

Team Captains' Perceptions of Athlete Leadership

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The purpose of this study was to identify and examine the leadership behaviors exhibited by formal athlete leaders. Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with six former university male ice hockey team captains. The results of the analysis revealed three higher-order categories: (a) interpersonal characteristics and experiences, which included elements related to their personal make-up and previous leadership experiences; (b) verbal interactions, which included interactions with teammates and coaches; and (c) task behaviors, which included responsibilities and behaviors relating to administrative matters and to improving team climate, norms, and functioning. The results revealed the importance of formally designated athlete leaders (e.g., team captains) by describing the nature of their experiences, the behaviors they displayed, how the behaviors were manifested, and when and where their leadership behaviors were exhibited.

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Leadership has been defined as "a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (Northouse, 2001, p. 3). Given its apparent practical appeal, it is not surprising that leadership has been one of the most studied areas in industrial and organizational psychology (Northouse, 2001). In sport, the importance of effective leadership has been cited by athletes and coaches as a vital component to achievement (Chelladurai & Riemer, 1998; Gould, Hodge, Peterson, & Petlichkoff, 1987) and athlete satisfaction (Riemer & Chelladurai, 1995). Up to this point, most sport leadership research has focused on coaching effectiveness by identifying their personality traits, behavioral attributes, and situational determinants (Chelladurai, 1984).

Several models of sport leadership have been advanced, the most noteworthy being Chelladurai's (1978, 1984, 1993) Multidimensional Model of Leadership (MML), a linear model comprised of antecedents, leader behaviors, and consequences. The antecedents are factors that influence leader behavior and can be classified into situational (e.g., team goals, norms), leader (e.g., leader's experience or personality), and team member characteristics (e.g., gender, ability). These antecedent variables are believed to influence three states of leader behavior, labeled required, preferred, and actual. Specifically, situational and member characteristics influence both required (i.e., parameters of the organization) and preferred (i.e., group member preferences) leader behaviors, while leader characteristics influence actual leader behaviors. The consequences contained in the MML are group performance and team member satisfaction which are a function of the degree of congruence among the three states of leader behavior. In order to examine the hypothesized relationships in the MML, Chelladurai and Saleh (1980) developed the Leadership Scale for Sports (LSS), an inventory that measures five dimensions of leader behavior: training and instruction, democratic, autocratic, social support, and positive feedback.

The majority of research using the LSS has focused on the leadership behaviors of coaches. One approach has examined the influence of the antecedent variables such as gender, personality, age, sport experience, athlete maturity, organizational goals, culture, and task roles in relation to preferred and perceived coaching behaviors (cf. Chelladurai, 1993; Chelladurai & Riemer, 1998). Another approach has examined the congruence between perceived and preferred coaching behaviors in relation to team performance and/or athlete satisfaction (cf. Chelladurai & Riemer, 1998). Overall, the results have shown that athletes were most satisfied with coaches who emphasized behaviors aimed at improving athletic performance by emphasizing the skills, tactics, and techniques of the sport. In addition, athletes perceived that performance was enhanced by coaches who provided positive feedback and rewarded good performances (Chelladurai & Riemer, 1998).

Although the leadership behaviors of coaches are fundamental to the satisfaction and performance of athletes, several researchers (Glenn & Horn, 1993; Kozub & Pease, 2001; Loughhead & Hardy, 2005; Rees & Segal, 1984) have suggested athletes are another important source of leadership within teams. Given the importance of athlete leadership, it is critical to distinguish between formal and informal leadership roles (Carron & Hausenblas, 1998). Formal leaders have been designated to their position by the organization (Loughhead, Hardy, & Eys, in press). According to Glenn and Horn, coaches typically have one or two athletes on a team who provide motivation and direction to their teammates. It is not uncommon for coaches to either appoint a team captain or have the team elect a captain. In the sport of ice hockey, the team captain wears the letter "C" on the jersey formally designating his/her leadership role. In contrast, athletes other than team captains can assume an informal leadership role since this type of leadership emerges on the basis of their interactions with other team members and is not formally appointed by the organization (Loughhead & Hardy, 2005).

Only a few studies have examined athlete leader behaviors. In particular, these studies were conceptualized from Chelladurai and Saleh's (1980) LSS and compared the relationship between athlete leader behaviors and coach leader behaviors. Furthermore, these studies did not distinguish between formal and informal types of leaders. For example, Kozub and Pease (2001) examined the coach-athlete leadership relationship in high school basketball. The results showed a positive relationship between athletes strong in task and social leadership behaviors and the coaching behaviors of social support, training and instruction, democratic behavior, and positive feedback. However, operationalizing athlete leadership into only task and social dimensions limited the identification of specific leader behaviors compared to the five leadership behaviors identified in the LSS. In an attempt to address this oversight, Loughhead and Hardy (2005) used the LSS to measure coach's behaviors and a modified version of the LSS (and its five leadership dimensions) to assess athlete leader behaviors. The results indicated coaches were perceived by their athletes to exhibit higher levels of training and instruction, and autocratic behaviors than athlete leaders. On the other hand, athlete leaders were viewed to display greater social support, positive feedback, and democratic behaviors than coaches. Taken together, the results indicated that coaches and athlete leaders exhibited different types of leadership behaviors.

Although this research highlighted some unique aspects of athlete leader behaviors, it did not distinguish between formal or informal leadership roles. This is somewhat unfortunate since the formal athlete leader, the team captain, assumes a considerable amount of responsibility within the team structure compared to fellow teammates (Lee, Coburn, & Partridge, 1983). While there is seemingly a lack of research pertaining to team captains, there is some anecdotal evidence highlighting their importance. Mosher (1979) suggested that team captains have

three main responsibilities: (a) to act as a liaison between the coaching staff and the players, (b) to act as a leader during all team activities, and (c) to represent the team at receptions, meetings, and press conferences. In addition to these three responsibilities, Mosher listed some of the duties team captains were expected to perform. First, team captains should ensure constant flow of information between the coaching staff and players. To this end, the captain should establish regular team and/or individual meetings with players and coaches. Second, team captains should lead by example, such as arriving early for practice, always working hard during practice, leading warm-up sessions, encouraging teammates, and helping younger players. Third, team captains should help coaches develop team norms and schedules. Finally, team captains should conduct themselves in a professional manner before, during, and after games, with respect to their teammates, opponents, and officials.

Given that the leadership behaviors of athletes are considered to be an important component of team success (Gould et al., 1987), it is surprising that research on athlete leaders is limited. Moreover, research on athlete leadership has yet to specifically examine formal athlete leaders and their behaviors. Using the MML as a guide, the purpose of this study was to address this oversight by identifying and examining the leadership behaviors of university male ice hockey team captains.

Method

Participants

Participants were six former Canadian university male ice hockey team captains who were identified by current or former Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS) coaches as being among the best team captains they coached. A minimum winning percentage of 50% while they were team captain was required. The combined record of the teams when the participants were captain was 114 wins, 41 losses, and 15 ties for a 73.5% winning percentage. In addition, two of the participants won the CIS National Championship during their tenure as team captain. Aside from coach recognition and team success, the participants must have played at the university level (CIS) for a minimum of two full seasons and must have completed a minimum of one full season as team captain at the university level. Table 1 provides a summary of the participants' history and accomplishments as captain.

Table 1
History and Accomplishments of Each Team Captain

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6
Season(s) as assistant captain at the CIS level	1	0	1	1	2	1
Season(s) as team captain at the CIS level	1	1	2	1	1	1
Season(s) as team captain after 14 years of age, prior to university	4	5	1	4	1	3
CIS Winning % (range) while team captain	80-90	90-99	60-70	50-60	50-60	90-99
Highlights	- CIS All-Canadian team - Award for athletics and academics	- CIS National Champion - 2 seasons as team captain in Major Junior hockey	- CIS All-Canadian team - Award for leadership, athletics, and academics	- 2 seasons as assistant captain in Major Junior hockey - Finalist in Major Junior hockey (2 years)	- Academic All-Canadian (4 years) - Award for athletics and academics	- CIS National Champion - 1 season as team captain in Major Junior hockey

Instrument and Procedure

Participants were contacted by email or phone, provided with a brief summary of the study, and asked to participate. Each team captain was interviewed individually, with each interview lasting between 45-60 minutes. The present study utilized a semi-structured interview approach. This allowed the researcher to suggest a topic and provided the participant an opportunity to answer freely, with few restrictions (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). The structure of the interview included introductory, key, summary, and concluding questions that were created specifically for this study. Questions were developed using Chelladurai's (1993) MML as a theoretical framework. Introductory questions focused on the *leader characteristics* dimension of the MML and were designed to initiate the discussion (e.g., How did you get involved in university ice hockey?; When and how did you become captain of your university team?). The key questions primarily focused on the *situational characteristics* of the MML by exploring the behaviors of team captains in a variety of settings, including practices, games, locker-room, and off-ice situations. A summary question was created to tie together the most important points (e.g., What are the key behaviors exhibited by a team captain?). Lastly, a concluding question was developed to allow the participants an opportunity to add any information. It should be noted that follow-up questions and probes were asked throughout the interview based on the answers of the participants. These questions explored the different leader behaviors contained in the MML.

Prior to the interview, the participant read and signed a consent form and completed a short demographic questionnaire. The researcher then informed the participant that the interview would be audio recorded and that a full verbatim transcript of the interview would be sent to the participant for approval prior to data analysis. The participant's confidentiality was protected through the use of a coding system that replaced each of their names with a code (P1-P6).

Data Analysis

The main objective of the data analysis was to create an organized system of categories that emerged from the unstructured data, regarding the behaviors of ice hockey team captains. The analysis was inductive and followed the guidelines outlined by Côté, Salmela, and Russell (1995), which consisted of three main steps: creating tags, creating properties, and creating and conceptualizing categories.

Prior to data analysis, each interview was transcribed verbatim with only minor edits, such as removing names that threatened confidentiality and adding relevant information in brackets to clarify ambiguous pieces of text (Côté et al., 1995). Then, each interview was analyzed and divided into pieces of information, called meaning units. A meaning unit is a piece

of text that expresses a single idea (Tesch, 1990). This portion of text can be a few words, a phrase, or an entire paragraph. Next, each meaning unit was named or tagged based on its content. Meaning units of the same topic received the same tag. Fifty-four tags emerged in the current study. Following this, similar tags were grouped into larger divisions, called properties. Each property was named according to the common features their meaning units shared (Côté et al., 1995). This process produced nine properties. The final level of classification consisted of grouping similar properties into higher-level divisions, called categories. These new categories were also tagged according to the common features of their properties. Three categories emerged from this process. This step was similar to the earlier stage of creating properties; however it was carried out at a higher and more abstract level of analysis (Côté et al., 1995). Data were examined until saturation of information was reached and no new level emerged at each level of classification (Côté et al., 1995). The QSR NUD*IST software program was used to help organize, code, and analyze the data. This computer program helped create a computerized index system through which all meaning units were easily retrieved and sorted.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Establishing trustworthiness is a vital component of any qualitative study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Sparkes, 1998). The present study used several techniques to ensure trustworthiness, such as member checks and peer review. The first type of member check involved a debriefing session at the end of each interview. At this time, the researcher summarized the interview and invited the participant to add or correct any information. A second member check occurred when each participant received a full verbatim transcript of his interview. Again, each participant had the opportunity to verify, clarify, add, or remove any portion of the interview. Of the six transcripts that were sent back to the participants, four participants changed nothing, one had minor edits, and one did not reply. Finally, a third member check consisted of sending a summary of the results to each participant to allow for additional comments or clarification (Sparkes, 1998). Of the six summaries that were sent to the participants, four replied indicating they were satisfied with the results.

Another technique for establishing trustworthiness is peer review. A peer research assistant examined 25% of the meaning units created by the research team and matched each meaning unit with a previously labeled tag. An agreement rate of 83% was reached for the meaning units. Discrepancies in classification between the research team and the peer research assistant were discussed until a consensus was reached. The same peer review process took place with the categorization of properties and categories. The peer reviewer classified all 54 tags into the nine properties and obtained a 94% reliability rate. Finally, the reviewer obtained a 100% agreement between the grouping of properties into categories.

Three other techniques were carried out to ensure the trustworthiness of the data. First, two pilot interviews were conducted with ice hockey team captains to practice and improve interviewing skills, and to pilot test the interview guide (Maxwell, 1996). Trustworthiness was also enhanced by having the interviewer attend CIS games and practices to become more familiar with the jargon, environment, and nature of the interactions between CIS hockey players. Finally, thick descriptions of the participants' thoughts are provided in the results section by including appropriate meaning units in order to help the reader interpret the data (Sparkes, 1998).

Results

A total of 425 meaning units emerged from the six interviews. From these 425 meaning units, three higher-order categories emerged from the data. These categories were labeled *interpersonal characteristics and experiences*, *verbal interactions*, and *task behaviors*. Each category will be explained in the following section.

Interpersonal Characteristics and Experiences

The higher-order category of *interpersonal characteristics and experiences* referred to the team captains' personal qualities and skills, as well as information pertaining to their sporting/hockey background and evolution as team captain.

Sporting/hockey background included team captains' personal evolution in sport, especially hockey, leading up to their university career. In particular, all the participants began playing and enjoying hockey at a young age, as evidenced in the following quote:

I am from Canada. I was young, probably skating since I was about three or four years old, and I started playing organized hockey at about five or six years old. I have played all my life. I was never pushed into it and I always loved the game and kept playing through university, and luckily after university. [P1]

The team captains also discussed their pre-university hockey years, including their experiences in Major Junior hockey, a training ground of aspiring professional players. After their junior eligibility ended, the participants had to choose between playing Canadian university hockey, playing professionally in Europe, or playing in a North American minor professional league. The opportunity to earn a university degree was a major factor influencing all of their decisions to play university hockey, perhaps indicating its importance: "For me, after playing Major Junior hockey, university hockey was a good option. I wanted to get my degree, so I had something to fall back on." [P4]

Evolution as team captain encompassed ways the participants acquired knowledge on becoming an effective team captain. This involved their previous hockey experiences and

learning from respected individuals. For example, these participants had played hockey with many team captains and were able to explain how these interactions shaped their own leadership style. More specifically, each participant alluded to the importance of learning from others:

I don't think you can teach someone to be a team captain. I think it has to do with a lot of experiences that you have had throughout your life, and it's learning from other people. I have played on teams with both great and terrible captains. It is looking at the qualities that these individuals have and seeing what you want to bring to a team. [P5]

Depending on the coach, the selection of team captain was either coach appointed or voted by fellow teammates. It appeared as though the participants were proud to be named captain. For most of them, it was not a surprise, as noted in the following quote:

I was not surprised to be named team captain; it was something I was thinking about for a few years. I knew that there were certain qualities and experiences that I had. I am not trying to sound arrogant; it was just something I felt was going to happen. [P5]

The team captains also described which qualities they felt were important for being an effective leader. It included communicating effectively by being honest and respectful, and by having a positive attitude. An accurate summary of their feelings can be found in the following quote: "Honestly, you just have to be yourself. I would never change my style just because I have a letter on my jersey, that's just not productive." [P4]

Despite a divergence in their personal qualities, all the participants stressed the importance of effective communication skills. For example, one team captain explained the importance of acting as a liaison between players and coaches:

For me, my role is like an hourglass. As a team captain I am the middle of the hourglass. You obviously have to deal with what is going on with the team, and this funnels up to you and you have to take that information and funnel it back up to who ever is making the decisions at the top. And likewise, when the sand runs down, you've got to flip it, it goes both ways. It is just transferring, being the channel that transfers information from coach to players, or players to coach or athletic director. A captain has to be a great listener and excellent communicator. [P5]

The participants also discussed the importance of controlling their emotions, remaining positive, and exhibiting trust and respect in their interactions with both coaches and teammates. The following quote focused on the importance of staying positive with a teammate:

I am a guy who will always cheer on the bench and between periods, I always cheer and stay positive. When a teammate is coming to the bench, I always say something positive to him, because when I come back to the bench, I like to hear that someone saw what I did. That motivates me. [P2]

Verbal Interactions

The higher-order category of *verbal interactions* referred to the interaction style and the type of feedback the captains provided to other individuals. More specifically, it involved interacting with coaches, teammates, and other team leaders.

Communicating with teammates was discussed by the captains, including how and when to provide feedback. For example, they observed their teammates' attitudes and performances before giving feedback: "In the locker room, you're more observant, you watch things, you watch how people are reacting, and you know body language." [P4]

Depending on the situation, team captains interacted differently with their teammates. At times, they used an autocratic style of interaction: "For some guys you have to challenge them and get in their face. When I talk to them, it's not a discussion." [P4]. Other times, they used a democratic style of interaction, which they stated was the most prevalent style: "My style was mostly democratic. Everyone participates and I try to involve young players." [P6]

In addition to the different styles of interaction, the content of their message also depended on the situation. Some messages were meant to give positive feedback, while others were intended to provide general information to the team. For example, "I like to give guys compliments, especially the young guys that are new to the team. I like to make them feel comfortable so they understand the team appreciates what they are doing." [P4]

Regardless of the style of interaction or the content of the message, the team captains stressed the importance of choosing the right moment to communicate with teammates. Two examples included: "You have to know your team well. It is obvious that if you talk or yell every time, it will not work. Pick the right moment to talk to some players." [P6]

If there is something that happens during a game, never say it in front of the team. Never embarrass someone in front of the team. I let the assistant captains lead most of the room discussions. When it comes time to say something that is when you step in, because that is when it will have the most impact. [P5]

The participants also discussed their relationship and interactions with the head coach, including providing feedback to him. Most captains alluded to the importance of having a good relationship with their coach. One of the participants expressed this point by explaining what would happen if there was a poor relationship: "If the team captain and the coach don't

get along, you're going to have trouble during the year. I have seen it happen, it leads to poor communication, and wrong messages go to the coach and to the players." [P1]

The coach-team captain relationship was important, especially as the captain needed to decide what information to share with the coach:

When the players have a concern with a player or the coach, you become the voice of the team to the coach. You are in the dressing room with the players. You get the sense and pulse of the team. You report to the coach what needs to be dealt with. You are a kind of medium between the coach and players. [P1]

It will not work if every player goes and sees the coach and tells him what he is thinking. Thus, I listen to each player, synthesize this information, and go see the coach. So, the coach will know what the players think without having to meet everyone. In other words, he will know the general thinking of the group. [P2]

Interactions with team leaders referred to the interactions with the assistant captains and experienced team members, involving aspects related to choosing, communicating with, and using these individuals to improve team functioning. Each captain discussed the process of choosing their assistant captains, which was often similar to their own nomination as team captain. In most cases, team members voted on the assistant captains: "The assistant captains were also voted by the players, like me, but if it was only my decision, they would have been my assistant captains anyway." [P3] Team captains also discussed their positive relationships with their assistant captains, highlighting the importance of this chemistry for team success. The ideal relationship between the team captain and his assistants can be seen in the following quote:

Team captains must have a good relationship with their assistant captains. This relationship has to be friendly without holding back opinions. It is impossible to be an effective team captain if your assistant captains dislike you. Between my assistants and I, we work as a unit to make sure that team spirit is 100%. [P2]

Roles of assistant captains were frequently discussed by each team captain. One common trend was looking for different strengths between captain and assistant captain. The following quote emphasized this point with respect to different organizational and personal skills:

It was great because I had three assistant captains that were different in many aspects. One was a great organizer. I would use his organizational skills to organize different events. Another was very good socially, so I would use him when dealing with social situations, making sure things didn't get out of hand. [P5]

In addition to the importance of assistant captains, team captains stressed the significant roles of informal leaders on the team. Informal leaders were any members on the team that showed leadership, without having a letter on their jersey. Despite no formal designation, these informal leaders had a significant leadership role on the team:

There are guys on the team who put everything into playing which can be a huge motivator to the other guys. One of the forwards who is playing defense this year has accepted every role that we gave him. I would say next year he'll be assistant captain or maybe even captain. You know, he'll go down and block shots. That's an example of a guy who leads by example. When you see this guy blocking shots in his face you say to yourself, now maybe if I skate a little harder I might not let him get that shot. So there are a lot of people that you can feed off that aren't captains or assistant captains. [P3]

Task Behaviors

The higher-order category of *task behaviors* referred to team captains' leadership responsibilities and behaviors designed to improve team climate, norms, and functioning. It included information pertaining to administrative duties, dealing with team issues, and setting the right example.

Administrative duties took place off the ice and included helping the coach with off-season planning and representing the team during various functions and gatherings. Helping the coach with off-season planning was discussed by the team captains who knew they were going to be team captain for the upcoming year: "We might have one or two meetings with the coaches during the summer just to touch base and talk about the upcoming year; who we're losing and who's coming in, but that's about it." [P4]

Another off-ice task was to organize formal meetings that dealt with team issues or fundraising activities. They also organized informal get-togethers to improve team morale, as evidenced in the following quote:

Last year, the team spirit was not good. We had a really good season but our team had several cliques. We had a lot of differing opinions concerning team chemistry. Thus, my assistant captains and I organized a team meeting to explicitly talk about the situation. We discussed our problem and everything ended well since we got to the CIS final. [P2]

In addition, team captains represented their team in different off-ice situations, such as meeting with fans, sponsors, media, or attending award receptions. Some individuals stressed the importance of representing their university. For example, one captain discussed his role with fans after they won the CIS Championship:

When we came back home after our victory at the CIS Championship, I talked in front of our fans. When you win something, it is the team captain who represents the team. Thus, you have to take the microphone and speak in front of everybody. [P2]

Participants also discussed dealing with on-ice and off-ice team situations in order to improve and manage team dynamics. In particular, it included referee interactions, setting team rules, and dealing with team problems. Almost all team captains discussed the importance of maintaining a good relationship with referees. In addition to these on-ice roles, team captains had off-ice roles to fill, such as setting rules for the team, particularly as they applied to team problems and decisions. For example, the opinions of team captains were important to their teammates and they were the "go to guy" when important decisions were required: "You have to be good at juggling things, figuring out how to handle each problem and making sure everything is still running smoothly." [P4] Team captains also stressed the importance of team spirit. According to some of them, this was their primary preoccupation as team captain: "My role was to make sure everything went well in the locker room. I was not a captain who talked a lot. I was quiet and I made sure that nobody was talking against another." [P6]

The captains also discussed the importance of leading by example in their behaviors on- and off-ice. For example, they gave 100% effort on the ice, worked hard during off-season, exhibited good attitudes and habits during practices, and helped young players. With respect to working hard on and off the ice, two captains commented:

The most important quality is your job on the ice. You have to work hard every time. When you have to criticize someone about his work ethic, you must be sure that he can't complain about yours. Team captains show their leadership by their work ethic. Some team captains will never stand up in the locker room to make a speech. They will leave this task to other guys. To me, it is on the ice that you can show the strongest leadership, because ice hockey is played on the ice. [P2]

It all comes back to leading by example. The one quality of a good team captain is leading by example, during practice and games, and even off the ice. If you work hard at games and every now and then you drink up and come to practice a little hung over, (it's okay) as long as you work hard and lead by example. It is the best way to be a leader and get respect. Not leading with talking all the time; the best leader is being accountable for his actions. Lead by giving your all. It is the same thing outside the sports world. If you work for a bank and your boss is a slacker, it doesn't make you want to work harder. Hard work is the best way to be. [P1]

Setting the example took place throughout the entire year. Off-season, team captains worked hard to be ready and in shape for the start of the season:

I always wanted to set a good example on and off the ice. For example, I trained during summer. Not everyone trains during summer; but I did it to set the example for my teammates. I wanted my teammates to train more during the off-season. [P2]

Additionally, team captains discussed their behaviors and attitudes during practices. For example, team captains had to be intense and show enthusiasm:

It was to bring enthusiasm to practices. I liked to practice. I made sure that practices went well. We have to be intense because we play the game the way we practice. I always liked to be the first to do the drill to show that I was ready. [P6]

Finally, team captains worked with young players to help them in hockey, academics, or any other situations:

For the younger guys, if they have a concern, they talk to the captain. If the captain can't help them, then he will bring it up with the coach. Most of the time, with the younger guys, you can help them without even going to the coach. If it is his first year and he is having trouble with his academics, you can tell him where to go. You don't always have to go to the coach. [P1]

Discussion

Overall, three main categories emerged from the analysis, and were labeled as *interpersonal characteristics and experiences*, *verbal interactions*, and *task behaviors*. The results of the current study will first be discussed in relation to the three categories, and will then address practical implications followed by limitations and future recommendations.

Interpersonal characteristics and experiences included qualities and skills of team captains, as well as information pertaining to their hockey and leadership experiences. In spite of each team captains' varied sporting background and leadership experiences, the current study identified some common developmental characteristics of these individuals. These included an early exposure to sport and to a high level of competition, as well as knowledge acquisition from previous team leaders. In the same way, while each team captain had his own personality, some common personal qualities emerged, such as being effective communicators, remaining positive, controlling emotions, and remaining respectful to teammates and coaches. This higher-order category was similar to the *leader characteristics* dimension of the MML. According to Chelladurai's (1993) MML, a leader's personal characteristics acts as an

antecedent that influences actual leader behavior. The current category can be conceptualized in a similar manner, since the experiences and personal characteristics of team captains appeared to impact their ability to lead effectively.

Furthermore, the results of *interpersonal characteristics and experiences* were similar to those found in qualitative studies on leadership development of both elite coaches (e.g., Miller, 1996; Miller, Bloom, & Salmela, 1996; Schinke, Bloom, & Salmela, 1995) and athletes (Wright & Côté, 2004). The results of these studies showed that elite coaches and athlete leaders started their athletic career early, acquired leadership skills from different sources (i.e., books, mentors, clinics), and had leadership positions in youth sport as athletes. Besides the background experiences, the current results also identified similar characteristics of captains that were supported in previous literature, including being an effective communicator (e.g., Miller et al., 1996; Riggio, Riggio, Salinas, & Cole, 2003; Stodgill, 1974), maintaining a positive attitude (e.g., Miller, 2002), controlling emotions (e.g., Wilson & Sullivan, 1998), remaining respectful (e.g., Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991) and trustful (Dirks, 2000). Of particular significance, the current participants stressed the importance of effective communication skills, something which has also been suggested as a key element in the emergence and effectiveness of leaders (e.g., Stodgill, 1974; Riggio et al., 2003; Wright & Côté, 2004). Thus, it can be speculated that team captains acquired and honed their leadership abilities and communication skills at a young age, enabling them to be effective leaders during their university hockey career.

Another higher-order category was *verbal interactions*, which explained interactions with individuals associated with the team. Due to their formal leadership status, team captains appeared to have a strategic hierarchical position that served as the communication bridge between coaches and players. In particular, they noted the importance of creating a trusting and open relationship with their coach. This is similar to Mosher's (1979) anecdotal suggestion that the captain must act as a liaison between the coaching staff and players. Despite this, the captains noted how they were careful about not giving too much information to their coach, in order to avoid being ostracized by their teammates and thought of as another coach.

It appeared that the timing and the quality of communication were more important than the quantity of feedback. The general purpose behind their verbal interactions was either to provide general information about the team or to motivate or raise a teammates' confidence. The importance of being attentive to players' attitudes and performance, and choosing the right moment to give feedback to players was also stressed by the current participants. In addition, team captains also mentioned using a more participatory interaction style with veteran teammates. Along the same line, Loughhead and Hardy (2005) found that peer leaders in sport exhibited more social support, positive feedback, and democratic behaviors than coaches. Therefore, it can be speculated that team captains' communication skills are fundamental to

individual player performance and motivation by providing support and positive feedback.

Task behaviors appeared to enhance team climate, norms, and functioning, which is related to the *training and instruction* dimension of the LSS. More specifically, this dimension focuses on teaching skills, techniques, and tactics, which did not emerge in the current study. However, the other aspect of this dimension, structuring and coordinating team member activities, was discussed by the team captains. This is not surprising since team captains stated they wanted to be perceived as players rather than as coaches. Similarly, research has suggested that coaches were perceived to exhibit greater task related behaviors than peer leaders (Loughhead & Hardy, 2005). Specifically, athletes perceived their coaches to exhibit a greater amount of training and instruction than peer leaders.

Most team captains of this study suggested the most powerful way to show leadership was by setting the proper example for teammates with both their on-ice and off-ice behaviors. This was accomplished by always working hard during practices, games, and the off-season. These results are very similar to those from a qualitative study on team norms by Munroe, Estabrooks, Dennis, and Carron (1999). More specifically, their results revealed four specific contexts where team norms took place: practice, competition, off-season, and social situations. Thus, it can be surmised that the leadership behaviors of team captains have consequences beyond the immediate interaction, by influencing team norms and consequently the atmosphere of the team (Munroe et al., 1999).

Setting the right example may also be a way to mentor young players. For example, research has provided evidence of coach-athlete mentoring in university sport (Bloom, Durand-Bush, Schinke, & Salmela, 1998; Miller, Salmela, & Kerr, 2002). The current results suggested the team captain also mentored their younger team members by providing information, support, and guidance. This mentoring appears to benefit all parties (i.e., protégé, mentor, and organization). While the team captain (i.e., mentor) makes an effort to set the right example, young players (i.e., protégés) will follow their footsteps, and the team (i.e., organization) should perform better. Further research should explore the factors that may influence the specific nature of the captain mentoring relationship.

The current study may help coaches better understand the behaviors exhibited by team captains, which may improve their relationship with their team leaders. For example, since team captains adapted their behaviors according to the coach's style, coaches may acquire more trust in their captains' abilities, thus enabling them to better utilize their captains' skills and knowledge. Overall, information of this sort should allow coaches to utilize their captains more effectively.

The findings of this study have some limitations which highlight areas that future research should address. One must be cautious not to generalize the results, as the sample size was small and from one sport. As well, all these captains came from teams with winning records. It would be interesting to examine successful captains of teams without a winning record. The current study should be replicated with female team captains to explore potential gender differences. This is especially the case with university sport athletes as women university students have expressed higher levels of stress than men in adjusting to campus life (Shields, 2002). Lastly, coaches, assistant captains, and informal peer leaders may also be interviewed to have a broader and more complete view of the behaviors of athlete leaders in sport.

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