LEADERSHIP IN SPORT AND SELF ESTEEM IN ADOLESCENT ATHLETES

LEADERSHIP NELLO SPORT E AUTOSTIMA NEGLI ATLETI ADOLESCENTI

Anna Maria Mariani
Università degli Studi Niccolò Cusano – Telematica Roma
Laboratorio di Ricerca Scientifica HERACLE
annamaria.mariani@unicusano.it

Abstract

Children and adolescents are in their own way to build personality, as biological, psychological and social characteristics. The environment has an important role for a balanced growth. Settings like school and other educational centers are relevant for youth since in such contexts they spend a large part of their time and have significant experiences with adults and peers. Thus, the influence of teachers and sport coaches in adolescents' development has to be taken into consideration. It is fundamental for them to have the right instruments to facilitate the balanced growth of young people. The focus of this review is on sport environment and the role of coaches in fostering athletes' motivation and self esteem. A lot of research show how coach's behavior has an impact on motivation to do sport but also on building a good level of self-esteem in adolescents. Different types of leadership behavior have been defined and different impacts on self esteem and motivation have been measured. Our review take into consideration the literature on this topic.

Keywords

leadership, self-esteem, sport motivation, coach, physical activity
leadership, autostima, motivazione sportiva, coach, attività fisica

1. Introduction

Children and adolescents are in their own way to build personality, as biological, psychological and social characteristics. As known, there is a native, hereditary and congenital patrimony of endowments, attitudes and dispositions, individually connoted, but also the experiences and the solicitations that children receive have an important influence on personality. In this path, they are vulnerable to stimuli from the environment and the experiences with significant peers and adults. In addition to the family, school and other educational centers, like sport and recreational facilities, have an important role in strengthening and supporting balanced development of young people and their health and well being.

Among the factors that support the balanced development of children and adolescents, one of the most important is self-esteem. Self-esteem can be defined as the self assessment of one's value as a person (Orth & Robins, 2013). This evaluation has an important function for the psychological well-being and it's strategic to respond in a functional way to society. High self-esteem is associated with satisfying interpersonal relationships, such as safety and closeness (Murray, 2005), appropriate coping strategies (Birndorf, Ryan, Auinger & Aten, 2005). On the contrary, low self-esteem is linked to depression and anxiety disorders (Liu, Wang & Zhou, 2014; Michalak, Teismann, Heidenreich & Strohle, 2011; Trzesniewski, Donnellan & Robins, 2003), to a sense of loneliness (Vanhalst, Luyckx, Scholte, Engels & Goossnes, 2013) and to disorders in nutrition (De la Rie, Noordenbos, Donker & Van Furth, 2007). In the development of self esteem in children and adolescents, the environment (home, school, sport, etc.) gives a profound contribute. An important role in improving self esteem is the acceptance by someone at home, school or other significant places (Hosogi, Okada, Fujii, Noguchi & Watanabe, 2012). In particular, the sport facilities are contexts where numerous young people are enrolled in recreational or competitive sport programs under the supervision of a coach. The coach, through his leadership behavior, can have an important impact on athletes' psychological well being, self-esteem and motivation in sports (Chelladurai, 1990; Reinboth, Duda, & Ntoumanis; Serpa, 1999; Smith & Smoll, 1996). The role of the coach has not only a technical aspect but also an interpersonal one. It includes supporting and motivating athletes but also knowing strenghts and limitations to produce the best possible performance. A large body of studies have shown the influence of coach's behavior to young people's perceived competences and skills (Balaguer, Duda, Atienza, & Mayo, 2002; Black & Weiss, 1992; Horn, 1985; Sarrazin, Guillet & Cury, 2001), self-esteem (Smith & Smoll, 1990; Smoll, Smith, Barnett, & Everett, 1993) and motivation (Amorose & Horn, 2001; Hollembeak & Amorose, 2005; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). The researches by Donnelly (1993) and Jowett & Cockerill (2003) showed the positive and/or destructive influence that coach may have on athletes' psychological wellbeing. As said by Nazarudin, Fauzee, Jamalis, Geok & Din (2009), "successful coaches are not only well versed in the skills of their sport: they also teach and model the skills needed for successful living in society".

The focus of this review is the relationship between coach's leadership behavior and players' self esteem and motivation levels.

2. Leadership in sport contexts

According to Chelladurai (1999), leadership can be defined as the "behavioral process aimed at influencing members to work toward achieving the group's goals". In business environment, there's a large number of theories that describe features and borders of leadership styles. Any leadership profile has an impact to individuals' and groups' performance, considering also the organizational and market context. In a similar way, the sport coach is identified as a leader by a substancial body of literature (Horn, 2008; Riemer, 2007; Kent & Chelladurai, 2001), having a significant impact on lives of athletes and on their performance, both at individual and group level.

Coach is a social agent influencing the athletes' behaviour (Jõesaar et al., 2012). Their performance and the psychophysiological well being are impacted by their perception of the social environment (Barcza-Renner, Eklund, Morin, & Habeeb, 2016) and coach can be considered as a key component of the social environment (Davis, Appleby, Davis, Wetherell, Gustafsson, 2018). Thus, a positive social interactions among athletes' and coach can enhance their performance (Bianco & Eklund, 2001). On the contrary, negative social interactions, such as neglecting behaviors, can negatively influence and damage their outputs (Newsom, Rook, Nishishiba, Sorkin, & Mahan, 2005).

It is important to underline that coach holds multiple roles in one person (teacher/instructor, organizer/planner, counselor, communicator and motivator) (Surujlal & Dhurup, 2012), having an impact on physical and psychological development of athletes, as well as on sport performance. The coach leadership plays both technical and interpersonal roles in maximizing athletes' performances. As regards technical aspect, the coach has in charge the training and game strategies fo the athlete or the team. Concerning the interpersonal role, he has to face motivation, support, strenghts, weaknesses, personality of athletes (Fletcher & Roberts, 2013). Several studies show that the leadership style can influence, not only performance, but also satisfaction, behaviors, (Crust & Azadi, 2009; Terry, 1984), well being and psychological health (Gustafsson et al., 2017), self-esteem, self-efficacy (Cengiz, Aytan & Abakay, 2012) and intrinsic motivation (Matosic, Cox & Amorose, 2014).

One of the most widespread approch to read and deal with leadership in sports is the Multidimensional Model of Leadership (MML) proposed by Chelladurai (1978). This approach is considered a synthesis and integration of different preexisting models of leadership. Before MML, the different approaches focused either on leader or on athletes or on situation. These elements were never considered as part of a unique concept. Chelladurai asserted that, in order to measure an effective leadership, it is necessary to consider both the behaviors displayed by the leaders and the preferences of the athletes and the demands of the situation. As represented in Fig. 1, an effective leadership is the combination of three elements: Situational Characteristics (e.g. cultural context, group's goals, type of task, gender, age, skills' level - Box 1), Leader Characteristics (Box 2) and Members Characteristics (Box 3). When these three elements are in agreement, the leadership style conducts to athletes' satisfaction, motivation and good performance. Empirical studies confirm that athletes seem to be satisfied when coaches have a training and instruction approach as well as positive feedback (Chelladurai, 1993).

The three states of leader's behaviors are directly influenced by one of these elements. The Situational Characteristics mostly defines the Required Behavior (Box 4) that is the set of prescriptions and proscriptions of the situation in which leadership occurs. Preferred Behavior, such as training, social support or feedback (Box 6) refers to the preferences of the group members and it is directly influenced by the members' characteristics (Box 3) such as personality and tasks ability. Members' Preferences are also influenced by the requirements of the situations. Then the Leader Characteristics, such as personality, expertise, (Box 2) influence the Actual Behavior (Box 5, i.e., how the leader actually behaves). However, the actual leader behavior is also affected by the constraints of the situation (Box 4) and the members' preferences (Box 6) as well. All these elements have a direct and indirect impact on Members' satisfaction and performances (Box 7). At the same level the members' satisfaction and performance can influence the leader's actual behavior.
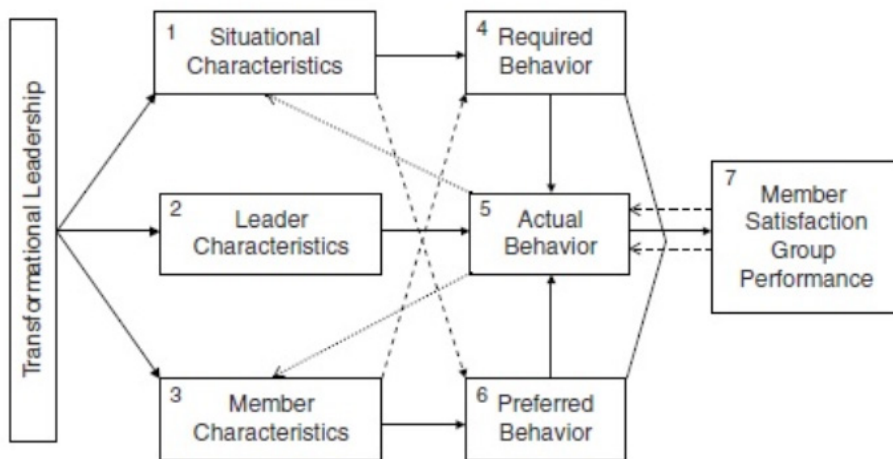
Fig. 1 - Multidimensional Model of Leadership (Chelladurai, 2007)

In order to measure the coaches' leadership behavior, Chelladurai and Saleh (1980) developed the Leadership Scale for Sports (LSS). It measures different dimensions of coach's behavior; the first one is the coach's decision making style (Democratic and Autocratic Style), than the coach's motivational tendencies (Social Support and Positive Feedback), and last the coach's instructional behavior (Training and Instruction). It measures the points of view: the members' preferences, the coach's perceptions about his behavior and the members' perceptions about coach's behaviour.

3. Coach's leadership style and interaction with self-esteem and sport motivation in adolescent athletes

According to Emler, self-esteem is considered as a part of our personality. It includes the personal perception about abilities, attitudes and weaknesses and its building process starts at birth and is influenced by one's experiences. It raises thanks to the sense of personal worth coming from our success in life challenges. Braden(1969) added that self-esteem is a human need; it is vital for life and is necessary to balanced and healthy self-development. Childhood and adolescence are crucial age for the development of self esteem and, at the same time, it plays a very important role for growth in adolescents. It is appropriate to underline how high self-esteem is associated with satisfactory interpersonal relationships, such as security and closeness (Murray, 2005), definition of life goals and mental health (Dunham, Baron, Banaji, 2007). Conversely, low self-esteem is linked to depressive states and anxiety disorders (Liu, Wang, Zou & Li, 2014; Michalak, Teismann, Heidenreich, Strohle & Vocks, 2011; Trzesniewski, Donnellan &Robins, 2003), to a sense of loneliness (Vanhalst, Luyckx, Scholte, Engels & Goossens, 2013) and to eating disorders (De la Rie, Noordenbos, Donker & Van Furth, 2007). Different links between self esteem and sport participation have been investigated by a large number of research. Liu, Wang, Zou and Li (2014) identified a real correlation between the increase in self-esteem and the performance of sport. Specifically, they found out that physical activity is consistently linked to the improvement of a variety of psychological and social factors in adolescents such as improvement of mental well-being, self-esteem, school performance, relations with parents, as well as the decrease anger, anxiety and depression have been noted in teenagers who prac-

tice physical activity. The systematic review carried out by Ekeland, Heian & Hagen, (2005) highlighted how physical activity contributes to the development of self-esteem in school-aged children. In addition, other studies suggest that sport participation directly affects the self-esteem of a specific self-assessment area, increasing physical competence and body esteem and, indirectly, global self-esteem (Mariani, Marcolongo, Melchiori & Peluso Cassese, 2019). As a result, increased sport participation can improve physical self-esteem, which in turn predicts an increase in global self-esteem (Jackson and Marsh, 1986). If sport and physical activity are so important to improve a variety of psychological and social factors in adolescents, is there any influence of the coach's leadership style in this process? Some research suggest that contextual factors can have an important influence on the effects of sport on youth, for example the relations with adults and peers (Brustad, Babkes, & Smith, 2001; Smith, 1999) or the sport program one takes part (Whitehead & Corbin, 1997). In context, one of the variable take into consideration, that can have an important influence on athletes' self-perceptions, is the coaches' leadership style (Coatsworth & Conroy, 2009). Some research demonstrate that coaches trained to have a more supportive, nurturing and encouraging style produce greater changes in youth's self-esteem (Coatsworth & Conroy, 2006; Smoll, Smith, Barnett, & Everett, 1993). For example, the research by Smoll, Smith, Barnett & Everett (1993) demostrate that CET Program (Coach Effectiveness Training; Smith & Smoll, 1996) had a positive effect on coaches that were perceived by their athletes as engaging in significantly more desirable behaviors (e.g. reinforcement, encouragement, technical instruction). Furthermore, an increase in self-esteem for low self-esteem boys has been registred. Coatsworth & Conroy (2006) shows that a CET interventions on coaches lead to an improvement on self-esteem for youngers and for girls with initially low levels of self-esteem. This kind of coach's behavior have been shown to influence also athletes' motivation (Amorose & Anderson-Butcher, 2007; Gagné, Ryan, & Bargmann, 2003). Motivation is the energy that make us moving and it directs our behaviors and actions (Roberts and Treasure, 2007). It involves internal processes (i.e. emotions, cognitions, needs, etc.) (Reeve, 2006). The reason to engage in sport, the sport motivation, is one of the most investigated aspects of motivation, in particular in youth. Lots of studies investigate the role of different social agents in youth sport motivation (Sarrazin, Vallerand, Guillet, Pelletier, & Cury, 2002) but also the influence of coaches' and teammates' goal orientations (Escartı´, Roberts, Cervello, & Guzma´, 2007). It has been seen that mental skill training program can have a positive influence on sport motivation, in particular in self-determined motivation such as Intrinsic and Identified (Mariani, Marcolongo, Melchiori, 2019). According to Self-Determination Theory, motivation has a base in three psychological needs: competence, relatedness and autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 1985). In particular, autonomy is the possibility to act according to his or her own values and interests. When the behavior is autonomous, it's a real manifestation of the self (Ryan & Deci, 2002; Ryan & Deci, 2007) and individuals have integrated the ongoing behavioral regulations (Ryan, 1995). It's immediate to link it to the coach's behavior, especially in adolescents who need to be lead by an adult. Lots of research have investigated the relationship between leadership profile and motivation of young athletes. The study by Borghi, Borges, Menegassi & Rinaldi (2017) shows that athletes coordinated by coaches who present social support style increase their intrinsic motivation but, if the leaders don't practice social support, the levels of amotivation are not modified. Furthermore, if coaches give no feedback, athletes tend to feel unmotivated, on the contrary, if they are used to give instructions and reinforcement about their performance, they feel valuable for their development. The data show also that autocratic behavior decreases intrinsic motivation and increases amotivation, and negatively influences the self satisfaction about performance and relationships with coaches (Duarte, Teques and Silva, 2017; Nazarudin, Fauzee, Jamalis, Geok and Din, 2011). These results are congruent with other research (Sari & Bayazit, 2017, Baric and Bucik, 2009; Horn, 2002; Amorose & Horn, 2001) that evince that training and instruction, a rewarding behavior and social support are most highly correlated with athletes' satisfaction and intrinsic motivation. As regards intrinsic motivation, democratic behavior has been reported having a positive indirect influence in college

team and individual athletes (Hollembeak and Amorose, 2005). Some studies show that coaches who encourage athletes to show autonomous behaviors ehnance motivation in young (Amorose and Anderson-Butcher, 2007; Banack et al., 2011; Vallerand, 2007). The study by Mouratidis, Lens and Vansteenkiste (2010) points out that athletes' motivation is positively influenced by coaches. It is important to mention that a meta-analysis found an overall positive relationship between autocratic behavior and satisfaction (Kim and Cruz, 2016).

4. Conclusions

Leadership is applicable across a wide range of domains and contexts. It seems to have a great importance in organizational environments. In recent years, a good attention is paid to leadership in sport environment as it is fundamental for athletes' performance, both individual and team. The focus of this review is on a specific target of sport environment, the adolescent athletes. As we said, adolescence is the age of change, youth build their personality and put the base for their future. It is important to encourage their balanced growth and to facilitate a favorable environment. Adults have a great responsability for the psychological well being of adolescents. Parents are the first social agency responsible for them, but also teachers and coaches can have an important role in their development as individual. Our focus is on sport coaching. We have focused on the influence that the coaches' leadership style can have on self-esteem and motivation in sport. Self esteem is a fundamental factor for promoting health and well-being in adolescents and adults. Cruz and Kim (2017) said that adolescent athletes have a preference for training and instruction behavior, followed by positive feedback, democratic behavior, social support and, at least, autocratic behavior. Many research show that training and instruction behavior, together with positive feedback strengthen self esteem in young and their motivation in sport. Coaches can have a transforming effect on athletes and it is important for them to have knowledge and be trained about the different approaches in leadership, in order to support motivation in sport and to foster self-esteem for a balanced growing of their young athletes.

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