

# Understanding Work Conflicts Among Family and Non-Family Employees - Applications in Family Hotels

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Understanding Work Conflicts Among Family and Non-  
Family Employees – Applications in Family Hotels

SENIOR PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

Family owned hotels in Croatia represent specific niche that attracts many customers even though there is no official record of them. In family owned hotels, there are family and non-family employees that have different view on business. At a work place, conflicts arise and it is important to see what is the main cause and how they can be resolved. Online questionnaire was distributed to members of National Association of Small and Family Hotels in Croatia and it shows that most of the employees, regardless of their family or non-family belonging are resolving conflicts by open communication. Majority of conflicts come out because of unclear work tasks, distrust and lack of tolerance among employees, disagreement with supervisor and wrong perception.

**KEY WORDS:** conflict, family owned hotel, conflict resolution, behavior styles, employees

## INTRODUCTION

### *Family owned business*

Family owned hotels in Croatia represent a very attractive and well-recognized type of accommodation to various customer niches. The research conducted by the Croatian Ministry of Tourism in 2013 provides relevant and useful data about existing accommodation in Croatia as well as about the number of family owned businesses.

Even though it is a challenge to define family business (Chrisman et al, 2005), the author of this project will regard family business as any business that has ownership within the family, and in which two or more employees are family and are involved directly to the business (Brockhaus, 2004).

A family owned business has a complex structure that can be crucial for the family and the business because both are intertwined, and, sometimes, even overlapping (Ramadani, Hoy, 2015). The authors defined family businesses as the types of business owned by families in which younger generations will continue the job when the time comes.

Any family business is a vision developed by members of the same family and introduced to other generations of the family (Chua et al., 1999). Family owned companies are different from other companies because they have many resources and capabilities that merely come from conversations between family members and the overall business is presented in a better light (Habbershon et al., 2003).

According to Perman (2006), 35% of companies that are listed in the Fortune 500 are identified as a family business. According to another source, family businesses are the ones that are more lasting and cannot be too common in general business world (Astrachan, 2010). In the European Family Business statistical report for 2012, it is estimated that 70% - 90% of GDP is annually made by family business.

### *Attributes of family business*

According to a research, the most important aspects of a family owned business are: the ownership, the strategies, the overall structure and the policies that regulate the business operations (Chua et al., 1999; Mandl, 2008). Meissner et al. (1994) define that a small family business has a different level of personalized service compared to big hotels. It seems evident that loyalty, personalized service and understanding the customers' needs and wants are leading to better success for family business. These types of companies can identify and recognize customer wishes and, by doing so, they can position the hotel towards attracting potential customers (Frehse, Peters, 2002).

Because of the hierarchy in family business, the family members can make quick decisions and react on time to make some changes that will have a positive impact on their business (Ittner, Larcker, 1996). Another way of looking at family business is that those businesses are operating for a number of years and it shows customers that they are buying good and quality service and goods (Peters, 2001).

### *Issues in terms of HR in family business*

Peters and Buhalis (2004) state that, in family owned businesses organization of work can be an issue if the employees are not following the company's standards. Businesses lack management necessary to establish principles and to lead them towards the goal. In family business, most of the employees are members of one family who often do not follow the company's directions and choose to follow their intuition instead. These self-driven decisions can affect the whole business in a negative way. Another flaw of family business is that sometimes almost all employees are family members, and because of that, family relationships could be the major factor in the management of the business (Tan, Zutshi, 2001). According to Terberger (1998), family members should have a higher motivation and a higher

desire to move the business forward. Another issue facing the HR in family business can result in difficult times when it comes to finding good (non-family) workforce and it can happen that when they find it, they would feel uncomfortable interacting and working with family members (Tan and Zutshi, 2001; Terberger, 1998).

### *Structure of employees (family vs non-family employees)*

In family businesses, managers and employees are usually a part of the same family and they share similar or the same values, goals and connections (Debarliev et al. (2015).

The main factor for identifying family business is that managers and employees share family connections, values and ethics, which are transferred and shared at work. Therefore, those factors brought from the family are mixed with business and open the space for conflicts.

Peters and Buhalis (2004) state that, family members are more accommodating when it comes to working hours and they adjust their lifestyles to the needs of their business. It is important that family members are always present, because the non-family employees will not care about the business as much.

### *Styles in managing conflict (Thomas Kilmann)*

Managing conflicts is a long process that requires involvement of skills, knowledge and experience in order to resolve conflicts in business (Spaho, 2013). If conflicts are not regulated and reduced, in the end they will bring loss in the business (Ozkul & Tuzunkan, 2013).

Thomas Kilmann Model is measuring five conflict factors that are proposed by Dual Concern Model and those are competing, collaborating, compromising, accommodating and avoiding (Shell, 2001). This model states that there are two standpoints for people who are going through a conflict: the concern that is showing their own outcomes and the concern for the other parties' outcomes (Lewicki et al., 2011, p. 22-24).

According to Lewicki et al., all of the above-mentioned factors have resulted with different standpoints about the types of concerns. Competing strategy states that persons go towards their own outcomes strongly and showing little concern for other parties' outcome.

Accommodating strategy states that persons show little concern for their own outcomes, but, nevertheless, they are interested if the other party accomplishes their outcomes. If a person shows little interest for the outcome, as well for other parties' outcome, this type of strategy is called avoiding strategy. Collaborating strategy is considered when there is high concern for their own outcome and high interest for other peoples' outcomes. Compromising strategy states that there is the same effort to pursue its own outcomes as well as help other pursue their own outcomes (Lewicki et al. 2011, p.22). According to study done by Ozkul et al. competing style is the most used style when managing conflicts in hotels and avoiding style is the least used one.

### *Conflicts*

Conflict is a form of disagreement between two or more sides that have different standpoint about goals, beliefs, values, etc. (Ting-Tommy, 1985, p.72). It is a process that shows the disagreement, discrepancy or any disruption between opposing sides (Rahim, Magner, 1995, p.722). According to Robbins (1998, p.434-435), it is natural to have conflict in our life and it cannot be avoided. However, it should be directed towards achieving goals and increasing the performance of the organization.

### *Levels of conflict*

According to Lewicki et al. (2011, P. 18), when two interdependent parties interact, each with their own goal which are not compatible, conflicts will happen. Four levels of a conflict are: intrapersonal, interpersonal, intragroup and intergroup conflict.

Intrapersonal conflicts are conflicts happening within an individual regarding ideas, thoughts, values, emotions etc. On the other hand, interpersonal conflicts are the ones that are happening between the individuals. They can occur between colleagues, siblings, neighbors or friends.

Intragroup conflict is a level of conflict arising within one group (between team members) and it affects the entire group productivity and decision-making. Intergroup conflict is happening between different groups (organizations, ethnic groups, etc.) and negotiation reaches highest complexity because of the large number of people involved in the whole conflict.

### *Conflict resolution*

Conflict resolution is a process of diminishing the sources of conflict; it is a whole package of methods and different approaches for solving a conflict (Wani, 2011). Conflict resolution has an important role and it is considered as a mechanism of making peace and solving differences (Wani, 2011).

According to Shonk (2019), it can be defined as informal and formal process where two or more sides want to come to the same conclusion and outcome. Conflict is present in every organization and it is almost impossible to avoid it, however it is mandatory to reduce it and resolve it in the best way (Yirik et al., 2015).

### *Decision making (HR issues)*

In family owned businesses, human resources have a big impact and there is a difference in approaches, they are moving from traditional to strategic management (Guest, 1989).

Strategic decision-making is a process that helps direct organization towards combining with the environment (Guest, 1989).



Human resources have a role of developing strategy that improves the strengths of the organization and as well as the whole human resources department of the organization and in that way, they will improve employee's behavior and the overall success of the company will be met (Bennett et al., 1998).

Business performance is crucial, it depends on the people in the organization, and HR is a big contributor to overall performance of businesses as well as for family firms (Ransburg et al., 2016). According to Ransburg et al. (2016), family firms have bigger complexity regarding HR, because they could face the overlap of elements and there are different dimensions in question.

### *Conflicts in family owned business*

Family business can represent the safety for family members as well as for non-family members that are working in the business (Kruzic, Bulog, 2012). According to Ivic (2018), company representative poses decision-making characteristics. However, small businesses are growing and expanding, with that, the complexity of the business arises, and owners see that in order for their business to move forward, they need to hire additional employees. In such environment, it is impossible to avoid conflicts.

### *Sources of conflict in family owned business*

According to Žarko (2017), conflicts arising in family business are usually between family members, family members and non-family members and between non-family members.

Conflicts arise when one side is not following the rules, or when one side opposes the other and when resistance of one side causes a reaction from the other side. Sources between family members are because of inheritance, leadership roles or financial distribution of the profit.

The biggest concern in family business is that not many employees understand and manage rules, their roles and responsibilities that are crucial for the overall success (Finch, 2005).

### *Conflict resolution in family owned business*

Conflicts are part of any business, however there should be ways to reduce them so they will not affect company's goal (Harland, 2015). According to Alderson (2015), conflicts can reduce if the family businesses organize family meetings, council, constitution as well as general meetings. According to Harland (2015), hierarchy is a big issue in family business, and sometimes this is the cause of a conflict because elders do not allow their family members to make their decisions. Separating family and business from each other is crucial thing for the success of the business and if they manage to do it, they will set an example for others.

### *Family owned hotels in Croatia*

In Croatia, according to the report from Ministry of Science in 2013, there were around 340 hotels with less than 50 units, however they are not classified as family owned business and based on that we cannot get the correct number. These hotels are listed in the system by official name "society with limited responsibility" ("društva s ograničenom odgovornošću") and because of this, we cannot know the exact number of family owned hotels.

According to the data from Ministry of Science (2013), there are 7,800 accommodation facilities and around 15,600 beds. Croatia has no official number of family hotels; however, through the Association of Small and Family Hotels in Croatia people can see listed family hotels in Croatia.

In the first part of this project, the author tried to explain the family owned hotels and the issues of conflicts between family and non-family employees. The following part is going to address the methodology of retrieving the data about the research. The data will be collected from the employees working in family owned hotels in Croatia.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this research was to understand the causes of conflicts in family owned hotels in Croatia and to see the types that used by the employees. In addition, the author wanted to investigate how conflicts are resolved and what are the causes of conflicts.

### **Participants**

The questionnaire was distributed online using the google form and it was sent via e-mail to family owned hotels in Croatia through Association of Small and Family Hotels in Croatia. All hotels are listed on this webpage with their contact information and it was the main source for data collection. The online questionnaire was sent to the 79 family owned hotels in Croatia from the list and to 10 other family owned hotels that are not on the list. The response rate was 61,80 %, meaning that 55 filled out questionnaire. Because of the good response rate, there was no need for follow up e-mails.

### **Materials**

The source for the questionnaire was a senior project from Mrs. Elizabeta Vuković in which she was researching how conflicts are managed in organizations on the example of state businesses. Original questionnaire has 27 questions divided into three parts. First part consists of demographic and sociographic questions. Second part is categorical format focused on causes of conflict. Third part is measuring level of agreement to find the behavior style.

### **Procedure**

For the purpose of the research, it was modified to eight questions with additional sub-questions. The questionnaire was translated into Croatian language for user friendliness. The questionnaire consists of three parts.

The first part of the questionnaire contains demographic and sociographic questions regarding the gender, age and employment status. The second part of the questionnaire is using the

categorical format and the focus is on the tendency of conflicts, effects of conflicts and how conflicts are solved. Third part of the questionnaire consists of categorical questions based on five point Likert scale and it measures the level of agreement when it comes to sources of conflict and what style do participants use while approaching conflicts at their work place.

The major limitation for conducting this research was the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic as the majority of hotels were closed and it was harder to get higher number of respondents.

A blank copy of questionnaire in APPENDIX B.

### **RESULTS**

In total, the author collected 55 online questionnaires and all of them were valid. Out of those 55 questionnaires, 71% were female participants and 29% male participants. Among the respondents, 47% of them are family members and the rest are non-family members. This provides us with good amount of respondents to analyze the difference of conflicts in family owned hotels. The statistic shows that 67,27% of respondents claim that they do not have a tendency for conflicts at their work place. Out of 55 participants, 26 of them are family employees and 14 out of them do not have tendency for conflicts. Furthermore, 38,46% of family employees state that sometimes they are involved in conflicts. As for the 29 non-family employees, 79,31 % of non-family participants stated that they do not have a tendency for conflicts at a work place and 20,68% of them stated that sometimes they are involved in conflicts. Out of 55 respondents, 52,73% claim that conflicts at a work place do not have a negative effect and that they can contribute to the development of new ideas, while the rest think otherwise. According to the respondents of the questionnaire, 96,36% of them think that through open communication conflicts can be resolved.

Among 55 participants, 67,27% of them agree that conflicts are caused by the wrong organizational structure while 18,19% disagree and the remaining 14,54% have neutral

opinion. Out of all respondents, 38 of them agree that conflicts are caused by the unclear definition of work tasks, while others disagree. When it comes to disagreement with the supervisor, 50,91% agree that this is the cause for conflicts and 32,73% disagree. The rest of participants are in the middle and they cannot decide what their opinion is.

Distrust among employees is one of the reasons for conflicts and 32 participants claim that they agree that this is the cause of conflicts and with this statement, 10 of them disagree and the rest is staying neutral. When it comes to lack of tolerance, 80% claim that this is the source of conflicts and the rest disagree. More than half of the participants, 33 of them agree that conflict are caused by the unclear work roles and that work tasks are put on the employees that have the lowest status in the business. On the other side, 14 of them disagree with this claim and the rest are staying neutral. When it comes to wrong perception among employees, 70,91% claim that they agree that this is the cause of conflicts and only 12,73% disagree and the rest are in the middle. (Figure 1.)

Out of 55 participants, only 8 of them are using competitive conflict type when it comes to work conflicts. More than half of participants (72,73%) use collaborating conflict type when it comes to work conflicts. Compromising conflict type is used by 35 (63,64%) people in work place when conflicts arise. Only 10 (18,18%) participants are using avoiding conflict type in work place. Accommodating conflict types is used by 23 (41,82%) participants when it comes to conflicts at a work place. (Figure 2.)

## DISCUSSION

This research tried to understand that conflicts in family owned hotels exist and that there are different ways of solving them. At a work place, conflicts can have a positive or negative effect, depending on the situation. According to the research that I conducted, conflicts are not seen as a negative effect rather they contribute to the development of new ideas and better work environment. This situation could be further researched, because sometimes people do

not know if they are in a conflict or not and based on that they cannot act accordingly.

Conflicts are usually resolved by open communication, and my research proves it, however we know that some people are choosing to neglect conflict resolution if the outcome is not in their favor.

At a work place there are several factors that are contributing to conflicts and many people are faced it with every day. One of the goals of my research was to measure what is the difference between family and non-family employees and what causes conflicts between them. Family employees want to be on the top of a company and sometimes non-family members are faced with some obstacles and conflicts. If you want that your company functions well it is necessary to reduce the distrust among employees, tolerance levels should be higher, roles for each employee need to be set and clear with no difference between same job positions and employees.

Company managers are required to set the work organization and make sure that all disagreements with employees are reduced because if you want to have a smooth business you need to know the limit. Based on the research it is shown that the majority of conflicts happen because of wrongly set work structure and not defined work tasks.

Every employee has its own behavioral style when it comes to conflict resolution and acts upon it. In my opinion, the causes of conflicts are not correlated to the behavior styles of the results. Furthermore, respondents are claiming that they are using collaborating and compromising style in most of the situations and the on the other side they claim that conflicts are happening because of distrust, tolerance, wrong perception and looking down on employees on the lower work positions. Family owned hotels in Croatia are small properties with lower number of employees that need to show their work and make sure that they stand out from the rest of the employees. This being said, it is known that the employees use competing style and no organization goes without it. My data collection claims otherwise.

## CONFLICTS IN FAMILY HOTELS

Most of the respondents claim that they are not using this style when it comes to conflict resolution.

For further research, I would suggest that there should be more participants because in that way, it would be more credible and more questions could be answered. In addition, there should be an equal number of family and non-family employees who would fill out the instrument, because in that way we can see in detail what triggers the conflicts and the difference between both sides.

Limitation for this research was the appearance of bias in the respondent's answers. In some answers, it is visible that they were not honest and consistent and because of that, the results are not precise. This could be seen in answers regarding the tendency for conflicts as stated in the results section.

Throughout this research, readers can get the insight into family owned hotels in Croatia and understand the conflicts that are happening within the employees. As stated before, in every hotel conflicts are happening, however this research brings closer to people the behavior styles that employees possess when dealing with conflicts.

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APPENDIX A

Figure 1.

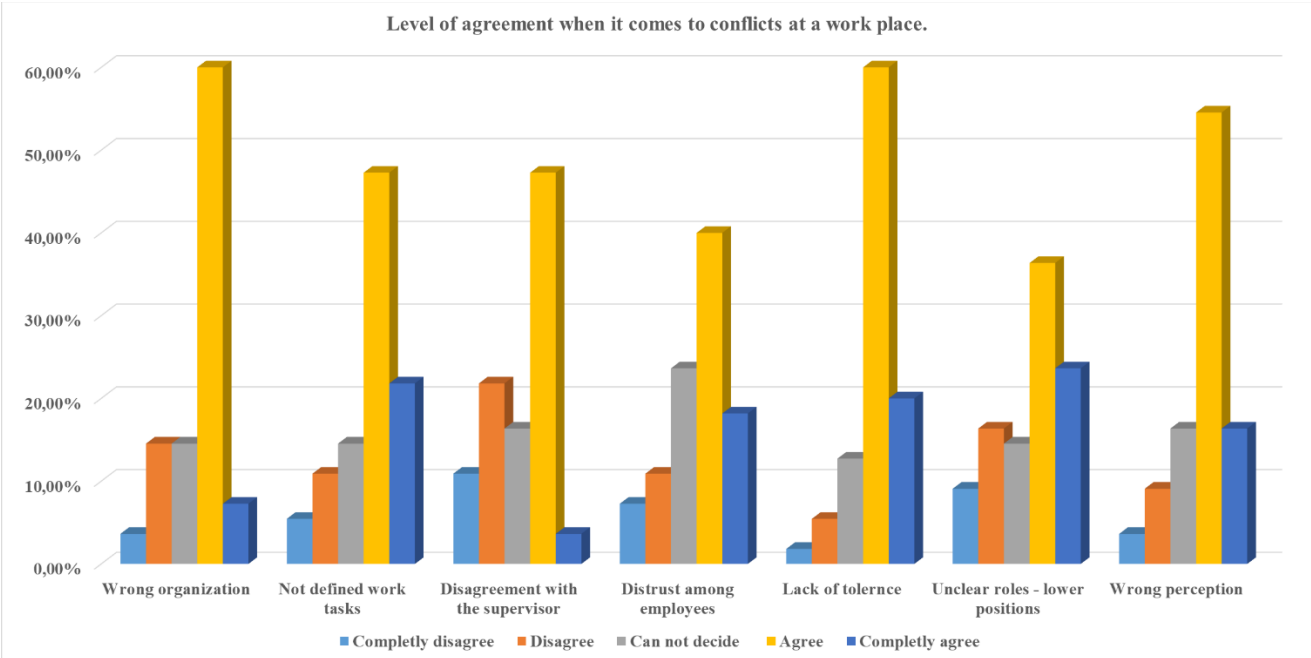


Figure above shows the level of agreement with seven possible causes of conflict.

Figure 2.

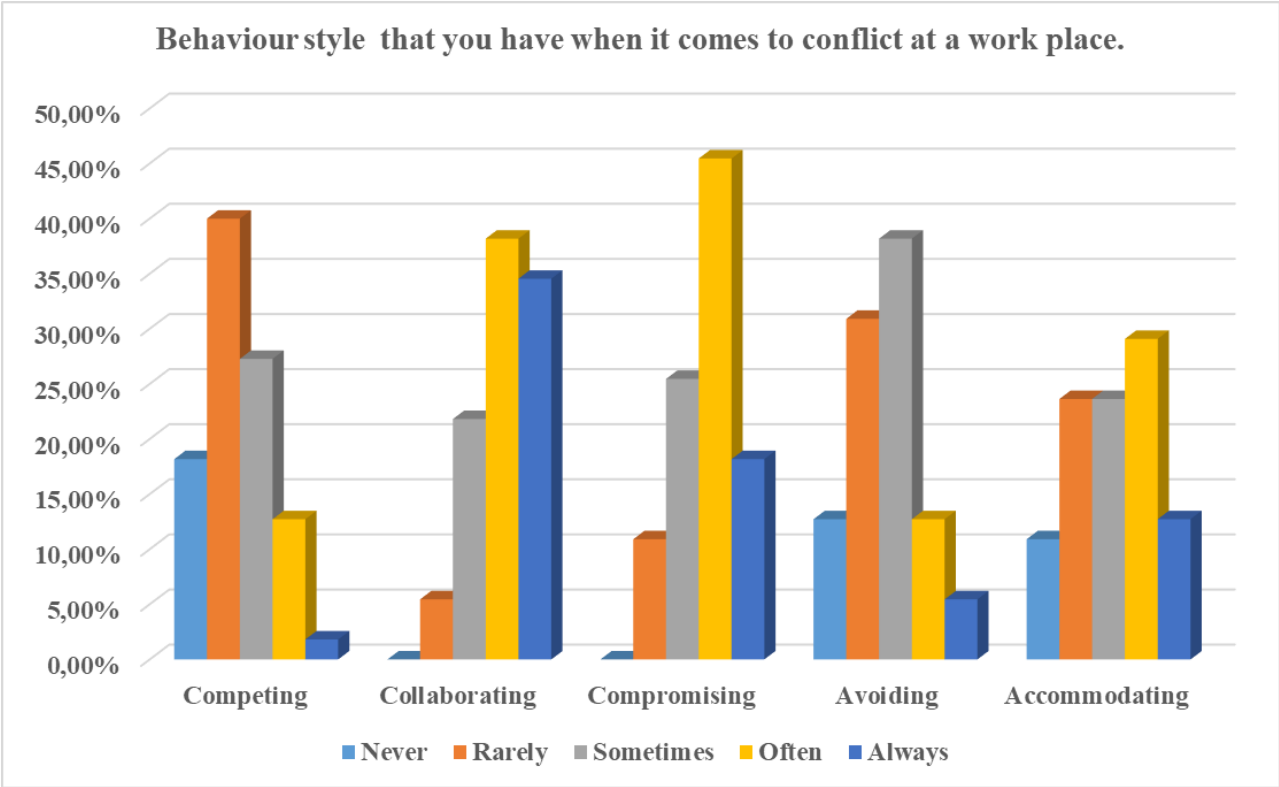


Figure above shows what behavior style respondents use the most when it comes to conflict at a work place.

APPENDIX B

Copy of the questionnaire:

Poštovani,

Moje ime je Paula Horvat i studentica sam četvrte godine visokoškolske institucije RIT Croatia u Dubrovniku, koja provodi program dodiplomskog studija menadžmenta u uslužnim djelatnostima fakulteta Rochester Institute of Technology iz Rochestera, u državi New York (SAD).

Za svoj završni rad, istražujem uzroke konfliktnih situacija u obiteljskim hotelima u Hrvatskoj kao i stilove pregovaranja te i frekvenciju istih između obiteljskih zaposlenika i/ili zaposlenika van obitelji.

Budući da ste Vi i Vaš hotel članovi udruge „Obiteljski i mali hoteli Republike Hrvatske“, molila bih Vas da ispunite priloženi upitnik. Ispunjavanje upitnika trajat će otprilike 5 minuta.

Sudjelovanje u ovom upitniku je u potpunosti dobrovoljno, a vaši podaci anonimni i povjerljivi, te ne postoji nikakav rizik ispunjavanja istog. Kako biste u potpunosti osigurali da Vaši podaci ostanu povjerljivi, molim Vas da na upitnik ne upisujete niti Vaše ime, niti ime hotela za koji radite.

Ukoliko odlučite sudjelovati, molim Vas da odgovorite na sva pitanja što je moguće iskrenije i preciznije.

Zahvaljujem Vam na Vašem vremenu i sudjelovanju u ovom istraživanju.

Ukoliko biste željeli bilo kakve dodatne informacije o ovom istraživanju ili mom diplomskom radu, slobodno mi se obratite na moj osobni telefon ili mail (+385916046606 / pxh2006@g.rit.edu) ili direktno mojoj mentorici, profesorici Mileni Kužnin (020 433 000 / milena.kuznin@croatia.rit.edu).

S poštovanjem,

Paula Horvat

1. Spol:

- Žensko

- Muško

- Ne želim se izjasniti

## CONFLICTS IN FAMILY HOTELS

2. Dobna skupina kojoj pripadate:

- od 18 do 30 godina
- od 31 do 40 godina
- od 41 do 50 godina
- od 50 godina i više

4. Molim Vas označite Vaš radni status.

- Zaposlenik koji je član obitelji i radi u obiteljskom hotelu.
- Zaposlenik koji nije član obitelji a radi u obiteljskom hotelu.
- Vlasnik obiteljskog hotela.
- Ostalo: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Da li ste skloni sukobima na radnom mjestu?

- Jesam
- Ponekad
- Nisam

7. Smatrate li da sukobi na radnom mjestu nisu uvijek negativna pojava te da mogu doprinijeti organizaciji u razvoju novih ideja?

- Da
- Ne
- Možda

8. Kako se prema Vašem mišljenju rješavaju sukobi na radnom mjestu?

- Otvorenom komunikacijom
- Sami po sebi
- Ignoriranjem
- Nije mi poznato

CONFLICTS IN FAMILY HOTELS

U kojoj mjeri se slažete ili ne slažete sa sljedećim tvrdnjama.

Molim Vas da označite za svaku tvrdnju jednu od ponuđenih ocjena

(1- ne slažem se, 2 - uglavnom se ne slažem, 3- ne mogu odlučiti, 4 – uglavnom se slažem, 5- potpuno se slažem)

	Ne slažem se	Uglavnom se ne slažem	Ne mogu odlučiti	Uglavnom se slažem	Potpuno se slažem
9. Do sukoba dolazi zbog pogrešno postavljenog organizacijskog sustava.					
10. Do sukoba dolazi zbog nejasno definiranih radnih zadataka.					
11. Do sukoba dolazi zbog neslaganja s rukovoditeljem.					
12. Sukob nastaje zbog nepovjerenja među zaposlenima.					
13. Sukob nastaje zbog nedostatka tolerancije među zaposlenima.					
14. Sukob nastaje zbog nejasnih uloga u organizaciji te se radni zadaci svode na zaposlenike koji su najniže rangirani u organizaciji.					
15. Sukob nastaje zbog iskrivljene percepcije među zaposlenicima.					



CONFLICTS IN FAMILY HOTELS

Molim Vas da označite koji stil ponašanja zauzimate kada dođe do sukoba na poslu? Za svaku od navedenih tvrdnja označite jedan od ponuđenih odgovora.

	<b>Nikad</b>	<b>Rijetko</b>	<b>Ponekad</b>	<b>Često</b>	<b>Uvijek</b>
16. Čvrsto branim vlastiti stav, ne brinem o osjećajima druge strane.					
17. Aktivno se uključujem u raspravu kako bi se došlo do zajedničkog rješenja.					
18. Uvijek objasnim vlastite potrebe, no iste stavljam u drugi plan zbog pronalaženja zajedničkog rješenja.					
19. Svoje mišljenje zadržavam za sebe zbog izbjegavanja sukoba.					
20. Posvećujem više pažnje zahtjevima kolega nego vlastitim ciljevima.					