Effectiveness of Authentic Leadership in the Context of Sports

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The purpose of this research is to introduce the recently developed concept of authentic leadership in the context of sports. It is also to examine the structural relationship among sports team leaders’ authentic leadership, athletes’ satisfaction with the leader, athletes’ job satisfaction, and their team commitment, in order to build more positive and healthy sport teams and enhance their effectiveness. Meanwhile, many researchers have consistently shown interest in studying leadership in the context of sports because leadership ultimately helps to improve athletes’ performance and becomes the basis of good outcomes and positive sports team effectiveness (Chelladurai, 1999, 2006; Chelladurai & Saleh, 1980; Kim, Lee, & Lee, 2011; Rowold, 2006). However, since the focus of previous leadership studies has been on behavioral theory, it is true that the level of understanding and depth of research on the character of leaders is relatively insufficient. Thus, it is necessary for a leadership theory stressing the qualifications or character of leaders, such as authentic leadership, to be applied to the field of sports in order to minimize negative incidents such as fixed games which coaches and athletes are complicit in, illegal fund raising, and embezzlement from certain team leaders, etc.

Authentic leadership is defined as “a pattern of leader behavior that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate, to foster greater self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering positive self-development (Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008).” It is believed that knowing oneself well and being true to oneself is the most significant characteristic in authentic leadership. In addition, authentic leadership is known to have a positive impact on various attitudes and behaviors of followers as well as on team performance such as job satisfaction and team commitment. According to several authors, authentic leadership positively influences satisfaction with the leader, followers’ job satisfaction, and their team or organizational commitment (Jensen & Luthans, 2006; Walumbwa et al., 2008). When followers have high satisfaction with the leader, turnover rate becomes lower and organizational satisfaction becomes higher. As a result, the organizational outcome is maximized. Therefore, verifying authentic leadership in the context of sports, which underlines the leader’s fundamental character and value, will help impact athletes’ satisfaction with the leader, their job satisfaction, and their team commitment.

In this research, a survey was conducted among 414 athletes from Korean professional sports leagues including baseball, football, basketball, volleyball, and handball. A total of 294 males (71%) and 120 females (29%) participated in the survey. The average age of the respondents was 24 years old, ranging from 18 to 39 (M=24.24, SD=4.22). The survey was composed of 36 items including 16 items for authentic leadership (Avolio, Gardner, & Walumbwa, 2007), 3 items for athletes’ satisfaction with the leader (Conger, Kanungo, & Menon, 2000), 5 items for job satisfaction (Brayfield & Rothe, 1951; Lim, 2006), and 6 items for team commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1997; Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993; Lim, 2006). All items were measured using a seven-point Likert scale. Cronbach’s Alpha coefficients for reliability indicated that internal consistency among those four variables turned out to be relatively reliable (α=.91 to .92). To test hypotheses, the structural equation modeling using AMOS 18.0 was utilized.

The research model and hypotheses created in this study were analyzed through the structural equation model. The goodness of fit index for the research model was as follows: χ²=775.534, df=243, p=.000, SRMR=.078, CFI=.926, TLI=.916, RMSEA=.073. Since goodness of fit is considered to be appropriate when SRMR is below .08, CFI and TLI are above .90, and RMSEA is below .05–.08 (Bentler, 1990; Marsh, Hau, & Wen, 2009), the results satisfied all the standards.

The research findings of this study indicated that sports team leaders’ authentic leadership had a positive effect on athletes’ satisfaction with the leader (t=10.786, p=.000), their job satisfaction (t=5.093, p=.000), and their team...
commitment ($t=4.652, p=.000$), respectively. In addition, athletes’ satisfaction with the leader also positively affected their job satisfaction ($t=3.683, p=.000$) and their team commitment ($t=5.473, p=.000$). In sum, sports team leaders’ authentic leadership had a direct impact on athletes’ satisfaction with the leader, their job satisfaction, and their team commitment, as well as an indirect effect on their job satisfaction and team commitment. In the following sections, theoretical and practical implications as well as the direction of future research shall be discussed.