

## The Sources of Conflict in Professional Basketball Teams - the Case of Greece



### Management

**KEYWORDS** : conflict, sources, professional basketball, coaches

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### ABSTRACT

*Conflict is an inevitable fact of human existence. It can arise among members within a team, such as a professional basketball team. The basketball coaches, acting as leaders of the team, they should identify the sources of conflict between the players and they should handle conflict effectively. The aim of this study was to examine the main sources of conflict, in order for the coaches to act properly and protect the cohesiveness of the team. The sample was consisted of 25 professional basketball coaches  $n = (25)$  who coached in professional level during the 2011-2012 seasons. They were surveyed using questionnaires. Using the descriptive statistics and the one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), it was found that, the professional basketball coaches consider the "communication breakdown" (2.84), as the main source of causing conflict among the players, followed by the "personality clashes" (2.89). Also they consider that the less source of causing conflict is the "scare resources" (4.60).*

### Introduction

According to Daft (2000), an important aspect of the team process, such as a professional basketball team, is cohesiveness. Often the terms "cohesion" or "cohesiveness" are used to describe a group in which the members all work together for a common goal or one where everyone is ready to take responsibility for group chores (Cartwright, 1968). Cohesiveness is very crucial especially for team sports where the final score, a win or a loss, depends to a large degree on the relationship and understanding between the players (Laios & Tzetzis 2005). Professional basketball team cohesiveness is defined as the extent to which players are attracted to the team and motivated to remain in it (Turman, 2003).

Whenever people such as professional basketball players and coaches work together some conflict is inevitable. Even the most supportive communication climates will not guarantee complete harmony (Adler & Rodman, 1994). Organizational conflict is the discord that arises when the goals, interests, or values of different individual or groups are incompatible and those individuals or groups block or thwart one another's attempts to achieve their objectives (Potrac & Jones, 2009). Conflict does not occur until the behaviour of one of the parties interferes with the efforts of the other (Dunham & Pierce, 1989).

Conflict arises from the clash of perceptions, goals, or values in an arena where people care about the outcome (Alessandra & Hunsaker, 1993). If the management of that conflict is not effective, it can totally disrupt the entire group process. Many people and organizations view conflict as a negative, or something to be avoided. Yet conflict, differences, or disagreements are a natural result of people working together. Also, without conflict, teams can become complacent and not perform at optimum levels. Conflict by itself is either good or bad. However, the manner in which conflict is handled determines whether it is constructive or destructive (Deutsch & Coleman, 2000). Conflict has the potential for either great deal of destruction or much creativity and positive social change (Kriesberg, 1998).

Another researcher, Capozzoli (1995), describe the outcomes of constructive and destructive conflict:

Constructive conflicts exists when...

People change and grow personally from the conflict  
The conflict results in a solution to a problem  
It increase involvement of everyone affected by the conflict  
It builds cohesiveness among the members of the team

Destructive conflicts exists when...

No decision is reached and problem still exists  
It diverts energy away from more value-add activities  
It destroys the morale of the team members  
It polarizes or divides the team

If an organization such a professional basketball team is to achieve its goals, coaches must be able a) to confine and b) to resolve conflicts in a functional manner. Conflicts are part of individual relationships and organizational development, and no relationship or organization can hope to mature to productivity and be successful without being able to resolve conflicts effectively (Cottringer, 1997).

Clearly, one of the main responsibilities of any basketball coaches is to resolve conflict. The two key goals for the coach are to remain impartial, and to facilitate understanding among the players. "As a team leader, one must realize the paradox that surrounds conflict. The team needs to embrace conflict as a means of generating and evaluating ideas. While at the same time, it must shy away from it to prevent anger, frustration, or alienation. The biggest challenge for the coaches as team leaders is figuring out how to balance these two forces (Brockmann, 1996).

### Sources of conflict in organizations – professional basketball teams

According to Potrac and Jones (2009), Daft (2000) and Fisher (1997), the sources, which can cause people, such as professional basketball players and coaches to engage in conflict are the following:

- Scare resources. In their desire to achieve goals, basketball coaches, players and personnel wish to increase their

recourses, which throw them sometimes into conflict. Contracts, extra bonuses, and fines are some example of money recourses. When players must complete for scare or declining recourses, conflict is almost inevitable. This kind of conflict occurs when the team is facing financial problems and the administration Board is not capable of regular payments.

- b) Jurisdictional ambiguities. Within an organization roles must be clearly defined if the group is to function effectively. Role definition reduces competition (Veninga, 1982). In a professional basketball team job boundaries and responsibilities must be clear. Basketball coaches, as leaders are responsible for this task. When the coach defines well and predicts responsibilities and duties, players and personnel will know where they stand. Otherwise, they may disagree about who has responsibility for specific tasks or who has a claim on recourses.
- c) Communication breakdown. Communication is very important process in sports. Poor communication in professional basketball teams between coaches and players result in poor individual and team performance. Information, ideas, and messages must be clear and well understood. Poor communication results in misperceptions and misunderstanding of other people (Kathleen, 1994).
- d) Personality clashes. Players and coaches are considering great personalities. Especially in professional basketball, the large number of “star players”, can lead to personality clashes. A personality clash occurs when people simply do not get along with one another.
- e) Power and status difference. Power and status differences occur when one party has disputable influence over another. That happened many times in professional basketball teams between players and coaches. They are engaging many times engage in conflict in order to increase their power and influence in the team.
- h) Goal differences. Goal is a desired future state that the organization attempts to realize (Riggs, 1995). Goal differences are common in basketball teams. Conflict often occurs because coaches, players and personnel are pursuing conflicting goals. The individual opposing goals might cause major clashes among team members.

**Method-Sample**

The sample included 25 professional basketball coaches who worked in Division I professional teams for the period of 2011-2012. All coaches responded to a questionnaire, which measures, according to their opinion, the sources of conflict occurred in their teams. All subjects were male.

**Procedure**

All basketball coaches responded to a questionnaire of six sources of conflict in their teams: a) Scare resources, b) Jurisdictional ambiguities, c) Communication breakdown, d) Personality clashes, e) Power and status difference, h) Goal differences. A questionnaire was sent to them and they were asked on a 1-7 Likert scale (1 – extremely important, 7 – not at all important), about the degree-importance of these sources in order to engage them and players in conflict.

**Results**

The responses of the professional basketball coaches were analyzed and ranked to investigate the degree-importance of these sources in order to engage them and players in conflict. The descriptive statistics are presented in table 1.

**Table 1. Descriptive statistics of causes conflict in professional basketball teams.**

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Ranking
Scare resources	25	4.60	.34	6
Jurisdictional ambiguities	25	3.76	.29	4
Communication breakdown	25	2.84	.21	1
Personality clashes	25	2.89	.24	2
Power-status difference	25	3.34	.28	3
Goal differences	25	4.44	.21	5

It was found that the professional basketball coaches rated “communication breakdown” (2.84) as the most important reason for causing conflict among them and the players. In contrast, “scare resources” a variable that represented financial problems received the lowest score (4.60).

**Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to determine the main causes of conflict between coaches and players in professional basketball teams in Greece. Based on review of literature it was found that there are six main causes of conflict between coaches and players. From these causes it was found that the “communication breakdown” (2.84), was considered by the professional basketball coaches as the main cause which can engage in conflict, followed by the “personality clashes” (2.89).

Communication between the basketball coaches and great personalities as the players are in professional basketball two very important causes for conflict. In basketball, due to the immediate and continuous contact (time out, game, overtimes etc), effective communication is considering a crucial factor for success. The information which exchanged and understood by coaches and players can motivate and influence behaviour. Therefore, the basketball coaches should find the most effective method to communicate in order to influence the individual and team performance. Bad communication, according to the coach’s opinion, can cause conflict and affect the cohesiveness of the team.

Also, the professional basketball players are considered strong personalities. The coaches should find methods to transfer in the most effective way the necessary information and instructions during practices and games. It very often phenomenon in professional basketball the “personality clashes”, and the coach’s duty and responsibility are to handle properly when this will occur.

The power and status difference (3.34) is the 3<sup>rd</sup> source of conflict and occur when one party (coaches) has disputable influence over another (players). The dictatorial or strict behaviour of the coach can cause conflict. Basketball coaches and players are engaging many times in conflict due to the fact that they both trying to increase their power and influence in the team.

The jurisdictional ambiguities (3.76), which mean responsibilities and duties and the goal differences (4.44), considered by the coaches the less sources for conflict. Usually, in professional basketball teams, coaches and players know very well their responsibilities and duties and as team sport, they have the same common goal, to perform in their maximum level and win the game. That’s why these two factors are considered by the coaches the less important causes for conflict.

Finally, the scare resources (4.60), is considered by the coaches as the less source of conflict. Coaches and players they have their own contracts and in a case of financial problems such as regular payments, the Board is usually responsible for that.

Conflict is an inevitable fact of human existence. If professional basketball coaches work to understand and manage it effectively, they will be able to improve both the satisfaction of the players and the individual and team performance. Therefore, it is essential for the coaches to understand the basic process of conflict, so they can work to maximize productive outcomes (positive performance) and minimize destructive ones (cohesiveness problems).

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