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The Strategic Nature of Servant Leadership and Emotional Intelligence in Interpersonal Conflict Management among Pastors from Selected Urban Churches in Kenya

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Abstract:

The study investigated the relationship between servant leadership and interpersonal conflict management among pastors in selected urban churches in Kenya. The study applied a pragmatic philosophy and used the convergent parallel mixed methods approach to collect data. The target population was 180 pastors. Through purposive sampling, a sample of 123 respondents was arrived at. Questionnaires were sent to respondents through email addresses and through WhatsApp social media applications. A total of 75 responses were received. The qualitative data were collected through a semi-structured questionnaire. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the texts from qualitative data. The qualitative analysis revealed challenges that impede the use of servant leadership in conflict management. The emerging themes from the qualitative analysis revealed that organizational leadership, organizational culture, spiritual maturity and self-leadership were necessary antecedents to the use of servant leadership in conflict management. The researcher recommends that leaders at the top or executive levels of an organization need to pay attention to the culture of the organization when handling conflict management if they desire to see an improvement in interpersonal relationships and overall performance. Practical recommendations from the findings include capacity-building education and training for pastors on the practical application of servant leadership behaviours in relation to conflict management, conflict resolution skills and emotional intelligence skills.

Keywords: Servant leadership, interpersonal conflict, emotional intelligence, pastors, Kenya

1. Introduction

Within organizations, one of the persistent challenges is interpersonal conflicts among individuals. In the church institution, various leadership styles have been deployed in an attempt to mitigate interpersonal conflicts. In Kenya, pastors have used authoritative and dictatorial leadership styles to address conflicts, leading to disastrous effects such as church splits (Matisi, 2021; Odhiambo et al., 2013). This has led to the call for alternative leadership styles that focus on problem-solving rather than forcing or avoiding behaviours in conflict management (Obi et al., 2020). Servant leadership is an instrumental leadership approach toward solving the root causes of leadership problems. According to Fields (2021), servant leaders are typically focused on helping, actively addressing problems, maintaining effective communication, and sustaining healthy relationships. Leaders who practice servant leadership make better choices and decisions and are better positioned to prevent and manage conflict when it arises (Buffel, 2020). Servant leaders openly recognize conflict, are naturally curious, have a desire and intention to expose the truth, and are naturally curious, which allows them to be open-minded and thus able to identify common goals to address during conflict (Tard, 2019). Servant leadership is also relevant to conflict management because it emphasizes love, human values, dialogue and negotiations (Wuli et al., 2020). Servant leaders are not immune to conflict and, therefore, must navigate the tension created by the conflict with maturity to positively influence the outcome of the conflict (Craun & Hensen, 2022). Thus, servant leadership is appropriate for conflict management.

Interpersonal conflict management is one of the challenges facing church institutions. Available studies conducted in the global, continental and local contexts have captured this challenge of conflict management. The types of organizational conflicts include intrapersonal conflicts, which are conflicts within an individual; interpersonal conflicts involving two or more people; intra-group conflicts between groups; and intergroup conflicts that arise within a group (Palmer, 2020). A literature review study of clergy who leave congregational ministry in the Roman Catholic Church and

Protestant denominations in the United States of America by reviewers Hamm and Eagle (2021) concluded that one of the main reasons for clergy exit was interpersonal conflict. Other documented effects of unresolved interpersonal conflict among pastors include damage to emotional health, such that they are unable to work together, leading to dysfunctional relationships, resignations, and terminations (Buffel, 2020; Palmer, 2020). In Kenya, Mwabonje et al. (2019) found that conflict among leaders at the Anglican Church Emmanuel Kengeleni Parish, Mombasa, was associated with rivalry, strained relations, retarded development and negative publicity of the church. Thus, because of the impact of interpersonal conflict, it was deemed necessary to investigate the application of servant leadership in the management of interpersonal conflict among pastors in selected urban churches in Kenya.

Emotions are an intangible component of conflict. Emotions during conflict include feelings such as anger, resentment, fear, rejection, anxiety and loss (Condliffe, 2016). The inclusion of emotional intelligence in the study stemmed from varied research that indicated that emotional intelligence significantly influenced conflict management. For instance, ineffective conflict management has been found to exist partly due to low emotional intelligence among individuals (Winardi et al., 2021). The use of emotional intelligence in conflict management among pastors has also been considered crucial to prevent disputes from escalating (West et al., 2018). Furthermore, research studies in other fields, such as nursing, underscore the effectiveness of emotional intelligence in conflict management (Al Hamdan et al., 2019; Aseery et al., 2023). In Kenya, emotional intelligence has been linked to church growth. In a study to assess the effect of shared leadership and emotional intelligence on church growth, Nzenge (2020) found that shared leadership and emotional intelligence significantly affected church growth in Pentecostal churches in Kenya in five counties, namely Machakos, Murang'a, Kajiado, Nakuru, and Nairobi counties. The study recommended that pastors and other church leaders develop strategic avenues for emotional intelligence development through forums such as workshops and seminars to help address issues such as emotional awareness and management. While Nzenge's research focuses on the effect of emotional intelligence on church growth, the current study focuses on emotional intelligence in conflict management among pastors in selected urban churches in Kenya.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Globally, unresolved interpersonal conflict among pastors has led to negative consequences. These include high chronic stress and burnout among pastors, slowing down or end of church growth and distraction from its mission (Roozen, 2015; Tanner, 2017). In Africa, interpersonal conflicts have led to pastoral exits from ministry, thus affecting the pursuit of pastoral calls to ministry and impacting congregations that are left without one of their pastors (Joynt, 2018). In Kenya, interpersonal conflicts have led to leadership wrangles, which in turn have led to litigation, congregation splits, strained relationships, impacted spiritual maturity negatively and hindered church growth (Mitu et al., 2023; Muhangi, 2021; Mwabonje, 2019). Although pastors are highly respected, consulted and most influential Christian leaders who influence their congregants and communities on how to manage conflict with each other, the impact of unresolved interpersonal conflicts among pastors themselves has detrimental effects on faith, bringing disillusionment, discouragement, loss of their calling, forced exits and change of vocation altogether (Mwania, 2020). Lack of and unawareness of conflict management skills has also been indicated to lead to an increase in conflicts among pastors (Pali, 2018). Pastors have used authoritarian, democratic and empowerment leadership styles when addressing conflict within congregations (Odhiambo et al., 2013). However, the area of leadership styles in managing interpersonal conflicts among themselves remains unaddressed. The area of research on servant leadership and interpersonal conflict management among pastors in Kenya has been unexplored. The study, therefore, aimed to learn from the experiences of the participants, their views and opinions on how to manage interpersonal conflicts among pastors through the awareness and practice of servant leadership behaviours, conflict management and the role of emotional intelligence in conflict management to address this gap.

1.2. Objective of the Study

To compare the themes derived from the qualitative inquiry on servant leadership, interpersonal conflict and emotional intelligence with the findings from the quantitative research.

1.3. Research Question

How do the emerging themes from the qualitative study compare or integrate with the findings from the quantitative phase of the study?

1.4. Significance of the Study

The findings were beneficial to pastors and churches interested in knowing how to improve the management of interpersonal conflict among pastors. The study's results provided empirical support for the implementation of servant leadership behaviours in addressing interpersonal conflicts among pastors and offered practical options on how to manage interpersonal conflict. The findings also contributed to the role of emotional intelligence in improving interpersonal conflict management among pastors. The study was significant to the pastors and clergy serving in other churches as well.

2. Literature Review

2.1. *Servant Leadership*

Servant leadership is a term attributed to Robert Greenleaf that encompasses both a leadership theory and a leadership style. The term 'servant leadership' originated from Greenleaf's writings (Crowther, 2018; Northouse, 2016). Greenleaf challenged traditional leadership theories and was motivated by a desire to see a change in business ethics where the consumer as employee or customer is well served instead of the motivation for profit, business growth, and creating good working environments for employees (Sobral, 2020). Servant leadership endeavours to engage others in decision-making processes that emphasize caring behaviour, uphold ethical standards, foster employee growth, and elevate while also improving the caring and the overall quality of organizational life (Spears, 2010).

Servant leadership is characterized by a fundamental inclination to prioritize serving others first out of a natural desire (Northouse, 2016). The leader who embodies servant leadership places the well-being of their followers above their own interests, actively fosters the development of followers, and consistently demonstrates strong ethical conduct towards both followers and stakeholders (Northouse, 2016). While servant leadership shares similarities with several other leadership theories, its distinctive emphasis on serving others first and moral integrity sets it apart. Comparable leadership theories include ethical leadership, transformational leadership, empowering leadership, spiritual leadership, authentic leadership and self-sacrificing leadership (Beck, 2014; van Dierendock, 2011). What distinguishes servant leadership from authentic and transformational leadership is that servant leadership aims to align the motives of followers and leaders (Selladurai, 2014).

Several studies examine the application of the servant leadership style in conflict management. Servant leadership has been shown to facilitate constructive conflict management styles in the workplace (Hough, 2021; Obi et al., 2020). According to Buffel (2020), servant leaders make better choices and decisions not only in prevention but also in the management of conflict. Keita and Lao (2019) conducted a study in America that revealed that servant leadership effectively addressed the underlying causes of leadership problems within the church. Freeborough (2021) also found that higher levels of servant leadership among non-profit workers in America led to lower interpersonal conflict in the workplace. Similarly, research conducted in Africa confirms a positive and significant relationship between servant leadership and interpersonal conflict management. For instance, a study investigating the link between servant leadership and emotional well-being through team conflicts among Catholic sisters in Nigeria conducted by Obi et al. (2020) concluded that the servant leadership style complements the collaborating conflict management style. Further, a review of conflict in the Lutheran Church in South Africa by Buffel (2020) also proposed that servant leadership be considered a necessary leadership style to address the conflicts, crises, and leadership problems facing the church. The findings from the aforementioned studies indicate the suitability of servant leadership to interpersonal conflict management within the context of pastors in Kenya.

2.2. *Organizational Conflict*

Conflicts are an interactive phenomenon that is marked by discord or disagreements among individuals, groups or organizations (Rahim, 2023). Conflicts can be classified according to the source of origin or antecedent. According to Blank (2020), there are four types of organizational conflicts. The first is interpersonal conflict, which refers to a conflict between two or more individuals and occurs due to how individuals are different from each other. The second is intrapersonal conflict, which is psychological and occurs within an individual's mind, involving thoughts, values, principles and emotions. The third is intra-group conflict, which happens among individuals in a team due to incompatibilities and misunderstandings among team members. The fourth type of organizational conflict is intergroup conflict, which takes place when misunderstanding arises among different teams within an organization. The emotions and feelings may also be created by personality clashes, sarcasm, and making fun of one's ideas, which leads to hostility, distrust, and negative feelings of anger and frustration (Gallo, 2017). To effectively address any type of organizational conflict, it is essential to apply an appropriate conflict management style.

Church leaders in Kenya face various challenges. In his study on leadership transition in the Anglican Church of Kenya, Wainaina (2021) found that leadership transition into the Bishop's role was a political process whereby bribery, intimidation, ethnic divides and rewarding of voters have caused the transition process to become corrupted. Various research studies have captured the incidences of conflict among pastors. For example, Mwabonje (2019) found that church conflict between the leaders inhibited the moral development and faith formation of church members. Muhanji (2021) delved into uncovering the underlying causes of leadership conflicts in the Quaker Church in Kenya. The prevalence of conflicts among church leaders is thus not new. According to Mwanja (2020), the management of conflict is at the heart of the gospel and, thus, the responsibility of every Christian. Therefore, the current study sought to make an effort to investigate the application of servant leadership in interpersonal conflict management among pastors in selected urban churches in Kenya.

In Kenya, some research studies on conflict management styles have been conducted within the banking sector and small-scale business owners (Kaimenyi, 2014; Momanyi & Juma, 2016). This highlighted a gap in research concerning conflict management styles focused on pastors in urban churches in Kenya. Odhiambo (2014) undertook a study on conflict management and leadership style in the ACK Diocese of Maseno North. Findings from Odhiambo's study indicated that pastors primarily use the authoritative leadership style when addressing conflict, followed by democratic and empowerment leadership styles. Kaimenyi's (2014) study among small-scale business owners in Kajiado showed close linkages between autocratic leadership style and competing for males and close linkages between democratic leadership

style and collaborating for females. The contextual gap that the present study factored in was in servant leadership style and conflict management styles among pastors in selected urban churches in Kenya.

2.3. Emotional Intelligence Theory

The idea about emotional intelligence was first published by Mayer and Salovey in 1990 (Mayer et al., 2016). The idea was further popularized by Daniel Goleman when he published his landmark book *Emotional Intelligence: Why Emotional Intelligence Matters* (Goleman, 2012). For over 30 years since then, there has been an abundance of academic research, numerous publications, the development of various theoretical models and instruments, and debate around emotional intelligence. Key proponents of emotional intelligence include Peter Salovey, John Mayer, Reuven Bar-On, and Daniel Goleman. Emotional intelligence has been applied to various contexts in both the academic and non-academic world, such as education (Halimi et al., 2021), nursing (Al-Hamdan et al., 2019), business (Makkar & Basu, 2019; Sharma & Tiwari, 2022), therapy (Foye et al., 2019; San Juan Ferer, & Hipola, 2020), and in family and parenting (Olutope et al., 2019). Emotional intelligence comprises four domains: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. Collectively, these four domains encompass 12 competencies. As outlined by Goleman and Boyatzis (2017), these competencies include emotional self-awareness, emotional self-control, achievement orientation, adaptability, empathy, positive outlook, organizational awareness, coaching and mentoring, influence, conflict management, inspirational leadership and teamwork. The current study focused on relationship management in emotional intelligence.

Emotional intelligence has consistently been associated with conflict management styles, with several highlighting its role in helping managers effectively handle conflict in the workplace. For instance, Al Hamdan et al. (2019) conducted a study examining the impact of emotional intelligence on conflict management styles among nurses in Jordan in the Middle East. In China, a study conducted by Chen et al. (2019) investigated the impact of emotional intelligence on conflict management styles among managers. The study examined managers at various hierarchical levels to determine their responses to conflict with their peers, subordinates, and supervisors. In the USA, Jackson (2023) conducted research to explore the relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict management among Black women leaders. The study targeted women aged 25 to 65 employed and in leadership positions in America. Ishola-Esan (2019) conducted research in Nigeria to investigate whether emotional intelligence was a requisite skill for pastoral leadership effectiveness within the churches of Southwest Nigeria. The study was necessitated due to the persistent and prevailing conflicts experienced within the churches in Southwest Nigeria. In Kenya, Mburu (2020) conducted a study to investigate how emotional intelligence collaborated with effective leadership to increase staff engagement and enhance benefits among virtual staff teams.

Different definitions of emotional intelligence exist. This results from the classification of emotional intelligence either as a trait, ability or a mixed model (Kanesan & Fauzan, 2019). Mayer and Salovey (1997) were the first to define emotional intelligence as the capacity to perceive and express emotion, integrate emotions with thoughts, comprehend and employ emotions in reasoning, and manage emotions in oneself and others. In the context of ability, emotional intelligence involves utilizing reason or cognitive intelligence to navigate emotional realms, such as recognizing emotion in faces, comprehending the significance of emotional language, and effectively managing emotions to inform decision-making and behaviour that adapts successfully to environmental challenges and stressors (Mayer et al., 2016; Miao et al., 2017).

Daniel Goleman's model of emotional intelligence comprises four domains: self-awareness, self-management, relationship management and social awareness (Goleman, 2012). According to Goleman, emotional intelligence influences almost all areas of our lives. Goleman considers emotional intelligence as a natural competency that can be learned by anyone at any level. Mattingly and Kraiger (2018) conducted a meta-analysis of studies on emotional intelligence training for adults. The findings of their study revealed a moderate positive effect of such training. This suggests that emotional intelligence can indeed be learned by adults. Goleman's model has shown a positive impact on workplace behaviour in the Indian banking sector (Makkar & Basu, 2019). It has also been found to predict effective leadership in the banking sector in Ghana (Fianko et al., 2020).

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

Research design focuses on approaches that provide specific directives for procedures used for conducting research, whether in quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017). Given the pragmatic research philosophy employed in the current study, the mixed methods research design was utilized (Creswell, 2014). In convergent parallel mixed methods, quantitative and qualitative data are collected concurrently and merged to offer a thorough examination of the research problem, with separate analyses for each set of data before integrating the results (Creswell & Clark, 2018; Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017). The rationale behind adopting the mixed methods approach is grounded in the understanding that leadership is a social construct, whereby knowledge or understanding is based on the thoughts, ideas or beliefs in the context of human interactions to give understanding. According to Leavy (2017), mixed methods research is essential when the research seeks to successfully describe the experiences of the sampled respondents and in order to attain a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem. However, the current paper focused on the qualitative findings gleaned from the data captured in the qualitative section of the questionnaire.

3.2. Target Population

Category	Number	Percentage
Pentecostal pastors	90	50%
Protestant pastors	90	50%
Total	180	100%

Table 1: Distribution of the Target Population

Source: Author (2024)

Table 1 presents the target population of the study. The target population was made up of all the pastors within the two church denominations identified for the study.

3.3. Sample Size Determination and Sampling Technique

Mixed methods research enables data collection from the same sample for both qualitative and quantitative data. The study was organized as convergent parallel mixed methods research. Therefore, qualitative data were collected from the entire sample. The leadership organization structure in churches places pastors at different levels of leadership. Therefore, to obtain a sample from each category among the pastors, the proportional stratified sampling technique was used. Proportionate stratified sampling was used to ensure that the sample size of each stratum was proportional to its share in the population. The computation was as follows:

Pentecostal senior pastors and Protestant parish ministers

$124(29/180) = 19$ Pentecostal senior pastors

$124(45/180) = 31$ Protestant parish ministers

Pentecostal ministry pastors/heads of departments and Protestant evangelists

$124(61/180) = 42$ Pentecostal ministry pastors/heads of departments

$124(45/180) = 31$ Protestant evangelists/heads of departments

Category of Respondents	Total Number	Sample Size
Pentecostal Senior Pastors	29	19
Protestant Parish Ministers	45	31
Pentecostal ministry pastors/heads of departments	61	42
Protestant Evangelists	45	31
Total	180	123

Table 2: Sample Size

Source: Author (2024)

Table 2 presents the strata sample size that was invited to participate in the study from the churches within the two denominations. The sample was arrived at through the application of the Yamane sample size formula.

3.4. Data Collection Instruments

The qualitative data were collected through open-ended questions, during which the respondents aired their experiences, views, and opinions freely.

3.5. Data Collection Methods and Procedures

To initiate the data collection exercise, contact was made with respective headquarters for introduction purposes and to obtain authorization. This included email, phone calls and actual visits. Upon securing authorization, respondents for the study were contacted through the lists of pastors obtained and the church website. A master list was compiled that included the names, phone numbers and email addresses of the pastors. Introduction emails were then sent to the sampled pastors to recruit them for the study. The emails included the link to the Google form questionnaire through which data would be collected, along with instructions on how to proceed.

The use of email interviews has become increasingly relevant, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and remote working (Dahlin, 2021). Additionally, the study of social sciences and humanities is increasingly taking place in digital environments; hence, there is a need to explore digital electronic research methods. Email interviews offer a convenient and effective means of generating rich qualitative data (Costello et al., 2017). Moreover, according to Fritz and Vandermouse (2017), email interviewing is suitable for eliciting deeply reflective responses in qualitative interviews and for reaching a geographically diverse sample. Hence, the present study utilized email and smartphone applications to distribute the Google form link for the questionnaire, facilitating data collection from pastors located in the different selected urban counties in Kenya.

According to Leavy (2017), written interviews have the benefit of allowing people from different locations to participate, allowing more time for participants to respond to the questions thoughtfully, and giving privacy as participants respond to sensitive topics. Finally, the questionnaire was divided into three sections. The first section of the questionnaire collected data on the specific demographics of the respondents. The second, third and fourth sections collected data on servant leadership, conflict management and emotional intelligence, respectively.

3.6. Data Analysis and Presentation

Qualitative data for the study were collected with the aim of conducting thematic analysis. The qualitative data was collected in text form through the semi-structured section of the questionnaire. Written text can be used as an informal approach to collecting qualitative data, especially where the qualitative text plays a complementary role, such as in mixed methods research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). In preparation for analysis, the qualitative data was picked from the Google form and copied onto a new document, keeping all the text intact. The responses were separated per question and per gender. Content analysis was then carried out to systematically investigate the texts. Content analysis involves identifying, describing and interpreting patterns in qualitative data collected to develop themes (Leavy, 2017). Repeated or similar words from the texts were coded, grouped and organized into themes. Qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ai. was utilized to facilitate data analysis.

4. Research Findings and Discussion

4.1. Response Rate

Category of Respondents	Total Number	Sample Size	Response Rate	Response %
Pentecostal Senior Pastors	29	19	14	19%
Protestant Parish Ministers	45	31	19	25%
Pentecostal Ministry/Heads of Departments	61	42	29	39%
Protestant Evangelists	45	31	13	17%
Total	180	123	75	100%

Table 3: Response Rate
Source: Author (2024)

Table 3 captured an analysis of the respondents. 75 out of the targeted 123 participants responded to the questionnaire. The overall response rate was 60%. In mixed methods research studies, the response rates depend on the method of survey distribution and range from 29% to 100% (Tomasi et al., 2018). For the study, an online web survey was used, whereby the research questions were input into a Google form. The link to the Google form questionnaire was then sent to participants via email and WhatsApp social media application. A meta-analysis of response rates of online surveys found that the average response rate was 44.1% (Wu et al., 2022).

4.2. Demographic Analysis

4.2.1 Gender Distribution among Respondents

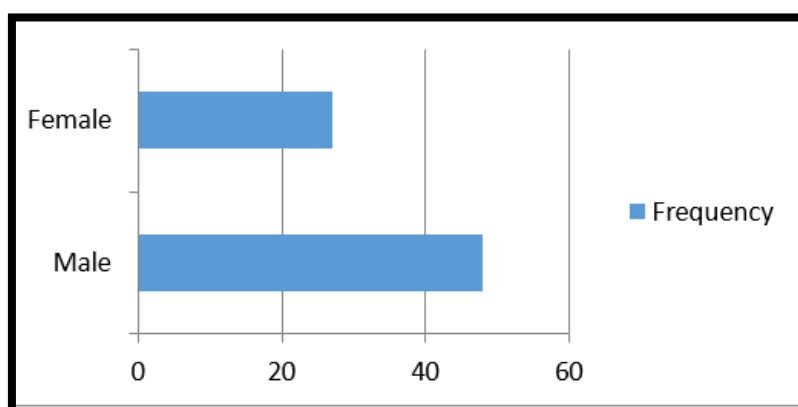


Figure 1: Gender Distribution of Respondents

Figure 1 illustrates the gender distribution. The total number of males who responded to the questionnaire was 48 (64%), while among females, the number was 27 (36%). More male pastors than female pastors participated in the study. A study by Maina et al. (2018) found that most pastors in church ministry in Nairobi County, Kenya, are males, thus supporting this study's findings that more males than females participated in the study.

4.2.2. Age Distribution among Respondents

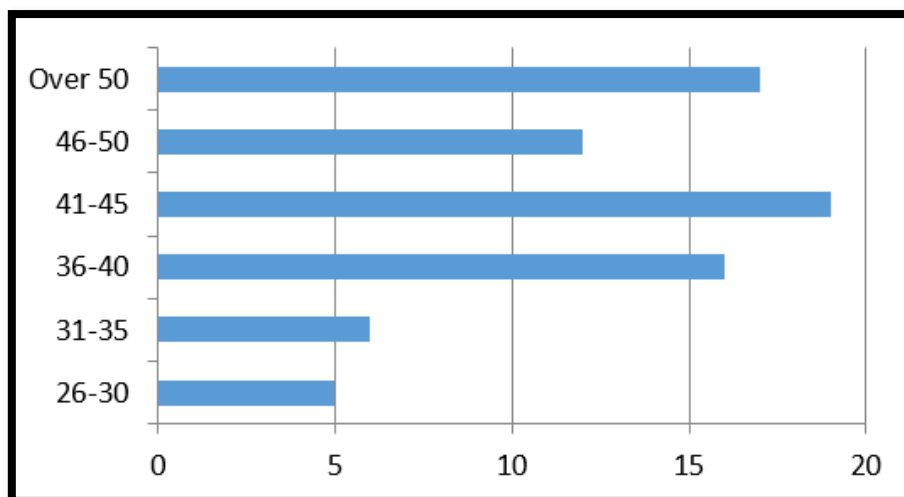


Figure 2: Age Distribution among Respondents

Figure 2 captures the age distribution of the respondents. In the age distribution, 5 (6.7%) were aged between 26 and 30 years, 6 (8%) aged between 31 to 35 years, 16 (21.3%) aged between 36 to 40 years, and the majority aged 41-45, who were 19 in number (25.3%). Respondents aged 46 to 50 were 12 (16%), and those aged 50 and above were 17 (22.7%). The age group 41-45 had the highest number per age range at 19 pastors in that age category. Overall, pastors aged 41 and above were the majority of the respondents, representing 48 out of 75 responses. This finding was similar to that of Thiga et al. (2021), who, in their study among selected churches in Nairobi, found that the majority of the pastors (83.3%) who participated in the study were aged 41 and above.

4.3. Thematic Analysis

4.3.1 Servant Leadership

Understanding of Servant Leadership		n	%	
Very well		36	48%	
Well		35	46.7%	
To some extent		4	5.3%	
		75	100%	
To what extent do you disagree or agree that using servant leadership is most effective in conflict management?	Male N (%)	Female N (%)	Total N (%)	p-value
To a moderate extent	4 (8.3)	3 (11.1)	7 (9.3)	0.889
To a great extent	29 (60.4)	15 (55.6)	44 (58.7)	
To a very great extent	15 (31.3)	9 (33.3)	24 (32)	
Does your supervisor use servant leadership to manage interpersonal conflicts among pastors?	Male N (%)	Female N (%)	Total N (%)	p-value
Yes	26 (54.2)	13 (48.2)	39 (52.0)	0.879
No	6 (12.5)	4 (14.8)	10 (13.3)	
I'm not sure	16 (33.3)	10 (37.0)	26 (34.7)	

Table 4: Servant Leadership

Source: Author (2024)

In the qualitative part of the questionnaire in the section on servant leadership, respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed that servant leadership is the most effective method in conflict management. While a minority (9.3%) viewed servant leadership as moderately effective in conflict management, the majority of pastors (58.7%) believed it to be greatly effective. This majority view, encompassing 60.4% of male and 55.6% of female pastors, showed a strong belief in the power of empathy, active listening, and prioritizing others in resolving disputes. Furthermore, a significant proportion, 31.3% of males and 33.3% of females, considered it to be extremely effective. These results are supported by previous studies that established the awareness, interpretation, and application of servant leadership by pastors (Cook II, 2020; Omogo, 2019).

However, when queried on 'Does your supervisor use servant leadership to manage interpersonal conflicts among pastors', 52% of the respondents agreed that their supervisors use servant leadership to manage interpersonal conflicts among pastors, while 34.7% indicated that they were not sure and 13.3% were convinced that their supervisors do not use servant leadership to manage interpersonal conflicts among pastors. This presented an interesting outcome, given that while 94.7% of the respondents understood servant leadership well, only 52% were sure that servant leadership was being used to manage interpersonal conflict. This finding pointed to a lack of awareness about knowledge or skills within servant leadership, which can be applied practically to manage interpersonal conflicts among pastors. The finding may also indicate that other leadership styles are currently used to manage interpersonal conflicts among pastors.

Among the respondents, 48% indicated that they were not sure their supervisors used servant leadership, and 13.3% were convinced that servant leadership was not used when managing interpersonal conflicts among pastors. From this analysis, it can be concluded that while there is knowledge of servant leadership and the general acceptance that it is appropriate for use in conflict management, results indicate that pastors do not use it to manage interpersonal conflict in their midst. This level of uncertainty could reflect a lack of clarity in leadership methods or varying interpretations of what constitutes servant leadership in practice. This analysis was supported by Resane (2020), who opined that the challenge of integrity in pastoral leadership observed in the South African church community could be attributed to a lack of understanding about servant leadership.

4.3.2. Emotional Intelligence

To What Extent Are Pastors Aware of Their Own Emotional Intelligence?				
To a very low extent	5 (10.4)	0	5 (6.7)	0.340
To a low extent	11 (22.9)	7 (25.9)	18 (24)	
To a moderate extent	29 (60.4)	19 (70.4)	48 (64)	
To a great extent	3 (6.3)	1 (3.7)	4 (5.3)	

Table 5: Emotional Intelligence

In the qualitative semi-structured questionnaire, respondents were asked to respond to the question - *In your view, does lack of emotional intelligence skills increase the incidences of interpersonal conflict with other pastors?* All male and female respondents responded in the affirmative. A thematic analysis of the responses revealed that limited knowledge of emotional intelligence was a great contributor to an escalation of conflicts. Respondents indicated that not being aware of one's emotions or the emotions of others, lack of self-awareness, and lack of knowledge and understanding about emotional intelligence increased conflicts, caused loss of good judgement about people and situations and hurt others in the process.

5. Discussion

The objective of the study was to identify themes from the qualitative part of the study on servant leadership, interpersonal conflict management and emotional intelligence among pastors in selected urban churches in Kenya.

Data for the qualitative research were collected using the same instrument that was used for quantitative data collection. The qualitative questions were positioned at the end of each variable. To separate the qualitative data from the quantitative, the qualitative responses were copied from the online Google form onto a Word document. The responses from males and females were separated and analyzed separately. The initial coding cycle was done manually. Thereafter, the Word document with all the qualitative responses was converted into a PDF and uploaded onto the software Atlas.ai for another round of thematic analysis. The third and final cycle of coding involved other researchers to confirm that the analysis was thorough and exhaustive.

5.1. Thematic Analysis of Servant Leadership

Under servant leadership, two questions were provided. Both questions had a scale from which respondents could choose an answer. Since the questions had choices, the responses under servant leadership were analyzed using STATA. The first question was asked in Q23 to *kindly indicate to what extent you disagree or agree that the use of servant leadership is most effective in conflict management*. The respondents were given a scale to indicate their answers. The scales were: to a very low extent, to a low extent, to a moderate extent, to a great extent and to a very great extent. The majority of the respondents (44 out of 77), representing 58.7%, indicated that they agreed with the statement to a great extent. Of these, 29 were male and 15 were female. Another 24 respondents, 32%, indicated that they agreed with the statement to a very great extent. Of these, 15 were male and 9 were female. Seven of the respondents, representing 9.3% of the total percentage, indicated that they agreed with the statement to a moderate extent, represented by 4 males and 3 females.

From this analysis on the use of servant leadership as most effective in conflict management, it can be deduced that while there is knowledge of servant leadership and the general acceptance that it is appropriate for use in conflict management, results indicate that pastors do not use it to manage interpersonal conflict among themselves. This level of uncertainty could reflect varying interpretations of what constitutes servant leadership in practice and the behaviours and skills within servant leadership that are useful in conflict management. Machokoto (2019) conducted a study to investigate the existence of servant leadership in practice by analyzing online sermons by various pastors. Machokoto observed that church leaders are more concerned about themselves than their followers or Jesus because of their consistent reference to themselves during sermons. According to Machokoto (2019), this outcome contradicts the servant leadership theory,

where the focus is on serving others and not the self. Additionally, it can also be deduced that pastors may be using other leadership styles when engaged in conflict management. This was supported by a study carried out by Nwan (2021), who assessed the use of transformational leadership to address leadership conflicts among church leaders in evangelical churches in Nigeria.

The second question under servant leadership inquired, '*Does your supervisor use servant leadership to manage interpersonal conflicts among pastors?*' Respondents were given three options to choose from: 'yes', 'no', and 'I am not sure'. A total of 39 respondents, of which 26 were males and 13 were females, indicated 'yes', representing 52%. This was followed by 26 respondents, 16 males and 10 females at 34.7%, who indicated, 'I am not sure'. Only 10 pastors, of which 6 males and 4 females, chose 'no' as their answer, representing 13.3%. These findings reveal that slightly more than half (52%) of the respondents agree that their supervisors use servant leadership to manage interpersonal conflicts among pastors. The remaining 48%, represented by those who chose a neutral answer, 'I am not sure' and 'no', reveal a level of uncertainty about their supervisor's use of servant leadership to resolve interpersonal conflicts among pastors. This could also reflect a lack of clarity about what constitutes servant leadership in practice.

According to Northouse (2016), servant leadership does not exist in a vacuum. Some of the factors that are likely to influence the practice of servant leadership include organizational culture and leadership attributes. Individuals bring their own personalities, traits, and ideas into leadership positions, and they differ in their moral development, emotional intelligence, and self-leadership (Northouse, 2016). The differences, in turn, influence how uniquely they live out servant leadership behaviours. Additionally, according to Du Plessis and Nkambule (2020), lack of a proper understanding of servant leadership principles, character, competencies and functions creates a misunderstanding of what servant leadership is among pastors.

Among the servant leadership behaviours, three servant leadership behaviours were considered in the context of interpersonal conflict management. The three servant leadership behaviours, based on Liden et al.'s (2014) servant leadership model, were emotional healing, putting followers first and behaving ethically. These three servant leadership behaviours were considered because of their focus on the specific servant leadership behaviour embodied within a leader.

Emotional healing in servant leadership encompasses the potential for healing oneself and healing one's relationship with others in an environment that includes forgiveness and compassion. Some of the challenges that the female pastors listed as hindrances to emotional healing included a lack of humility, competitiveness, selfish interests, lack of forgiveness, intolerance, bias, and fear of looking unspiritual, among others. One of the respondents indicated, "*In my opinion, pastors lack humility towards each other. Some also feel superior and do not want to accept their mistakes. There is also a lot of mistrust and competition.*" Similar issues were also raised by the male pastors, including denial of one's weaknesses, attitude, pride, lack of respect and '*hidden issues like hatred by other pastors*'. These challenges make it difficult for an environment where emotional healing of self and others can take place.

Putting followers first is also a servant leader behaviour that involves prioritizing the needs of others above one's own interests, demonstrating humility, respect, honour, integrity and compassion in conflict management. Responses from the respondents about challenges that pastors face in managing conflicts with peers included *personal interests above the ministry interests, selfish interests, pride, seeing yourself better than others, lack of empathy, looking down on others, and seniority*. One of the respondents said, "*Power differentials, transfers laced with a suspicion that supervisors are settling personal scores, personality differences, envy, and lack of growth in the organization so that people jostle for positions.*"

Behaving ethically as a servant leader includes principles such as respect, integrity, justice, communication, dialogue, loyalty, fairness, strong moral principles, honesty, and community, as necessary in servant leadership in order to enhance the success of the church that pastors serve in. Some of the challenges that the respondents gave that touched on ethical behaviour included: *love of money and sex, competition to outsmart one another, greed, flaws or deficiencies in character, unwillingness to follow laid down policies, intolerance and lack of open communication, accountability and transparency*.

The analysis of the themes that emerged from qualitative responses on the challenges that cause interpersonal conflict to become difficult to manage revealed that character flows among pastors played a major role. Additionally, the lack of a suitable environment for conflict management was indicated by the embedded culture of competitiveness, miscommunication, lack of open channels of communication and sweeping conflict issues under the carpet.

5.2. Thematic Analysis of Conflict Management

Under conflict management, three questions were presented to the respondents. The first question asked, "*In your view, what are some of the challenges that cause interpersonal conflict among pastors to become difficult to manage?*" From the responses by males, four themes emerged. These were ego and pride, failures or weaknesses in self-leadership, poor communication and relationship dynamics, and lack of spiritual and emotional intelligence. The responses by females also brought out four themes:

- Ego and power dynamics with 16 mentions,
- Communication and transparency issues with 12 mentions,
- Weak self-leadership and personal spiritual life with 19 mentions and
- External pressures and expectations from leaders with 6 mentions

The second question, under conflict management, asked respondents to *kindly indicate what they would recommend to help manage interpersonal conflict among pastors*. Among the male respondents, communication and dialogue were the most common responses, with 16 mentions, followed by unity and collaboration, with 13 mentions. Other themes that were highlighted included the need for training and development with eight mentions, ethical living

with seven mentions, spiritual maturity with six mentions, and structural and organization changes with five mentions. Among the female respondents, six themes emerged. The most highlighted theme was the need for training in conflict management, emotional intelligence, and conflict resolution skills, with 17 mentions. This was followed by the theme of unity and collaboration and the need for improved organizational communication, with 10 mentions each. Concerns related to the leadership of the organization were also highlighted with 9 mentions. The least mentioned was the need for growth, personal spiritual practices and ethical values with 4 mentions.

The third question under conflict management was: *"Does lack of knowledge about conflict management skills lead to an increase in interpersonal conflict with other pastors? Yes/No. Explain your answer."* Among the male respondents, 43 indicated 'yes', agreeing with the statement that lack of knowledge about conflict management skills did indeed lead to an increase in incidences of interpersonal conflicts among pastors. In elaborating their responses, four themes emerged. These were the impact of lack of knowledge and understanding about conflict, lack of training and skills, spiritualization of conflict issues and judgement, and the impact of personality and leadership styles during conflict. Among the female respondents, 26 indicated 'yes' in response to the same question. Three themes emerged from the analysis of the responses by the females. According to the females, a lack of knowledge about conflict management skills led to conflict avoidance and mismanagement of conflict. Emotional blindness and ignorance were the second theme, and the final theme was spiritualizing matters and judging instead of addressing conflicts practically.

5.3. Thematic Analysis of Emotional Intelligence

In the area of emotional intelligence, two questions were asked. The first question was: *"From your observations and experience, to what extent are pastors aware of their own emotional intelligence?"* Respondents were provided a scale to record their answers. The second question was: *"In your view, does a lack of emotional intelligence skills increase the incidences of interpersonal conflict with other pastors? Explain your answer below."* Among the male pastors, 44 responded with an affirmative 'yes'. The number of themes that emerged from their responses was five. The male pastors highlighted the importance of emotional intelligence, the causes of conflict, the need for education and training, the impact of emotional intelligence on relationships and the need for conflict resolution management information and skills. All the female respondents indicated 'yes' to the same question. Four themes emerged from the analysis of their responses. Emotional intelligence was indicated to cause self-awareness and regulation, understanding and empathy, effective communication and relationship skills, and continuous learning about emotional intelligence and conflict resolution skills would reduce the incidences of conflicts.

6. Summary

Under servant leadership, two themes emerged. First, it was on awareness versus practice. While a majority of the pastors acknowledged their belief in the effectiveness of servant leadership in conflict management, there was a disconnect between the awareness or familiarity of servant leadership and the actual living lifestyle that demonstrated servant leadership behaviours in their relationships with others, especially during conflict management. Qualitative findings revealed behaviours contrary to servant leadership behaviours, such as selfishness, pride and competition, which led to interpersonal conflicts. This suggests a need for understanding and consistent application of servant leadership in managing interpersonal conflict. The second theme was the influence of organizational culture. The pastors indicated that conflicts were not proactively addressed in their churches, thus creating a culture of low trust. Additionally, the pastors also indicated that top leadership did not seem keen to deal with issues. Instead, matters would be swept under the carpet or individuals in conflict would be transferred to other stations instead of addressing the issues. Organizational culture was seen to influence how individuals practice servant leadership. This suggests the importance of addressing organizational factors and enhancing the pastors' understanding of servant leadership principles for effective conflict management.

Under conflict management, the pastors indicated that some of the issues that made conflicts difficult to manage with fellow pastors included poor communication, ego, lack of spiritual maturity and external pressures. Both male and female respondents emphasized the impact of personal weaknesses, power dynamics and lack of emotional intelligence in conflict management. The pastors recommended that enhanced communication, training and collaboration be key strategies for managing conflicts. The quantitative results of the analysis of the conflict management styles also indicated that collaborating was the most preferred conflict management style among the pastors, followed by accommodating. The least preferred style from the quantitative results was competing, although the pastors described the organizational culture as very competitive. The female pastors particularly emphasized the need for conflict management training and emotional intelligence to address interpersonal conflicts effectively. Lack of knowledge about conflict management was perceived to contribute to the increase in interpersonal conflicts among pastors. Both genders emphasized the importance of emotional intelligence in conflict management and resolution, highlighting the need for continuous training and development in this area.

Under emotional intelligence, three themes emerged. The first theme was the perceived awareness and importance of emotional intelligence among pastors in conflict management. Both male and female respondents affirmed its role in promoting self-awareness, empathy and effective communication. The second theme was the need for training among respondents. There was consensus among the respondents on the importance of education and training to enhance emotional intelligence skills. Continuous learning was viewed as one of the key avenues essential for improving relationship dynamics and reducing conflict incidences. Thirdly, the pastors indicated that emotional intelligence was critical in helping to reduce conflicts among themselves by facilitating self-regulation, understanding of others and

communication. Though emotional intelligence emerged as a key factor in conflict management, as indicated by pastors, the quantitative results indicated that there was no significant moderating effect of relationship management on the relationship between servant leadership and conflict management styles.

The qualitative analysis of the study identified key themes under the variables of servant leadership, conflict management and emotional intelligence, offering valuable insights into the pastors' perceptions and practices. Regarding servant leadership, two prominent themes emerged: the disconnect between awareness and practice and the influence of organizational culture on the practice of servant leadership behaviours. While pastors presented belief in the efficacy of servant leadership in conflict management, discrepancies between knowledge and actual behaviours were noted. This indicated a pressing need for alignment between perception and behaviour. Additionally, the impact of an organizational culture characterized by a lack of proactive conflict management and low trust underscored the significance of addressing systematic factors to foster a conducive climate for servant leadership implementation. Similarly, in conflict management, themes such as ego and poor communication were highlighted as impediments to conflict management. There was consensus on the importance and need for enhanced communication and training to mitigate conflicts effectively. Finally, emotional intelligence emerged as a critical factor in conflict management, with pastors recognizing its role in self-awareness, empathy and conflict resolution. While these qualitative findings provide a rich contextual understanding, quantitative results revealed no significant moderating effect of relationship management in emotional intelligence on the relationship between servant leadership and conflict management styles. This suggests a subtle interaction between the theoretical constructs and their practical manifestations, calling for further investigation to clarify the relationship between perception and action within pastoral leadership contexts.

Freeborough (2021) found that higher levels of servant leadership lead to lower levels of interpersonal conflict in the workplace. It is recommended that pastors undergo training on servant leadership, conflict management, and emotional intelligence in order to improve the management of interpersonal conflict. Regarding the application of servant leadership in the church world, Crowther (2018) recommends that servant leadership training must include the soul of the leader to prepare the individual not only to succeed but also to handle success when it comes. The request for regular short and professional training in these three areas was indicated in the recommendations from respondents as captured in the qualitative data analysis. This finding was also supported by Matisi (2021), whose findings indicated that pastors who were trained demonstrated spiritual maturity during conflict and performed better than untrained pastors in handling conflict.

7. Recommendations for Further Studies

The study was done among pastors in selected urban churches in Kenya. Future studies can be expanded to study other mainline denominations in Kenya, such as Baptist, Methodist, Seventh Day Adventists, African Brotherhood Church, and Deliverance churches, as well as interdenominational and non-denominational churches. Similarly, other studies can be done in Para-church organizations and in local and international Faith-based organizations such as World Vision, Compassion International, and the Fellowship of Christian Unions (FOCUS). Additionally, future studies can also expand the scope to include other Eastern African countries and Africa-wide organizations.

The majority of research studies on servant leadership, conflict management and emotional intelligence have been carried out in corporate organizational settings. There is a need to conduct additional studies in Christian settings such as Bible college institutions and Faith-based organizations. Other areas of interest could also be in businesses established and run by Christians. Further research studies could be done on organizations with multiple international campuses beyond Kenya and Africa.

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