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COACH AND ATHLETE LEADERSHIP IN SPORT

Todd M. Loughhead and Gordon A. Bloom

Leadership has traditionally been assigned great importance by coaches, athletes, spectators, and media. In the sport context, coaches such as Sir Alex Ferguson, Phil Jackson, and Pat Summitt, and players such as Derek Jeter, Michael Jordan, and Sheryl Swoopes were highly regarded for their leadership abilities. Historically, coaches have been viewed as the leader of their respective teams. However, the importance of athlete leadership has received increased attention lately from both the media and academic communities. A recent example of strong coach and athlete leadership can be seen with the San Antonio Spurs of the National Basketball Association (NBA). Based on their years of consistency, the Spurs are viewed as the model franchise in the NBA. Their head coach, Gregg Popovich, has won three coach of the year awards and four NBA championships, and has a career winning percentage of 68.9 – third best in league history. Despite being considered one of basketball's best leaders, Popovich has always credited the team's leadership core (Tim Duncan, Tony Parker, Manu Ginobili) as a key element of their success. Consequently, the objectives of this chapter are to present an overview of the models and theories of coach and athlete leadership, as well as the research that has been carried out in these contexts.

Models and theories used in the study of sport leadership

Multidimensional model of leadership

The Multidimensional Model of Leadership (MML; Chelladurai, 1978, 2007) has been one of the most widely used models for the study of leadership in sport. The majority of research using this model has examined the leadership behaviors of coaches and has been recently used in the study of athlete leadership. The MML is a linear model composed of antecedents, leadership behaviors, and consequences. The antecedents within the model directly affect leader behaviors. The antecedents are divided into three categories: situational, leader, and member characteristics. Situational characteristics include group goals, task type, and social norms as well as other factors such as organizational regulations. Member characteristics represent the attributes of the follower which may include personality, gender, and ability.

Lastly, the leader characteristics refer to the leader's attributes including personality, expertise, gender, and experience.

The three antecedents influence three forms of leadership behaviors: required, preferred, and actual (Chelladurai, 1978, 2007). Required leader behaviors refer to behaviors needed in certain situations and are directly influenced by the antecedents of situational and member characteristics. Preferred leader behaviors are different from required leader behaviors. In the former, leadership behaviors are desired by the followers, whereas in the latter they are required. These preferred behaviors are influenced by the antecedents of situational and member characteristics. Finally, actual behaviors are impacted directly by the antecedent of leader characteristics but are also influenced by both the preferred and required behaviors. Leaders devise contextually appropriate leadership behaviors based on their own individual characteristics, but also take into account what leadership behaviors are required and preferred by the athletes based on the situation. In this way a leader's behavior is not only shaped by all three antecedents, but also by the other two types of behavior. If these three leadership behaviors (i.e., required, preferred, and actual) are congruent, positive consequences for the athletes (e.g., greater satisfaction, better performance) are more likely to occur (Chelladurai, 1978, 2007).

Full Range Model of Leadership

The Full Range Model of Leadership (FRML; Avolio, 1999) was created to help contextualize different leadership styles. In particular, this model contains three broad categorizations of leadership behaviors: *laissez-faire*, transactional, and transformational leadership (Avolio, 1999). In this model, these three categories of leadership fall on a continuum ranging from active-passive and effective-ineffective. *Laissez-faire* is the most passive and ineffective form of leadership and is viewed as the absence of leadership. Further, a *laissez-faire* leadership style is often considered to be a failure to lead (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003).

Transactional leadership is a more effective and active form of leadership than *laissez-faire* (Avolio, 1999). This form of leadership involves an exchange between the leader and follower, with the follower receiving rewards (e.g., praise, feedback) contingent upon quality work, effort, and behavior, while punishments are distributed to correct poor work, effort, and behavior (Burns, 1978). Transactional leadership is an effective form of leadership that operates through the establishment of carefully monitored mutually beneficial exchange relationships. The focus of these exchange relationships is purely to satisfy the immediate self-interests of both leader and follower.

Transformational leadership was originally conceptualized in organizational settings over three decades ago based on the seminal writings of Burns (1978) and was popularized by Bass and his colleagues (e.g., Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1994). The distinction between transformational and transactional leadership is that transformational leadership focuses upon building relationships with followers based on emotional, personal, and inspirational exchanges with the end goal of follower development, while transactional leadership relies upon an exchange of rewards for services provided. Unlike transactional leaders, transformational leaders do not only operate via exchange relationships (Bass & Riggio, 2006). They elevate followers' performance and satisfaction to new heights by motivating, encouraging, stimulating, and inspiring them in order to maximize their potential. Within the FRML, transformational leadership is considered the most effective, active, and beneficial form of leadership (e.g., Dionne, Yammarino, Atwater, & Spangler, 2004; Ruggieri, 2009).

Originally Burns (1978) described transformational leadership as independent of transactional leadership. However, Bass (1985) found that transactional and transformational leaders were not opposite of each other. Rather, transformational leadership was an extension of transactional leadership that induced new degrees of follower satisfaction and performance. Thus, transactional leadership can be viewed as a building block for effective transformational leadership to occur (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, & Fetter, 1990). Avolio (1999) has suggested that effective leaders primarily display transformational leadership behaviors and use, on occasion, transactional leadership behaviors.

Coaching model

Côté, Salmela, Trudel, Baria, and Russell (1995) advanced a leadership model geared towards coaches that examines the “how” and “why” of coaching. Known as the coaching model (CM), this framework broadly captures the most influential factors of coaching. According to the CM, coaches have a goal of developing their athletes/teams, which is influenced by three peripheral components: the *coach's personal characteristics*, the *athlete's characteristics*, and the *contextual factors*, which in turn determine which of the primary components of *organization*, *training*, and *competition* must be improved to develop the athlete and the team. With respect to leadership, the CM allows coaches to establish guidelines to create optimal conditions for athlete performance and development and, in turn, help identify coaches' knowledge and strategies when dealing with their athletes.

The *organization* component of the CM involves the use of the coach's knowledge in arranging the ideal plans for the team to train and compete, while taking into consideration further responsibilities such as working with staff members, team selection, and helping the athletes with their personal problems (Côté *et al.*, 1995). Planning and having a vision are key organizational components for coaches to help guide the other elements of the CM (Bloom, Falcão, & Caron, 2014). The vision influences both the long-term goal of the program's growth and development along with the short-term goal of what the coach believes each athlete or the entire team can achieve in any given season.

The *training* component of the CM involves applying the coach's knowledge to help athletes develop and execute various technical, tactical, physical, and mental skills (Côté *et al.*, 1995). Gould and Maynard (2009) reviewed research on Olympic performance and found an association between optimal physical training and Olympic success. Yukelson and Rose (2014) interviewed the head coach of an NCAA team that won four consecutive national championships and postulated that the best time to get the athletes mentally and tactically prepared was during practice time. Based on these findings, it is evident that the period of training should encompass not only high quality of physical training but also high quality of mental training for optimal performance in competition.

The *competition* component has been referred to as those coaching tasks involved throughout the day of the competition, divided into before, during, and after competition (Bloom, 2002). Bloom, Durand-Bush, and Salmela (1997) revealed common competition routines of expert team sport coaches that included structured pre-game warm-ups and pep-talks where they focused on helping the athletes achieve stable levels of arousal. To prepare themselves, coaches engaged in mental rehearsal of their game plans to help them control their emotions and adjust to spontaneous in-game situations (Bloom *et al.*, 1997).

Côté and colleagues (1995) described *coach's characteristics* as the philosophy, perceptions, and beliefs that influenced their work in organization, training, and competition. Moreover, Bloom and Salmela (2000) found that expert team sport coaches attributed great importance

to such personal skills as communication, work ethic, and a desire to acquire knowledge. Similarly, Bennie and O'Connor (2011) noted that coach's personal characteristics and philosophy combined with their technical and tactical knowledge affected their leadership abilities in planning training sessions, organizing team meetings, and making technical and tactical decisions.

Athlete's personal characteristics encompassed the athlete's stage of learning, personal abilities, and any other personal characteristics that could impact the coaching process. More specifically, this category explains how the athlete's background and individual differences influence the components of organization, training, and competition. For instance, differences in the age, characteristics, and developmental level of the athlete indicates that coaches need to possess different types of knowledge and skills to develop their athletes. Accordingly, coaches should be aware of the characteristics of their athletes in order to develop a team environment that takes full advantage of the individual makeup of the athletes. For example, some athletes may be lacking in the fundamental skills of their sport and, as a result, a coach will need to spend time teaching these skills.

Contextual factors are unstable factors such as assistant coaches, parents, working conditions, scholarship allotment, and budget restrictions that play a role in the coaching process. Coaches have to be adaptable as they work in a multitude of contexts that differ in terms of support, resources, equipment, facilities, and staff.

Research on coaching and athlete leadership

This portion of the chapter will be divided into four sections and will highlight research that has examined coaching and athlete leadership. The first three will discuss coaching research organized by the theoretical framework that guided those particular studies, while the final section will focus on athlete leadership.

Coaching research using the multidimensional model of leadership

A large amount of research has been conducted examining the leadership behaviors of coaches in conjunction with various athlete and team outcome variables from Chelladurai's (1978, 2007) MML. To date, the majority of coaching research using the MML has primarily examined the outcomes of satisfaction, performance, and cohesion. Surujlal and Dhurup (2012) examined the preference of leadership behaviors of 400 university-level male and female athletes. In general, athletes preferred that their coaches use positive feedback and instruction leadership behaviors the most, followed by democratic behaviors, social support, and autocratic behaviors. In addition, the results revealed that male athletes had a greater preference than female athletes for autocratic behaviors and social support. In contrast, female athletes preferred instruction, democratic, and positive feedback coaching behaviors compared to their male counterparts. Further, Høigarrd, Jones, and Peters (2008) examined performance and satisfaction with elite soccer players. The players were asked to read scenarios that described a successful team (i.e., had won their first ten league games, and have been playing well) and an unsuccessful team (i.e., had lost their first ten league games, and have been playing poorly). Participants indicated that positive feedback, instruction, and democratic behaviors were the most preferred coaching behaviors regardless of the scenario. Finally, researchers have found a relationship between coach leadership behaviors and cohesion. Specifically, researchers have found the leadership behaviors of social support,

instruction, positive feedback, and democratic behaviors have been positively related to both task and social cohesion (Nezhad & Keshtan, 2010; Ramzaninezhad & Keshtan, 2009).

Coaching research using the Full Range Model of Leadership

Since the beginning of the new millennium, coaching research has started to incorporate aspects of the Full Range Model of Leadership, in particular the transformational leadership component, in both empirical and conceptual writings. From an empirical perspective, Charbonneau, Barling, and Kelloway (2001) were one of the first to our knowledge to examine transformational leadership within the context of sport. They examined varsity athletes from a variety of individual (e.g., judo and swimming) and interdependent (e.g., volleyball and basketball) sport teams and how these athletes perceived their coaches' transformational leadership behaviors. This research tested the hypothesis that the effects of transformational leadership upon individual athletic performance were mediated by intrinsic motivation levels of the athletes. The results revealed that transformational leadership behaviors from the coach were related to performance but were mediated by the intrinsic motivation levels of the athletes. Therefore, it would appear that transformational leadership behaviors from the coach are effective in enhancing performance; however, athletes must simultaneously be motivated or willing to improve. In a study examining coaching effectiveness, Rowold (2006) asked judo athletes to rate the leadership behaviors of their instructors, their instructor's perceived leadership effectiveness, and satisfaction with the instructor. The results revealed that both transactional and transformational leadership accounted for a significant increase in perceived leadership effectiveness and satisfaction with the instructor. The results from this study indicate that coaches may benefit from using a full range of leadership behaviors. More recently, Vella, Oades, and Crowe (2013) examined the relationship between coach's use of transformational leadership behaviors and positive developmental outcomes on a sample of adolescent male and female soccer players. The results indicated a positive relationship between coaching transformational leadership and developmental outcomes such as better personal, social, and cognitive skills, more effective goal setting, and more likely to take initiatives in sport.

From a conceptual perspective, Vallée and Bloom (2005) conducted semi-structured interviews with elite university coaches who were intent on turning around struggling varsity sport teams. The results uncovered that successful coaches formulated a vision for their teams and this vision was communicated more effectively using transformational leadership. Further, Chelladurai (2007) added transformational leadership as a wide-ranging influence on the three antecedents (situational, leader, and member characteristics) within the MML. Hence, transformational leadership will continue to be an emerging theory in the sport coaching literature.

Coaching research using coaching model

Many studies in coaching science have produced research identifying the role of the coach in athlete development and team success (e.g., Bucci, Bloom, Loughead, & Caron, 2012; Duchesne, Bloom, & Sabiston, 2011; Rathwell, Bloom, & Loughead, 2014). For example, Rathwell *et al.* (2014) provided a comprehensive understanding of head coaches' characteristics, values, and behaviors, and how they affected the selection and development of their head assistant coach. This study presented the philosophies of coaches who continuously produced athletes that excelled in football, school, and in their communities

and how they mentored their coaching staff in order to achieve their short- and long-term goals. The results demonstrated that a winning at all cost philosophy was not a prerequisite for achieving team success in university sport. The coaches were aware that few Canadians play professional football and used football as a tool to develop athletes' skills in and outside of sport. Aspiring coaches adopting these philosophies may produce student-athletes that can continue to succeed beyond their athletic careers.

Duchesne *et al.* (2011) interviewed intercollegiate coaches from the highest competition level of American university sport in order to learn about their experiences coaching international student-athletes. The results suggested that coaching international student-athletes involved an additional responsibility of mentoring players to improve as students, athletes, and members of their communities. The responsibility of the coach went beyond the playing field by helping athletes adjust to a new country and culture. Some of the challenges faced by these international athletes are adjusting to the loneliness in their new home country, overcoming language barriers, learning new social norms, and adjusting to new training regimens (Schinke, Yukelson, Bartolacci, Battochio, & Johnstone, 2011).

Bucci and colleagues (2012) provided information on how coaches can cultivate positive and productive relationships with their athlete leaders. Coaches had a very clear understanding of the qualities they looked for in their athlete leaders both on and off the ice. Moreover, coaches appeared to have shared positive relationships with their athlete leaders throughout their careers. Interestingly, many of the findings that emerged from this study were consistent with previous literature pertaining to athlete leadership. More specifically, athlete leadership is essential and affects coaching and team success. This knowledge can lead coaches to strengthen the leadership of the team by carefully identifying, developing, and utilizing their athlete leader's influence and aptitudes more effectively.

Athlete leadership research

In addition to research examining coaching leadership, a newer line of leadership research has focused on the athletes. One of the first studies examining athlete leadership came from Loughead and Hardy (2005), who compared the leadership behaviors of athlete leaders and coaches. The results showed that coaches exhibited more instruction and autocratic leadership behaviors than athlete leaders. In contrast, athlete leaders exhibited greater social support, positive feedback, and democratic leadership behaviors than coaches. Researchers have also examined some of the correlates related to athlete leadership. In an examination of cohesion, Vincer and Loughead (2010) found the athlete leader behaviors of instruction and social support were positively associated with task and social cohesion, while democratic behaviors were positively related to task cohesion. Additionally, Callow, Smith, Hardy, Arthur, and Hardy (2009) examined the relationship between transformational leadership behaviors of team captains and cohesion amongst collegiate ultimate Frisbee players. The results showed a positive relationship between the transformational leadership behaviors and cohesion.

In addition to cohesion, correlates such as communication and collective efficacy have been examined in relation to athlete leadership. For example, Smith, Arthur, Hardy, Callow, and Williams (2013) examined transformational leadership behaviors, intra-team communication, and task cohesion in ultimate Frisbee players. The results revealed that intra-team communication mediated the relationship between the athlete transformational leadership behaviors and task cohesion. Using both transformational and transactional athlete leadership behaviors, Price and Weiss (2013) found that athlete leaders who displayed

transformational leadership had teams that were more positively task and socially cohesive, and were more collectively efficacious. In contrast, athlete leaders who displayed transactional leadership behaviors had teams that were less task cohesive.

In a qualitative study examining athlete leadership, Dupuis, Bloom, and Loughead (2006) interviewed six former ice hockey team captains who were identified by coaches as being the best team captains they have worked with. Findings revealed that these captains controlled their emotions, respected their teammates and coaches, had positive attitudes, a strong work ethic, and communicated effectively. These qualities helped team leaders develop positive relationships with their coaches and teammates, and facilitated their leadership duties by mentoring young players. Overall, these findings identified the potential impact athlete leaders can have on other team members.

Conclusions

Early sport leadership research primarily investigated coach leadership behaviors. Recently, attention has also examined the leadership behaviors of athletes. The current chapter has provided both theoretical and empirical support concerning the importance of coach and athlete leadership in sport. Future research should focus on women's sport leadership. There are relatively few studies examining women in coaching and women as athlete leaders, despite some evidence in the business sector showing differences in leadership styles between women and men (Van Engen & Willemsen, 2004). Interestingly, research in the United States has shown a decline in women coaches since the adoption of Title IX in 1972 when 90 percent of collegiate women's teams were coached by women to 42.9 percent in 2012 (Acosta & Carpenter, 2012). Some of the reasons for this decline may be attributed to family commitments, burnout, salary, and lack of support from administrators (Kamphoff, 2010).

Furthermore, the majority of coaching and athlete leadership research has utilized samples from youth and university-level sport. It would be interesting to examine the professional ranks to determine whether the theoretical models and findings presented in this chapter are relevant at the highest levels of performance sport. Lastly, there is very little research examining mentoring in sport. The research that has been done has focused on the mentoring received by coaches (e.g., Koh, Bloom, Fairhurst, Paiement, & Kee, 2014). While this research has been useful from a coach education perspective, a similar approach could be used to study athlete-to-athlete mentoring with the hope of producing athletes who are better equipped to handle the pressures and expectations of sport.

To further advance our understanding of sport leadership and to continue developing better coaches and athlete leaders, it will be important to utilize a strong theoretical base. In this chapter, we have presented several theoretical perspectives to help guide future research. Based on a meta-analysis from organizational psychology that contained hundreds of leadership studies, Avolio, Reichard, Hannah, Walumbwa, and Chan (2009) found that the most effective leaders utilized both transactional and transformational leadership behaviors. Consequently, the examination of a full range of leadership behaviors is required to best understand leadership effectiveness.

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