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**A comparative study of decision making styles of  
trainee coaches and coaches with experience**

**Somya Awasthi and Priyanka Prabhakar**

**Abstract**

Coaching is a decision making process (Abraham, Collins, and Martindale, 2006). Coaches are required to make decisions under stressful conditions on a regular basis. Conflict model by Janis and Mann (1977) states that decisional conflict stress is the major reason for decisional failure and failure in high-quality decision making. This study aimed to find the difference in decision making style of experienced (N=39) coaches and inexperienced coaches (N=49) and the relation between self-esteem level and the style of decision making. Melbourne decision making questionnaire part I and part II (Mann, Burnett, Radford and Ford, 1997) was used to measure self-esteem (Part I) in decision making and four styles of decision making (Part II). As determined by one-way ANOVA the results indicated the coaches without experience have a hypervigilant [ $F(1, 85) = 8.60, p = .004$ ] and defensive avoidance decision making style (procrastination [ $F(1, 86) = 4.30, p = .041$ ], buck-passing [ $F(1, 86) = 7.43, p = .008$ ]), it is associated with high stress and the decision maker tries avoiding the conflict by postponing the decision or passing the responsibility to someone else. Hypervigilant decision making style is associated with severe emotional stress and the decision maker wants a way out of the dilemma and therefore might hastily choose the alternative that will provide immediate relief from the panic like situation encountered by the individual. Using Pearson's correlation it was found that coaches with lower self-esteem employed defensive avoidance (buck-passing  $r(86) = -.464, p < .01$ , procrastination  $r(86) = -.568, p < .01$  and hypervigilant  $r(85) = -.429, p < .01$ ) decision making style more as compared to coaches with high self-esteem who were more likely to use vigilance  $r(86) = .401, p < .01$  decision making style. By including stress management and coping strategies in the coach training curriculum future coaches will be better equipped at making effective decisions during training and competition.

**Keywords:** Decision making, experience, coaching

**Introduction**

Human life is essentially a series of making various choices which lead to achievement of a set goal. This is a very crude way of explaining decision making which is often explained as a cognitive process of identifying and choosing from alternatives to achieve a set goal. However, the process entails a complex series of steps which various authors have tried to explain by proposing multiple models and theories. In sports, as in other facets of human existence, various decisions are to be made on a regular basis which may impact various factors effecting the game, the athlete, the team, the coach etc. often these decision makers are coaches who have to make decisions under time pressure. The choices thus made by a coach have an effect on the outcome of a game, they work under tremendous amount of pressure and stress especially during a game. Although it doesn't mean that the stress is lessened during the training and coaching, they have targets to achieve in a limited time.

This is the reason why the conflict model proposed by Janis and Mann (1977) [6] is being referred to for the purpose of the current study.

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According to this model of decision making, decisional conflict stress is the major reason for decisional failure and failure in /high-quality decision making. A decisional conflict may arise when an important decision is to be made by an individual and the risks and losses that may be incurred owing to the important nature of the decision to be taken can further aggravate the decision maker and lead to decisional conflict stress which in turn will affect the quality of the decision taken. The symptoms of decisional conflict are apprehensiveness, hesitation, vacillation, distress, etc. Decisions are still made, however, by using various coping patterns.

According to the conflict theory of decision making there are three major coping strategies. Vigilance, hypervigilance and defensive avoidance (procrastination, buck-passing and rationalisation). Vigilance is the only coping strategy which allows sound and rational decision making (Mann, Burnett, Radford & ford, 1997) <sup>[9]</sup> it is associated with moderate amount of psychological stress. A vigilant decision maker will painstakingly collect all the relevant information, find alternatives and evaluates them carefully before taking action. Hypervigilance is associated with severe emotional stress. The decision maker wants a way out of the dilemma and therefore hastily chooses the alternative that provides immediate relief from the panic like situation experienced by him/her. Defensive avoidance is associated with high stress and the decision maker tries avoiding the conflict by procrastinating, shifting responsibility to someone else, the evaluation of alternatives is usually biased and leads to faulty decision making.

“Coaching is a decision making process” (Abraham, Collins, and Martindale, 2006 p.549) <sup>[1]</sup> although the cognitive nature of sports coaching has been acknowledged the research in coaches’ decision making is limited (Gilbert & Trudel, 2004) <sup>[5]</sup>. “Coaching is a very complex and dynamic task, carried out in an ill-structured, constantly changing environment” (Nash & Collins, 2006) <sup>[1]</sup>

## Methodology

### Participants

Participants included a total of N=88coachesN=49 trainee coaches with zero years of experience and 39 experienced coaches with one or more years of experience the mean number of years of experience M=7.86, SD=12.34. The participants belonged to fifteen different sport disciplines including individual and team sports.

## Tools

The Melbourne decision making questionnaire by Mann, Burnett, Radford, & Ford (1997) <sup>[9]</sup> is an instrument for measuring patterns for coping with decisional conflict. The questionnaire is a three point scale and it is in two parts; Part-I consist of 6-items, measures self-esteem in decision making and Part-II consists of 22- items, measure style of decision making. The purpose of this questionnaire is to assess how individuals approach decision making situations. It has four sub scales, vigilance; which includes an evaluation of the situation and making a decision based on evaluation of alternatives and is the a rational decision making style, hyper vigilance; is a hurried approach to decision making and is used by the individual to remove the discomfort of the decision making situation, procrastination; is part of defensive avoidance and buck passing includes passing the responsibility of decision making to someone else hence avoiding responsibility.

## Procedure

Melbourne decision making questionnaire by Mann, Burnett, Radford, & Ford (1997) <sup>[9]</sup> was administered to the group of trainee coaches from different sport discipline sessions. The questionnaire was administered to experienced coaches individually. The participants were told to think of the decision making situations they have been during coaching sessions.

## Results

The styles of decision making were compared, vigilance, buck-passing, procrastination and hypervigilance with the coaching experience (N=88, M= 7.86, SD=12.34) i.e., coaches with experience of one year or more (N=39) and coaches without experience and in training (N=49). It was revealed upon comparison of means that the there was a statistically significant difference between groups (coaches with experience and coaches without experience) as determined by one-way ANOVA. The coaches with experience had a statistically significantly lower mean as compared to coaches without experience on the following styles of decision making; buck-passing [F (1, 86) = 7.43, p = .008] procrastination [F (1, 86) = 4.30, p=.041] hypervigilance [F (1, 85) = 8.60, p =.004]however, no significant difference was noted between groups in terms of decision making self- esteem.

Table 2

*ANOVA of Decision Making Styles in Coaches with Experience and Without Experience*

		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Vigilance	Between Groups	.084	1	.084	.199	.657
	Within Groups	36.359	86	.423		
	Total	36.443	87			
Buck-passing	Between Groups	1.410	1	1.410	7.438	.008
	Within Groups	16.306	86	.190		
	Total	17.716	87			
Procrastination	Between Groups	1.314	1	1.314	4.299	.041
	Within Groups	26.277	86	.306		
	Total	27.591	87			
Hyper-vigilance	Between Groups	2.713	1	2.713	8.583	.004
	Within Groups	26.873	85	.316		
	Total	29.586	86			

Upon further statistical investigation using Pearson's correlation to determine the relation between coaching experience and styles of decision making it was found that a negative correlation exists between the coaches experience and the following styles of decision making; buck-passing  $r(86) = -.218$ ,  $p < .05$ , procrastination  $r(86) = -.300$ ,  $p < .01$  and hypervigilance  $r(85) = -.382$ ,  $p < .01$ .

There was also a negative correlation found between the age of coaches ( $M=33.84$ ,  $SD=12.26$ ) and following styles of

decision making procrastination  $r(86) = -.266$   $p = .05$  and hyper vigilance  $r(85) = -.386$   $p = .01$ .

A negative correlation was revealed between decision making self-esteem and following styles of decision making buck-passing  $r(86) = -.464$   $p = .01$ , procrastination  $r(86) = -.568$   $p = .01$ , and hypervigilance  $r(85) = -.429$   $p = .01$ . Whereas, a positive correlation was found between decision making self-esteem and vigilance  $r(86) = .401$   $p = .01$ .

Measures	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1.Coaching experience	1	.150	-.218*	-.300**	-.382**
2. Vigilance	.150	1	-.343**	-.371**	-.128
3. Buck Passing	-.218*	-.343**	1	.660**	.494**
4. Procrastination	-.300**	-.371**	.660**	1	.547**
5. Hyper-Vigilance	-.382**	-.128	.494**	.547**	1
M	7.86	9.98	5.46	3.63	4.67
SD	12.34	2.63	2.28	2.37	2.15

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).  
\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

## Discussion

The decision making styles obtained are based on the decisional conflict model of Janis and Mann (1977) [6] which states that decisional conflict stress is the major reason for decisional failure and failure in /high-quality decision making. Research on anticipatory stress (Starcke., 2008) [13] has shown that decision making can be negatively affected by stress even though information about outcome contingencies is provided individuals still take disadvantageous decisions. It is important to understand which factors cause stress to experienced and inexperienced coaches. A study on experienced and inexperienced basketball coaches found that the coaches with lesser experience rate expectation of self, quality of preparation and importance of eventual outcome as factors causing the most pressure on their in-game decision making. Mid and late career coaches reported expectation from self as being the most stress creating factor (McCluney, McCullick & Schempp, 2018) [10]

The results from the present study show that coaches without experience have a defensive avoidance decision making style which is associated with high stress and the decision maker tries avoiding the conflict by postponing the decision or passing the responsibility to someone else. Defensive avoidance decision making style includes procrastination ( $F(1, 86) = 4.30$ ,  $p = .041$ ) and buck-passing ( $F(1, 86) = 7.43$ ,  $p = .008$ ). Procrastination is postponing the decision until a later time this can be attributed to irrational fears and self-criticism of one's ability to complete a task (Ellis & Knaus, 1979) [3]. Since the coaches without experience have lesser knowledge and work experience it is possible that they have lesser confidence in their abilities and therefore might have a higher threshold for certainty before taking decision (Ferrari & Dovidio, 2000) [4]. This is further supported by the results obtained in the present study which reveal that coaches with lower self-esteem were more likely to employ defensive avoidance, buck-passing  $r(86) = -.464$   $p = .01$ , procrastination  $r(86) = -.568$   $p = .01$ , and hypervigilance  $r(85) = -.429$

$p = .01$  decision making as compared to the coaches with high self-esteem who relied more on vigilance decision making style  $r(86) = .401$   $p = .01$ . It should also be considered that coaches with lesser experience attribute expectation of self, quality of preparation and importance of eventual outcome as pressure creating factors during in-game decision making (McCluney, McCullick & Schempp, 2018) [10]. Therefore, it is possible that the inexperienced coaches might have a higher threshold certainty in order to reduce pressure experienced during times of in-game decision making.

The present study found that coaches without experience also have hypervigilant ( $F(1, 85) = 8.60$ ,  $p = .004$ ) decision making style. This decision making style is associated with severe emotional stress and the decision maker wants a way out of the dilemma and therefore might hastily choose the alternative that will provide immediate relief from the panic like situation encountered by the individual. Decision making during a game situation is usually stressful as it has bearing on the outcome and therefore causes a high stress situation. (McCluney, McCullick & Schempp, 2018) [10]. Inexperienced coaches when faced with the task of quickly detecting errors in student's skills may resort to keeping students busy, happy and good which is a common strategy employed by inexperienced teachers (Placek, 1983) [12]. This is due to the lack of instructional knowledge which is the reason why a hasty decision may be made to find relief from the panic like situation. On the contrary when experienced coaches are faced with similar task tend to utilise their experience and provide more technical instructions. (Jones, Dale, Housner & Kornspan, 1997) [7]

Coach's age ( $M=33.84$ ,  $SD=12.26$ ) also plays a factor in the decision making style used. Younger coaches tend to use procrastination  $r(86) = -.266$   $p = .05$  and hypervigilance  $r(85) = -.386$   $p = .01$  decision making style more as compared to older coaches. Keinan (1987) [8] found that under stress college students tend to make decisions without considering the alternatives. This supports the results obtained in this

study as the avoidance decision making style is based on avoidance of taking decisions and therefore vigilant decision making style is not used by the younger coaches who also have lesser experience.

### Conclusion

Coping strategies used under stress determine the decision making style. The young and inexperienced coaches have more defensive avoidance decision making style and also have hypervigilant decision making style all of which is associated with high stress and disregard of alternatives. These results can be attributed to less knowledge and experience. The coaches with more experience have a vigilant decision making style which implies that they tend to take decisions after careful examination of alternatives. This is due to more experience of situations encountered during coaching. The study didn't take into account the gender differences and no other variables were explored. The future studies can include more variables related to in-game decision making in order to better train the future coaches and include stress coping strategies in curriculums being taught at Sports coaching institutions.

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