Training of Leaders for Egalitarian and Elite Sport

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There has been a growing interest among sport management and sport psychology scholars on the organization and administration of youth sports. Among the many reforms suggested by these scholars, the foremost emphasis has been on leadership. For instance, Duda and Hall (2001) had suggested that leaders of youth sports should cultivate a task climate wherein the emphasis will be on effort and personal improvement rather than an ego climate where one’s ability and performance are compared to those of others. Similarly, Amorose and Horn (2000) and Amorose and Anderson-Butcher (2007), based on Deci and Ryan’s (1985) self-determination theory, have advanced their model of autonomy-supportive leadership which tends to satisfy the basic needs of autonomy, relatedness, and competence. Chelladurai (2012) labelled this as soft leadership and contrasted with what he called hard leadership advocated by him (Chelladurai, 2007) and indicated by the findings that athletes preferred their coaches to be autocratic (e.g., Chelladurai & Arnott, 1985). More significantly, he synthesized these differing approaches by linking them to Keating’s (1964) distinction of pursuit of pleasure and pursuit of excellence in sport. That is, hard leadership is said to be more suited to the enterprise of pursuit of excellence while soft leadership is most appropriate to the pursuit of pleasure. The notion of hard leadership in pursuit of excellence was echoed by McLaren, Eys, and Murray (2015) who noted that strong leadership can be the difference between success and failure in sport.

The hard-soft leadership paradigm is, to a large extent, similar to the distinction made between transformational leadership (TL) and servant leadership (SL) in management literature (e.g., van Dierendonck, Stam, Boersma, de Windt, & Alkema, 2014). In general, TL focuses on leader’s skills, power position, creating a vision for the organization, member performance and achievement of organizational goals. In contrast, servant leadership addresses the needs of followers, mutual power between the leader and followers, and the autonomy and development of the followers. Further, dimensions of transformational leadership include individual consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, role modeling, emphasis on group goals and their achievement, and contingent rewards (e.g., Vella, Oades, & Crowe, 2013). In contrast, dimensions of servant leadership have been identified as standing back, forgiveness, courage, empowerment, accountability, authenticity and humility (van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011). Accordingly, we can conclude that transformational leadership is more pertinent to pursuit of excellence and servant leadership is more applicable to pursuit of pleasure.

Given the two distinctive purposes of sport participation and the leadership models relatively more relevant to each, the next issue is to identify and train leaders for each domain. Thus, the major focus of this project is on identifying appropriate training programs for leaders in the two domains—pursuit of pleasure and pursuit of excellence in sports.

One recently popularized theory in leadership training/development (LTD) is the concept of leadership pipeline (Kaiser, 2011). The fundamental premise in this is that the nature of managerial jobs differs across organizational levels and that different ‘skill sets’ are required to perform different jobs effectively (Guangrong & De Meuse, 2013). We can extrapolate this line of reasoning to our contention that pursuit of excellence and pursuit of pleasure require not only different ‘skill sets’ but also ‘mindsets’ meaning that the leaders in the two enterprises should have differing value systems, goal orientations, and attitudes toward their clients. Accordingly, the training programs designed to cultivate leaders in the two domains would differ in the values they emphasize, the goals they pursue, and the service orientations they cultivate.

The training programs for leader development are grouped into (d) a ‘skill based’ developmental approach (deliberate practice) for those pursuing excellence (Anderson, 1982; Ericsson et al., 1993; Tracey & Elcombe, 2016) and a ‘person-based’ approach for those young leaders working with athletes who are pursuing sport for pleasure.
(Cornelius-White, Motschnig-Pitrik, & Lux, 2013; Larson, 2016). Future studies should design leadership training programs for the differing domains of sport and verify the efficacy of them in achieving the goals of each domain.