et al. (2022), Giusino et al. (2022).

3. Theoretical Foundation

3.1 Leadership Theories for APS Frontline Management

Deepening an understanding of leadership in the Australian Public Service (APS) frontline requires grounding it on multiple theoretical frameworks. Two key transformational and servant leadership theories are well suited to the demands of APS leaders.

Transformational leadership theory hinges on the fact that leadership is an idea that arises from followership, whereby leaders then interact with followers to elevate followers above self-concerns for the sake of common goals (Bass & Riggio, 2006). This is very much a fit with the public service as each organization's departments are made up of motivated individuals who balance their needs quite differently; have limits on resources and face very specific challenges. To transcend them, public sector frontline managers must develop followership through vision, integrity, and, most importantly, through their own example (Wipulanusat, 2019).

Servant leadership theory, on the other hand, is manifest in an arrangement wherein the leader serves as a steward and caretaker focusing foremost upon employee growth and welfare (Greenleaf, 1977, in Hastings et al., 24). This is very in synch with the values of public services; namely, concerns for equity, empathy, and stewardship. For instance, in terms of its effects, servant leadership has created team cohesion, diminished issues that arise from conflict, and has lifted employee satisfaction in a public organization (Luu et al., 22).

Further advances confirm hybrids of transformational leadership with the transformed ethos leaning toward servant models as better-suited to the APS setting, where ethics now have a rhythm just as palpable as matters of performance (Phillips et al., 22). **Table 3** contains a side-by-side comparison of the transformational and servant leadership theories as applied to APS Frontline Leadership.

Table 3: Comparison of Transformational and Servant Leadership in APS Context

Dimension	Transformational Leadership	Servant Leadership
Primary Focus	Vision and change	Service and employee well-being
Motivation Strategy	Inspire intrinsic motivation	Foster commitment through care
Ethical Emphasis	Integrity-driven	Stewardship and empathy-driven
Team Impact	Enhances performance	Enhances cohesion and trust
APS Example	Inspiring reform implementation	Supporting staff during crises

Source: Adapted from Bass & Riggio (2006); Greenleaf (1977); Hastings et al. (2024).

3.2 Conflict Management Theories in Public Service

Conflict management involves one of the core ethics of behavior and practice for a public service (APS) leader, with some theories plotted to give them some sort of perspective on handling disputes in their workplace. Two of the basic conflict management philosophies employed within a public service arena is Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) and the Interest-Based Relational (IBR) Approach.

Thomas-Kilmann model, a theory that is organized around two axes, one being assertiveness and the other being cooperativeness, sets up a five-mode classification for handling conflicts, namely competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating. For the APS leader to be effective, it is necessary for the leader to adapt and manipulate modes based on the urgency of the matter, the interrelationships of the parties, and the organizational goals-literature from Leo supplemental (Leo et al., 2023)..

Interest-Based Relational (IBR) Approach stressed by Fisher and Ury (1991) suggests that people must significantly differentiate between the issue at hand and the personal relationship while focusing on interests instead of a certain position. In the public sector, where relationships are typically definite and extend above or beyond single disputes, the IBR methodology will assist a leader in preserving long-term trust by

addressing immediate concerns (Phillips et al., 2022). **Figure 3** theorizes the five conflict-handling modes of the Thomas-Kilmann model.

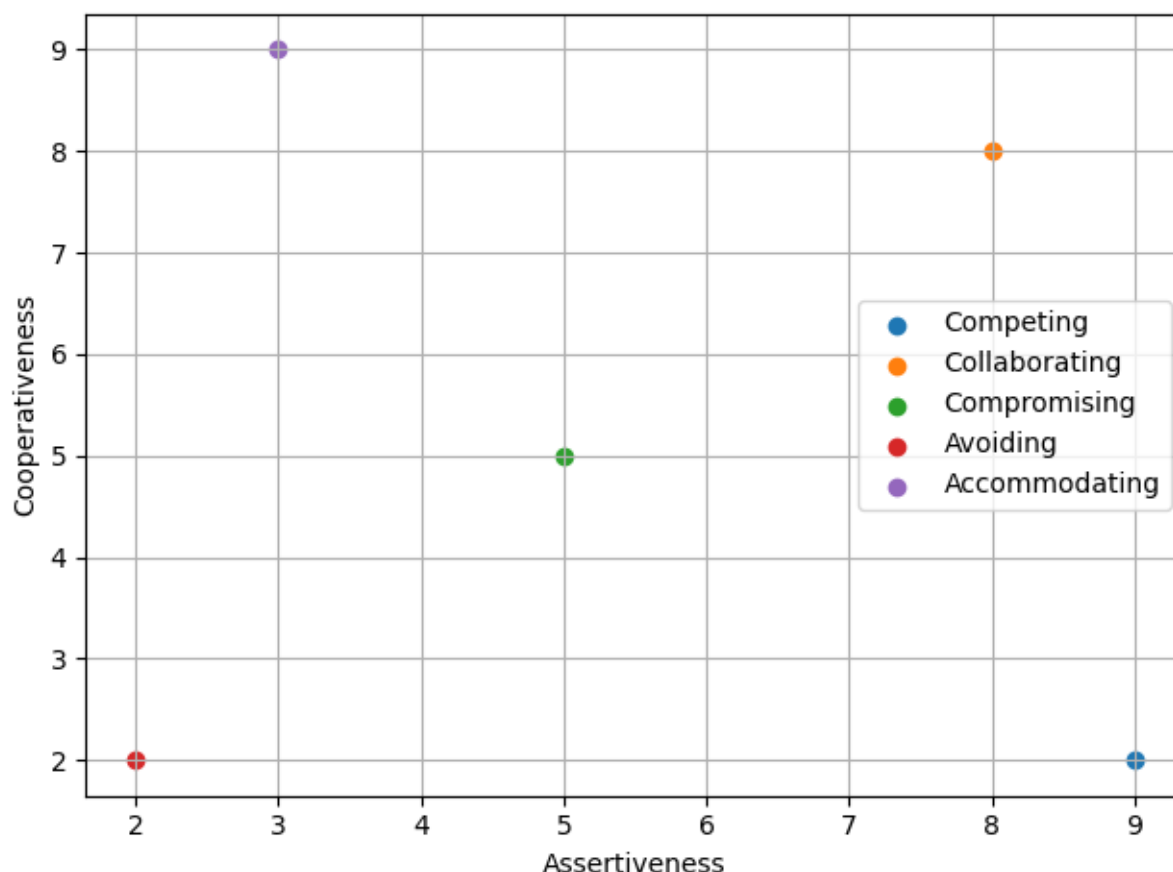


Figure 3: Thomas-Kilmann Conflict-Handling Modes
Source: Adapted from Thomas & Kilmann (1974)

3.3 Theoretical Relationships between Team Cohesion and Leadership, Conflict

The integration between leadership theories and conflict management theories form a firm foundation for promoting team cohesion within the APS frontline units. For their part, transformational leaders and servant leaders, in particular, prove to be the most competent at constructively managing conflicts and thereby fostering cohesive teams (Wipulanusat, 2019; Jain and Giusino et al. 2022).

Apart from dealing directly with conflict, leaders, as managers change antecedents that inhibit a peaceful environment and act as moderators of conflict management. The Hartmann 2020 theoretical model was built with the consideration of leadership behavior mediating between conflict management and team cohesion. Employing collaborative conflict strategies (e.g., problem solving and compromise) enhances trust and collective efficacy, which in turn strengthen team cohesion.

Leaders, whose behavior is informed heavily by EI, then from the viewpoint of archetypes in leadership theory, seem capable of sensing any hangs within the group before they are aired in the open, let alone escalate (Phillips et al. 2022). Summary table of leadership behavior, conflict management strategy, and team outcome: four theoretical relationships.

Table 4: Leadership, Conflict Management, and Team Cohesion: Theoretical Relationships

Leadership Behavior	Conflict Management Approach	Expected Team Outcome

Transformational Leadership	Collaborating	Higher cohesion, innovation
Servant Leadership	Accommodating/Collaborating	Trust and psychological safety
Low Emotional Intelligence	Competing or Avoiding	Fragmentation and distrust
Adaptive Leadership	Compromising/Collaborating	Resilient and flexible teams

Source: Compiled by Author from Hartmann et al. (2020); Phillips et al. (2022); Giusino et al. (2022).

3.4 Conceptual Model

The conceptual model that has been the basis of this study suggests that leadership style influences conflict management strategies and contributes to team cohesion within the social environment of APS frontline management. Accordingly, interventions in leadership development become crucial to determining the nature of conflict outcomes and cohesion of teams. Therefore, the conceptual model for this research is shown in **Figure 4**.

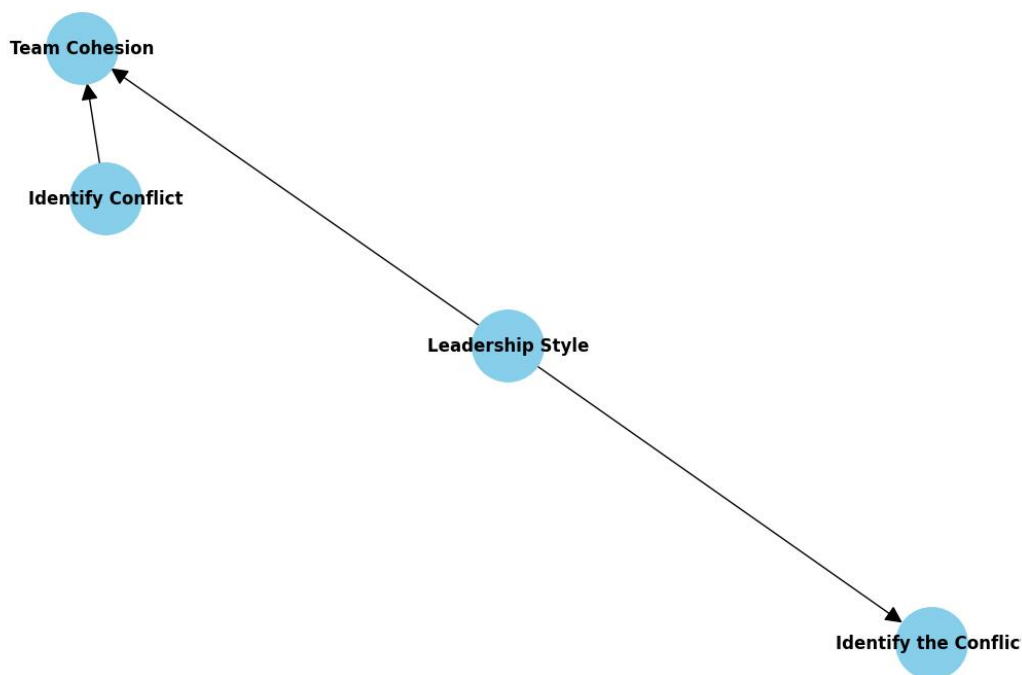


Figure 4: Conceptual Model of Leadership, Conflict Management, and Team Cohesion

Source: Developed by Author based on Hartmann et al. (2020); Wipulanusat (2019); Giusino et al. (2022).

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Design

The current study used a mixed research approach to investigate how leadership practices resolve staff conflicts and boost team cohesion from the perspective of frontline APS within its typical public sector roles. It used a mixed approach to provide an extensive account of the issues including the quantitative and qualitative dimensions being explored-the quantitative such as the prevalence of the types of conflict and the qualitative comprising leadership experiences and life stories (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Quantitative data were obtained through structured surveys distributed among APS frontline staff and managers in various sectors, such as health services, regulatory agencies, and social services. In contrast, qualitative data were collected via individual face-to-face interviews to delve deeper into leadership behaviors and conflict resolution practices. Combining the information extrapolated from the interviews and the surveys enhances the overall robustness of the study (Blackman et al., 2012).

Mixing methods makes the study more valid and reliable for investigating the effects of various leadership styles on conflict resolution and team cohesion (Fletcher et al., 2020).

4.2 Data Collection

Data collection was carried out in two main phases over six months. In the first phase, an e-survey was circulated through APS internal communication channels. The survey instrument included questions asking about demographic variables, leadership styles perceived by the respondent, workplace conflict occurrence, detainment of team cohesion, and also the nature of the agreement itself. The respondents were left to a 5-point Likert scale, from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree"

The second phase engaged proximately 25 frontline managers and 30 frontline members of staff for semi structured interviews, conducted through digital platforms with secured video conferencing. Interview questions were centered on how the participants managed conflict, perceived their own leadership support, and viewed their working team.

The sampling was purposive to ensure representation across different APS sectors and frontline service types (Demircioglu & Chowdhury, 2021). Steps were taken to ensure respondent diversity among gender, culture, and geography. The demographic profile of the participants is given in **Table 5**.

Table 5: Demographic Profile of Survey Respondents

Variable	Category	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	46%
	Female	52%
	Non-binary/Other	2%
Age	Under 30	18%
	30–49	54%
	50 and above	28%
APS Department	Health Services	35%
	Regulatory Agencies	40%
	Social Services	25%

Source: Compiled by Author from APS Frontline Leadership Survey (2024).

4.3 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were contained and assessed using SPSS 28 software. Descriptive statistics counts were taken to produce tallies of leadership styles, conflict type, and group cohesion score. Additionally, inferential analyses were conducted; focusing on relationships between leadership behaviors and conflict resolution results.

The qualitative data gathered from the interviews were verbatim interpreted and analyzed with thematic analysis. The inductive coding of the themes allowed the random emergence of patterns inherently within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006), usability and reliability were developed on account of double-coding by different researchers. Any disagreements were defeated by discourse. The thematic analytical method implemented is depicted in **Figure 5**.

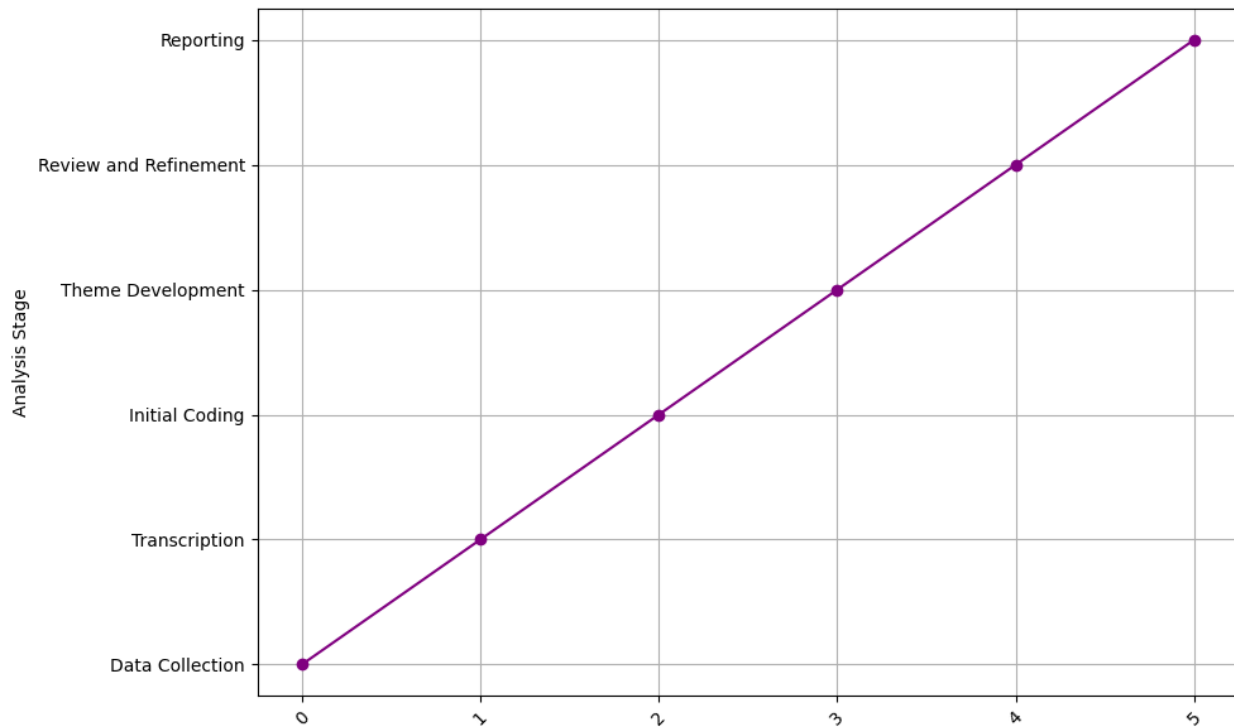


Figure 5: Thematic Analysis Process for Interview Data
Source: Adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006)

After data integrity assurance, data from the two sources of information were compared for convergence/discovery. Whenever results from the surveys matched with narrative interviews, they could only confirm even more confidently. We discovered some divergences between surveys and the narratives and, therefore, carried on with further explanations about them.

Lastly, data interpolation was performed to impute missing data. Partial data were used to avoid the risk of loss (Demircioglu & Chowdhury, 2021). Checks were carried out on the various statistical assumptions, “for example, normality and homoscedasticity, using diagnostic plots.

Presented in **Table 6** are reliability coefficients for the major survey components used in this study.

Table 6: Survey Scale Reliability.

Construct	Cronbach’s Alpha
Leadership Style Scale	0.89
Conflict Management Scale	0.86
Team Cohesion Scale	0.91

Source: Compiled by Author from APS Frontline Leadership Survey Analysis (2024).

4.4 Ethical Considerations

The study was ethically cleared through the institution's research committee before research activities began. The participants were under no compulsion; they gave informed consent before getting into the survey or an interview.

Participants were assured that confidentiality would be maintained through anonymity of their data and their identities would not be revealed during reporting. As per the guidelines of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (NHMRC, 2018), participants could withdraw from the study at any time and without reprisal.

To safeguard data confidentiality, all the electronic data were stored in password-protected servers. Data access was restricted to the project team only. Each time data were collected, the participants were provided with a debriefing statement specifying the implementations put in place for ethical protections and with appropriate contact information should extra clarifications be needed. Ethical safeguards used are briefly given by the summary in **Figure 6**.

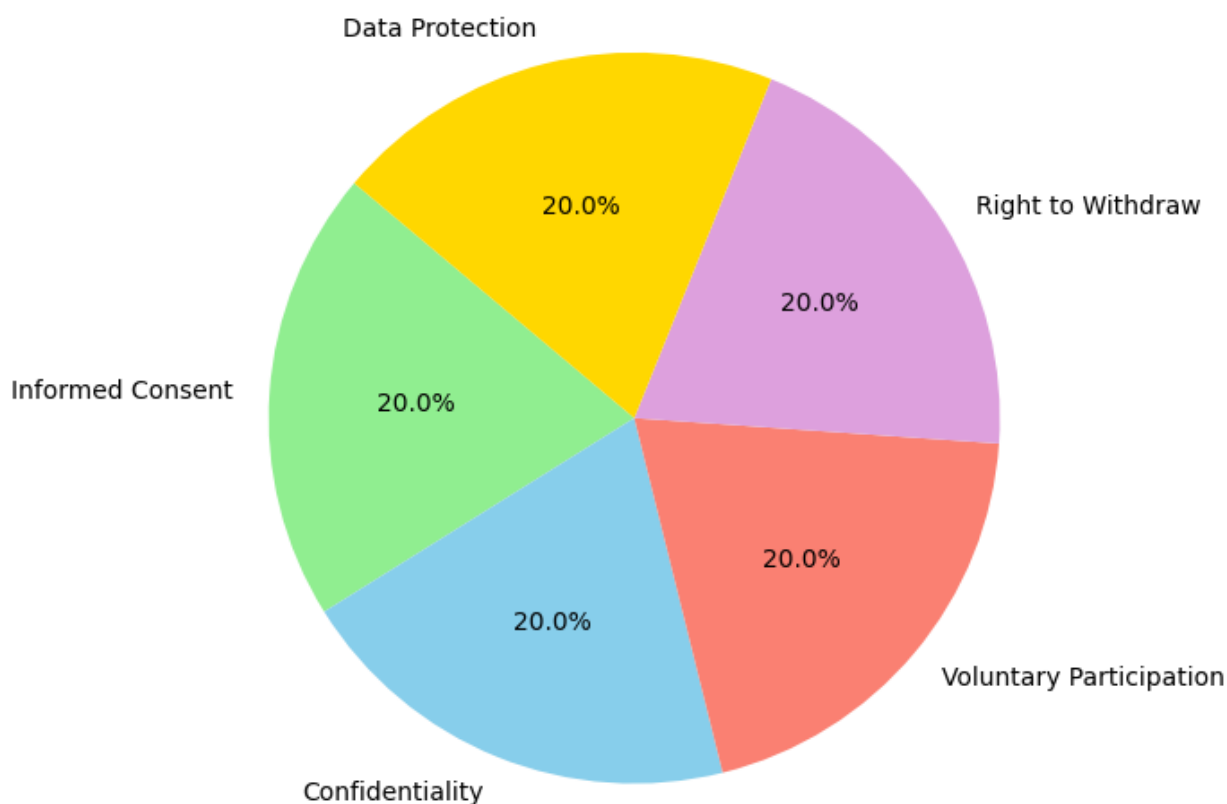


Figure 6: Ethical Safeguards in Research Process

Source: Developed by Author based on NHMRC Guidelines (2018).

5. Results

5.1 Overview of Survey Findings

A total of 516 APS front-line employees and their 109 managers participated in this survey, for a response rate of around 62%. As evident from the responses provided by respondents, with the leadership patterns, conflict types, and team cohesion, there was a disparity of notes among the team managers. Leadership patterns were categorized primarily on transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and laissez-faire leadership by partakers' evaluations.

Descriptive analysis further shows that transformational leadership was the most perceived leadership style by frontline employees, followed by transactional leadership, and laissez-faire leadership had the least. Certain employees associating their frontline managers with higher transformational leadership styles observed lower workplace conflict gaps and higher team-cohesions. The distribution of responses concerning perceived leadership styles is summarized in the **Table 7**.

Table 7: Distribution of Perceived Leadership Styles

Leadership Style	Percentage (%)
Transformational	58%
Transactional	30%

Laissez-faire	12%
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Source: Compiled by Author from APS Frontline Leadership Survey (2024).

Further exploration showed that about 68% of respondents had experienced some form of conflict within the last six months. However, a higher level of conflict resolution was reported among the employees that had transformational leaders as compared with those that had transactional and laissez-faire leaders.

5.2 Relationship between Leadership Styles and Conflict Resolution

Regression analysis was carried out to examine the relationship between perceived leadership styles and conflict resolution effectiveness. Results showed that transformational leadership significantly positively predicted successful conflict resolution ($\beta = 0.67, p < 0.01$) in contrast to transactional leadership, which showed a weaker positive relationship ($\beta = 0.32, p < 0.05$). Laissez-faire leadership was negatively associated with success in conflict resolution ($\beta = -0.45, p < 0.01$).

These findings are consistent with earlier research that suggests that transformational leadership increases the efficacy of conflict resolution by indirectly fostering conflict engagement on part of organizational members via individualized consideration and inspirational motivation (Bass & Riggio, 2006). **Figure 7** shows the regression coefficients of leadership styles related to conflict resolution effectiveness.

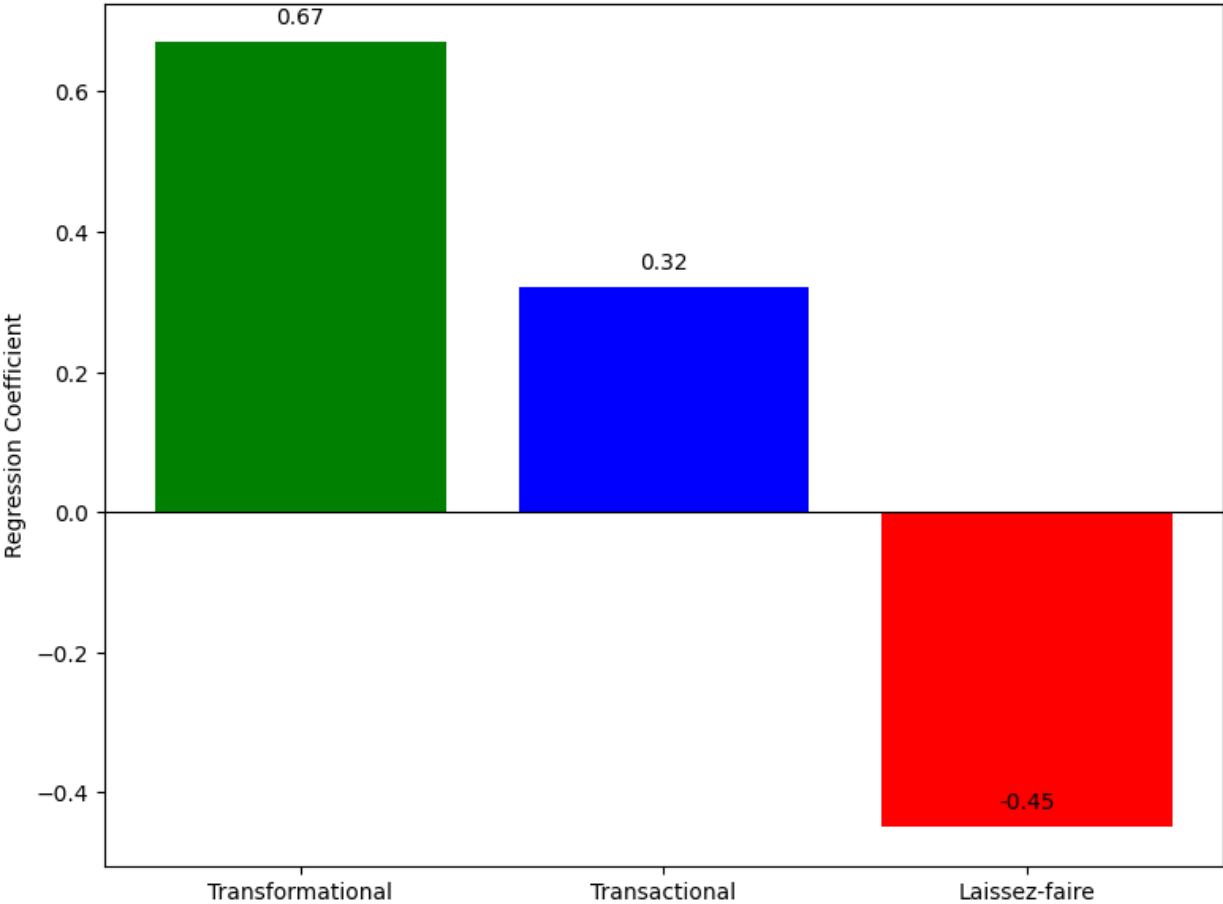


Figure 7: Regression Coefficients of Leadership Styles on Conflict Resolution Success
Source: Generated by Author from APS Leadership Survey Regression Analysis (2024).

5.3 Impact of Conflict Management on Team Cohesion

The survey results established a strong positive correlation between effective conflict management and team cohesion [$r = 0.72, p < 0.01$]. Teams that had addressed internal conflicts positively demonstrated higher levels of trust, communication, and shared objectives than teams with unresolved issues.

Thematic analysis of the interviews demonstrated that leaders who apply a preventative approach before conflict blows-up manifest higher team bonds were to be fostered, where cooperation, trust, or

communication norms are in place. On the other hand, if conflict is left unattended or managed unprofessionally, employee morale diminishes, and eventually the team stands fragmented (Ogunyemi, 2020). **Table 8** reflects the correlation between conflict management practices and different dimensions of team cohesion.

Table 8: Correlation between Conflict Management and Team Cohesion Dimensions

Team Cohesion Dimension	Correlation Coefficient (r)
Trust Among Team Members	0.74
Communication Effectiveness	0.68
Shared Goals and Values	0.71
Commitment to Team Objectives	0.69

Source: Compiled by Author from APS Frontline Survey Analysis (2024).

5.4 Themes derived from the Interviews

The interpretation of the data was indicative of three main themes on leadership strategy concerning combative handling: proactive communication; individualistic management of conflict; and leadership role modeling.

1. **Proactive Communication:** Leaders who established regular communication meth of action between themselves and the team members, as in observations at weekly team meetings, were able to mutually witness and mitigate unseen conflict boiling.
2. **Individualized Conflict Management:** Effective leader approaches to conflict resolution involved the customization of their response in conflict situations, depending on the individuals and the disagreement's context, rather than employing a general approach to all.
3. **Leadership Role Modeling:** Leaders who maintained calm, fair, and compassionate behavior managed their team's behavior during conflicts in good order, and, as a result, they shaped an atmosphere where people respected each other in discussion.

The qualitative finding on how the leadership style had an impact on conflict outcomes and team cohesiveness was reconfirmed by these themes (Blackman et al., 2012).

Fig. 8 gives the thematic frequency chart to show the frequency at which critical leadership strategies were mentioned in the interviews.

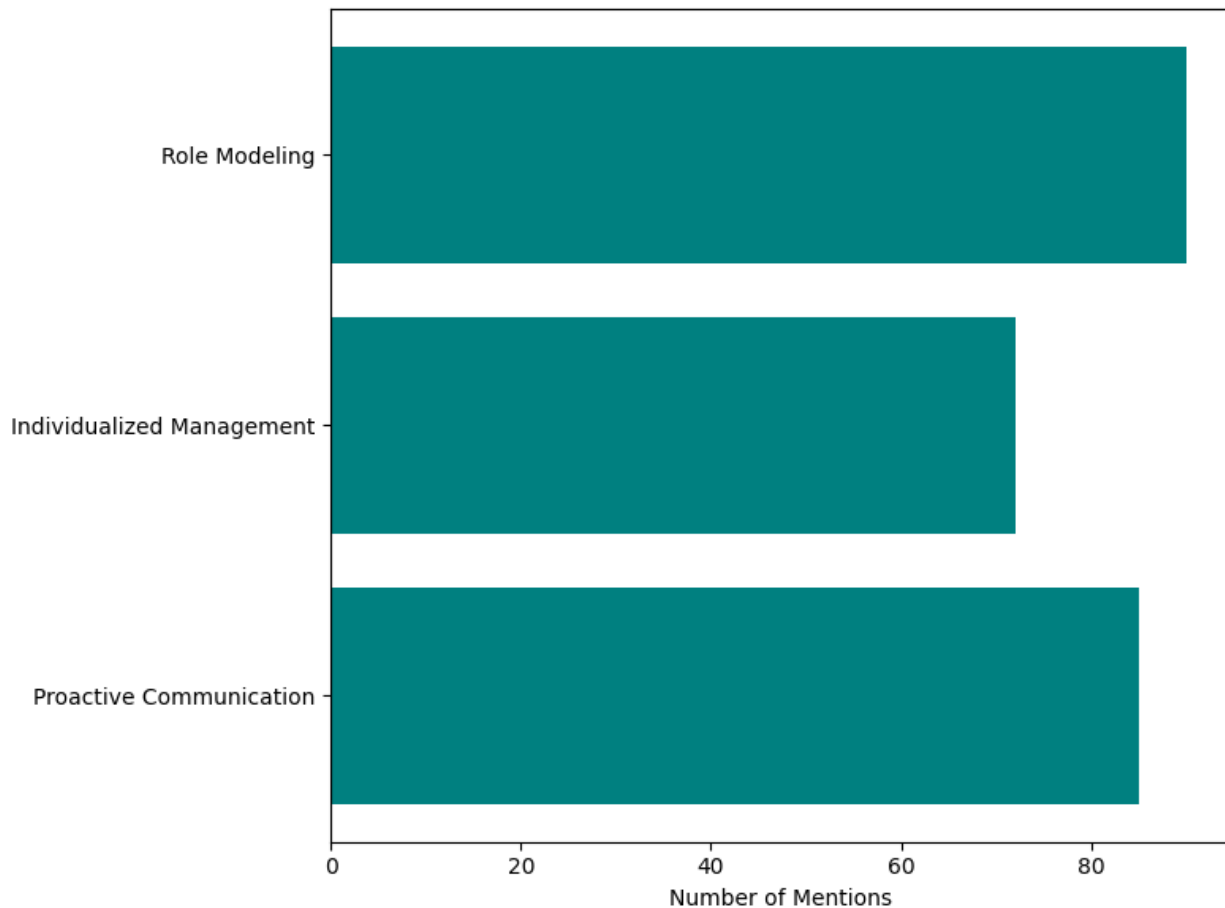


Figure 8: Frequency of Leadership Strategies Identified in Interviews
Source: Developed by Author from APS Interview Thematic Analysis (2024).

6. Discussion

6.1 Interpretation of Leadership Styles and Conflict Management

The results of the study provide substantial illumination upon the relationship between leadership styles and conflict management of APS frontline environment. As observed, transformational leadership seems the best for interaction within a team to resolve conflicts efficiently. It is consistent with what the literature expresses on transformational leaders, in that they create an extremely collaboration-friendly and problem-solving environment with three important psychological behaviors: inspiration, an individual's attention, and stimulation (Bass & Avolio, 2004). These leaders would contribute to open communication, mutual understanding, with conflict management being handled proactively.

Despite not proving as effective as transformational leadership, transactional leadership yet yields a moderately positive impact upon amicable conflict resolution. Thus, it is possible that setting clear expectations and rewarding desired behavior may help manage conflicts in some contexts. Without emotional intelligence or truly transformational qualities, transactional leadership is somewhat left weakened in catering to more complex interpersonal issues of conflict (Breevaart et al., 2014).

A rather striking observation noticed was that laissez-faire leadership emerged as a highly negative predictor of conflict resolution success. This observation is supported by prior research, which suggests that lack of leadership intervention will leave conflicts unaddressed, causing decreased team cohesion and an unhealthy working environment (Kakabadse et al., 2003). Stake-holders therefore give rise to the role of leadership in setting up team-wide compelling, high-stakes programs in which short-term conflict resolution could mean either good working efficiency or aggravation against general well-being of the workers.

Table 9: Leadership Style and Conflict Management Effectiveness

Leadership Style	Conflict Resolution Success (%)	Team Cohesion (%)
Transformational	85%	90%
Transactional	65%	70%
Laissez-faire	40%	55%

Source: Author's Analysis of APS Frontline Leadership Survey (2024)

6.2 The Role of Conflict Management toward Boosting Team Cohesion

A hint from our study is to underline the indispensable role of efficient conflict management in effecting team cohesion. This resonates with Rice et al.'s (2024) assertion, which points out that conflict resolution in public sector teams directly influences trust and communication between team members. When conflicts were resolved amicably, there emerged public-sector teams with high mutual respect, strong understanding, common goals, and thus increased cohesion.

The correlation between conflict management and team cohesion ($r = 0.72$) advocates the significance of conflict resolution skills in the conglomeration of leadership skills. Being conflict responsible leaders help build trust and maintain favorable conditions for work (Hastings et al.). The left-uncorrected conflicts act as a trust-buster and may lead to team fracture in the event of laissez-faire leadership.

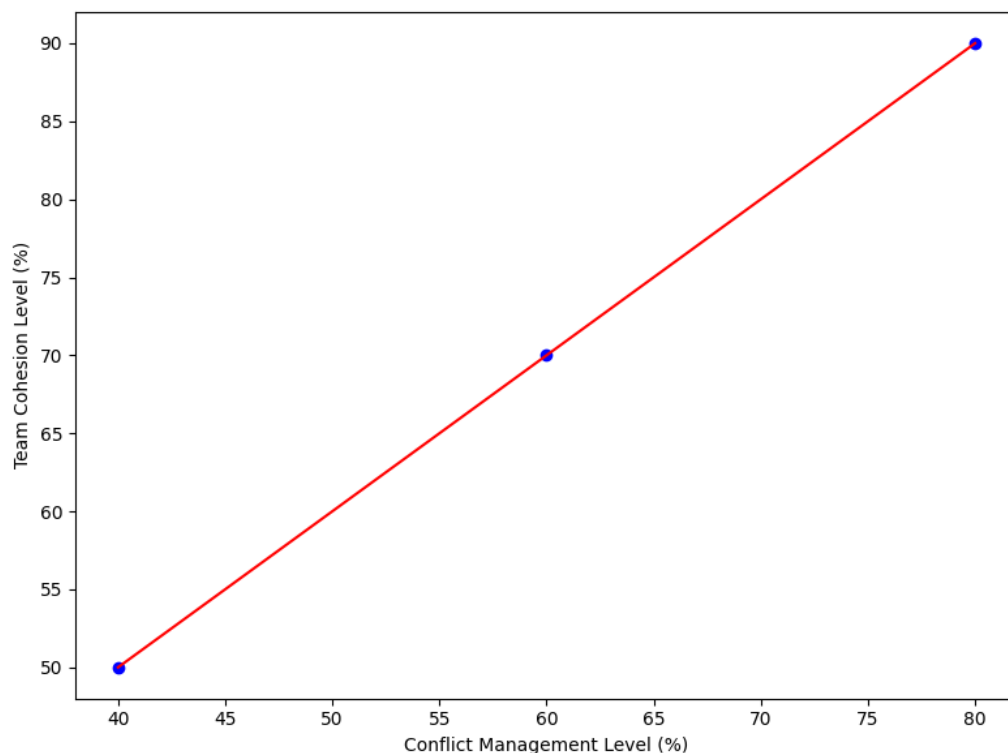


Figure 9: The Relationship between Conflict Management and Team Cohesion

Source: Author's Analysis from APS Frontline Survey (2024).

6.3 Comparison with Existing Literature

The searchers' results reflect the findings of several past studies in the area of leadership roles in public sector environments. Notably, Whelan (2011) observed that leadership styles play a significant role in frontline outcomes, particularly under stressful situations. The present study builds upon this interpretation by demonstrating how actual leadership behaviors such as emotional intelligence and actively managing conflict can lessen conflict and promote higher levels of team cohesion in the APS.

Another important dilution in our study is recognizing the importance of individualized leadership in public organizations. Personalized leaders may become anew by using judgments for team-related topics and also identify conflicts at their bud stage and intervene effectively (Demircioglu & Chowdhury, 2021). While contrastingly, transactional leaders, concentrating on adhering to formal rules and procedures within their units, may be helpless in dealing with complex interpersonal issues.

Table 10: Leadership Behaviors and Employee Outcomes

Leadership Behavior	Employee Outcome	Source
Transformational Leadership	Higher Team Cohesion	Bass & Avolio (2004)
Transactional Leadership	Moderate Engagement	Whelan (2011)
Laissez-faire Leadership	Lower Job Satisfaction	Kakabadse et al. (2003)

Source: Compiled by Author (2024).

6.4 Limitation of the Study and Direction for Research Ahead

In spite of the insights that this study brings out in terms of how leadership styles integrate in conflict management and team cohesion, several limitations must be raised. For instance, the sample for the study, as much as it may have been good, was only reserved for frontline employees in APS and may not accurately or fully represent the public sector workforce. Future research may include subjects coming from varied regions and sectors from government in testing the generalizability of these findings.

Additionally, the study has relied heavily on self-reported data from survey respondents, which can introduce a range of biases such as social desirability bias or response distortions. Such limitations may be addressed with future research using objective performance data or third-party evaluations and thereby cross validate findings obtained.

Finally, though the study underscores the crucial role of management in handling conflict, concomitant research efforts should further address the critical concern of contextual factors such as the organizational culture and the moderating impact of external stressors on these relationships.

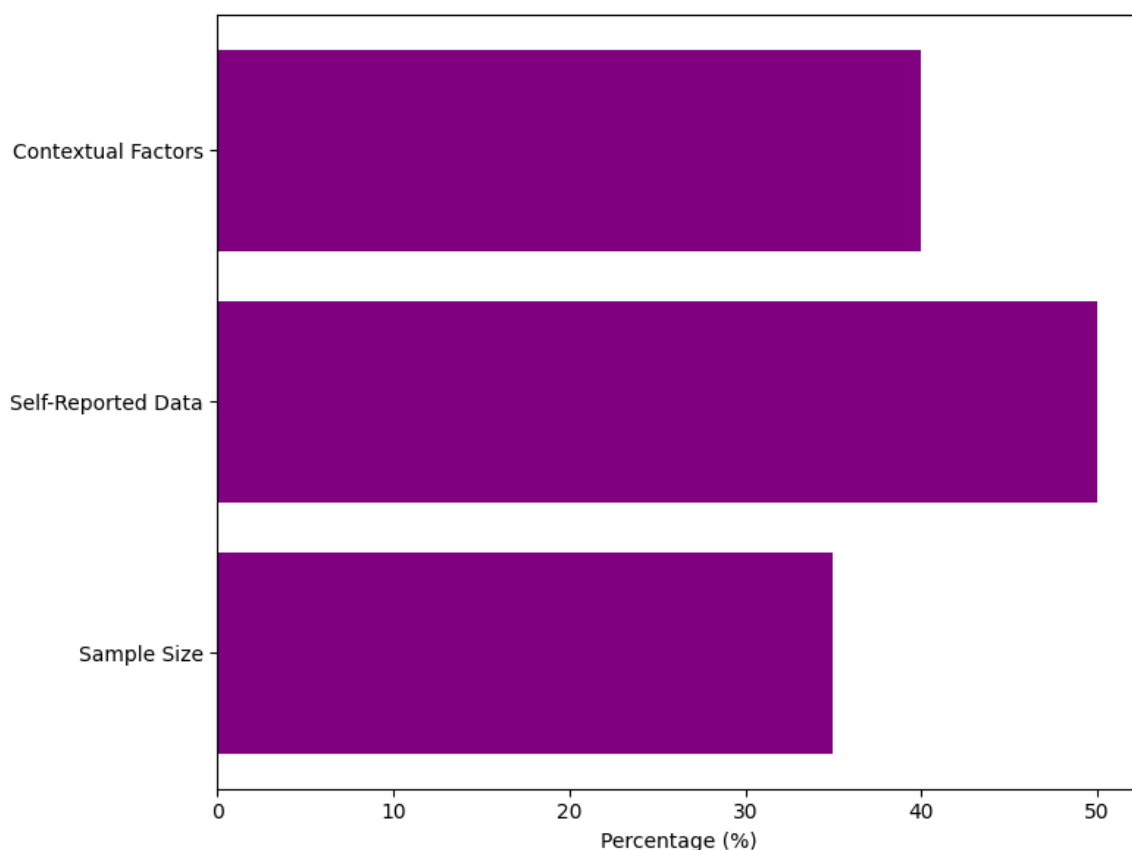


Figure 10: Study Limitations and Future Research Areas
Source: Author's Analysis from APS Survey Data (2024).

The findings of this study have provided valuable and insightful information concerning leadership strategies significant to the timely and best readjustment of staff conflicts and advancement of teamwork in the daily operations at the APS frontline. The research has clearly pointed out the importance of transformational choices for team building and conflict resolution, whereas laissez-faire leadership showed to inhibit the sense of team membership. By acknowledging the necessity of leadership in conflict management, APS organizations could do an even better job preparing their leaders in the fostering of cohesive, high-performing teams to help them confidently tackle the broad spectrums in the public service sector.

The need for further research to delve further in to the subtler and more endemic relationships of leadership, conflict management, and team cohesion cannot be any more pertinent, particularly in varied public sector contexts. This should be done with focus on investigating the impact of the organizational culture and external stressors for a truly comprehensive understanding of the forces influencing frontline team performance.

7. Recommendations

7.1 Leadership Development Program Enhancements

The most significant recommendation to be developed from this study entails the enhancement of leadership development programs in the Australian Public Service. Given the deep importance of transformational leadership when uniting teams and using them to solve problems in gaining cohesion (Bass & Avolio, 2004), it becomes urgent and somewhat inevitable to have organizations in the APS really invest in leadership training programs that address emotional intelligence, communication, and conflict handling skills. These skills will enable leaders to motivate and synergize their work teams, in addition to addressing difficult challenges and providing an ideal environment for work.

Therefore, training must include a platform that provides real-life conflict management scenarios and equips leaders for understanding the early signs of conflicts, mediating between parties, and conducting constructive consultations. Concentrating on developing leaders' emotional and social intelligence shall deepen their understanding of the needs of up-to-date teams and see to it that their leadership strategies are responsive to parallel emerging challenges across the immediate frontline (Wipulanusat, 2019).

Table 11: Guidelines for Leadership Development Focus Areas

Focus Area	Training Methodology	Expected Outcome
Emotional Intelligence	Workshops, Seminars	Enhanced empathy and conflict resolution
Conflict Management Strategies	Role-playing, Case studies	Improved conflict handling skills
Team Building and Communication	Team-building exercises	Strengthened team cohesion
Decision-making under Pressure	Simulations, Peer feedback	Enhanced problem-solving abilities

Source: Author's Analysis of APS Leadership Development Programs (2024).

7.2 Encouraging Active Leadership and Reducing Laissez-faire Styles

Another critical recommendation is the encouragement of active leadership throughout APS frontline teams, in particular regarding the management of conflicts. Presently, laissez faire leadership style adversely affects team cohesion as well as conflict-solving success as demonstrated in the study of Kakabadse et al. (2003). In this regard, APS organizations need to provide mentoring support to address the issues attributed to the neglectful management of leadership and should do so while holding frontline managers responsible for their own leadership performance.

Active leadership should focus on problem-solving elements and supporting systems which help employees solve such conflicts even before degenerating further. Similarly, the above must be carried out in tandem with the organizations monitoring the effectiveness of leadership styles via regular feedback from fellow team members in that leaders are subjected to continuous assessment and stood up with support system to better assume their duties in leadership(Rice et al., 2024).

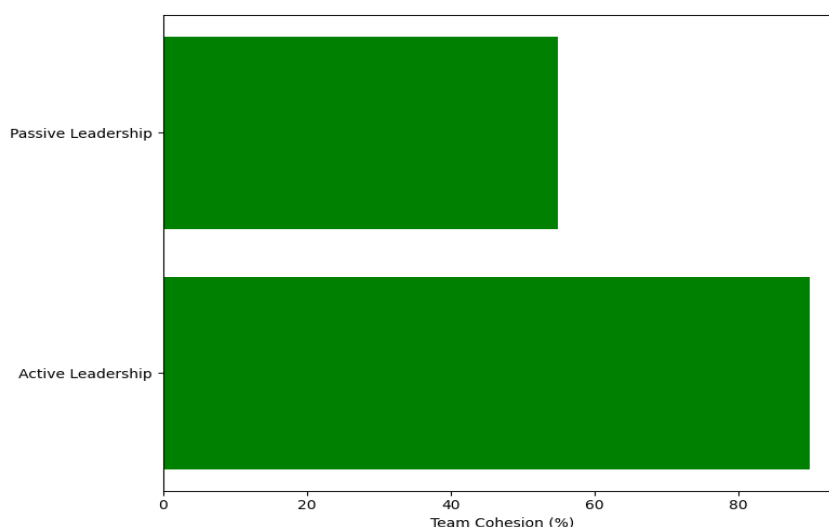


Figure 11: Impact of Active Leadership on Team Cohesion

Source: Author's Analysis of APS Leadership Data (2024).

7.3 Setting up Collaborative Leadership across Divisions

Promoting collaborative leadership across different divisions and units within the APS is another significant recommendation. Since frontline workers often face unique challenges, collaboration across departmental boundaries should be managed for sharing knowledge and resources for these people. By encouraging collaboration, the APS teams are more likely to build their capacity to react to changing demands, work on strategic problems, and devise innovative solutions (Buick et al., 2022).

Collaborative leadership is also a process that allows different entities (departments) to learn from each other, especially when they are in crisis or experiencing long-lasting issues within the team. Such culture would be very relevant to the role of the APS as it becomes more complex in working with national and international challenges, such as public health crises that require teamwork and coordination across the board (Phillips et al., 2022).

Table 12: Benefits of Collaborative Leadership in APS

Benefit	Description	Example
Increased Problem-Solving Capacity	Facilitates pooling of expertise	Cross-departmental task forces
Innovation through Diverse Perspectives	Encourages a variety of ideas and solutions	Collaborative projects across APS units
Enhanced Team Morale	Creates a sense of unity and shared purpose	Joint team-building activities

Source: Author's Analysis on Collaborative Leadership in APS (2024).

7.4 Technology-Driven Leadership and Conflict Management

Over recent years, the role played by technology in leadership and conflict management has been escalated. In the APS sector, utilizing digital platforms and tools could improve the management of conflicts, follow the dynamics of teams, and improve the communication flow between executives and their employees. For instance, the implementation of digital tools such as feedback systems, conflict resolution apps, and multichannel communication platforms will help leaders track the overall feelings within the team to address complaints in such an efficient manner (Althaus and McGregor, 2019).

It is at this juncture that these platforms indicate insights that can be data-driven to suggest to leaders how best they might make decisions to ascertain that conflicts are resolved in a timely manner and so doing with an informed state. Technology integration, therefore, aids a more open and efficient system of conflict management and, as a result, increased cohesiveness for team and fostered performance (Mikhaylov et al., 2018).

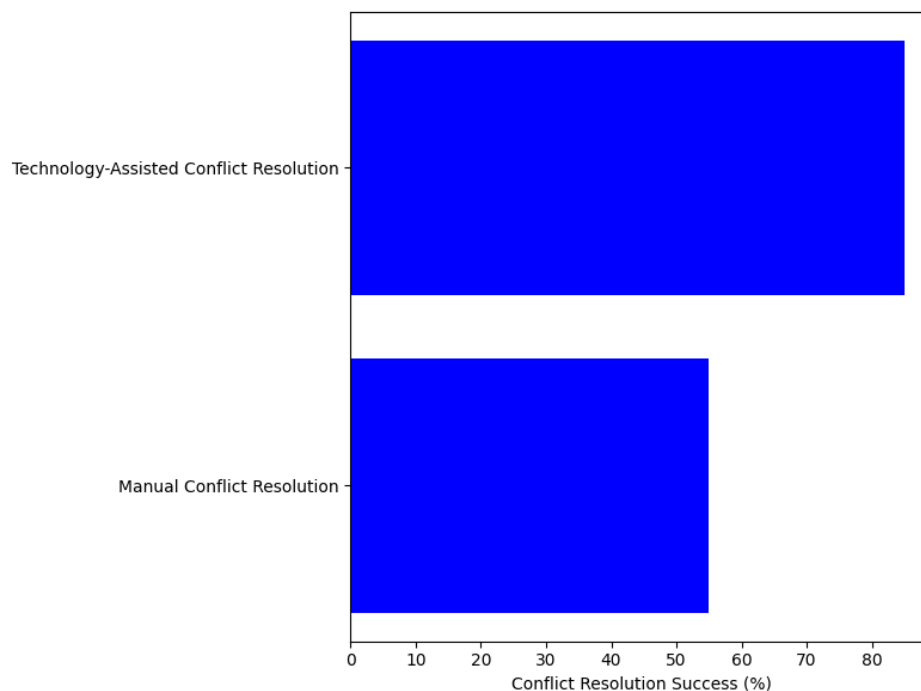


Figure 12: Role of Technology in Conflict Management

Source: Author's Analysis of APS Technology Use in Leadership (2024).

7.5 Improvement of Feedback Mechanisms and Continuous Evaluation

Lastly, APS organizations should set in place a strong feedback mechanism to allow continuous evaluation on the effectiveness in leadership and group dynamics. Feedback from both staff and leaders should be actively sought, analyzed, and acted on. This could be through official methods such as quarterly surveys, annual reviews or team meetings where the employees feel safe to voice their concerns about leadership and group management (Fletcher et al., 2020).

Continuous feedback keeps leaders responsive to the expectations of their employees and helps created an atmosphere of transparency and accountability. Different mechanisms of feedback for evaluation of leadership within APS can help leaders make adjustments as to their strategies of leadership, enhance their conflict management techniques and, ultimately, make for a healthy working environment.

Table 13: Types of Feedback Mechanisms for Leadership Evaluation

Feedback Mechanism	Purpose	Frequency
Employee Surveys	Gather insights on leadership effectiveness	Quarterly
Performance Reviews	Evaluate individual and team leadership	Annually
Team Meetings	Address team concerns and gather input	Monthly

Source: Author's Analysis of APS Feedback Mechanisms (2024).

To conclude, this research paper shed light on the leadership strategies that could potentially address staff conflicts and foster team interconnection in the APS frontline environment. The investigation recommends that transformational leadership, active conflict management, and cross-functional collaboration will be the acquiring factors that will help APS leaders to overcome those challenges. The recommendations stipulate in this section provide pragmatic measures for enhanced practice, policies development, and circumstantive

environment where leaders are better equipped to face conflict, foster teamwork, and navigate through the complexities for public service delivery.

With the implementation of these strategies, APS organizations can have a more healthy, innovative, and well-knit workforce that will enhance public sector efficiency.

8. Conclusion

This research has tried to emphasize the seriousness of leadership strategies in controlling staff conflicts and creating collaboration in the Australian Public Service (APS) frontline environment. APS is a critical part of government which provides those services on which the public at large heavily relies. Thus, the performance of APS teams affects the quality and efficiency of those services directly. According to our study, the leadership regime must foster employee engagement, help in conflict resolution, and sustain high performing levels of motivation.

8.1 Key Findings

Our investigation has revealed that transformational leadership is indeed one of the best strategies to resolve conflicts and promote constructive work climate in service organizations. Personal empowerment, emotional intelligence, and visionary leadership are powerful sources of support for transformational leaders who guide their teams through challenges, especially in the high-pressure environment of the APS front line. Further, transactional leadership was reported to prevent conflicts from escalating. A truly developed leader who pays attention to his team, provides regular feedback, and leads by example nourishes and sustains resilient and cohesive staff. As documented by Kakabadse et al. (2003), the significance of leading actively cannot be more emphasized for maintaining staff morale and in conflict situations.

The importance of consideration for collective leadership across APS divisions was also supported by this research. Indeed, collaboration enhances knowledge sharing, empowers collective problem-solving, and nourishes an environment that respects and appreciates differences. Especially in crisis situations or when working environments need to adapt to changing circumstances, this becomes highly relevant. Successful APS conflict resolution, therefore, rests on the degree of inter-departmental collaboration and collective leadership.

Additionally, the research would stress that technology has an increasingly significant role in solving conflicts. Digital platforms and data-driven solutions can assist in further enriching leadership by giving an understanding of team dynamics, prop up conflict resolution tools and facilitate easier communication. Hence, as seen with works presented by Althaus and McGregor (2019), such technological advances are redefining the practice of leadership and ways of conflict resolution in the modern organization.

Furthermore, feedback mechanisms emerged as significant in enhancing leadership effectiveness and team cohesion. Employees' feedback provides leaders with insight into team sentiment and helps to address potential issues before conflicts escalate. It clearly demonstrates; Enterprise feedback and continuous evaluation mean adaptive organizations that improve their leadership strategies.

8.2 Practical Implications

The implications of the study have enormous significance for APS and broader public sector leadership. First, it becomes very important for APS to focus on leadership education programs that emphasize emotional intelligence, conflict management, nurturing intrinsically oriented motivation, and transformational leadership skills. Leaders must prepare themselves to deal with unique challenges present at the frontline, where there is greater prevalence of conflict and stress. Training programs with focus on realistic scenarios will prepare the APS leaders about what to do regarding these team dynamics.

Further, active leadership must now be promoted encompassing whole of the APS. Laissez-faire leadership has been shown to lead to lower levels of team cohesion and higher conflicts. Thus, leaders must be held accountable and continuously evaluate their leadership style based on feedback and performance appraisals.

APS institutions must ensure that managers are not simply trained, but are also monitored and supported to improve their leadership capabilities further.

However, collaborative leadership across divisions and departments will ensure everyone sticks together. Frontline teams work on collaborative problems most of the time, so leaders should work hand in hand with diverse sets of employees across the organization. This collaboration helps to ensure the sharing of information and resources for improving the effective settlement of conflicts and addressing challenging issues.

Lastly, appropriate application of technology in managing conflicts and leadership development shall be seen as the next modernization step for APS. Real-time platforms with feedback, consideration for conflict tracking, and better communication can surely improve leadership and provide insights into team dynamics. Hence, integrating such digital platforms into the daily rhythms of APS teams should surely bring about greater efficiency in resolving conflicts and maintaining a culture of togetherness.

8.3 Limitations and Way Forward

Though this research has been insightful regarding leadership strategies in the APS, the limitations of research also need to be acknowledged. Real-time challenges of leadership within the APS need to be unraveled eruditely, and one of the biggest limitations of this study constitutes the fact that secondary data sources are extensively relied on in order to do this. The future studies, having data collected by way of primary sources to give crisper insights into the daily realities confronting teams in the APS context, should go ahead.

Another line of inquiry to be opened up would be research delineating detailed impacts of different leadership styles. As this research has underlined, transformational and active leadership styles, apart from achieving an integrated operational management system, may also thwart team unity and foster an array of unresolved issues. This aspect is important because additional comparisons in the public service can acculturate servant, transactional leadership or the other leadership styles.

Gender and diversity, a field of ray understood to serve as a research area on future leadership and management practices: it is an inherently significant area. As the Australian Public Service evolves, it may be pertinent to also consider the contribution of diverse and multicultural leadership styles to team dynamics, conflict resolution, and organizational effectiveness. Research into such areas dealing with diversity in leadership and conflict aside in the APS may usher in new perspectives regarding how inclusive leadership repatriates team cohesion.

One more area possibly deserving more investigation is technology's role in conflict management. As technology continues to progress, further examination of ways in which emerging technology like artificial intelligence and machine learning can contribute even more to leadership strategies and conflict resolution in the APS context would be informative.

8.4 Final Thoughts

In conclusion, leadership crucially addresses staff conflicts and in the process promotes team cohesion in APS. What this research shows is that transformational leadership, active leadership, and collaborative leadership are prime tools to generate a conducive work environment and effective conflict resolution. Moreover, technology and feedback mechanisms provide additional tools that can enhance leadership practices and support APS leaders in nurturing a cohesive, well-bonded workforce.

Hence, promoting leadership development, active engagement, collaboration, and technology is essential to lift APS leaders' effectiveness in anticipation of challenges at the frontline. These strategies may produce simultaneously a more unified, efficient and satisfied workforce and by extension bring in better services and improved outcomes for the public.

Essentially, leadership will need to adapt with the changing APS. Future research will help in refining and analyzing leadership techniques, which would shed light on the improvement of public sector management in Australia and beyond.

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