THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COACHES’ LEADERSHIP STYLES, TEAM COHESION AND TEAM SUCCESS: THE CASE OF PREMIER LEAGUE SOCCER CLUBS IN ETHIOPIA

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to examine the relationship between coaches' leadership styles and team cohesion in Ethiopian premier league soccer clubs. 180 players who participated in Ethiopian premier league soccer competition completed the demographic questionnaire, leadership scale for sport (LSS) and group environment questionnaire (GEQ). The LSS contained 40 items that measured five dimensions of leadership behaviors and the GEQ with 18 items assessed two dimensions of group cohesion. Results showed a significant positive relationship between coaches' behaviors of training and instruction, democratic behavior, and social support with group cohesion. There was no significant relationship between positive feedback and autocratic behaviors with group cohesion. Comparison of coaches' leadership styles demonstrated that coaches exhibited higher training and instruction and lower autocratic behavior. In addition, findings showed significant relationship between group cohesion and team success and the coaches of successful teams exhibited higher training and instruction behaviors. In summary, the effect of coaching behaviors on group cohesion and team success apparently demonstrated the importance of using the appropriate leadership styles.

KEYWORDS: leadership behavior, team cohesion, success

INTRODUCTION

In any sports competition, an individual athlete or a team would participates targeting better performance for achieving success. The likely success of an athlete or a team is the result of better preparation and hard efforts. It is obvious that an individual athlete or a team preparation for successful sports performance requires multi-dimensional considerations that include physiological, psychological, technical, and other aspects.

Johson (n.d) asserted that winning in many sports is not a matter of physical dominance alone, but rather it is attributed to a combination of physical, psychological and technical preparations. It is on the basis of such convincing argument that sport clubs of different events around the globe have included sport psychologists as part of their winning team. Research findings showed that those athletes or team players having psychological skills in trainings and competitions have better self-efficacy and sports performance (Lowther, Lane, & Lane, (2002)). As the same authors noted, this is
mainly due to the fact that several psychological skills, for example, relaxation, emotional control, or goal setting, used in trainings and competitions are associated with high self-efficacy and successful performance.

The success of a team mainly depends on the behavior of members or players of that particular team. The two components of such behaviors of individuals attached to the team are leadership and team cohesion. At the same time, behaviors of individuals in a team are not isolated, they are interrelated. One’s action, decision or behavior of an individual or group in a team may affect others and their behavior too. Hence the present study aimed to identify the relationship between leadership styles, team cohesiveness, and performance in Ethiopian premier league soccer clubs. The rationale behind this study was, as to the researcher knowledge, there is no a single research in this area that address the coach leadership style and team cohesion in Ethiopian premier league soccer clubs.

Review of related literature

No one denies that psychological preparations and trainings are more complex and challenging in team sports as they require more collective efforts, group interactions and cohesions, and motivation. As a result, it is commonly agreed that sport psychologists can enhance performance by enhancing psychological skills (Murphy and Tammen, 1998; Weinberg & Gould, 1995). As far as soccer trainings and competitions are concerned, some of the potential psychological variables that significantly determining performance and success of a soccer team include coach’s leadership styles and team cohesion, among others.

The coaches leadership styles, team cohesion, motivation, and coach effectiveness have been mentioned as integral components of sport psychology by leading practitioners, scholars, and organizations (e.g. Bollettieri, 2001; Weinberg, 2002). Most researches on coaching effectiveness have assumed that coaches greatly influence athletes’ performance, behavior, psychological, and emotional well-being. Regarding to this, Horn (2002) stated that the behavior of coaches directly influences the motivation, team cohesion, and perceived success, achievement behavior of athletes and overall success of the team. In many sports, “the behavioral changes of the athletes are considered to be the direct result of the coach’s leadership” (Barrow, 1977, p.232).

Consequently, a soccer coach leadership style has a great impact on individual performance. Coaches usually give an instruction to the soccer player on how to understand and employ a strategy and evaluate the performance of athletes (Turman, 2008). The coach’s primary objective is to develop both the physical and psychological aspects of an athlete’s performance. As Wiese-Bjornstal, LaVoi & Omli (2009) found out a coach should also foster a climate around the team that affects athlete development and creates an atmosphere conducive to an optimal athlete, as well as team performance. Overall, the coach influences the player’s knowledge of the game, skill level, and team cohesion through his or her actions (ibid).

It is becoming a global phenomenon to use sport psychology as part of the winning soccer team both at national and international levels. In the sport psychology research literature, leadership has been studied primarily in terms of coaching leadership and its effects on player’s performance (Chelladurai & Carron, 1983; Chelladurai, 1984; Horne & Carron, 1985; Riemer & Toon, 2001; Ipinnmoroti, 2002). Investigation of leadership behavior and the effects of leadership in athletes are crucial to understand the performance of sport teams as an organization. Continuous investigation about coaching leadership style and team cohesion can facilitate the improvement of coaching performance and the evaluation of effectiveness of coaching leadership on athletic performance because effective coaching behavior has been shown to be an important determinant of team cohesion and team success (ibid).
The relationship between coach leadership styles and team cohesion has been described by different researchers in different time at different sports. Regarding to this, Carron & Brawley (1993) mentioned that leadership and cohesion are key elements to the development of effective groups and the method that the leaders used to promote and create high level of team cohesion have dramatic effects on the way a group performs. The coach behaviors and team cohesion have positive relationships in various research works. Fisher, Mancini, Hirsch, Proulx, and Staurowsky (1982) conducted behavioral observations of coaches during practices using group environment questionnaire for athletes to assess team climate and satisfaction and found out that those coaches whose team reported high in team cohesion and less in satisfaction shows many behavioral differences.

In relation to team cohesion and coach behavior, Westre & Weiss (1991) also examined the relationship between athlete perceived coaching behavior and team cohesion in high school football teams. The findings revealed that those coaches who were perceived as providing more positive reinforcement, social support, and democratic behaviors by their athletes had more cohesive teams. Other studies also discovered that the relationship among perceived coach leadership behaviors and team cohesion have consistently shown that those coaches employing a democratic, supportive style using positive feedback and sufficient training and instruction are more likely to foster a cohesive team environment in soccer (Maby, 1997; Westre & Weiss, 1991) and baseball and softball (Gardner, Shields, Bredemeier, & Bostrom, 1996; Shields, Gardner, Bredemeier, & Bostrom, 1997). In addition to this, Shields (1997) found that coaches’ self-rated leadership behaviors were related with team cohesion and team performance.

Team cohesion or integration, is one of the consequences that are related to coaches behaviors. Cohesion can be categorized in two dimensions: task cohesion (the degree of commitment to common goals or tasks) and social cohesion (the group attractive, the rate of interest of members to each other and their satisfaction in the group) (Chelladurai & Carron, 1983).

Team cohesion and performance have been extensively researched in an attempt to quantify the strength and direction of their relationship. Early studies established the cohesion-performance relationship, though agreement about which factor is driving this relationship (i.e., cohesion affecting performance or vice versa) has not yet been reached (Carron, 2002). Subsequent studies have also investigated moderating variables of team cohesion in an effort to devise strategies to help develop team cohesion and thus influence performance. Early researches have focused on exploring moderating variables of the cohesion-performance relationship with athletes and the competitive level of the team.

According to Moradi (2004), team cohesion is an essential factor that changes a collection of individuals into a team and contributes a lot in developing team performance and a good feeling of satisfaction between the members. Team cohesion includes task cohesion and social cohesion. Social cohesion indicates the amount of interpersonal attraction among group members, i.e., the extent that the group allows individuals to reach their desired goal. Task cohesion also includes practical assessment of the level of athlete and team coordinated efforts that show to what extent each team and its members achieve its goals (Carron, Brawley & Widmeyer, 1998).
Carron (1982) presented a conceptual model of cohesion in sport teams based on the assumption that there are many factors related to group cohesion or prediction of it. One of these factors is leadership. Based on the model, coaches' behavior (training and instruction, social support, and positive feedback), coach's decisions (democratic and autocratic), interpersonal relationships between the coach and players and the relationship between coach and team (in reaction to the situations in which the team is under pressure) is influential on sport teams cohesion.

Regarding to the relationship between leadership styles of coaches and team cohesion, different researchers such as Chaw and Bruce (1999) in research on various sport teams, Murray (2006) in research on football and baseball players, Ramzaninezhad and Hoseini (2009) in research on the professional League club football players in Iran and Moradi (2004) in his research on professional basketball players reported that social cohesion and task cohesion had significant positive relationship to training and instruction, democratic, social support and positive feedback leadership styles. On the other hand, it was also reported social cohesion and task cohesion had a significant negative relationship to the autocratic leadership style (ibid). Similarly, Murray (2006) reported that successful football teams have higher task cohesion. With regard to difference in sport performance between task and social cohesion, Ramzaninezhad & Hoseini (2009) have showed that those teams who had a higher level of task cohesion were more likely to be successful than those teams who are social oriented. In relation to coach leadership style and team cohesion, Wester and Weiss (1991) in their research on male high school football players have found out task cohesion and social cohesion had significant positive relationship between training and instruction, democratic, social support, and positive feedback leadership styles. Similarly, Peace and Kozub (1994) in their research on girl’s high school basketball teams showed that task cohesion had a significant positive relationship to coaches’ leadership styles while social cohesion had no relationship with leadership styles.

METHOD

Participants

Based on the criterion obtained from the last three years club competition results from the Ethiopian Football Federation, three categories of club status were identified. There were 14 clubs in Ethiopian premier league soccer competition in 2009 to 2011. Accordingly, those clubs whose results fall between 1-3 were considered ‘successful’, clubs who ranked between 6 - 8 were considered ‘less successful’, and clubs who were ranked the last three (12-14) were considered ‘unsuccessful’. Then, all male players in the successful, less successful and unsuccessful category were selected purposely for the study which makes the total participant 180.

Measures

The study used a questionnaire to measure three constructs, including player’s demographic information, leadership scale for sport (LLS) which was adopted from Chelladuri & Saleh (1980) and the Group Environment Scale Questionnaire (GEQ) adapted from Carron, Widmeyer, & Brawley (1985). The study participant filled in the demographic information that asked the players to report their age, years of experience in playing soccer, perceived leadership of their coach and team cohesion.
The Leadership Scale for Sports (LSS) was administered with the aim of assessing athletes’ perceptions of their coaches’ leadership style and behaviors along five different dimensions was used in this study. The LSS consists of 40 items that asked the athlete to indicate the degree to which his coach exhibited the type of behavior described in the individual items. The response format consists of a five-point Likert-type scale (always, often, occasionally, seldom or never) with numbers representing athletes’ perceptions that their coach exhibited that type of behavior. The 40 individual items in the LSS were divided into five subscales with each subscale representing a particular type of coaching leadership style or behavior. The five sub scales were: autocratic behavior subscale, democratic behavior subscale, training and instruction subscale, social support subscale and the positive feedback subscale.

The Group Environment Questionnaire was administered to measure athletes’ perceptions of their team’s cohesiveness. The GEQ had 18-items that assess two different aspects or dimensions of group cohesion, namely task cohesion and social cohesion. The athletes’ responded based on a Likert scale that range from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.”

Both the LSS and GEQ had a proven content, concurrent, predictive, factorial and construct validity (Chelladurai & Riemer, 1998; Chelladurai, 1993; and Horn, 2002). Moreover, pilot testing to check the internal consistency of the various scales were computed. The internal consistencies for the various scales were presented in table 1 below. For the leadership scale, the reliability ranges from .853 for the training and instruction behavior to .654 for the autocratic one. For the team cohesion scale the internal consistency were .953 and .662 for the social and task cohesion respectively. See table 1 below.
Results

The participants' age ranged from 21 to 32 years of age with a mean age score of 26.98 yrs and a standard deviation of 2.24. The mean score of players' playing experience of soccer was 6.0 with a standard deviation of 2.1.

The first objective was to find out the relationship between coach leadership style and team cohesion. In this study, team cohesion was categorized into task and social cohesion. Table 2 below displayed the relationship between coach leadership style and task cohesion.

Table 2: Pearson Correlation between coach leadership style and task cohesion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Training instruction &amp; Democratic behavior</th>
<th>Democratic behavior</th>
<th>Autocratic behavior</th>
<th>Social support</th>
<th>Positive feedback</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Task cohesion</td>
<td>.299**</td>
<td>.277**</td>
<td>-.124</td>
<td>.261**</td>
<td>.143</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Significant at .01

* Significant at .05
As indicated in table 2, task cohesion had a statistically significant positive relationship with training and instruction (r=.299, p<.01), democratic (r=.277, p<.01), and social support (r=.261, p<.01). Though autocratic and feedback leadership style had a negative and positive relationship respectively (r=-.124, p>.05, r=.143, p>.05) with task cohesion, they did not have a statistically significant relationship.

The findings related to the relationship between coach leadership style and social cohesion was presented in table 3 below.

**Table 3: Pearson Correlation between coach leadership style and social cohesion**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social cohesion</th>
<th>Training &amp; instruction</th>
<th>Democratic behavior</th>
<th>Autocratic behavior</th>
<th>Social support</th>
<th>Positive feedback</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.237**</td>
<td>.270**</td>
<td>-.016</td>
<td>.192*</td>
<td>.058</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Significant at .01  
* Significant at .05

As shown in table 3, social cohesion had a statistically significant positive relation with training and instruction (r=.237, p<.01), democratic style (r=.270, p<.01) and social leadership style (r=.192*, p<.05). On the other hand, autocratic and feedback leadership style did not have any relationship with social cohesion.

In this research it was also investigated to find out which coaching leadership styles as perceived by players were the most common in Ethiopia premier league. As indicated in figure 1 below the soccer coach in Ethiopia exhibited training and instruction leadership style more than the others style (Mean = 40.4, SD= 11.7) followed by the democratic style (Mean = 24.9, SD= 8.3) and social support (Mean = 21.9, SD =6.4). On the other hand, the Ethiopian coaches exhibited the positive feedback (Mean = 15.7, SD =4.4) and autocratic style (Mean = 13.2 SD =2.9) least. (See graph 1 below).
Figure 1: Comparison of coach leadership styles

An attempt was also made to see whether there are differences on team success (categorized as successful, less successful and unsuccessful teams) by coach leadership styles. In this regard, it was found out that successful team exhibited a higher score on training and instruction (Mean = 50.2, SD = 9.8), democratic leadership style (Mean = 30.5, SD = 7.9), social support style (Mean = 25.4, SD = 5.7) and positive feedback (Mean = 18.2, SD = 4.4) than both the less successful and unsuccessful teams. On the other hand, there were no differences on team successes with regard to autocratic leadership styles (Mean = 14.2, SD = 2.8). (See table 4)

Table 4: Coach Leadership styles by Team success

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Training and instruction</th>
<th>Democratic Behavior</th>
<th>Autocratic Behavior</th>
<th>Social support</th>
<th>Positive feedback</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successful</td>
<td>50.2</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less successful</td>
<td>39.1</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsuccessful</td>
<td>42.1</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>44.0</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>13.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Similarly team cohesion with team success was cross tabulated. The findings revealed that those teams who were successful and less successful scored higher than the unsuccessful ones on measure of team cohesion task. Similarly, on measure of team cohesion social those teams who were successful and less successful exhibited higher scores than the unsuccessful ones.

**Table 5: Team cohesion by team success**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Team cohesion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successful</td>
<td>31.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less successful</td>
<td>31.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsuccessful</td>
<td>29.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>30.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion**

The objectives of the research was to find out coaches’ leadership styles as related to team cohesion in premier league soccer clubs of Ethiopia. Moreover, the research attempted to investigate which coaching leadership styles as perceived by players were the most common in Ethiopia premier league and whether there are differences on team success (categorized as successful, less successful and unsuccessful teams) by coach leadership styles and by team cohesion.

To this end it was found out that Ethiopian premier league soccer players perceived training and instruction coaching behavior, democratic and social support had a statistically significant positive relationship with task cohesion. On the other hand, the relationship between autocratic and feedback leadership style with task cohesion were not statistically significant though autocratic leadership style exhibited negative relationship. This finding is consistent with the findings of Moradi (2004) and Murray (2006). In his research on professional basketball players, Murray reported that task cohesion had a significant positive relationship to training and instruction, democratic and social support leadership styles. However, in this research unlike that of Murray it was found out that no significant relationship between positive feedback and task cohesion. Similarly, with regard to social cohesion it was found out that players perceived
training and instruction coaching behavior, democratic and social support had a statistically significant positive relationship with social cohesion but a non significant relationship to autocratic and feedback leadership style though autocratic leadership style exhibited negative relationship . The findings of this research corroborate with the findings of Moradi (2004) and Murray (2006). However, with regard to the relationship between positive feedback and social cohesion, there was a positive but no significant relationship unlike that of Murray (2006)

Regarding to perceived coach’s leadership styles, the result of this study showed that coaches exhibited a higher leadership style in training and instruction followed by democratic behavior, social support, positive feedback and low in autocratic behavior. The findings of this research are in agreement with the findings of Bennet and Manuel (2002).

With regard to differences among team success on team cohesion, it was discovered that the successful and the less successful teams had higher level of task and social cohesion than unsuccessful ones. In this regard, Ramzaninezhad & Hoseini (2009) have also reported that teams who have high level of task and social cohesion tend to be more successful than teams who exhibited low level of task and social cohesion.

**Conclusion**

The objective of the study was to find out the relationship between coach leadership styles, team cohesions and team success as perceived by Ethiopian premier league soccer players. To this end data were collected from 180 Ethiopian premier league players through a questionnaire. Data gathered through a questionnaire might have a limitation of indicating appropriately players’ perceived behavior of their coaches. Moreover, the study employed correlational design which also limit to establish the cause and effect of variables. In spite of these limitations, the study came up with the following major points.

- Task cohesion had a statistically significant positive relationship with training and instruction, democratic and social support while autocratic and feedback leadership style had a non significant negative and positive relationship respectively.
- Likewise, social cohesion had a statistically significant positive relation with training and instruction, democratic style and social leadership style while autocratic and feedback leadership style exhibited a non significant negative and positive relationship respectively.
- The soccer coach in Ethiopia exhibited training and instruction leadership style more than the others style followed by the democratic style and social support while the positive feedback and autocratic style were the least ones.
- Successful team exhibited a higher score on training and instruction, followed by democratic leadership style, social support style and positive feedback than both the
less successful and unsuccessful teams while there were no differences on team successes with regard to autocratic leadership styles.

- Successful and less successful scored higher than the unsuccessful ones on measure of task cohesion. Similarly, on measure of social cohesion those teams who were successful and less successful exhibited higher scores than the unsuccessful ones.

**Implications**

The study investigated the relationship between coach leadership styles, team cohesions and team success as perceived by Ethiopian premier league soccer players. In the light of the findings of the study, the following recommendations were forwarded.

- A coach should promote training and instruction leadership style, democratic leadership style, social support style and positive feedback behavior among his team.
- A coach should also promote a culture of both type of cohesion, namely task cohesion and social cohesion among his team.
- A rigorous study including observational method should be done in the future to pinpoint the appropriate leadership style and team cohesion.

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