

**Perceived and preferred leadership decision making styles in women's teams**

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**Poster  
Abstract 461**

Within an organization many interactive, coactive and independent functions exist. The very nature of an organization is based upon the interrelationship of leaders and followers. As an organization functions all activities involve decisions of various levels of perceived importance. The natural framework of an organization, with leaders and followers, presents a situation whereby leaders are usually responsible for decision-making.

The decision-making process can be examined from a cognitive or social perspective (Chelladurai & Turner, 2006). As a cognitive process, the focus is on the decision maker's ability to address the rationality of the decision. Rationality in decision-making requires one to evaluate the available options and select the most beneficial to meet the preferred outcome, in a group the level of rationality increases as the number of group members increase. The negative to this is the time the decision making process will take with a group. Within the context of teams, decision-making may be a social process. This social process changes the dynamic of the decisions, as social influence becomes a mitigating factor (Chelladurai & Arnott, 1985). Influence of certain members of the group may be stronger in group level decisions.

Research in the decision-making style has produced some expected outcomes. Specifically, as the discrepancy between preferred and perceived style of decision-making grows, athletes become less satisfied with the coach. When the preferred and perceived styles are similar, ratings of coaching effectiveness by athletes increase (Gordon, 1988; Chelladurai et al., 1989). One issue that still seems to be unresolved is that of gender of the team. Literature on this topic has produced inconsistent findings. Numerous studies have produced gender differences, with females preferring a more participatory style than males (Chelladurai & Saleh, 1978; Chelladurai & Arnott, 1985); studies have also found no difference between male and female teams (Chelladurai et al., 1989; Sherman et al., 2000). One area of preferred and perceived decision-making style that has not been thoroughly examined is the gender of the coach. Gender of the coach is not typically an issue in male sport, but in female sports, the gender of the coach may have an effect on the social process of decision-making.

The purpose of this study was a) to assess the differences in female athletes' perception of leaders' decision-making style and their preference for decision-making style, b) to assess the effect of gender of the coach on perceptions and preferences for decision-making style.

The participants for this study were 206 female collegiate hockey players from 14 teams. 104 athletes had a female coach and 102 had a male coach. The decision-making style questionnaire was adapted from Chelladurai and Quek (1995). The data was analyzed using frequencies to remain consistent with Chelladurai and his associates previous analyses. To test the first purpose, paired sample t-tests were used as each scenario was an independent assessment of coaches use and athletes perception on decision-making style. The second purpose, to assess gender of coach difference, was tested using univariate ANOVA.

The results indicate that athletes favor a more autocratic style (Autocratic I- 58%; Group- 6.2%) in scenarios that includes game strategy and personnel decisions. Scenarios that included tournament attendance, travel arrangement and uniform decisions featured a majority of preference for Consultative II (36.6%) with Consultative I (21.6%). In the scenarios identifying the making of a practice schedule, the most preferred style was group (29.9%) and Consultative II (27.8%). The pooled differences in each of the thirty-two scenarios all present significant results in paired-sample t-tests. The result for differences in gender of coach by each variable presented no significant difference in any scenario.

The finding that female athletes prefer more decision-making participation than they perceive the coach to use supports previous research results (Chelladurai & Arnott, 1985). In each of the scenarios, the athletes preferred a more participatory style than the coach exhibited. This result is not surprising in a practical manner either. The nature of female groups in other research settings also provides evidence that females are more inclined to work in an inclusive participatory manner.

The finding that female athletes do not perceive any difference in decision-making style of male and female coaches or the preference for more or less participation in decision-making dependant on coaches' gender is a novel finding. The increase in male coaches in female sports presents some interesting dynamics, but athletes do not seem to differentiate between genders in preferred coaching decision-making styles. Female coaches also do not seem to be perceived as being less autocratic than their male counterparts.