



PERSONAL DETERMINANTS OF STYLES USED FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION AMONG ATHLETES

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ABSTRACT

Conflicts are an unavoidable part of the world of sports. They are the result of the stress and high expectations to which athletes are subjected before, during and after sports competition. This study **aims** at detecting typological characteristics that influence preferred styles of conflict resolution in the sports field. **Method:** The research was done among 225 athletes aged from 18 to 25 years, grouped by sex and sport. Respondents completed Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQ) and Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory–I (ROCI–I), for measurement of styles to resolve interpersonal conflicts. **Results:** The preferred styles of conflict resolution in all groups of respondents were integrating and compromising. Athletes from team sports showed statistically significant higher results in terms of using an obligating and compromising style of conflict resolution, compared with athletes from individual sports. The extroversion had a significant impact on the use of integrating style and compromising style. Psychotism was a determining variable in avoiding the integrating style and using the dominant style. **Conclusion:** On the basis of typological characteristics of personality, coaches can implement more effective approaches and solutions for the optimization of interpersonal interaction and adequate resolution of conflicts arising through the use of appropriate strategies.

Key words: extroversion, neuroticism, integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising.

INTRODUCTION

Conflicts are an unavoidable part of contemporary sport. Conflicts in sports occur frequently because of the pressure of competition. They appear any time before, during, or after competition when athletes are most stressed or excited. Such conflicts are amplified in expression and feeling due to the athletes' strong need and desire to win. Conflicts among athletes, or between an athlete and a coach, can destroy an entire career in a short period of time (1-4).

Traditional strategies of behavior, elected by the participants in the conflict, depend to a great extent on the orientation towards achieving their goals (assertiveness) or objectives of the partner (compliance) (5-7).

These strategies have been adopted by most professionals dealing with conflicts, although different authors describe them with different terms. One of the popular classifications of styles of conflict resolution divides them into five main types. Rahim's systematic approach to conflict management identifies five styles of handling conflict (integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising) (8). In the integrating style, also known as problem solving, the aim is to find solutions that are satisfactory and acceptable for both sides. It involves collaboration between the parties that are willing to reach a mutual and acceptable solution through openness, exchange of information, examination, and exploration of differences in order to arrive at a constructive solution that goes far beyond personal and limited visions of the problem. It is applicable to solving complex problems, but the procedure of finding the best solution requires a lot of time.

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Avoiding style, also known as suppression, is characterized by withdrawal, suppressing, or delaying the problem rather than attempting to find a solution. As suggested by Rahim this style may take the form of postponing an issue until a better time, or simply withdrawing from a threatening situation. As suggested by Rahim, this style may take the form of postponing an issue until a better time, or simply withdrawing from a threatening situation. This style often reflects little concern toward the issues or parties involved in the conflict, and the attitude to refuse or deny acknowledging the existence of a conflict in public. It is effective in certain difficult situations, since it does not lead to escalation. However, it is not applicable to important problems in which postponing would lead to deepening of the conflict.

The dominating style, also known as competing, aims at satisfying one's own interests at the expense of others. This way of resolving conflicts is power-oriented, using the formal power. A dominating person stands up for their own rights and ignore others' needs and expectation, also known as competing. This is a win-lose style expression of a forcing behaviour in order to win one's position.

The obliging style, also known as accommodating, is expressed in the neglect of interests to satisfy the interests of the other party. An obliging person neglects and sacrifices personal concern so to satisfy the concern of the other party. This style is associated with a non-confrontation element characterized with the attempt to minimize differences and to emphasize commonalities to satisfy the concern of the other party. As suggested by Rahim, this style may take the form of selfless generosity, charity, or obedience to the party's order. This type of behavior is appropriate when the compromising party is in a weak position and thus gets something in return, but the main conflict remains unsolved.

Compromising style is the intersection of a distributed and integrative dimension. It seeks mutually acceptable solution that partially satisfies both parties. The styles sees both parties involved in give and-take or sharing solutions, whereby both parties accept to give up something to make mutually acceptable decisions. Compromising style may involve

splitting the difference, exchanging concession, or seeking a quick, middle ground position. This style is appropriate when the time for a solution is restricted and/or the sides have opposing goals (9, 10).

The analysis of the styles of conflict resolution requires compliance not only with situational determinants but also with the typological characteristics of the participants. We focused our attention on personal typological features according to the factor theory of H. Eysenck (11). The typological characteristics are basic for the activation, the individual style of work, and for number of other psychological phenomena. They are integrated into three basic factors: extroversion, neuroticism, psychoticism. The factors mentioned above are connected to a maximum wide circle of personal dimensions – behaviorist, interpersonal, psychological, physiological, etc. Each personality can be analyzed inside the continuum, determined by the three basic factors. The differences in the context of these factors are accompanied with differences in conduct and activity, in communication with others, in the relationship with oneself and with the external environment.

Extraversion is characterized by being outgoing, talkative, high on positive affect, and in need of external stimulation. According to Eysenck's arousal theory of extraversion, there is an optimal level of cortical arousal, and performance deteriorates as one becomes more or less aroused than this optimal level. Thus, at very low and very high levels of arousal, performance is low, but at a more optimal mid level of arousal, performance is maximized. Extroverts, according to Eysenck's theory, are chronically under-aroused and bored and are therefore in need of external stimulation to bring them up to an optimal level of performance. Introverts, on the other hand, are chronically over-aroused and jittery and are therefore in need of peace and quiet to bring them up to an optimal level of performance (11).

Neuroticism is characterized by high levels of negative affect such as depression and anxiety. Neuroticism, according to Eysenck's theory, is based on activation thresholds in the sympathetic nervous system or visceral brain. This is the part of the brain that is responsible for the fight-or-flight response in the face of

danger. Neurotic people, who have low activation thresholds, experience negative affect (fight-or-flight) in the face of relatively minor stressors - they are easily upset. Emotionally stable people, who have high activation thresholds, experience negative affect only in the face of very major stressors - they are calm under pressure. Neuroticism, the disposition to experience negative affect, can be distinguished from negative affect itself, in that those disposed to experience negative affect (e.g., anxiety) may tend to avoid situations that cause it.

Psychoticism is characterized by nonconformity, hostility, and impulsivity. The physiological basis suggested by Eysenck for psychoticism is testosterone, with higher levels of psychoticism associated with higher levels of testosterone (11).

PURPOSE

The aim of this study was to reveal the influence of typological features of personality on preferred styles of conflict resolution. We assumed that the use of certain styles of conflict resolution was determined by some typological characteristics of the personality.

Participants: The research was done among 155 athletes aged 18 to 26 years (mean age 22.9 years); of them - 73 women, 82 men; 83 practice individual sports, 72 – team sports. All researched athletes were informed about the purpose of the study.

Table 1. Mean values of typological features of personality, differentiated by gender and sport

Variables	Extraversion		Neuroticism		Psychoticism	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Athletes in the research	15,59	3,39	11,29	5,18	4,9	3,4
Women	15,38	3,58	12,06	5,46	4,27	2,5
Men	15,85	2,97	10,11	4,99	5,26	3,44
Individual sports	15,34	3,75	11,22	4,96	5,45	3,44
Team sports	16,2	2,52	11,34	5,46	4,71	3,72

According to the standards for Bulgarian female population aged between 16 and 70 years (12), the studied athletes were characterized by moderate and strong extroversion. Similar results were indicated in other studies (12, 14). Basically, extraverts are characterized by increased activity, proneness to movement and actions that characterize sport activity. In the dimension of neuroticism,

Data Analysis SPSS 25.0 was used for statistical processing. A set of statistical procedures was applied: descriptive statistics, comparative analysis ((Mann-Whitney (U) test), regression and correlation analysis.

METHODS

1. **The Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQ)** for research of the typological characteristics of the personality, adapted for Bulgarian conditions (12).

2. **Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory–I (ROCI–I)**, Bulgarian version (13) includes 35 statements based on factor analysis grouped into five subscales that relate to the integrating, avoiding, dominating, obliging and compromising styles. The statements are valued with a five-point Likert type scale, as the higher value reflects more frequent use of the corresponding style.

RESULTS

The comparative analysis of the experimental data showed that among respondents, divided by gender and type of sport, there were statistically significant differences in some of the tested variables, which requires a differentiated analysis of the obtained results.

The variational analysis of the experimental data revealed the extraversion was a leading typological characteristic among the athletes as a whole (**Table 1**). Men demonstrated a higher level of extroversion (M = 15.85; Sd = 3.0) than women (M = 15.38; Sd = 3.6).

the values of women (M = 12.06; Sd = 5.46) were statistically significantly higher compared

to those of men (U = 1.96; $\alpha = 0.05$). Similar differences between the genders in terms of neuroticism were observed in other studies (14-16,)

There was no statistically significant difference in the values by sport. Men (M=5.26; Sd

=3,44) and those involved in individual sports ($M = 5.45$; $Sd = 3.44$) had higher levels of psychoticism than women ($M = 4.27$; $Sd = 2.5$) and those practicing team sports ($M = 4.71$; $Sd = 3.72$). Similar results regarding gender differentiation were found in other studies (14, 17, 18).

The results from the variational analysis of conflict resolution styles revealed that the most

preferred style by all subjects was the integrating one, and the dominating and obliging style were the least used. In the group of women there were higher values compared to those of men in terms of integrating, avoiding and compromising style. However, the difference was not statistically significant (Table 2).

Table 2. Mean values of the preferred styles of conflict resolution

Variables	Integrating	Avoiding	Dominating	Obliging	Compromising
Athletes in the research	28,17	19,65	19,6	21,58	26,41
Women	28,68	19,85	19,43	21,62	26,64
Men	27,73	19,47	19,75	21,55	26,22
Individual sports	27,45	19,63	19,33	20,63	25,75
Team sports	28,79	19,58	19,98	22,21	27,14

Athletes in team sports are more likely to apply an integrating, obliging, and compromising style than athletes in individual sports. This can be explained with the fact that team sports require effective interpersonal interaction, associated with a favorable atmosphere in the group. The optimal realization and effective result depend on this. A more adequate resolution of conflicts is achieved through strategies that are acceptable to both parties. The same or similar results were observed in the use of the avoiding and dominating style for resolving conflicts by athletes practicing

individual and team sports. Statistically significant differences were found between athletes engaged in individual and team sports in terms of the use of the obliging style ($U = 1.99$, $\alpha = 0.046$).

To reveal the relations and interdependence of the studied variables, we used correlation analysis (Spearman criterion). Numerous correlations were established between typological features psychoticism and styles of conflict resolution - moderately negative using integrating style in conflict situations; moderately to dominating and slightly negative with compromising style.

Table 3. Correlation coefficients between typological characteristics of personality and styles used to resolve conflicts.

Variables	Integrating	Avoiding	Dominating	Obliging	Compromising	Extraversion	Neuroticism
Avoiding	0.08	-					
Dominating	-0.05	-0.22*	-				
Obliging	0.39**	0.38**	-0.11	-			
Compromising	0.67**	0.12	0.08	-0.41**	-		
Extraversion	0.33*	-0.09	0.03	0.11	0.20	-	
Neuroticism	-0.17	0.02	0.08	-0.01	-0.06	-0.46**	-
Psychoticism	-0.45**	-0.02	0.39**	-0.37*	-0.35*	-0.13	0.21

Legend: ** significance level $p=0,01$; * significance level $p=0,05$

The use of an integrating style correlated poorly with dimension extroversion, significantly with compromising style and moderately with obliging style. There was a poor correlation between avoiding and obliging style and a weak inverse correlation between avoiding and dominating style. This result meets expectations because the avoiding and the obliging style are less assertive. Those who prefer to use one style often cling to the other. On the other hand, the dominating style is highly assertive and its use is associated with avoidance of style, which is characterized by low concern for one's own interests (avoiding) (5, 8).

To reveal the dependence of styles used to resolve conflicts of typological features of personality we used stepwise linear regression analysis. As a dependent variable we included consecutively each of the styles of conflict resolution analyzed in the aggregate of three independent variables extroversion, neuroticism, and psychoticism (**Table 4**).

The application of an integrative style was preferred by the women and the athletes from team sports with high levels of extraversion. This style was avoided by the athletes practicing individual sports and by the women with higher levels of psychosis. Psychoticism was a determining variable for the men and the athletes practicing team sports who used a dominating style in conflict situations. These results can be explained by the fact that people with high levels on the psychoticism scale are characterized by selfishness, asociality, tendency to aggression and hostility - traits that do not promote adaptation to critical situations by implementing strategies that are beneficial for both sides in the conflict, but rather - of power-oriented strategies, characteristic of the dominating style.

Low levels of psychoticism were observed in women who tend to resort to an obliging style. In the same group, high levels of extraversion encourage the use of compromising style to resolve conflicts.

Table № 4. Results of regression analysis

Dependent variables	Extraversion				Psychoticism			
	β	t	sig.	ΔR^2	β	t	sig.	ΔR^2
Integrating - women	0,33	2,11	0,04	0,25	-0,4	-2,53	0,02	0,32
Integrating - individual					-0,35	-2,08	0,05	0,91
Integrating - team	0,34	2,1	0,04	0,09				
Dominating - men					0,31	2,06	0,05	0,07
Dominating - team					0,515	3,449	0	0,24
Obliging -women					-0,44	-2,72	0,01	0,17
Compromising - women	0,46	2,86	0,01	0,18				

CONCLUSIONS

The preferred styles of conflict resolution in all groups of respondents were integrating and compromising, i.e., looking to constructive outcome satisfaction as a whole or in part for both sides. Generally, athletes were characterized by moderate and strong extroversion. The women showed a statistically significantly higher level of neuroticism than the men. A higher level of psychoticism was observed in the practitioners of individual sports and in the group of men. Athletes in team sports are statistically significantly more likely to use an obliging and

compromising style to resolve conflicts than are athletes in individual sports.

Numerous interdependencies have been established between the studied typological traits and conflict resolution styles. The expectation that certain personality traits influence the choice of a certain style for resolving conflict situations was confirmed. The most significant was the influence of psychoticism, which determines the application of a dominant style in the group of men and athletes in team sports. This personality trait was associated with avoiding the integrating style by the group of women

and athletes from individual sports, as well as obliging style again by women. The high level of extraversion is a precondition for an integrating and compromising style.

The choice of a certain strategy of behavior is made on the basis of psychological attitudes, arising both under the influence of the objective characteristics of the situation and according to the individual characteristics of people who prefer one or another strategy of interaction.

Knowing and complying with the typological features of the personality presupposes affirmation of the principles of the individual approach. On this basis, the coach can apply more effective approaches and solutions in optimizing the style of interpersonal interaction and adequate resolution of conflicts through the use of appropriate strategies.

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