

# APPROACH TO TEAM CONFLICT RESOLUTION

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*Original scientific paper*

## Abstract

*This work includes research of team conflict resolution styles in sports by basketball coaches. This research was conducted at the European Junior Basketball Championship B Division held from July 23 to August 2, 2009 in Sarajevo. Research tasks were created with the goal to establish styles for resolving team conflict by coaches in basketball, to determine dominating styles and with the help of a questionnaire to analyze opinion about correlation of the offered styles and their effectiveness. The questionnaire created by Kreitner and Kinicki (1998), has given answers on these hypotheses. Sample was comprised of 14 coaches from 24 basketball teams which took part in competition. The research was conducted through the questionnaire which covered five different conflict resolution styles: bonding, reconciling, imposing, avoiding and compromise. Coaches of tested teams who have dominating styles for resolving team conflicts caused by certain reasons, have shown that hypothesis relating to coach's different adaptational styles of conflict resolution is completely confirmed.*

**Key words:** conflict, coach, coach's style.

## INTRODUCTION

Tensions, frictions and conflicts are constituent parts of modern sport. Their frequency made us used to look at them as a normal phenomenon. That is the reason why we react to them spontaneously, without looking for causes and without realizing consequences. In our country, basketball is student sport, which emphasizes obedience, so we consider conflicts detrimental and undesirable. Perfect situation would be if we didn't have them at all. However, researches conducted so far show that besides negative effects conflicts also bring some positive effects. Understanding them contributes to a better communication among coaches, players and fans. In other words it leads to better results. Since the conflicts are a common thing in sports, avoiding resolution can have negative consequences such as aggression, psychosomatic disease, addiction, depression, becoming too exhausted by practices (Robins, 1974 & Vecchio, 2000). The most distinct expression, which is the best for us to comprehend the meaning, defines conflict or common fate. Term conflict has a variety of meanings, and in most cases it refers to all situations where there are opposite motifs, developments, purposes, impulses, etc.

Interpersonal conflicts can be reduced to belief conflicts, which have source in the fact that different people have different ways of perceiving the same situation and they completely believe in their perception. (Petz, 1991).

Just as we mentioned above, that conflict is a common thing which occurs in all relations, conflicts itself can neither be characterized as good nor bad. The aim for us should not be to look for relations without problems, but to learn how to resolve conflicts in appropriate way (Gordon, 1993 & Stanicic, 2006).

*What is the attitude of coaches in conflict resolution? – Methodological scope of research*

Research of conflict resolution in sports teams by coaches was conducted at the European Junior Basketball Championship B Division held from July 23 to August 2, 2009 in Sarajevo.

*Subject and problem of the research*

Coaches as leaders and their staff members play a key role and they are in the central position when it comes to team leadership. Therefore, they determine how will conflicts be resolved within a sports team or will they be resolved at all. The approach of coaches to team conflict resolution will determine projections of all participants of practices, games...and by that way it will influence how a possible change is experienced, as their own personal change or an imposed change.

Intention is to determine through empirical research among coaches of basketball teams at the European Junior Basketball Championship 2009, how basketball coaches and their staff members use various approaches in conflict resolution within their own team and how the use of a certain style influences result of the whole team.

*Research tasks*

Considering research subject and goal setting, the following tasks were defined:

1. To determine styles of conflict resolution for chosen basketball coaches using the questionnaire created by Kreitner and Kinicki (1998).
2. To explore the opinion of participants about the correlation between offered styles and team effectiveness.
3. To explore and determine is there a dominating style for resolving team conflicts and reasons that lead to them.
4. To study contemporary professional literature in the area of leadership, compare theoretical

discussion with results of the research, and come up with conclusions.

### *Hypotheses*

Considering the goals set in this research, theoretical findings, results of previous researches, as well as previous experiences, it is assumed that:

1. Coaches adjust different styles of conflict resolution.
2. Coaches have dominating styles of conflict resolution which are influenced by certain reasons.

Starting from defining the problem, sub-hypotheses are set which are going to help by showing the whole picture of the use of various styles for conflict resolution.

It is assumed that basketball coaches mostly use two styles:

- Bonding, which is directed to results and
- Compromise, the most commonly used style.

### *Research styles*

Research among coaches at the European championship was conducted within the scope of quantitative data analysis, where attempt was to try finding sources in certain styles of conflict resolution, with possibility of numerical data. Style represents an established order and procedure of activity, as well as the flow of activity and operation. Style used in this research is descriptive and in less extent theoretical.

### **Research techniques and procedures**

Polling is a research procedure. It is a procedure where questions are asked to respondents (coaches) (M.A. Rahim, 1985), about facts which are important for the covered area. Respondents circle the correct answer. Structured questionnaire (Identifying style for conflict resolution) consists of 15 enclosed questions marked from 1 to 5 or in descriptive way (Rarely-Always-Dominant). Although it is hard to draw a precise line between questionnaire poll and judgement scale, because questions in polls can demand from respondents to estimate as in our case, there is a printed scale of judgement in table. This questionnaire offers different dimensions, where the use of different styles for conflict resolution contributes to more or less effectiveness. Data collected through research procedure and instruments, made possible for us to

have an insight to research questions relating to establishing styles for conflict resolution, by chosen coaches.

### **Research sample**

Twenty four teams took part at the European Junior Basketball Championship B Division. Fourteen coaches were chosen for the research procedure. These samples belong to a group of probable samples. A sample is:

- typical, because it consisted of junior basketball team coaches;
- aimed, because it includes teams from the above mentioned championship;
- random, it is within the group of 24 teams.

Area of the research is Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo.

Tabling and describing techniques, techniques of graphic display and conclusion, were used for arranging and statistical analysis of data.

### **Research limits and validity**

Research did not consider team effectiveness at previous competitions, but only at this competition in 2009. From methodological point of view, it is about non-representative sample. The questionnaire is not adequately examined and there is no valid outcome of such research. Personal perception and self-evaluation are not adequate ways of analyzing conflict resolution style, and they offer just an insight to "inner self vision" of analyzed coaches.

There are numerous style typologies used by sport experts in practice. One of them belong belongs to M.A. Rahim (in Kreitner and Kinicki, 1998). It is about five different styles described as: bonding, reconciling, imposing, avoiding and compromise.

### **RESULTS**

Research conducted by questionnaire covers five different styles of conflict resolution. They are described as bonding, reconciling, imposing, avoiding and compromise, and are incorporated in 15 statements. Through their evaluation and perception of offered dimensions, coach's style of team conflict resolution will be defined. Table 1. Illustrates styles of conflict resolution which coaches use in their coaching practice:

State-team	Bonding (sum of grades)	Reconciling (sum of grades)	Imposing (sum of grades)	Avoiding (sum of grades)	Compromise (sum of grades)
Sweden	15	15	9	11	11
Poland	8	11	14	9	6
Montenegro	14	11	14	10	8
England	15	12	8	10	8
Belgium	15	12	15	4	9
Holland	14	12	10	9	9

State-team	Bonding (sum of grades)	Reconciling (sum of grades)	Imposing (sum of grades)	Avoiding (sum of grades)	Compromise (sum of grades)
Estonia	10	9	9	10	8
BiH	13	10	11	11	10
Iceland	9	11	12	13	10
Belorussia	10	9	14	9	8
Austria	14	14	10	12	11
Switzerland	12	10	10	11	9
Finland	15	14	11	14	14
Norway	15	15	7	13	15

Table 1. Styles of conflict resolution used by coaches

Style called "bonding" characterizes needs of coaches to cooperatively identify a problem and find alternative solutions. This style, considered to be very dominant, was chosen by five coaches or 36,00 %.

This style has limits in situations when starting points of opposing individuals or parts of the team, are established on the opposite value systems. This style requires more time. Good side of this conflict resolution style is that it offers a long term solution, because its direction focuses on basic problem caused by conflict.

Style called "reconciling" is a dominant style in the work of two coaches, which is 14,00% out total number (14) of chosen coaches.

This style is typical for coaches who are able to neglect their own starting point, in order to satisfy the needs of players. It reduces differences and promotes common interests. It is not appropriate for more complex problems which tend to become worse. Good side of this style is that it improves cooperation between the sides in conflict. It is interesting that it was used by coaching staff of Sweden, who won the competition.

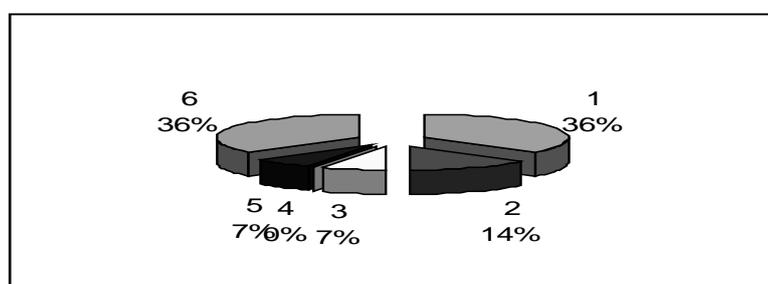
Dominant style which in professional literature is marked as "imposing", is attributed to a coach who puts his views and interests in the first place, while being insensitive and showing lack of interest for the needs of other side. Two coaches (7 %) chose this style of conflict resolution. This style relies on formal power and its use in obedience of players

and other staff members on the opposing side. This style has a limited use in the situations where conflict subject is not very important, while conflict itself has to be resolved in a very short period of time. It is not appropriate for teams where tendency is to create an open and cooperative atmosphere, because it disrupts coach-player relationship.

Style known as "avoiding" characterizes coaches who prefer passive attitude towards conflict and who tend to excommunicate a problem and hide it. If problems are trivial that is not detrimental, but if serious problems occur than hiding them leads to escalation. Of course, this style buys some quality time, but it generates conflicts of larger proportions. (Jankovic, 1993). This style is not dominant for any coach and therefore it is not articulated by any significant grade.

Style known as "compromise" is widely used in amateur sport. However, coaches tend to avoid it in these types of competition. This style is used modestly by Norwegian national team, (7,0 %). Norway didn't accomplish and significant result (they didn't reach top 8). One important characteristic of this style is that there is a mutual indulgence by both sides in conflict – players and coaches. It is justified to the extent when both sides have opposite goals. It is described as democratic style which doesn't produce significant losses. Time value is limited which hinders more creative approach to resolution (Stanicic, 2006).

Dominant styles of conflict resolution by basketball coaches are shown in percentages in picture 1.



Key: 1. Bonding, 2. Reconciling, 3. Imposing, 4. Avoiding, 5. compromise, 6. Not defined

Through comparison of the chosen conflict resolution by coaches with geographical area they come from, one can notice that coaches from Scandinavian countries have positive styles that are very developed. Bonding is dominant style for coaches of Sweden, Finland, Norway and Benelux countries. Watching their coaching style at the European championship one could notice tranquillity, nonverbal messages by the whole coaching staff, that are definitely more effective than verbal. It could also be noticed on the practices of these teams that they maintain the balance between praise and constructive critic. Swedish team that won the competition was informed (both players and coaches) about challenges and possibilities, and what is characteristic, they avoided success related promises. Finland and Norway reacted in a similar way although they didn't achieve any significant results at this competition. Norwegian coach used styles of bonding, reconciling and compromise as dominant styles.

Bosnian team coaches had average indicators of potential use of all styles. They preferred bonding style for conflict resolution within their team. On practices, Bosnian coach demanded mutual understanding from his team, not a win. In other words he didn't want success based on conflict and disagreement.

Coaches of teams covered by this research who have dominant styles for resolving conflicts which were caused by certain reasons, showed that hypothesis relating to coach's various adapting styles of conflict resolution is entirely confirmed.

Table 1 clearly shows that coaches perceive all offered styles of conflict resolution in their practice. There is no doubt that all styles are not equally used and are not in harmony percentage-wise.

Research also showed that coaches who are flexible when it comes to the use of offered styles are not effective, even with their results at the competition. Current situations offer certain unpredictability and therefore situational approach might be the best style for conflict resolution.

Research also showed that coaches with flexibility of using offered styles are not effective even with their results at the competition. Current situations offer certain level of unpredictability, therefore in this case situational approach might be the best for conflict resolution. This type of approach demands special abilities from coaches, knowledge and experience that a coach must have in his competence. With the help of research through used research instrument one could not determine any dominant style of conflict resolution which is caused by absence of coach's specialized competences for sports team leadership. The most relevant critique about coach's style and quality of conflict resolution would be given by his players.

## CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that most coaches at the European championship think that conflicts should be avoided, and that surroundings full of peace and understanding should be created. Conflicts are unpleasant experiences in life as well as in sports. Instead of actions people talk about intentions, while conflicts are solved administratively instead of constructively and operatively.

Empiric research conducted here also showed certain limitations related to surroundings, that is constant changes and pressure as compared to each team's result. Since coaches play central role here, team chemistry depends on them. Of course, when it comes to resolution of possible team conflicts coaching style will also have a great influence on the final outcome. Research articulated conflict resolution styles for chosen coaches using questionnaire created by Kreitner and Kinicki (1998). Dominating styles of conflict resolution as well as reasons that led to conflicts, were also determined.

Research showed that coaches rarely use avoiding and compromise styles which are suitable for amateur and recreational sports. In this research, dominant styles for conflict resolution by coaches in their teams are bonding and reconciling. These styles are largely directed to team relations and are indicators that coaches have different approaches to offered styles for conflict resolution which justifies set hypothesis for articulated tasks.

If the fact is accepted that many conflicts in sport are good for more productive and creative work, and that constructive team leadership can lead to improvement of overall work and interpersonal relations, then the time is to start a new "conflict culture".

One important fact is described in professional literature, while it was left out of research, and that is that other circumstances which are not covered by this questionnaire influence effectiveness of leadership in cases of conflict resolution.

Of course, culture can be created by systematic education about leadership and by building competence of the whole coaching staff and all sports consumers, not just of coaches. This implies that in one team instead of "command – perform" style, culture of communication, cooperation, constructive confrontation, and mutual tolerance should be encouraged. Coaches play a key role in this task. Responsibility for conflict resolution lies on all conflict participants, but the biggest responsibility is on coach and team management. They should be careful, open, sensitive, but at the same time energetic when it comes to conflicts that pose a threat to normal processes in team and sports in general.

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**PRISTUP RJEŠAVANJA SUKOB U TIMU**

*Originalni naučni rad*

**Sažetak**

Rad obuhvata istraživanje načina rješavanja sukoba u sportskoj ekipi od strane trenera košarkaških ekipa. Istraživanje je provedeno na Europskom prvenstvu B divizije za selekcije juniora u košarci koje je realizirano od 23.07. do 02.08. 2009. godine u Sarajevu. Zadaci istraživanja su projicirani u smjeru ustanovljavanja stilova rješavanja sukoba u košarkaškoj ekipi od strane trenera, utvrđivanja preovladavajućih stilova rješavanja sukoba i analiziranja mišljenja o povezanosti ponuđenih stilova upitnikom i njihove učinkovitosti. Upitnik koji su kreirali Kreitner i Kinicki (1998) pružio je odgovore na postavljene hipoteze. Uzorak od 14 trenera je uzet od 24 ekipe koje su učestvovala na natjecanju. Istraživanje je realizirano sa upitnikom koji tretira pet različitih stilova rješavanja sukoba i to: povezivanje, izgladivanje, nametanje, izbjegavanje i kompromis. Treneri tretiranih ekipa koji imaju preovladavajuće stilove rješavanja sukoba koji su uslovljeni određenim razlozima, pokazali su da je hipoteza koja se odnosila na trenerove različite adaptirajuće stilove rješavanja sukoba u potpunosti potvrđena.

**Ključne riječi:** sukob, konflikt, trener, stil trenera.

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