Assessing Group Cohesion Among Intercollegiate Sport Teams through Sociograms and the Group Cohesion Index.

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Given the important influence that group cohesion has on group performance, ability to achieve goals and retain quality members (Sabin & Alexandru, 2015), it has received significant attention from scholars, particularly with sports teams or groups (Benson, Siska, Eys, Priklerova, & Slepicka, 2016). Group cohesion relates to the efficacy, role involvement, communication and leadership development of the group (Appleton, Terlektsi, & Coombers, 2013). Researchers have focused on the development of group cohesion within a female volleyball team pertaining to team performance (Sabin & Alexandru, 2015), the impact of hazing on group cohesion (Lafferty, Wakefield, & Brown, 2016), and the affect an athlete’s role has on their perceptions of group cohesion (Benson, Eys, & Irving, 2016). Despite the aforementioned literature, little research has incorporated a longitudinal approach (besides Benson et al., 2016), and the role a team’s leader (i.e. head coach) has on group cohesion or how leader-follower interactions among team members can impact group cohesion. Therefore, the purpose of the current study was to see how interactions among a head coach and team leadership council members (student-athletes) affect and change group cohesion throughout a season. We constructed the following research question:

RQ1: How do interactions between a head coach and student-athletes affect group cohesion throughout a season?

Method

In order to assess the change of group cohesion throughout a season, we used the sociogram method to track and quantify interactions among two female National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division III teams (one lacrosse and one soccer team) at the same university. The sociograms were drawn out by two of the authors during each team’s leadership council meeting (N = 7 members for each sociogram). The two authors compared their sociograms in order to check for reliability. Sociogram data were then analyzed using the Group Cohesion Index (GCI) (Dimock & Devine, 1997). The GCI was performed to quantify group cohesion and openness to interact with others in a group (Dimock & Devine, 1997). The group cohesion index is a calculation ranging from 0 to 1. The index was calculated based on the number of mutual interactions among group members divided by the total number of possible mutual interactions between pairs of group members (Appleton et al., 2013). The total number of possible mutual interactions was determined by multiplying the number of possible choices of interactions (for example the current council had seven total members, so the choice for each member was six) by the number of group members minus one and then divided by two (Dimock & Devine, 1997). The result depicts the strength of group cohesion and comfortability of members to interact with the group, with 0 being weakest and 1 being the strongest.

Results

The results of the group cohesion index indicated two different trends for the two teams. The soccer team’s index (0.72 – 0.94) increased from the first to the second meeting while the lacrosse team’s index (1.00 – 0.48) decreased with each passing meeting. Further data are being collected throughout the Fall 2018 and Spring 2019 seasons.