

Exploring leadership and cohesion in division III basketball programs

Corinne Farneti, *The Ohio State University*

Brian Turner, *The Ohio State University (Advisor)*

**Management/Leadership
Session 10**

**Friday, May 30, 2008
8:00 AM - 8:25 AM**

**Presentation (25-minute)
Abstract 95**

In all athletics, both satisfaction and/or performance success are goals of athletes and coaches alike. Past research has indicated that leadership behaviors and group cohesion each have a profound effect on these variables (Carron, Brawley, & Widmeyer, 1985; Carron & Chelladurai, 1981; Trail, 2004; Turman, 2003; and Westre & Weiss, 1991). Because these constructs make up such a large and important part of the athletic team atmosphere, the vast amount of existing research is certainly warranted. Although the research has been thorough, some gaps still exist in the current literature. Consequently, this study will address various leadership behaviors and their effects on team cohesion.

Leadership is the ability to influence people toward the attainment of goals (Dupuis, Bloom, & Loughead, 2006; Laios, Theodorakis, & Gargalianos, 2003). Leadership is just as, if not more, vital in the athletic world as in the business world. The importance of effective leadership has been seen by athletes and coaches as a vital component to achievement (Chelladurai & Riemer, 1998) and athlete satisfaction (Riemer & Chelladurai, 1995). As a coach, one is expected to lead his or her players to both individual and common goals throughout the season. Athletes look to their coach as a source of knowledge and guidance, and deem the coach-athlete relationship as vital to a team's success.

Chelladurai (1978) states that leadership "is the most critical dependent variable in organizational analyses" (p. 37). By the examination of an organization's leaders, one is able to discern elements of the organizational culture, expectations, and success. While it is undeniable that leadership is important in all types of organizations, researchers have suggested differences in leadership dimensions and behaviors. For example, Yukl's (1981) managerial practice survey alone lists 11 dimensions of leadership. The dimensions include networking, supporting, managing conflict and team building, motivating, recognizing and rewarding, planning and organizing, problem solving, consulting and delegating, monitoring operations and environment, informing, and clarifying roles and objectives.

Rivaling in importance, some social scientists deem cohesion the most important small group variable (Bollen & Hoyle, 1990). Cohesion has been defined as the "tendency for a group to stick together and remain united in the pursuit of its goals and objectives" (Carron, 1982, p. 124). Team cohesion is a multidimensional process involving specific coaching behaviors as well as interactions among the coach, individual team members, and the overall sport context (Carron, 1982). Team cohesion may be instrumental in the achievement of group goals and also can become a team goal in itself (Martin, 2002). In fact, a lack of cohesion is often cited as a reason for failure to meet expectations (Westre & Weiss, 1991). In other words, when a goal is not met, athletes and coaches alike often point to cohesion as the reason for their disappointment.

This research project intends to examine the perceptions of leadership style and its effect on the perceived cohesion of their teams. Division III basketball players (along with their head coaches) from approximately 20 teams will be recruited to participate in this study. Questionnaires will be distributed to head coaches after an initial contact by email. The coaches will then assign a team captain the role of distributing athlete questionnaires to the rest of the team. The Leadership Scale for Sports (LSS) questionnaire will be administered to both the athletes and their head coach, with discrepancy scores (i.e., the difference between the player's and coach's perception of leadership) calculated for each individual player. These results will then be compared to the results of the Group Environment Questionnaire (GEQ) to determine if there is any relationship between the players' perception of leadership style and team cohesion.

Additionally, both the gender of the athletes and head coaches will be analyzed to determine if there is a significant relationship between the two in terms of leadership behavior and perceptions of cohesion. Differences based on player roles (starter/non-starter, points, rebounds, minutes per game), and year in school will also be discussed.