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Early warning, conflict, and conflict resolution in the sports enterprises

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The study investigated the awareness of early warning, conflict management strategies, and their application in resolving conflicts within the sports industry in Nigeria, addressing three research questions and a hypothesis. The research employed a correlational design method, utilizing a logically validated 20-item self-structured questionnaire with a reliability coefficient of 0.88. Data were collected from Presidents, Secretaries, Technical Directors, and Board Members of Sports Federations (n=82). The findings revealed that a majority of sports managers and administrators lack awareness of conflict early warning (60%) and possess insufficient knowledge of conflict management strategies (89%), although they actively apply conflict resolution methods (90%). Furthermore, the study indicated a positive correlation between early warning (r = 0.060) and conflict management strategies (r = 0.026) with the application of conflict resolution methods. However, additional tests demonstrated that awareness of early warning and conflict management strategies do not significantly predict (F=2.725) the application of conflict resolution in real situations. As a recommendation, the study suggests that sports managers and administrators should enhance their understanding of early warning and conflict management, applying them proactively to resolve conflicts and mitigate their impact.

Key words: Conflicts, early warning, sports, enterprises, conflict resolution.

INTRODUCTION

Conflicts can be viewed as disputes between parties, and if not managed properly, they may escalate to violence. However, not all conflicts lead to violence, and some can be constructive. When conflicts become destructive, violence often follows. Properly managed conflicts can result in mutual benefits, fostering understanding, tolerance, learning, and effectiveness. Recent events in the global sports industry have highlighted that unmanaged conflicts by administrators can impact athlete performance.

Simply recognizing the existence of conflict and its potential for violence is not sufficient to prevent negative outcomes. Understanding the stages leading to conflict can be a valuable tool for mitigating and managing conflicts, as well as devising prevention strategies. Early warning is a crucial aspect of crisis response, and its effectiveness relies on recognizing indicators that may worsen a situation. Unfortunately, many sports administrators and managers lack familiarity with early warning phases, making it challenging to prevent or reduce the severity, frequency, and casualties of impending conflicts in the sports community.

One significant responsibility of a sports manager is resolving conflicts, a natural by-product of managing

people. An effective manager should not only respond to and control conflict but also have the ability to prevent it. Conflicts in the sporting enterprise often arise between athletes, coaches, and sports leaders due to differing values, needs, ambitions, and motivations. Rather than being viewed as a negative emotion, conflicts should be seen as opportunities for change and new possibilities.

Sports conflict is not confined to developing countries; it permeates all societal contexts where more than one person is involved. At times, conflicts in sports extend beyond individual perceptions to encompass national political and economic interests. Bertoli (2017) cited several instances of nationalist-triggered conflicts in the sports realm, such as the football war between El Salvador and Honduras (1969), the Egyptian-Algerian World Cup dispute (2009), the Serbian-Albanian drone conflict (2014), and English-Russian Euro riots (2016). Sfeir (1985) reported on the status of Muslim women in sports, highlighting the conflict between cultural tradition and modernization. Omoruan and Eboh (2016) observed the ongoing conflict between Physical Education Teachers and other subject Teachers over the management of sports in schools within the Nigerian education system.

In 2022, Novak Djokovic faced deportation from Australia and was disqualified from participating in the 10th Australian Open, despite initially being granted an exemption due to vaccination issues. Various conflicting issues, including human rights, social injustice, transgender concerns, and substance abuse, continue to be prominent in the sports landscape.

Recent examples include FIFA and UEFA's decision to ban all Russian clubs and national teams indefinitely due to the conflict with Ukraine. Additionally, temporary bans were imposed on Kenya and Zimbabwe due to internal conflicts involving government interference with the national sports federation. The Nigeria Basketball Federation also imposed a self-imposed ban due to persistent internal crises overseen by the Ministry in charge of sports.

Numerous conflict situations emerged during the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup in Australia, leading to some controversial decisions by FIFA. These included the agreement to pay players directly due to issues related to unpaid bonuses and inadequate support from National Football Federations, the suspension of the President of the Spain Football Association, and players withdrawing from their national teams, among other issues. Despite the prevalence of such conflicts, there is a noticeable absence of scientific investigation in academic literature. Averting these conflicts may be possible if major stakeholders are familiar with early warning signs. Moreover, empirical research on the application of conflict resolution models could provide valuable insights, offering a theoretical foundation for qualitative or quantitative research in conflict resolution within the sports industry. This paper aims to assist sports managers and administrators in handling conflicts and may serve as a starting point for future research on conflicts in the sports sector.

This research aims to determine the level of awareness among sports managers and administrators regarding early warning signs of conflicts, their knowledge of conflict management strategies, and the application of these strategies for conflict resolution in the Nigerian sports industry. To achieve this, the study formulated the following research questions and a hypothesis to provide direction for the investigation.

1) To what extent are sports managers/Administrators aware of early warning signals that trigger conflict situations in the sports industry?
2) To what extent are sports managers/Administrators aware of conflict management strategies that prevent conflict situations in the Sports Industry?
3) To what extent do sports managers/administrators apply conflict resolution methods in resolving conflicts in the sports industry?
4) Sports managers'/administrators' knowledge of early warnings and conflict management strategies does not significantly predict the application of conflict resolution methods in resolving conflicts in the Nigerian Sports industry.

Administrators and managers in sports should possess the necessary skills to effectively address conflicts, including the ability to identify early warning signals, propose strategies for resolution, and ensure positive outcomes when conflicts arise. Unfortunately, there is a scarcity of empirical evidence in academic literature regarding the use of early warning signals to mitigate conflicts in sports. Many conflicts go undocumented, and their underlying causes are often not subjected to empirical investigation. Instead, the prevailing focus tends to be on using sports as a tool for promoting conflict resolution. This article aims to shed light on the importance of early warning signals in conflict resolution within the sports industry.

Irrespective of the type of sports organization, effective and efficient management of issues is crucial for achieving organizational goals. A collective vision should be established, clearly defining responsibilities for each individual, team, and department. Sports managers must be attuned to potential conflicts among their employees, preventing them from escalating into communication breakdowns. All members of the organization should be equipped with the necessary skills to manage conflicting situations effectively.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The inspiration for this study is drawn from Durkheim's (1950) functionalist theory, rooted in the premise that society comprises various norms, values, roles, institutions, and purposes interconnected for mutual survival. The theory emphasizes how social structures

influence actions and relationships within the societal framework, asserting that shared values harmoniously unite independent units of society. Sports align with this theory as they not only contribute to maintaining social order but also provide opportunities for individual self-expression amidst diverse national and cultural preferences. Improperly resolved conflicts in sports can lead to a breakdown in social order, disrupting the balance and resulting in frustration and aggressive outbursts.

Moreover, sports serve as a unifying force, bringing individuals from different backgrounds together through shared values. The hierarchical structure within sports establishes a system where each participant plays a role interconnected from top to bottom, fostering coexistence and collaboration as a cohesive unit. Sustaining team cohesion requires every participant to possess a comprehensive understanding of identifying and managing conflicts that are likely to arise. This study is crafted to acquaint significant stakeholders in the industry with the true meaning of conflicts, early warning systems, conflict resolution in sports, ethics and conflict in sports, identification of conflict flags, stages of conflicts, methods for minimizing conflicts, and strategies for resolving and managing conflicts.

Due to the inherent subjectivity in defining conflicts, attempts to establish a universal definition often lead to further conflicts. Rahim (2010) highlights a point of contention, namely, whether conflicts can be attributed to behavioural patterns or specific types of situations. He defines conflict as "an interactive process manifested in incompatibility, disagreement, or dissonance within or between social entities." In Nicholson's (1992) perspective, conflict is an activity that arises when conscious beings (individuals or groups) aim to carry out mutually inconsistent acts regarding their wants, needs, or obligations. While Rahim (2010) leans toward a situational definition and Nicholson (1992) favors a behavioral one, both definitions are valid as they both underscore dissonance or inconsistency. It proves challenging to separate behavior from conflict situations, making it reasonable to view conflicts as situations between at least two independent parties characterized by perceived differences, deemed a threat to a common goal, and likely to result in a negative emotional state. Conflict can be triggered by a clash of interests, stemming from the escalation of a disagreement, which is a common prerequisite, and is marked by the presence of conflict behavior, where individuals actively attempt to harm one another. Katz and McNulty (1994) posit that a conflict situation arises when two or more interdependent parties experience strong emotions, hold seemingly incompatible outcomes or beliefs, and at least one party acknowledges the problematic nature of this incompatibility in their thinking. In conflicts, the parties perceive that they are heading towards irreconcilable outcomes, where the term "outcome" refers to what the person desires, the preferred solution, or element. Interests, rooted in human needs and

beliefs, underlie these positions and represent an individual's ideas and feelings about what is desirable and useful.

Concerning the classification of conflicts, Amason and Sapienza (1997) distinguish two types: affective and cognitive. Cognitive conflicts are task-oriented and arise from differences in opinions or judgments, while affective conflicts involve strong feelings stemming from personal differences, leading to heated disagreement. Jehn and Mannix (2001) proposed a threefold classification of conflict: relationship conflicts, task conflicts, and process conflicts. Relationship conflicts emerge from interpersonal incompatibilities; task conflicts involve misunderstandings about the group's approach to a task, its methods, and the group process. While relationship and process conflicts are deemed harmful, conflicts related to tasks are considered beneficial as they encourage diversity of opinion. However, caution must be exercised to prevent escalation into work, process, or relationship conflicts. Task conflicts have been associated with two related and advantageous outcomes, the first being the quality of the group's decisions.

Task conflicts contribute to a better cognitive understanding of the discussed problem, enhancing decision-making within conflicting task groups. This type of conflict can result in greater satisfaction with group decisions and a heightened desire to remain within the group. Jowett (2007) differentiates between content conflict, where individuals disagree on how to approach an issue, and relationship conflict, where individuals disagree, noting that content conflict can be beneficial as it increases motivation and stimulates discussion, while relationship conflict reduces productivity, loyalty, and overall satisfaction. Relationship conflict tends to make individuals irritable, negative, and suspicious.

Regardless of the classification, what these conflicts have in common is that in any sports organization, numerous situations can give rise to conflicts within the social world.

Conflict early warning system

Regardless of their type, conflicts in sports do not emerge abruptly; they are preceded by early warnings, which many sports directors often tend to overlook. Early warning is a process that involves identifying specific indicators and patterns of signals, interpreting these patterns to anticipate the likelihood of conflicts escalating into a violent situation. In essence, conflict early warning is the systematic collection and analysis of information from various sources to predict the escalation of violent conflicts. This process includes gathering information using specific indicators, analyzing data, attributing meaning to indicators, contextualizing it within the environment, forecasting potential developments, formulating best- and worst-case scenarios, proposing response options, and

communicating findings to policymakers for decision-making and action (Matveeva, 2006).

Effective prevention relies on the timely response to early warnings through visionary conflict prevention mechanisms. According to Gaston and Igomu (2010), reliable early warning provides an opportunity not only to prepare for short-term challenges but also to design, support, and implement long-term visionary strategies and development programs that can reduce the risk of future negative conflicts. Early advising, therefore, becomes a crucial aspect of promoting peace among stakeholders in the sports industry, analyzing signs and symptoms or indicators of potential sources of conflicts to prompt preventative actions and prevent escalation into violent conflicts. When early warnings are ignored, conflicts unfold, and resolution becomes inevitable.

Conflict resolution can be understood as the styles and processes employed to facilitate the peaceful resolution of conflicts and hostilities. It is often used interchangeably with disagreement resolution, involving arbitration and action processes. The concept of conflict resolution can also encompass the use of peaceful resistance measures by disputing parties to achieve effective resolution. Nicholson (1992) highlights that a conflict is considered resolved when the inconsistencies between the desires and actions of parties are addressed.

Concession is a vital aspect of conflict resolution, and any process designed to incorporate positive conflict from the outset needs to be cautious to prevent its deterioration into negative forms of conflict. It is essential to exercise caution to avoid violating ethical principles, as there have been instances where resolved conflicts were suspended due to such violations. Therefore, having a sound understanding of early warning signals can help prevent conflicts from escalating to the point of requiring conflict resolution.

Sports enterprise in conflict resolution

Sports enterprises, also known as the sports industry, encompass a realm in which individuals, organizations, businesses, and associations engage in producing, facilitating, promoting, or organizing activities, experiences, or business ventures centred on sports. It constitutes a domain where the goods or services offered to consumers are sports-related and may include products, services, individuals, locations, or ideas. Pitts and Stotlar (1996), as cited in Gouws (2001), define the sports industry as a sector comprising a variety of sport-related products and consumers, where the offerings cater to the consumer's needs and desires related to sports, fitness, recreation, or leisure.

The focal point of the sports industry often revolves around professional leagues, such as the National Football League (NFL), National Basketball Association (NBA), National Hockey League (NHL), and World Wrestling Entertainment Inc. Other entities falling under the umbrella of sports enterprises include sports apparel companies (such as Nike, Adidas, and Reebok), sports marketing firms, sports gambling entities, sports arena/travel companies, as well as sports supplement/drug companies. Media associations play a central role in the landscape of sports enterprises.

The sports world, particularly sports associations, is not immune to conflict. According to Schulz (2011), altercations involving high-profile players and trainers are common, albeit less newsworthy. Conflict and power struggles within both professional and community sports clubs are also prevalent. Sport is a highly emotive domain, characterized by strong-willed, focused personalities with a passion for the sport who are generally unwilling to compromise or tolerate alternative perspectives. Consequently, it is inherently a terrain filled with conflicts.

According to Doig (1994), the increasing links between sports and business have spurred an ethical debate concerning sports directors. Many believe that the commercialization of sports and the influence of the media are significant contributors to the perceived "corruption" in the sporting landscape (DeSensi and Rosenberg, 2003). They describe the ethics of sports operation as an applied area of moral guidance, where ethical propositions and principles are applied to understand, analyze, and resolve specific moral dilemmas within sports operations.

A report commissioned by the Australian Sports Commission in 2003, titled "Ethics in sport – exploration conducted with Australian sporting personalities and organisations," defines ethics as "Respect, fairness, justice, republic, fairness, equivalency, doing what is right and a duty to watch for actors, activists, directors, coaches, and cults, as well as observers" (Daly, 2003). The increasing professionalization of sports and sports operations has underscored the connection between professionalism and the importance of addressing ethical issues in sports operations. Sports directors bear the responsibility for the operation and organization of sports, addressing ethical issues such as professionalism, fairness, legal governance, human resource matters, and social justice related to sports in all situations (DeSensi and Rosenberg, 2003).

According to Sherry et al. (2007), traditional sports ethics exploration has primarily focused on the ethical aspects within the sport itself, the events, and the athletes participating in it. However, the application of ethical principles in the governance and organization of sports has become an integral aspect of the modern sporting landscape. The influence of business practices and commercial culture on sports is a consequence of societal shifts towards further ethical organizational changes and growth in the sports industry.

Woodhouse (2012) emphasizes that certain aspects of sports as a global enterprise may not align with conflict resolution values. For instance, sports are often entwined with significant transnational marketing and advertising strategies. In football, particularly, it has become a trend

for wealthy individuals and even states to invest staggering amounts and acquire top clubs from England, France, and Spain, even if it contradicts the ethical principles on which the club or association is founded. As an illustration, the ethical principle of "not at each" regarding alcohol consumption, applicable to all sports, may not be upheld since alcoholic beverage manufacturers are major sponsors of major football events in Europe and America.

Identifying conflicts flags

In Sports Federations/Associations, two main types of disputes have been identified, which commonly exacerbate conflicts, although these types may also arise in other situations. Sporting enterprises, as companies dealing with their employees, athletes, and models, often encounter these types of disputes.

The first type is Disputes of Rights, where individuals or groups are entitled by law, contract, previous agreement, or established practice to certain rights. Disputes of rights typically revolve around issues such as employment contracts, legally enforceable matters, or unilateral changes in accepted or customary practices. Such disputes are usually resolved through legal decisions or arbitration rather than negotiation. This type of dispute may occur in dealings with sporting clubs, athletes, and models who serve as brand ambassadors, and those involved should carefully review the conditions to ensure their rights are protected.

The second type is Disputes of Interests, where conflicts may arise over matters of opinion, such as a player or team being entitled to certain resources or privileges (e.g., access to property or better playing conditions). As there is no established law or right in these cases, disputes of interest are typically resolved through collective bargaining or negotiation. This type of dispute may be more common among board members and administrators of sporting enterprises.

Stages of conflict

The effective management of conflict necessitates an understanding of its various developmental stages. Occasionally, leaders can intervene before conflicts escalate into more serious issues if they can identify the conflict's nature and how far it has progressed. According to Adenyi (2020), the typical stages include the following:

1. Where the eventuality for conflict exists: In other words, athletes and sympathizers feel that lack of coffers, diversity of language, or culture may affect conflict if sports directors aren't sensitive to diversity.
2. Land conflict: A competitive situation could fluently unmask over into conflict if sports directors aren't sensitive to diversity.
3. Latent conflict: Where a competitive situation could fluently unmask over into conflict –e.g., at a sports competition in the Colosseum where there are egregious differences between teams that are contending.
4. Opening conflict: This can be touched off by an incident and suddenly come to a real conflict.
5. Aftermath conflict: The situation where a particular problem may have been resolved but the eventuality for conflict still exists. The eventuality may be indeed lesser than before if one person or group perceives itself as being involved in a palm-lose situation.

Organizational conflict can manifest between individuals, within a group or department, between groups or departments, or even across associations. Conflict may arise due to various reasons, and within sports associations, conflicts occur for similar reasons such as conflicting aspirations and time-consuming activities, overlapping authority, task interdependencies, conflicting evaluation or reward systems, limited resources, and status inconsistencies. Regardless of the conflict's source or type, having the ability to manage conflict is an essential skill.

The behaviors for handling conflict can be categorized along two dimensions: cooperativeness (the extent to which one party attempts to satisfy the other party's concerns) and assertiveness (the extent to which one party tries to satisfy their own concerns). From these two dimensions, five conflict-handling behaviors emerge.

Avoiding

Withdrawing from situations that can spark conflicts similar to not engaging in a sharp argument with a supporter of a group with a different testament concerning a sports programme or event.

Contending

One person tries to satisfy his or her interests, without regard to the interests of the other party.

Compromising

Each party is concerned about its thing accomplishment and the thing accomplishment of the other party and is willing to engage in a give-and-take exchange and make concessions until a reasonable resolution of the conflict is reached.

Accommodating

One person tries to please the other person by putting the other's interests ahead of his or her own.

Collaborating

The parties to a conflict try to satisfy their pretensions without making any concessions and rather come up with a way to resolve their differences that leave them both better off. When the parties to a conflict are willing to cooperate and concoct a result that each finds respectable (through concession or collaboration), an association is more likely to achieve its pretensions.

How to manage and resolve conflict situations

Collective bargaining

In a sports environment, it is essential to establish a common system that allows relevant groups (management and employees) to communicate and address issues. This process is often referred to as "dialogue." Bringing together representatives from all groups to collaboratively find solutions has proven to be more effective than avoidance or unilateral decision-making. It is generally better to achieve a resolution through a collaborative process. Members within the same association, who need to come together and fulfill their agreements, can do so by adhering to established rules and procedures.

Concession

The dictionary definition of concession is "the act of yielding or granting something." For example, South African labor relations law provides for a conciliation process in which parties in conflict, unable to reach an agreement, must seek resolution before resorting to more drastic measures, such as a strike or lockout. Many find it beneficial to involve a mediator in the conciliation process. Similarly, all sports associations can consider conciliation as an initial step. There are three common methods for resolving issues that have reached the stage of open discussion, often employed by various associations. Understanding this process is crucial so that individuals can determine which approach is appropriate for their specific situation in a sporting event.

Negotiation/concession

This is a process in which authorized representatives of different groups come together in a conflict situation to resolve problems, differences, and reach an agreement. Reaching an agreement is a deliberate process by a group of representatives to resolve differences and reach a consensus through negotiation. The outcomes often hinge on the relationship between the groups. Concession frequently involves compromising, whereby one group concedes on one demand while compromising on the other. Sports administrators, business people, and football representatives often resolve issues through concessions.

Mediation/discussion

This is the most popular way to resolve a problem. When negotiations fail or are likely to fail, both parties often turn to an independent mediator. This person or group attempts to facilitate the resolution of the problem. The mediator plays a crucial role in the process, providing advice to both parties and groups, acting as a facilitator, and proposing solutions. A mediator is defined as a person who seeks to resolve a dispute through the intervention of members from two groups. In essence, the mediator can be viewed as a neutral third party guiding the conflicting parties in the process of finding resolutions to their differences (Forsyth, 2006). Indeed, if group members do not engage in the conflict as if they were not involved, sometimes a potentially violent conflict can escalate to the point where mediation becomes inevitable. Third-party mediation of conflicts facilitates communication between conflicting groups. By allowing members to express their views and seek explanations of other members' positions, the mediator acts to prevent embarrassment or a "loss of face" that disputants might face. This can be achieved by promoting communication during the mediation process.

Unlike judges, mediators act solely as facilitators; they have no decision-making authority and cannot propose solutions to conflicting parties. The mediator can also assist members in refining their judgments and arguments and coordinate the meeting time and location to the satisfaction of both parties. Forsyth (2006) suggests three main styles for mediation: the Investigative Process, wherein the mediator asks each disputing party about their perspectives, needs, and desired outcomes and helps generate solutions based on the responses. The Investigative Process is the least common form of mediation.

Arbitration

Mediation involves two parties in disagreement explaining their perspectives to the mediator, who facilitates the generation of arguments-based solutions. Decision-making is a stylish way to resolve conflicts, and it is generally considered the most peaceful approach overall (Warwas, 2020). Moot Court, on the other hand, involves an open discussion between the parties and the mediator regarding the issues and potential solutions. In the facilitative approach, the mediator cannot impose a resolution. Following the discussion, the most common method of mediation is through negotiation (Alimova and Golovina, 2019).

Alternative dispute resolution (ADR)

In practice, Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) refers to the various methods people can use to resolve disputes without resorting to court litigation. The World Intellectual Property Organization offers invaluable solutions,

particularly in arbitration and mediation. ADR serves as a straightforward, time- and cost-saving medium that assists both parties in a sports dispute to achieve a mutually satisfactory resolution. Parties involved in a dispute may appoint a mediator, arbitrator, or expert with specific knowledge of sports law, intellectual property (IP), and dispute resolution. They also benefit from having a neutral forum for resolving international disputes through a single process. ADR processes are designed to promote the attainment of optimal results.

Other dispute resolution services include dispute resolution consultancy and document management to aid in resolving controversies arising in sports. Disputes in sports often encompass a range of issues related to valuable products, product designs, laws, associated programs, and patented technological advancements. The importance of ADR has become pivotal in Nigerian law. Section 19 (d) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) provides for the resolution of disputes through arbitration, arbitral claims, and awards.

Empirical framework

Various attempts have been made to investigate the relationship between early warning and conflict resolution in the sporting world. Paradis et al. (2014) examined competitive sports athletes' perception of intra-group conflict in sports. Ten intercollegiate athletes participated in a semi-structured interview. The results indicated that athletes perceived the nature of conflict to manifest itself in several ways, including disagreement, negative emotions, and interference or antagonistic behavior.

Narimani et al. (2008) evaluated the relationship between attachment styles and self-efficacy in conflict resolution styles among sports coaches. One hundred twenty coaches were sampled, and data were collected with the aid of a questionnaire. Results showed a negative relationship between the avoidant conflict resolution style with self-efficacy and secure attachment style. Multivariate regression coefficients showed that secure, insecure, avoidant, and self-efficacy attachment styles are predictor variables of dominant, avoidant, and cooperative conflict resolution styles.

Wachsmuth et al. (2018) investigated coach-athlete conflict and focused on conflict management approaches used to minimize dysfunctional and maximize functional outcomes of interpersonal conflict. Twenty-two high-performance coaches and athletes took part in a semi-structured interview. A cross-case content analysis revealed that coaches and athletes prevent the onset of conflict through a functional quality relationship and an optimal working environment, engaging in active conflict prevention strategies.

In a similar vein, Holt et al. (2012) examined female varsity athletes' perception of teammate conflict. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 19 females from four sports teams. Analysis revealed that conflicts were a prevalent feature on their teams, with conflicts relating to performance and relationships identified. Strategies that athletes thought might help create conditions for managing conflicts included engaging in team building early in the session, addressing conflict early, involving mediators, and holding team meetings.

Earlier, Hodzic and Hiseinagic (2010) investigated the styles adopted by coaches in resolving conflict in basketball to determine dominating styles and effectiveness. A questionnaire was used to collect data from 14 coaches from 24 basketball teams that took part in the European Junior Basketball championship held in 2009. The identified conflict resolution styles included bonding, reconciling, imposing, avoiding, and compromising.

Bussel and Doherty (2015) investigated the dynamics of the conflict process in volunteer boards of nonprofit community sports clubs. The study examined the nature and level of conflict, issues and conditions that incite conflict, how conflict is managed, and its ultimate impact on board members. Results showed that board conflicts were perceived to be relatively low and predominantly task-related, with some evidence of escalation to relationship conflict. The board intended to utilize collaboration or compromise to handle conflict, which was perceived to engender positive outcomes.

The findings highlight the importance of awareness of potential internal and external conflict triggers, monitoring and effectively managing task conflict, and addressing the challenges of communication that may set the stage for conflict or enable its constructive management.

From the foregoing review, one could easily observe that there is a dearth of empirical literature on conflict early warnings and conflict resolution in the sports industry. Sports managers in Nigeria are not well-captured in empirical literature, thus creating the need for this study to help sensitize and update their skills in conflict resolution.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopted a correlational design using a survey method. The population consists of all sports managers at various Sports Federations in Nigeria. Purposive randomized sampling was used to select 82 sports managers who volunteered to participate in the survey, utilizing a 20-item five-point Likert-type self-developed questionnaire. The questionnaire is divided into three sections. Section A consists of demographic variables such as gender, age range, years of experience, name of Federation/Department, and role in the organization. Section B focuses on the independent variables of early warning and conflict management strategies (5 = Very Much Aware, 4 = Aware, 3 = Marginally Aware, 2 = Not Aware, and 1 = Undecided), while Section C focuses on the dependent variable of the application of conflict resolution methods (5 = Very High Level, 4 = High Level, 3 = Moderate Level, 2 = Low Level, and 1 = Very Low Level).

The instrument underwent logical validation by three experts, and a test-retest method was employed using sports managers at the state level who were not part of the study to establish reliability.

The coefficient index was 0.88 using Cronbach's alpha statistics.

Table 1. Correlation analysis of the extent of sports managers awareness of conflict early warnings in the sports industry (N=82).

VAR	VA	A	MA	NA	R	R^2	AR	Extent
1	02	19	26	35				
2	06	19	23	34				
3	09	37	19	17				
4	20	40	18	04	0.244	0.060	0.048	6%
5	-	08	20	54				
Total	37	123	106	144				
Mean	7.4	24.6	21.2	28.8				

Source: Field Data (2023).

Table 2. Correlation analysis of the extent of sports managers awareness of conflict management strategies in the sports industry (N=82).

VAR	VA	A	MA	NA	R	R^2	AR	Extent
1	01	02	14	65				
2	06	01	09	66				
3	03	11	54	14				
4	07	11	55	09	0.160	0.026	0.014	2%
5	05	10	61	06				
Total	22	35	193	160				
Mean	4.4	7	38.6	32				

Source: Field data 2023.

The questionnaire was distributed through Google Forms and shared via social media platforms. The research questions and hypothesis were answered and tested with percentages, means, and regression analysis, with alpha set at a 0.05 significance level.

RESULTS

Data were collected from 82 respondents who serve as managers at National Sports Federations and Boards. The administrators include Secretaries of Sports Federations (37), Presidents (09), Technical Directors (17), and Board members (19). Regarding their years of experience in managerial roles, 34 had 1 to 5 years of experience, 23 had 6 to 10 years, 19 had 11 to 15 years, and 6 had 16 years and above. In terms of gender, the demographic data revealed that 57 were male, while 25 were female. The age range showed that 09 were aged 31 to 40, 52 were aged 41 to 50, and 21 were aged 50 and above.

Research question one: To what extent are sports managers/Administrators aware of early warning signals that trigger conflict situations in the sports industry?

As indicated in Table 1, the majority of the respondents (60%) are not aware or marginally aware, while 40% are aware or very much aware of early warnings that trigger conflict in the sports industry. Additionally, the correlation coefficient of 0.244, which is greater than zero, indicates a positive linear relationship between early warning and conflict resolution. This implies that for every increase in the level of awareness of conflict early signs by managers and administrators, there is a corresponding application in conflict situations. The R^2 of 0.060 suggests that only 6% of managers' knowledge of early warning determines their application in real-life situations in the sports industry.

Research question two: To what extent are sports managers/Administrators aware of conflict management strategies that can prevent conflict situations in the sports industry?

From the data in Table 2, it can be inferred that the majority of the respondents (89%) are not aware or marginally aware, whereas 11% are aware or very much aware of conflict management strategies in the sports industry. Also, the correlation coefficient of 0.160, which is greater than zero, shows that there is a positive linear relationship between awareness of conflict management strategies and conflict resolution. This implies that for every increase in the level of awareness of conflict management strategies by managers and administrators, there is a corresponding application in conflict situations.

The R^2 of 0.026 indicates that only 2% of managers' knowledge of conflict management strategies determines their application in real-life situations in the sports industry.

Table 3. Correlation analysis of the extent of sports managers application of conflict resolution methods in the sports industry (N=82).

VAR	VHL	HL	ML	LL	VLL	R	R²	AR	Extent
1	27	38	11	06	-				
2	16	46	18	02	-				
3	12	34	27	04	05				
4	30	32	18	04	-				
5	14	42	17	07	02	0.394	0.156	0.100	16%
Total	99	192	91	23	07				
Mean	19.8	38.4	18.2	4.6	1.4				

Source: Field data 2023.

Table 4. Regression analysis on sports managers/Administrators' awareness of early warning, conflict management strategies and application of conflict resolution methods in the Nigeria sports industry (N=82).

Model	Sum of squares	df	Mean of square	F	Sig.	Decision
Regression	52.096	2	26.048			
Residual	755.282	79	9.561	2.725*	0.072	Accept Ho
Total	807.378					

*Not significant as p>.05.
Source: Field data 2023.

Research question Three: To what extent do sports managers/Administrators apply conflict resolution methods in the sports industry?

Data in Table 3 revealed that the majority of the respondents (70%) utilize conflict resolution methods at a high level, 22% utilize them marginally, whereas 8% utilize them at low and very low levels in their practice as sports industry managers. Also, the correlation coefficient of 0.394, which is greater than zero, shows that there is a positive linear relationship between the various methods and conflict resolution practice. This implies that every method effectively utilized increases the likelihood of conflict resolution by managers and administrators in the Nigerian sports industry. The Rsquare of 0.156 indicates that 16% of managers utilizing conflict resolution determine the prevention of conflict from escalating into crises in the sports industry. A further test of the model revealed that mediation and litigation methods were the most frequently used, while arbitration and negotiation were the least frequently used.

Hypothesis: Sports Managers'/Administrators' awareness of Early Warnings and conflict management strategies does not significantly predict the application of conflict resolution methods in resolving conflicts in the Nigerian Sports industry.

The analysis in Table 4 shows that the F $_{(2,79)}$ is 2.725, and the p-value (0.072) is greater than the alpha level set at 0.05. This implies that there is no significant predictive effect of awareness of early warning and conflict management strategies on the application of conflict resolution methods. Therefore, the null hypothesis stated is retained. It can be concluded that having early awareness of conflict early warning and awareness of methods does not translate to application in real-life situations among managers and administrators of the Nigerian sports industry.

DISCUSSION

The results of the study indicated that despite the majority of sports industry stakeholders not being aware of conflict early warnings, there is still a positive relationship between awareness of conflict early warning and conflict resolution among managers and administrators in the sports industry in Nigeria. The findings support Muggah and Whitlock's (2022) observation that the practical operationalization of conflict prevention and conflict early warning lags behind its theoretical development. Earlier, Tokarski (2009) stated that while the specific context of early warning may differ, there are common patterns and similarities in the occurrence, formation, and dynamics of conflict which those saddled with authority to address confrontations should be aware of. The importance of awareness of early warning is key to the understanding of the role of sport in the context of conflict resolution is the understanding of the

nature and driving forces of the conflict itself. Findings further showed that awareness of conflict management strategies correlates positively with conflict resolution. This result is in disagreement with Narimani et al. (2008) result that showed a negative relationship between avoidant conflict management styles. The findings also confirm Hodzic and Huseinagic's (2010) report that bonding, reconciling, imposing, avoiding, and compromising are effective strategies utilized by coaches to resolve conflicts. Also, Wachsmuth et al. (2018) study that coaches and athletes prevent the onset of conflict through functional good-quality relationships and an optimal working environment and engaging in active conflict prevention strategies. The disagreement observed could be attributed to the number of strategies investigated and the method of data analysis. However, sports managers knowing the variety of strategies could enhance their adaptation skills to conflict situations.

The result of the hypothesis revealed that there was no predictor effect of early warning and conflict management strategies on the application of conflict resolution methods among sports managers in Nigeria. This result indicates that the perception of sports managers as to what conflicts is vital to taking proactive measures. This line of understanding is similar to that of Paradis et al. (2014) in that an athlete's perception of the nature of conflict could manifest in several ways, including disagreement, negative emotions, and interference. No matter the perception, conflict is always a prevalent feature in sports management. As such, conflict relating to performance and relationships cannot be ignored.

Holt et al. (2012) identified strategies that athletes thought could help managers create conditions for managing conflict, including engaging in team building early in the session, addressing conflict early, engaging mediators, and holding team meetings. The findings are in disagreement with Bussel and Doherty (2015), who highlight the importance of awareness of the potential for both internal and external conflict triggers, monitoring, and effectively managing task conflicts and addressing the challenges of communication that may set the stage for conflict or enable its constructive management. The observed disagreement could be attributed to the method of data collection.

Conclusion

Conflicts are inevitable in the sports enterprise, and awareness of conflict early warning and conflict management strategies is an important managerial skill that positively relates to the identification of signs and trigger actions to respond timely to reduce the onset, duration, intensity, and effect of multiple forms of crises in the sports industry. The majority of sports managers in Nigeria is not conversant with early warning and is not properly grounded in the strategies for managing and resolving conflicts, which is why early warning and conflict

management strategies were not significant predictors of conflict resolution. Administrators and managers have the sole responsibility to reduce conflict situations to the barest minimum in their federation/department not to erode the virtues sports provide to society. They should avail themselves of all opportunities to improve their negotiation, mediation, and compromising skills and apply them in real-life situations, not just having theoretical knowledge.

Recommendations

Given the importance of early warning and the role conflict management plays in conflict resolution, the following is suggested as recommendations:

1) Sports managers should update their knowledge of early warning in a variety of sports situations. This they can achieve by attending workshops and conferences and taking additional courses on conflict resolution.
2) The Federal Ministry of Sports Development should introduce Conflict management strategies for all newly elected members of sports federations.
3) Sports administrators should explore all alternative dispute resolution strategies in resolving conflicts instead of using litigations.
4) Further investigation should be extended to State Sports Councils in Nigeria as there is a dearth of empirical literature on conflict resolution in the sports industry.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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