

How Does Council-Manager Conflict Affect Managerial Turnover Intention?: The Role of Job Embeddedness and Cooperative Context

Abstract

Turnover intention is an important yet underexamined concept in local government studies. Although the association between council-manager conflict and managerial turnover intention is well documented, the underlying mechanisms have not yet been elucidated. This study fills this research gap by analyzing two variables in the relationship: organizational job embeddedness and cooperative context. Results from partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) reveal that organizational job embeddedness mediates the link between task conflict and managerial turnover intention. The results also indicate that a cooperative context can moderate the negative indirect relationship between council-manager task conflict and managerial turnover intention.

Keywords: turnover intention; task conflict; organizational job embeddedness; cooperative context

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Managerial turnover is an important topic for the public sector (Rutherford and Lozano 2018). It is generally agreed that managerial turnover can lead to political uncertainty and inconsistent organizational outcomes (Boyne et al. 2011). At the municipal level, managerial turnover can affect the outcomes of long-term policies, such as external service delivery and long-term debt (Clingermayer, Feiock and Stream 2003; Clinger et al. 2008). Worse yet, frequent managerial turnover can indicate leadership instability and negatively influence the city's future search for competent candidates.

This study seeks to advance our understanding of how council-manager conflict can lead to municipal manager turnover intention. Turnover intention is defined as a deliberate willfulness to leave the organization and is regarded as the last in a sequence of withdrawal cognitions (Tett and Meyer 1993). Among the existing local government studies, council-manager conflict has been identified as a strong "push factor" in triggering managerial intention to leave current positions, given the premise that managers are hired to serve at the pleasure of elected officials (McCabe et al. 2008; Pammer et al. 1999; Whitaker and DeHoog 1991). However, several research gaps exist.

First, few local management studies have distinguished between different types of council-manager conflicts. Organizational conflict is a multidimensional construct and a

distinction needs to be made between a relationship conflict and a task conflict (Rahim 2001). A relationship conflict is a “socioemotional conflict arising from interpersonal disagreements” (Tekleab, Quigley and Tesluk 2009, p.172), while a task conflict relates to “*disagreements* about tasks, policies, and other business issues” (Rahim 2001, p.77). Since task conflicts and relationship conflicts may deploy different mechanisms affecting turnover decisions (Jehn 1995), studies on the relationship between council-manager conflict and managerial turnover intention need to decouple these two types of conflicts. In this study, we focused on council-manager task conflicts which are more likely to lead to managerial turnover compared to relationship conflicts (Whittaker and DeHoog 1991). As indicated by Whittaker and DeHoog (1991), only 15% of the municipal managers they interviewed left office due to council-manager differences in personalities, values, and interpersonal styles.

Second, few local government studies have systematically examined the process linking council-manager conflict and managerial turnover intention. Kaatz et al. (1999) found that council-manager conflict is an important cause of managerial stress, burnout, and low job satisfaction, which in turn could lead to a manager’s voluntary turnover. However, Hom and Griffeth (1995) found that psychological states can only explain moderate variance of turnover. In the present research, we investigated the intermediary role of organizational job embeddedness in linking council-manager task conflict and a municipal manager’s turnover intention. Job embeddedness, which is defined as a set of social, psychological and financial forces that bind employees to the organization (Mitchell et al. 2001), has been shown to serve as

a mediator between work-related factors and key organizational consequences, including employee turnover intentions and actual turnover (Hom et al. 2009).

Lastly, few studies have empirically examined the boundary conditions of the conflict—turnover intention linkage. As a result, little is known about why some managers choose not to leave even when they have “high-risk” conflict with elected officials (Whitaker and DeHoog 1991). Researchers have yet to study those situations where the negative impact of council-manager conflict on turnover intention is augmented or mitigated. In this study, we focused on whether council-manager task conflict takes place in a cooperative context or an uncooperative context. Previous studies have shown that conflict tends to be more constructively managed in a cooperative context (Deutsch 1973). This study argues that a cooperative context can exist between the council and the manager even with the presence of task conflict (Svara 1999). The extent to which the context is cooperative will moderate the impact of council-manager task conflict on managerial turnover intention.

To summarize, this study took a holistic view that combines both mediators and moderators in one model to examine the impact of council-manager task conflict on managerial turnover intention. Based on the research gaps, we presented our research model (see Figure 1). The viability of the model was then tested with the self-reported data obtained from municipal managers from the state of Missouri. At the end of this paper, we presented the findings and discuss their implications.

[Figure 1 here]

Theory and Hypotheses

Council-Manager Task Conflict, Turnover Intention, and the Mediating Effect of Organizational Job Embeddedness

In the business literature, scholars primarily use affective work attitudes (e.g., job satisfaction) to explain employees' conflict-generated quitting propensity and behaviors (Amason and Schweiger 1994). However, others found that affective work attitudes could only explain a moderate variance of turnover (Hom and Griffeth 1995). Mitchell et al. (2001) introduced the concept of job embeddedness to explain voluntary turnover. They posited that individuals get stuck in their organization through a collection of psychological, social, and financial forces. The more strands binding the individual, the harder it is for them to leave their current organization and job (Mitchell et al. 2001). Employees are not only enmeshed into a working environment (organizational job embeddedness), but also into a non-work environment (community job embeddedness). Between these two dimensions of job embeddedness, scholars argue that organizational embeddedness, in most cases, better predicts employee turnover (Lee et al. 2004). Thus, we focus on the organizational dimension to expand our understanding of *how* council-manager task conflict impacts managerial turnover intention.

Each dimension of job embeddedness has three components—links, fit, and sacrifice. Links are the “formal or informal connections between a person and institutions or other people” (Mitchell et al. 2001, p. 1104); fit is “an employee’s perceived compatibility or comfort with an organization and with his or her environment” (Mitchell et al. 2001, p. 1105); and, sacrifice is

“the perceived cost of material or psychological benefits that may be forfeited by leaving a job” (Mitchell et al. 2001, p. 1105).

In line with Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, we argue that organizational job embeddedness serves as an intermediary mechanism between council-manager task conflict and a manager’s turnover intention. COR theory roots in the notion that people actively seek to obtain, allocate, and protect resources they value (Hobfoll 2001). Resources can be anything important to the person, including personal resources (e.g., self-esteem, the importance of achievement) and conditional resources (e.g., job autonomy, the amount of feedback) (Dewe, O’Driscoll and Cooper 2012). From a COR perspective, job embeddedness can be conceptualized as a result of resource accumulation (Halbesleben and Wheeler 2008). It represents a state of resource abundance in which person-to-person relationship resources accumulate to the extent that the individual feels linked to the organization; a sense of belonging accumulates to the extent that the individual feels they fit in with the job and the organization; and, certain resources that are difficult to duplicate outside the organization accumulate to the extent that the individual develops a psychological desire to protect and not sacrifice those resources (Harris, Wheeler, and Kacmar 2011).

On the one hand, we expect that a task conflict with elected officials will deplete a manager’s resources that eventually there will be a decrease in the manager’s job embeddedness. COR theory proposes that external threats, such as conflicts at work, will cause resource lack or loss (Dewe, O’Driscoll and Cooper 2012). For managers, continuous task conflict with elected

officials can be time-consuming, emotionally-draining, and distracting, all of which lead to a gradual erosion of resources (Hobfoll 2001). Task conflict with elected officials can be detrimental to a manager's self-efficacy, sense of accomplishment, and sense of job security, thereby lowering their perceived fit with the city government. The tension inherent in council-manager task conflict hinders managers from establishing more stable and enduring links throughout the organization. Finally, such conflicts can impede the creation of organization-specific resources (e.g., informal power within the city government) that managers are not willing to relinquish. To this point, we expect that task conflict is negatively associated with a manager's organizational job embeddedness based on the idea that council-manager task conflict is a key factor determining the abundance of resources that a manager can obtain within the city government.

H1: Municipal managers who report lower levels of council-manager task conflict are likely to report higher levels of organizational job embeddedness.

On the other hand, we argue that organizational job embeddedness will be negatively related to managers' turnover intention. Drawing on COR theory, job embeddedness represents the accumulation of resources that are restricted to the position and the organization (Halbelseben and Wheeler 2008). The resources associated with the links and perceived fit can't be carried over to another organization. The presence of job embeddedness indicates that changing jobs would be a costly and risky investment for managers. Prior studies have tested the job embeddedness—turnover linkage in various organizational and cultural contexts (e.g.,

Peltokorpi, Allen and Froese 2015). Compared with affective work attitudes (e.g., job satisfaction) which fluctuate over time (Wheeler, Harris and Sablinski 2012), job embeddedness has an advantage in predicting turnover intention since the components of job embeddedness, particularly links and sacrifice, develop slowly over time and tend to be more stable (Halbesleben and Wheeler 2008). Employees who are more embedded in the organization are less likely to have an intention to quit and actual quitting behaviors, even after controlling for other major turnover antecedents (Lee et al. 2004).

H2: Municipal managers who report high levels of organizational job embeddedness are likely to have lower levels of turnover intention.

Taken together, we hypothesize that organizational job embeddedness mediates the impact of council-manager conflict on managerial turnover intention. Organizational job embeddedness can translate the influence of work environment into an individual employee's work-related decisions. We offer the following hypothesis:

H3: Municipal managers' reported levels of organizational job embeddedness mediates the relationship between council-manager task conflict and managers' turnover intention.

Council-Manager Task Conflict and the Moderating Effect of Cooperative Context

The outcomes of task conflict are also affected by the context in which disputes take place: whether the disputants are engaged in a cooperative context or an uncooperative context (Deutsch 1973). A cooperative context can mitigate the negative impact of conflict, whereas an uncooperative context can enhance the negative impact of conflict.

A cooperative context refers to a circumstance in which two or more entities engage in a mutually beneficial, rather than competitive, *exchange* (Johnson and Johnson 2005). According to Svava (1988), shared goals, mutual trust, and coordination of effort are indicative of a cooperative context in a city government. A cooperative context indicates that two or more entities have established a positive interdependence in which their actions increase the likelihood of each other's success and promote the achievement of joint goals even if they have conflicting views; an uncooperative context indicates that individuals have established a negative interdependence and their actions obstruct the achievement of each other's goals (Deutsch 1949).

This idea that the existence of a cooperative context is independent of conflict has also been applied to the local government setting. Svava (1999) pointed out that council-manager relations can be conflicting and cooperative simultaneously. Theoretically, the interaction pattern between the manager and the council in a given city could be placed in one of the quadrants in figure 2. For example, variant 1 refers to the situation in which the council and the manager can maintain a high level of coordination and constructive communication, although the two sides may disagree about the substantive ends of considerable policy issues. Variant 4 signifies the coexistence of a low conflict level and high cooperative spirit, which represents the most ideal combination.

[Figure 2 here]

There are several reasons for elected officials and managers to maintain a collaborative atmosphere even with the presence of council-manager conflict. From a normative perspective,

both elected officials and managers are obligated to advance the public interest and deliver high-performance work. This shared obligation determines that the responsibilities of elected officials and professional managers, in the pursuit of sound governance, cannot be strictly separated as suggested by the politics-administration dichotomy (Svara 2001). Instead, the political-administrative relationship could be complementary, which is characterized by interdependency, shared roles, and reciprocal influence (Demir and Nank 2012). This politics-administration complementarity model calls for a supportive and cooperative partnership between elected officials and managers (Svara 2001).

Another stream of research explains the instrumental motivations of forming a cooperative context between the council and the manager. On the one hand, the council controls the resources that the manager needs to carry out the council's vision, goals, and priorities, including discretion and flexibility, financial, technical and human resources. To reduce environmental uncertainty as well as secure positions, managers need to develop or maintain a favorable relationship with the entire council. On the other hand, the council has instrumental motivations to form a cooperative relationship with the manager. Local elected officials are mostly part-time and amateur; the manager is their primary source of information. Some studies have reported that a manager can have a greater impact than the governing body itself (Nalbandian 1991).

If a council-manager task conflict and a cooperative context can coexist, then it is plausible to assume that a conflict occurring in a cooperative context involves a different set of

outcomes than one occurring in an uncooperative context. Within a cooperative context, entities tend to perceive the organization as a unified and coherent whole and are bonded together (Johnson and Johnson 2005). Both parties will engage in positive interactions characterized by mutual help and assistance (Johnson and Johnson 1981), exchange of needed resources and information (Crawford and Haaland 1972), adequate feedback to improve performance (Ryan 1982), and willingness to explore different points of view (Deutsch 1949). Consequently, conflicts occurring in a cooperative context are likely to be centered on how best to achieve mutual goals through an open-minded and respectful discussion of conflicting views. A more cooperative context leads to the use of persuasion and support to resolve (Tjosvold 2002), and a more positive attitude towards, conflict (Johnson and Johnson 2005). In contrast, an uncooperative context is characterized by threat and coercion, ineffective and misleading communication, and distrust (Deutsch 1949). When conflict occurs in such a context, entities primarily care about who will win.

From a COR perspective, a favorable circumstance, such as a cooperative context, is associated with resource gains. A cooperative context can expand an individual's pool of available resources (e.g., effective communication, feedback) and replace other resources that are lacking or eroded due to ongoing or unresolved conflict (e.g., mutual trust, respect, willingness to achieve consensus) (Hobfall 1988). For municipal managers, a cooperative context can reduce the damaging impact of task conflict on a manager's perceived comfort level with the local government, their perceived ties with colleagues in the local government, motivation to take on

difficult tasks, and persistence in working toward goal achievement (Johnson and Johnson 2005). Thus, the negative impact of a council-manager task conflict on managers' job embeddedness is mitigated. We hypothesize:

H4: A cooperative context moderates the relationship between council-manager task conflict and managers' organizational job embeddedness. Specifically, the negative relationship between council-manager task conflict and managers' job embeddedness will be weaker in a more cooperative context.

If a cooperative context moderates the impact of council-manager task conflict on a manager's organizational job embeddedness, it is likely that a cooperative context will conditionally moderate the indirect relationship between a council-manager task conflict and managerial turnover intention.

H5: A cooperative context moderates the negative indirect relationship between council-manager task conflict and managerial turnover intention. Specifically, the negative relationship between council-manager task conflict and managerial turnover intention will be weaker in a more cooperative context.

Methodology

Sample and Data Collection

Our sample was drawn from municipalities located in the state of Missouri, US. Missouri as a state is very similar to the national average¹. For example, Missouri's population density, age distribution, the proportion of African Americans, percentage of persons in poverty, and

educational attainment were close to those of the entire country². Therefore, research with Missouri data promises practical implications. However, we encourage future research to replicate this study with samples from other contexts to test the external validity of our findings.

[Table 1 here]

Before data collection, in-depth interviews with five municipal managers were conducted. During the interviews, they were asked to share their understandings regarding why some managers left their positions. The interviews greatly helped us construct the survey questionnaire. We then obtained the directory of 199 city managers/administrators from the Missouri City/County Management Association (MCMA). From December 2016 through June 2017, we sent out our survey questionnaires to all 199 city managers/administrators. Three waves of online surveys and one wave of self-administered mail survey were used to increase the response rate. After data cleaning, we retained 120 observations in our final sample with a response rate of 67%. Table 1 reports the demographics of municipal managers in the final sample.

[Figures 3a, 3b, 3c here]

[Tables 2a, 2b, 2c here]

The sample of 120 municipalities was fairly representative of all the 199 Missouri municipalities with the position of municipal manager. Figure 3a, Figure 3b, and Figure 3c report the frequency distribution of the 120 municipalities (the final sample) as compared to the 199 municipalities (the sampling frame) in terms of population size, percentage of Whites, and educational attainment. Table 2a, Table 2b, and Table 2c report the percentages of each category

of population size, racial homogeneity, and educational attainment in both the sample and the sampling frame. There was no substantial difference between the composition of our final sample and that of the sampling frame.

Analytical Technique

Partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was used to test our theoretical model. This technique has been increasingly used in organizational studies and business management studies (Hair et al. 2017). Compared with covariance-based structural equation modeling (CB-SEM), PLS-SEM overcomes some of CB-SEM's theoretical and estimation problems which makes PLS-SEM an appropriate analytical technique for this study:

(1) PLS-SEM provides robust model estimations with small sample sizes (Reinartz, Haenle and Henseler 2009). It can achieve sufficient levels of power when sample sizes are small. Chin and Newsted (1999) suggested that the minimum recommended sample sizes in PLS-SEM range from 30 to 100 cases. Given the final sample size of this study is 120, PLS-SEM is expected to produce more robust estimates compared to CB-SEM. (2) Unlike maximum likelihood-based CB-SEM, PLS-SEM is a nonparametric method and does not assume that data should be normally distributed. We examined whether the variables were normally distributed using skewness and kurtosis normality tests. The results showed that cooperative context, organizational job embeddedness, and turnover intention were not normally distributed. Therefore, PLS-SEM was a more appropriate approach in this study. (3) Compared with CB-

SEM techniques, PLS-SEM tools are more sensitive to moderator effects (Chin, Marcolin and Newsted 2003).

Consistent with CB-SEM, data analysis in PLS-SEM includes two distinct stages. The first stage involves assessing measurement properties by examining convergent validity and discriminant validity. The second stage is the assessment of the structural model. Smart PLS 3.0 was used to test the hypothesized relationships.

Measurement

All survey items were measured on a 1-7 scale with 1= strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree. To measure municipal managers' turnover intention, we adapted survey items from Tett and Meyer (1993). Turnover intention was measured by averaging municipal managers' responses to three items: (1) the extent to which they think of quitting their job, (2) the likelihood that they will look for another job during the next year, and (3) the attractiveness of staying in their current job (reverse coded).

A municipal manager's organizational job embeddedness reflects their degree of attachment to their work life. We adapted the survey items from Clinton, Knight, and Guest (2012) to measure the three dimensions of organizational job embeddedness: items 1 and 2 captured the degree of job-fit, item 3 detected the level of linkage of the manager to the organization, and item 4 reflected the real or imaged loss the manager would experience if they left.

In this study, we developed a measurement of council-manager task conflict based on Svava's (1999) conceptualization of leadership responsibilities in local governments which suggested that elected officials and managers share responsibilities in mission, policy, administration, and management. Additionally, Demir (2009) found that management activities largely remain an area for managers in which elected officials rarely get involved. Therefore, this study primarily considers task conflicts between a manager and city council that occurred over issues related to mission, policy proposals, and policy administration. The manager's perceived level of council-manager task conflict was used to measure this construct.

Based on Svava (1998), we used managers' responses to measure the cooperative context between the manager and the council in terms of (1) their shared goals of promoting the long-term interests of the public, (2) their coordination efforts, and (3) their mutual trust.

We controlled for some factors that are expected to have effects on municipal manager turnover intention. First, certain demographic characteristics were controlled, including the manager's gender and tenure (Mani 2014). Managers serving in more homogeneous cities may have lower levels of turnover intention (McCabe et al. 2008). Therefore, the total population of the municipality, the population growth rate from 2000 to 2010, and the percentage of Whites were also included as control variables. Second, previous studies have identified ease of movement as an antecedent of turnover behavior (March and Simon 1958). We included the manager's perceived job alternatives as a control variable. We adapted the survey items from Jackofsky and Peters (1983) and measured managers' job alternatives in the following aspects:

(1) the possibility of finding a better job, (2) the availability of acceptable jobs, and (3) the manager's confidence in finding a similar job. Lastly, it is plausible that managers embedded in their communities are less likely to leave their positions. We adapted the survey items from Clinton, Knight and Guest (2012) to measure the three dimensions of community job embeddedness, including the degree of fit to the community, the level of linkage to the community, and the sacrifice that managers would experience if they left the community.

Assessment of Common Method Bias

We conducted Harman's single factor test to examine the extent to which the total variance can be explained by a single factor. We observed that the maximum variance explained by a single factor was only 38.6%, which indicated that common method bias was not a significant problem in this research (Podsakoff and Organ 1986). We also followed the suggestion of Kock (2015) and conducted a full collinearity test to assess common method bias in PLS-SEM. Since all factor-level VIFs resulting from this test were below 3.3, the model was not contaminated by common method bias (Kock 2015). Neither the single factor test nor the full collinearity test suggested a threat of common method bias³.

Results and Findings

Descriptive Statistics

[Table 3 here]

Overall, the managers reported a moderate level of task conflict with their respective councils (Mean=3.10, S.D.=1.11). They perceived a relatively high level of cooperative

atmosphere with their councils (Mean=5.75, S.D.=1.18). And they reported a relatively low level of turnover intention, with a Mean at 2.43 and a S.D. at 1.41.

Evaluation of Measurement Model

The goal of measurement model assessment is to ensure the reliability and validity of the construct measures. Following the suggestions of Hair et al. (2017), the criteria we used included internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. The results of the measurement model are shown in Table 4.

[Table 4 here]

We assessed the internal consistency reliability of constructs using composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha. CR and Cronbach's alpha above 0.6 are considered acceptable levels of internal consistency reliability (Hair et al. 2017). The results indicated that both CR and Cronbach's alpha of our constructs showed internal consistency.

Convergent validity was assessed by the outer loadings of the indicators and the average variance extracted (AVE). The outer loading indicates the extent to which the associated indicators have in common. Hair et. al (2017) recommended that items with outer loadings above 0.40 could be retained for analysis. All outer loadings were above 0.50 in this study. AVE is another common measure to establish convergent validity at the construct level. AVE of each construct was above 0.50, revealing that the construct explained more than half the variance of its indicators.

Discriminant validity measures the extent to which a construct is distinct from others. We followed the suggestion of Henseler, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2015) and assessed discriminant validity using the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT) of the correlations. HTMT is the mean of all correlations of indicators across constructs measuring different constructs relative to the mean of the average correlations of the indicators measuring the same construct (Hair et al. 2017). According to Henseler, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2015), an HTMT value above 0.90 suggests a lack of discriminant validity. All HTMT values were lower than the threshold value of 0.90. We also tested whether the HTMT values were significantly different from 1. We ran bootstrapping of 5000 samples and obtained the bootstrap confidence intervals for all constructs. No bootstrap confidence intervals included the value 1, suggesting that the constructs were empirically distinct.

Evaluation of Structural Model

Collinearity Assessment. We checked the collinearity between each set of predictor constructs before hypotheses testing. The variance inflation factor (VIF) value was used to examine collinearity. All VIF values were below the threshold of 5, therefore, collinearity among the predictor constructs is not a critical issue in this study (Hair et al. 2017).

Structural Model Path Coefficients. We evaluated the statistical significance of our hypotheses based on the *t*-values generated by bootstrapping 5000 samples.

[Figure 3 here]

Figure 3 depicts the main parameters obtained for the model under study in the structural assessment. In H1, we hypothesized a negative relationship between council-manager task

conflict and organizational job embeddedness. PLS-SEM revealed a significant negative relationship between the two constructs ($\beta=-0.325$, $t=3.303$, $p=0.001$) with a 95 percent bootstrap confidence interval (95% CI) that did not include zero (-0.506 , -0.121). H1 was supported. We also found support for H2 which predicted the negative relationship between organizational job embeddedness and managerial turnover intention ($\beta=-0.339$, $t=3.193$, $p=0.001$, 95% CI= -0.529 to -0.114).

We followed the suggestion of Hair et al. (2017) to test the mediating effect of organizational job embeddedness between council-manager conflict and managerial turnover intention (H3). We first tested the significance of the indirect effect and found that the indirect effect (0.110) between task conflict and managerial turnover intention via organizational embeddedness was significant ($t=2.093$, $p=0.036$, 95% CI= 0.020 to 0.225). Next, we continued to test the significance of the direct effect from council-manager task conflict to managerial turnover intention. The direct relationship was 0.181 and statistically significant ($t=2.174$, $p=0.030$, 95% CI= 0.011 to 0.339). Since both the direct and indirect effects were positively significant, organizational job embeddedness represented partial and complementary mediation of the relationship between task conflict and managerial turnover intention (Hair et al. 2017).

[Figure 4 here]

In H4, we hypothesized that a cooperative context moderates the relationship between council-manager task conflict and organizational job embeddedness. The interaction term was created using the production indicator approach (Hair et al. 2017). The PLS-SEM results

indicated that the interaction term between council-manager task conflict and cooperative context was statistically significant ($\beta=0.240$, $t=2.682$, $p=0.007$, 95% CI=0.089 to 0.393). We reported the plotted simple slopes at one standard deviation above and below the mean value of cooperative context in figure 4. The slope of the relationship between council-manager conflict and organizational job embeddedness was relatively weaker with a more cooperative context. It indicated that a cooperative context indeed mitigated the negative impact of council-manager task conflict on managers' organizational job embeddedness. The interaction term's f^2 effect size had a value of 0.144 which indicated a relatively large effect (Kenny 2016). H4 was supported.

To test the moderated mediation effect (H5), we obtained the index of moderated mediation. According to Hayes (2015), the index of moderated mediation for our model refers to the specific indirect effect of the moderating effect on managerial turnover intention. The PLS-SEM result indicated that the index of moderated mediation ($\beta=-0.081$) was significant ($t=2.093$, $p=0.036$, 95% CI=-0.172 to -0.014). As the confidence interval did not include zero, and with the upper bound negative, it suggested that the indirect effect of council-manager task conflict on managerial turnover intention through organizational job embeddedness was negatively moderated by a cooperative context. Overall, H5 was supported.

Among all the control variables, only job alternative ($\beta=0.334$, $t=4.564$, $p=0.000$, 95% CI = 0.191 to 0.481) and community job embeddedness ($\beta= -0.256$, $t=3.169$, $p=0.002$, 95% CI = -0.417 to -0.098) were statistically significant. Job alternative was found to have a positive

relationship with managerial turnover intention, whereas community job embeddedness had a negative relationship with managerial turnover intention.

Assessment of R^2 Values, Effect Size f^2 and Predictive Relevance Q^2 . In addition to path coefficients, the predictive capability of the PLS-SEM structural model should also be assessed by the level of R^2 values, the f^2 effect size, and the predictive relevance Q^2 (Hair et al. 2017).

The R^2 value represents the amount of explained variance of the endogenous constructs in the structural model. The R^2 value of organizational job embeddedness (0.489) and turnover intention (0.502) can be considered moderate (Hair et al. 2017).

[Table 5 here]

Effect size f^2 measures if an exogenous construct has a substantial impact on an endogenous construct. Values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 were used to represent small, medium, and large effects (Cohen 1988). Table 5 reports the f^2 values for all combinations of endogenous constructs and corresponding exogenous constructs. Except for several control variables (including gender, age, tenure, population size, population growth rate, and percentage of Whites), all effect size values were more than 0.02 which shows either small or medium effects of the exogenous latent variables.

Additionally, we examined Stone-Geisser's Q^2 values which measure the model's out-of-sample predictive power or predictive relevance. The Q^2 values reflect the extent to which a PLS path model predicts data not used in the model estimation. For a specific endogenous latent variable, a Q^2 value greater than 0 suggests that the model has predictive relevance (Hair et al.

2017). We used the blindfolding procedure and specified the omission distance $D=7$. The Q^2 value of organizational job embeddedness was 0.228 and the Q^2 value of managerial turnover intention was 0.268. The Q^2 values were considerably above zero. Thus, the results provided evidence for the model's predictive relevance.

Assessment of Goodness-of-Fit Index

Unlike CB-SEM, PLS-SEM does not have an established global goodness-of-fit measure for assessing the overall model. Recently, Henseler et al. (2014) suggested that the standard root mean square residual (SRMR) could be used to validate the model. The SRMR is defined as the root mean square discrepancy between the observed correlations and the model-implied correlations (Hair et al. 2017). The SRMR value (estimated model) we obtained (0.079) was below the threshold value of 0.08 which was considered a good fit (Hu and Bentler 1998).

Discussion

Theoretical Implications

The overriding goal of this study was to provide a more nuanced perspective of the impact of council-manager task conflict on managerial turnover intention. We primarily adopted a COR perspective to build our theoretical framework. This perspective is particularly relevant to municipal managers as council-manager relations constitute vital resources for managers to be motivated and successful. Our results make several theoretical contributions to the literature.

First, the finding that task conflict is negatively associated with managers' organizational job embeddedness offers new empirical evidence to support the detrimental impact that task

conflict can have within local governments. It echoes the result of a recent meta-analysis conducted by De Dreu and Weingart (2003), which indicated that strong and negative correlations exist between task conflict and team performance as well as team member satisfaction. However, it should be noted that prior research conducted in the business context also indicated that task conflict can bring in positive outcomes for organizations. Task conflict has the potential to enhance decision quality (Janssen, Van de Vliert, and Veenstra 1999) and team creativity (Farh, Lee, and Farh 2010). Future local government studies need to provide more evidence regarding the outcomes of council-manager task conflict.

The finding that task conflict is negatively associated with managers' organizational job embeddedness also provides a new perspective in our understanding of how organizational job embeddedness is shaped. The exploration of factors that foster employee organizational job embeddedness is still far from sufficient. Most of the extant literature focused on the contributions of human resources (HR) management practices (such as training, promotion, and autonomy) in promoting job embeddedness (Bambacas and Kulik 2013). In this research, however, we turned our attention away from HR practices and identified that the level of task-related conflict occurring during the interaction between a municipal manager and a city council can explain the extent to which a manager embeds in a municipal government.

Second, the finding that organizational job embeddedness is positively associated with municipal managers' turnover intention is consistent with the business management literature that increasing organizational job embeddedness is likely to reduce employees' propensity to

leave the organization and to increase retention. To our best knowledge, the potential effect of “pull-to-stay” forces has not been explicitly tested in the public management literature. The present study represents an empirical confirmation of the relationship between job embeddedness and turnover intention in the public sector.

Third, building on COR, we provided an alternative explanation in which council-manager conflict impacts turnover intention through the intermediary mechanism of organizational job embeddedness. In our model, task conflict is treated as an external threat that will deplete the resources that managers can obtain; in turn, the lack of resources for coping with a certain situation, the possible resource losses, or the inability to replenish resources managers have expended (Hobfoll 1988) will increase managers’ intentions to leave their current positions.

The inclusion of cooperative context as a moderator in the conflict—turnover intention relationship represents one of only a few attempts to consider the context of conflict in council-manager relations. Previous studies seemed to equate the presence of council-manager conflict with the lack of a cooperative context (e.g., Demir and Nank 2012). It is currently supposed by some that if a council-manager conflict can be reduced or eliminated, a cooperative context is likely to prevail, and managers will be less likely to leave. However, situating conflict and cooperative context at opposing ends of a continuum may oversimplify the power relations and interaction patterns between the governing body and the manager. We suggest that a council-manager task conflict and its cooperative context should be viewed as two continua and can

coexist in council-manager relations. Council-manager relations should be assessed on a two-dimensional matrix rather than at discrete locations on a spectrum.

Although previous studies have touched on the bases of council-manager cooperation (Demir and Nank 2012), it is still rare for local government studies to empirically test the impact that a cooperative context can have in the governmental process. In this study, we highlighted the important role of a cooperative context in “lessening” rather than “eliminating” the destructive impact of task conflict on managers’ organizational job embeddedness as well as their turnover intentions, through either gaining additional resources or replacing eroded resources. Within a cooperative context, both the manager and the council realize that they must work together, which would, therefore, decrease the tendency of the manager to feel uncomfortable about unavoidable task-focused disagreements. This finding echoes Svara’s (1999) call for greater efforts to elevate the decline in council-manager cooperation in local governments.

Practical Implications

Beyond the theoretical contributions, the results of this study also have practical implications. Intense task conflict could be symptomatic of managers’ withdrawal. Thus, a key implication is that local governments should respond to indications of council-manager conflict as early as possible before it culminates into a tidal wave of withdrawal perceptions and cognitions.

However, it would be simplistic to assume that a local government can be task-conflict free. Instead of focusing on how to completely avoid council-manager task conflict, it would be

more realistic for local officials to explore how such conflict can be constructively managed, particularly, under what conditions task conflict can be less destructive. Our findings indicated that a practical way to achieve this goal is to nurture a cooperative context. Although it is beyond the scope of this research, local officials should take proactive measures to strengthen cooperation. Possible options offered by previous research include improving relations among elected officials (Svara 1999) and holding regular workshops to identify mutual expectations and to gain consensus (Pammer et al. 1999). Efforts to create a cooperative context should highlight the interdependence between the two sides of officials in achieving present as well as future goals.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study is not without research limitations. A more nuanced analysis of council-manager task conflict is needed in future studies. For example, a municipal manager who encounters task conflict with only one or two council members may find the job unpleasant, but not untenable. However, a manager who disagrees with a majority of city council members may perceive a low level of job embeddedness and start searching for another position. Future research could also deploy more objective indicators to measure council-manager task conflict.

There also might be some unmodeled variables that account for the proposed relationships in the model. For example, we only focused on one dimension of council-manager conflict—task conflict. However, there are some circumstances in which council-manager relationship conflict could be intensified. The political tension among elected officials or a

substantial change in the composition of the city council can trigger a council-manager relationship conflict that drives a manager to leave (Whitaker and DeHoog 1991). Future studies could examine how the interplay between council-manager task conflict and relationship conflict shapes managerial turnover intention. Finally, the research design of this study is cross-sectional. Cross-sectional studies can help generate causal hypotheses but cannot determine causality. Future research could deploy an experimental design to untangle the causal relationships in the model.

Despite these limitations, this study is one of the few attempts to develop an integrated moderated mediation analysis linking council-manager task conflict and managerial turnover intention. In an era of political polarization, the impact of council-manager interactions on outcomes as important as turnover intention should be particularly emphasized. More research along this line of inquiry is needed to provide further insights into the constructive management of council-manager relations.

Notes

1. <https://www.businessinsider.com/the-most-average-states-in-america-2014-4#11-michigan-1>. [Accessed on Oct 15, 2019].
2. The data were obtained from the U.S. Census. <https://www.census.gov/>. [Accessed on Oct 15, 2019].
3. We appreciate the anonymous reviewer's suggestion that actual turnover could be used as the ultimate dependent variable to address the possible common method bias. We created a dummy variable "Actual Turnover" with "1 = the city has a new manager" and "0= No turnover". However, we still keep turnover intention as our ultimate dependent variable for the following reasons: (1) We tested the Pearson correlation between "Actual Turnover" and "Managerial Turnover Intention". The correlation coefficient was 0.27 ($p < .01$). The weak correlation

indicated that turnover intention and actual turnover are indeed two distinctive concepts. Therefore, by replacing the variable “Managerial Turnover Intention” with “Actual Turnover”, this research would test a different question. (2) Another reason is that “dummy-coded indicators...should not be used as the ultimate dependent variable” in PLS-SEM (Hair et al. 2017, p.27).

Table 1. Demographics of Municipal Managers in the Final Sample

Variables	Characteristics	Respondents (%)
Gender	Female	10%
	Male	90%
Age	Less than 40 years old	8.33%
	Between 40 and 60 years old	63.34%
	Greater than 60 years old	28.33%

Tenure	Less than 5 years	44.17%
	Between 5 and 10 years	33.33%
	Greater than 10 years	22.50%

Table 2a. Comparison Between Sampling Frame and Final Sample: Population Size

Population Size	<5,000	5,000 – 10,000	10,000 – 20,000	20,000 – 30,000	30,000 – 40,000	40,000 – 50,000	>50,000
199 Municipalities (Sampling Frame)	47.74%	18.59%	19.6%	5.53%	2.01%	0.5%	6.03%
120 Municipalities (Final Sample)	46.67%	16.66%	22.5%	4.16%	1.67%	0.83%	6.67%

Table 2b. Comparison Between Sampling Frame and Final Sample: Percentage of Whites

% of Whites	<20%	20%-40%	40%-60%	60%-80%	80%-100%
199 Municipalities (Sampling Frame)	1.51%	0.5%	2.51%	11.06%	84.42%
120 Municipalities (Final Sample)	0.83%	0	1.66%	9.17%	88.33%

Table 2c. Comparison Between Sampling Frame and Final Sample: Educational Attainment

% of High School or Higher	<20%	20%-40%	40%-60%	60%-80%	80%-100%
199 Municipalities (Sampling Frame)	0	0	0	13.57%	86.43%
120 Municipalities (Final Sample)	0	0	0	10%	90%

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics (Non-Categorical Variables)**N=120**

Variable	Mean	S.D.	Min.	Max.
Council-Manager Task Conflict	3.10	1.11	1	6
Cooperative Context	5.75	1.18	1.33	7
Organizational Job Embeddedness	5.69	0.98	2	7
Turnover Intention	2.43	1.41	1	7
Job Alternative	4.54	1.32	1	7
Community Job Embeddedness	5.24	1.49	1.33	7
Tenure (yrs)	7.59	7.64	0.11	34
Population (2010)	16765.87	46722.19	187	470800
Population Growth (% , 2000-2010)	14.99	26.08	-17.25	149.10
% of Whites	89.27	11.00	18	98.30

Table 4. Evaluation of Measurement Model

Latent Variable	Indicators	Convergent Validity		Internal Consistency Reliability		Discriminant Validity
		Loadings	AVE	CR	Cronbach's Alpha	HTMT confidence interval does not include 1
Turnover Intention (TI)	TI1	0.83	0.64	0.84	0.72	Yes
	TI2	0.87				
	TI3	0.70				
Council-Manager Task Conflict (TC)	TC1	0.92	0.63	0.83	0.70	Yes
	TC2	0.55				
	TC3	0.86				
Organizational Job Embeddedness (OJE)	OJE1	0.87	0.58	0.84	0.75	Yes
	OJE2	0.90				
	OJE3	0.62				
	OJE4	0.58				
Cooperative Context (CC)	CC1	0.89	0.67	0.86	0.75	Yes
	CC2	0.67				
	CC3	0.87				
Job Alternative	JA1	0.82	0.64	0.84	0.72	Yes

(JA)	JA2	0.72	0.73	0.89	0.82	Yes
	JA3	0.86				
Community Job Embeddedness (CJE)	CJE1	0.85				
	CJE2	0.86				
	CJE3	0.87				

Notes: AVE=average variance extracted; CR=composite reliability

Table 5. f^2 Effect Sizes

	Organizational Job Embeddedness	Turnover Intention
Task Conflict	0.147	0.043
Cooperative Context	0.058	
Moderating Effect	0.144	
Organizational Job Embeddedness		0.136
Job Alternative		0.203
Community Job Embeddedness		0.109
Gender		0.009
Tenure		0.001
Population Size		0.008
Population Growth		0.006
% of Whites		0.007

Appendix. The Measurement of Variables

Variables	Measurement
Managerial Turnover Intention^{a†}	TI1. I often think of quitting this job. TI2. It is likely that I will look for another job during the next year. TI3. There isn't much to be gained by staying in this job (R).
Council-Manager Task Conflict^{a†}	TC1. I regularly agree with the government mission set by elected officials (R). TC2. Elected officials and I sometimes have very different perspectives on various policy proposals, such as budget priorities and land-use plans. TC3. Elected officials and I frequently take the same viewpoints on how policies should be implemented (R).
Organizational Job Embeddedness^{a†}	OJE1. The city government provides me with a way of life that suits me. OJE2. Overall, I fit very well in the city government. OJE3. Overall, I have strong ties with people throughout the city government. OJE4. There would be many things this city government that I would be sad to lose if I left.

Cooperative Context^{a†}	CC1. Elected officials and I share the goal of promoting the long-term interest of the public. CC2. Sometimes elected officials refuse to cooperate with me (R). CC3. By and large, elected officials and I trust each other.
Job Alternative^{a†}	JA1. It is possible for me to find a better job than my current one. JA2. Acceptable jobs can always be found. JA3. There is no doubt that I can find a job that is at least as good as the one I now have.
Community Job Embeddedness^{a†}	CJE1. There is plenty to keep me happy off duty around here. CJE2. Even if I decide to leave my current job, I would still live in this area. CJE3. I would be very sad to leave the community where I live right now.
Gender[†]	1=Male, 0=Female
Tenure[†]	How long the respondent has been in his/her position as a municipal manager
Population*	The total population of a given municipality
Population Growth*	The population growth rate from 2000 to 2010 of a given municipality
% of White*	The percentage of Whites of a given municipality

Notes:

a. All items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree).

† Source: MO municipal manager survey

* Source: U.S. Census (2010)

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Figure 1. Conceptual Model

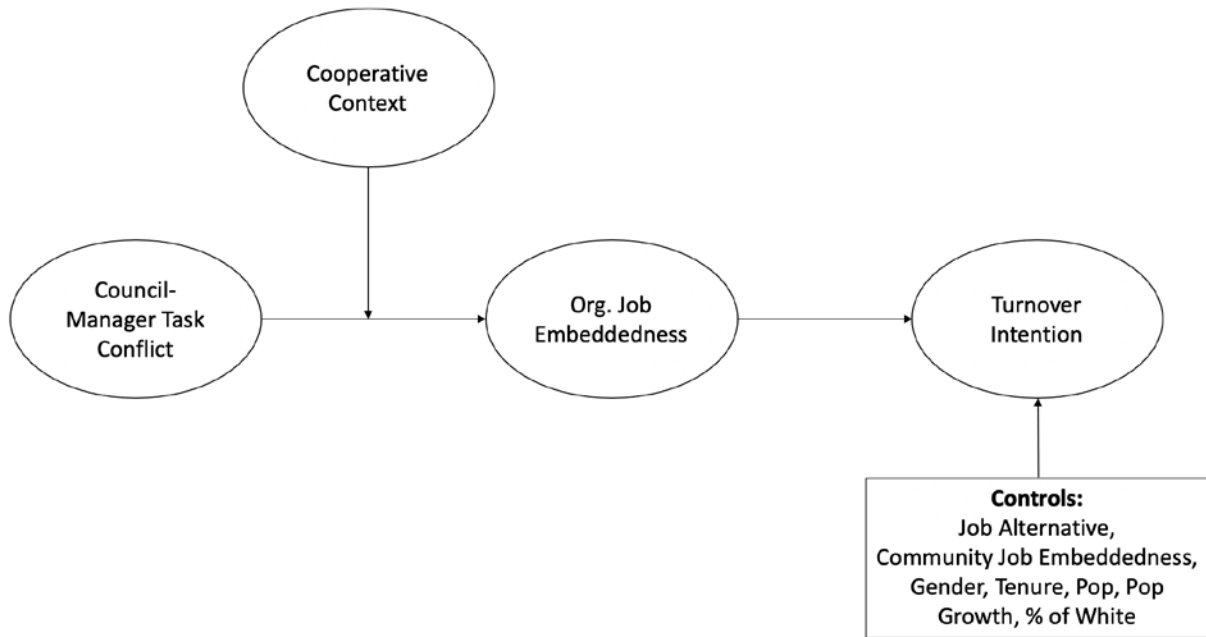
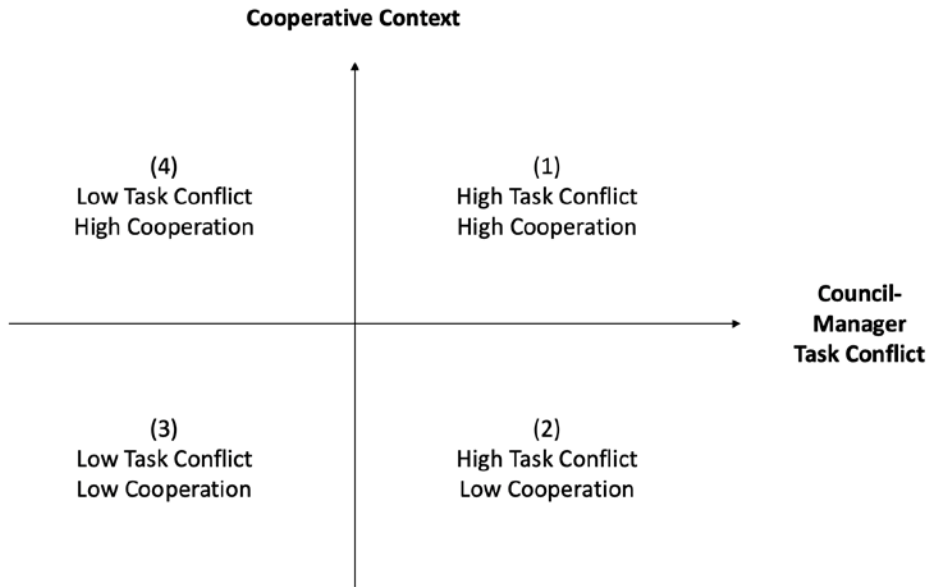


Figure 2. Typology of Four Variants of Council-Manager Task Conflict and Cooperative Context



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Figure 3a. Comparison Between Sampling Frame and Final Sample: Population Size

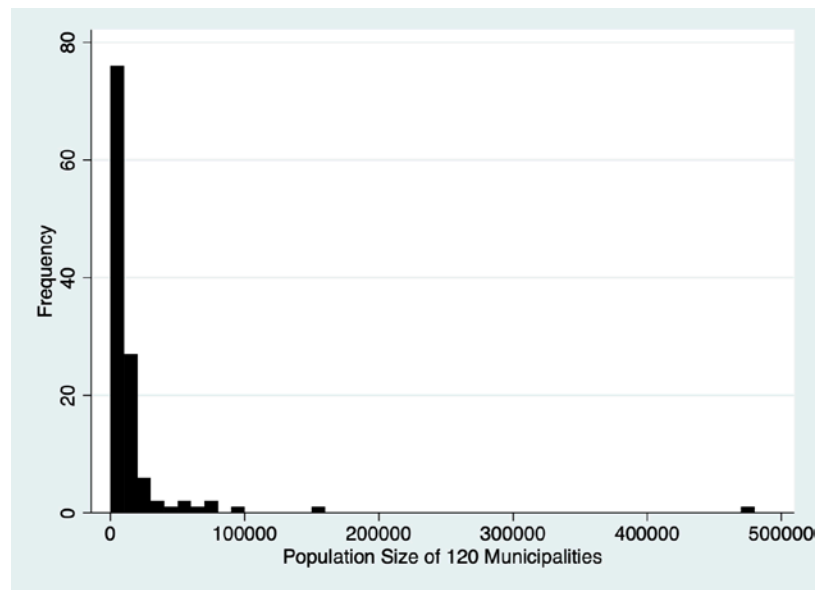
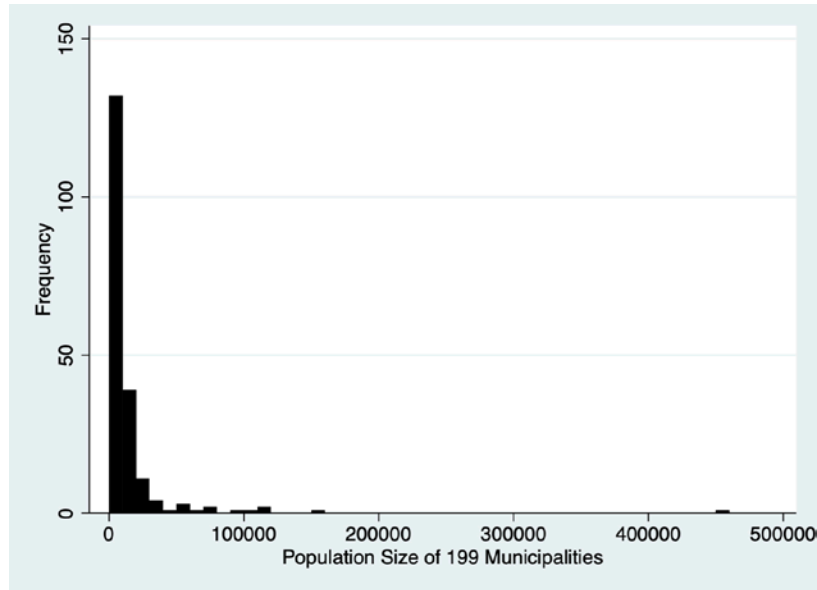


Figure 3b. Comparison Between Sampling Frame and Final Sample: Percentage of Whites

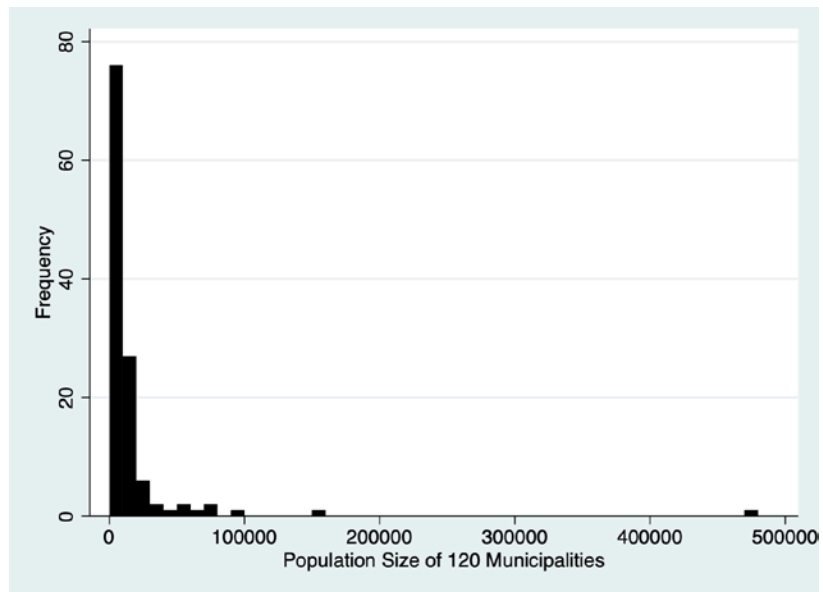
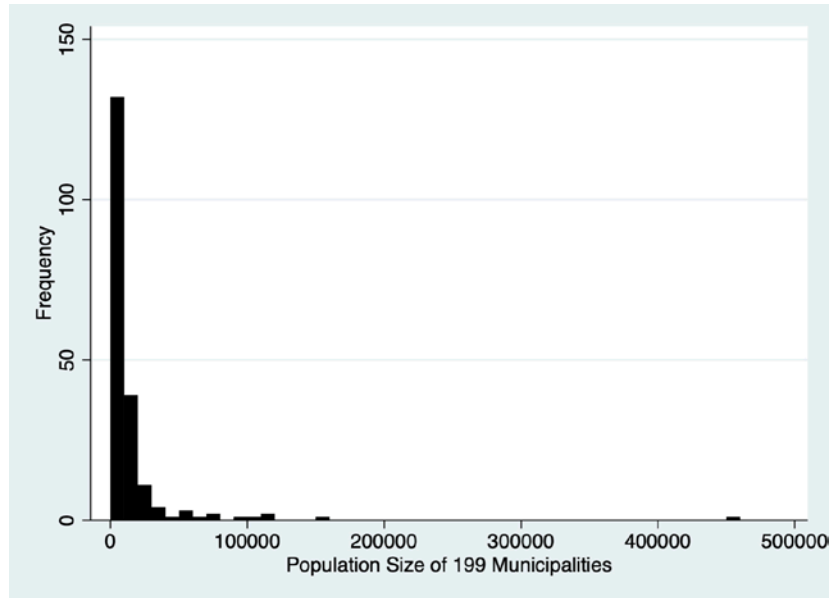


Figure 3c. Comparison Between Sampling Frame and Final Sample: Educational Attainment

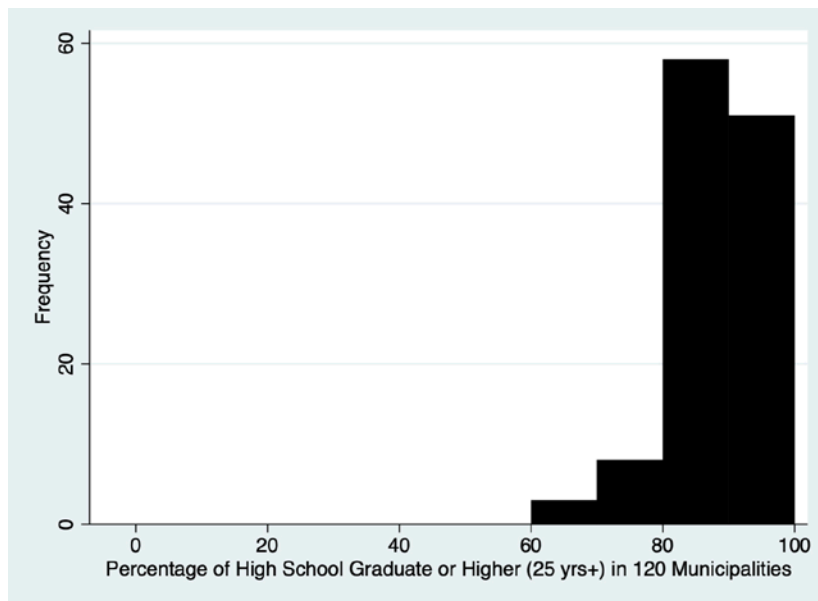
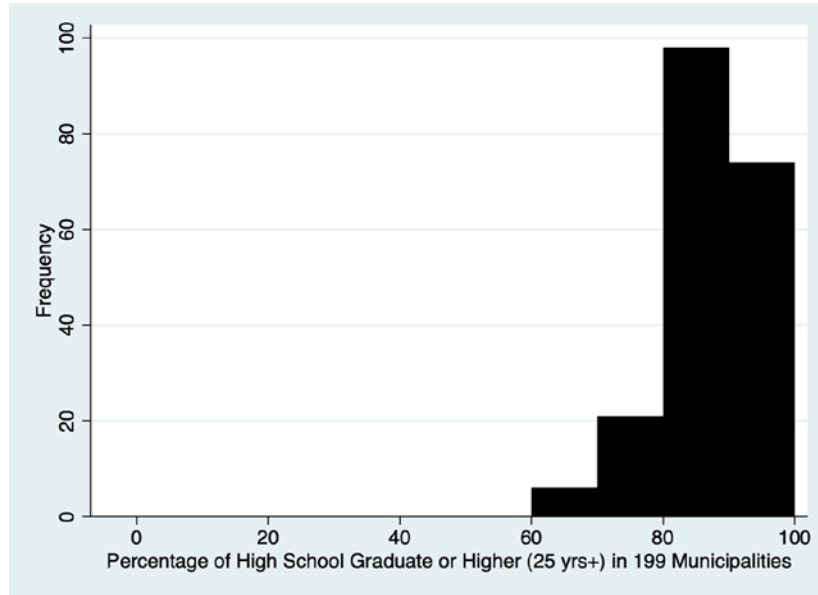
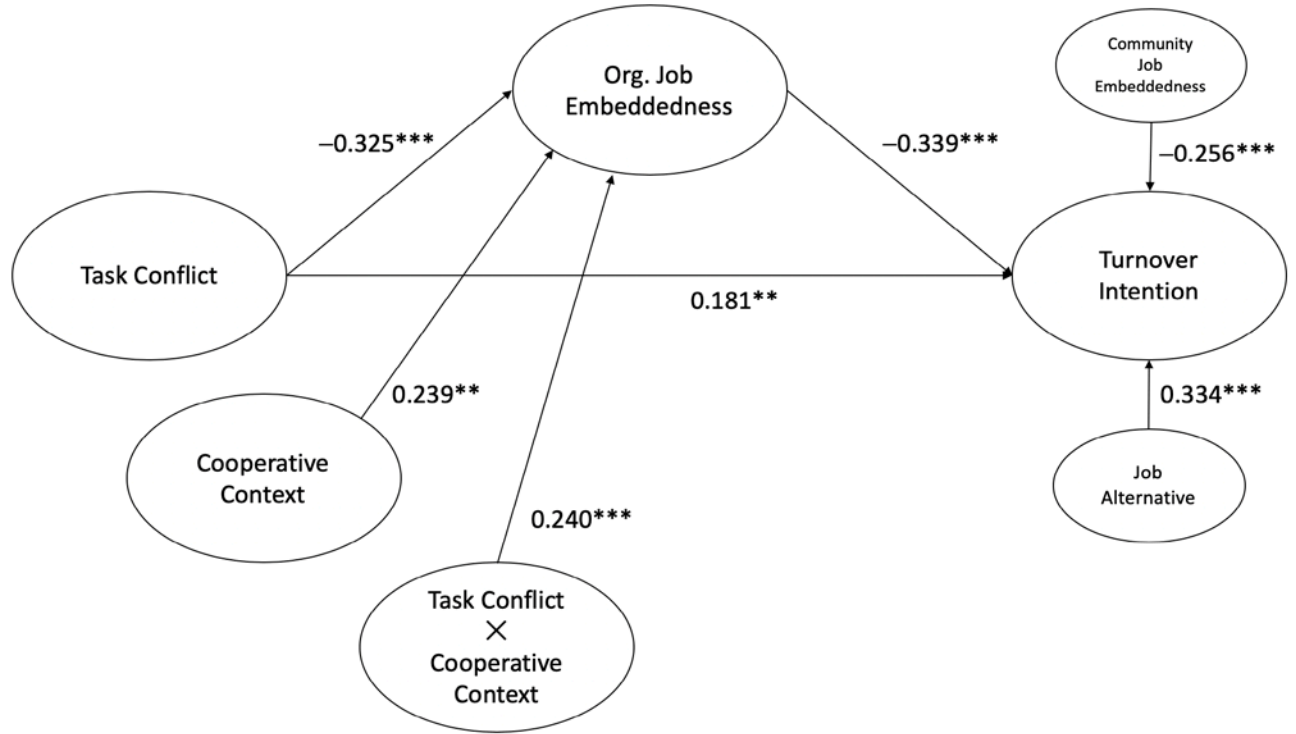


Figure 3. Statistical Diagram of Task Conflict Effects on Turnover Intention with Path Coefficients



Note: Non-significant control variables are not presented due to clarity reasons.
*** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$

Figure 4. Organizational Job Embeddedness Predicted by Council-Manager Task Conflict Moderated by Cooperative Context

