

A Review of Psychological Factors Affecting Team Performance and Team Dynamics

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ABSTRACT

Psychological factors have a significant impact on team dynamics and performance outcomes in competitive sport. This article addressed the intricate interaction of communication, leadership styles, and group cohesion with team effectiveness and success as a whole by focusing on each component separately initially. Communication is essential to gain trust, cooperate, and share feedback, strategies, tactics, etc., in a sports team, but communication could be thwarted by barriers of language and emotional misunderstanding which reduced performance in the group. Leadership style varied given the leader's approach. This creates different dynamics in the group related to the intention of the leader. Transformational leadership helped foster trust and motivation compared to autocratic approach which diminished teamwork and performance. Coaches shape the dynamics of sport groups by fostering a support environment, allowing for people to feel successful at implementing the necessary communication while controlling emotions. Group cohesion relates to task and social cohesion as an involvement toward the success of the team. Cohesive teams have better teamwork, trust, and motivation; therefore, better performance results. Improved group cohesion can occur through team-building, communication systems, and committed to collaboration. We have discussed the considerations of tailored psychological-based approaches exclusive to creating approaches to consider these factors to best support athlete development/personal performance and team performance. Further research would be helpful to better clarify the psychological factors that influence group dynamics in sport.

Keywords: Autocratic leadership, Group cohesion, Social cohesion, Task cohesion, Team dynamics, Transformational leadership

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INTRODUCTION

Psychological factors are critical in the performance of teams in competitive sport which requires a consideration of the team dynamics of an organization. Understanding how motivational factors, communication, and interpersonal relationships can influence team dynamics can yield valuable insights into how to improve performance outcomes. Research has consistently shown that teams that have trust and a shared sense of purpose achieve better results than teams that do not possess these psychological essentials. The relationships and communications of team members can shape behaviors which potentially shape teams' overall climate (morale and motivation), and the performance outcomes that are achieved, whether positive or negative. This essay will focus on the psychological factors that influence team cohesion and performance outcomes, in the context of relevant peer-reviewed literature and relevant research. Examining the psychological factors in this manner aims to help uncover the science behind effective teamwork in sport and ultimately foster a greater understanding of high-performance teams in sporting contexts.

In sport, team dynamics is defined as the interplay and relationships between the complex array of psychological and social dimensions that impact on athletes and their movement to work collaboratively toward their collective performance goals. Importantly, the notion of team dynamics reminds us that winning teams are not just a collection of athletes with transferable skills, but rather a collective with relationships and communications that underpin their collective movement to achieve performance goals.

Theories about team dynamics not only examine issues of trust and role clarity, and conflict resolution, but also reach conclusion about whether these areas can dramatically enhance team performance and satisfaction. The evidence suggests that the better the communication and encouragement among the team members, the higher the level of cohesiveness – and the better the performance (Elsadig *et al.*, 2024).

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In addition to communication and encouragement, consideration must also be given to external factors, such as coaching approach and the organization's culture, as they can support or interfere with positive team dynamics, and will be important when considering performance outcomes in sport (Zawacki-Richter *et al.*, 2019). Thus, while team dynamics should be understood both by practitioners and researchers in sports psychology (Zawacki-Richter *et al.*)

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS IN TEAM PERFORMANCE

In sports, psychological factors indicate much about the extent of team performance because it also affect individual players and

team performance. Good communication, teamwork, and shared motivation are important to creating a positive psychological environment, which is essential for the importance of psychological factors in team performance in sports, psychological factors indicate much about the extent of team performance because it also affects individual players and team performance. Good communication, teamwork, and shared motivation are important to creating a positive psychological environment, which is essential for performance. For example, teams that build high level of trust with a shared collective belief are better able to execute strategy in sport competitions. Grounded in the review article, the external stress of COVID-19 has shown that teams can modify their support systems and adapt to navigating resilience and flexibility while they faced adversity (Curtin *et al.*, 2022). Therefore, if teams understand psychological aspects, it fuels connections and unity among the support team, it makes sense, from a performance perspective, as mental health is an important aspect of sporting success.

THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION IN TEAM DYNAMICS

Effective communication is an important factor in any successful sports team, heavily influencing teamwork and performance outcomes. In the sport setting, clear and open communication develops trust between players, which is a significant contributor to effective teamwork and collaboration (Zejin, 2024). In addition, when communication is open, feedback and adjustments to decisions or strategies can be made rapidly, creating a culture of adaptability in the team, a significant asset against competition. In addition, with the rise of remote communication in the sport setting, it is important to recognize how this medium changes dynamics when working in a team. Studies have shown that shifting to virtual teamwork creates unique challenges, including misunderstanding and limited outlets for non-verbal communication, decreasing collaboration and effectiveness (Lindström and Flou, 2021). Given these challenges, teaching athletes to communicate effectively and creating strong leaders can improve performance by improving the overall effectiveness of the team and also demonstrating how effective communication is in the sports context.

CATEGORIES OF COMMUNICATION IN A SPORTS TEAM

Effective communication is very important for sports teams to achieve their potential, influencing interpersonal relationships, as well as performance with respect to the team as a whole. Communication is typically categorized into talking, body language, and written communication; these are all crucial to develop understanding and teamwork. Talking refers to conversations happening during practices and games that allow players to share ideas and give feedback. After all, a sport is a team-based activity and is affected by how a team communicates with one another. Body language, gestures, etc., is also important to their interactions with each other. Writing, whether through playbooks, papers, or other documentation, also serves as a valuable repository or guide for teammates, emphasizing the need for accurate communication and an agreed upon strategies. Studies have shown that effectiveness of communication types

is influenced by emotional aspects of team relationships (trust, emotional intelligence) and overall performance (Park and Kim, 2022; Zeppenfeld *et al.*, 2022). By keeping communication lines open, a team can maximize its ability to work effectively with each other, providing a better chance of winning.

THE ROLE OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION ON TEAM COHESION

Effective communication is integral to creating team unity, most importantly in sports where interactions of team members significantly impact on performance. Communication fosters teamwork and enhances relational trust between members, and this is instrumental to collective success. Research indicates that teams working as complex adaptive systems, thrive when members share and exhibit different ways of communicating. In addition, focus on common goals and recognition of the roles of each member of the group, effective communication clarified any ambiguity and strengthens relationships among members (Ramos-Villagrasa *et al.*, 2018). Further to this, a meta-review indicated that planned communication strategies have medium effects on team and performance outcomes, underscoring the importance of discussing clearly between team members (McEwan *et al.*, 2017). Thus, effective communication is essential to establishing an environment conducive to teamwork, fostering group unity, and elevating performance outputs in sport.

THE BARRIERS OF COMMUNICATION AND THE CONSEQUENCES ON PERFORMANCE

Effective communication is a crucial facilitator within sports settings to improve team dynamics and performance, yet it can also be hindered by a number of barriers. Numerous barriers to communication exist, including aspects such as different languages and emotional misinterpretations, which can contribute to confusion, resulting in decreased teamwork and cooperation among teammates. For example, differences in languages and cultures can potentially lead to miscommunication, resulting in conflict between teammates or decreased trust (Thakur and Krithika, 2023). In addition, players may have emotions such as anxiety or lack of confidence, where poor mental states also serve as a barrier to teamwork by discouraging players from openly sharing plans or strategies, which can lead to a lack of cohesiveness (Barrera *et al.*, 2021). Ultimately, the mental impacts of ineffective communication can have substantial negative impacts on performance, only increasing with the more physical demands of an athlete found during competition; that when an athlete does not clearly form ideas or strategies for plays or make adjustments during a game, it can diminish performance. It is necessary to recognize and address communication barriers to create a collaborative environment that is conducive to helping team performance in competitive sports.

LEADERSHIP STYLES AND THEIR EFFECT ON TEAM PERFORMANCE

The impact of leadership styles on team performance is a significant part of team dynamics. In particular, team dynamics are critical in sports where teamwork and motivation are essential to success. Research indicates that leadership behaviors, such as

those in Chelladurai's multidimensional model leadership, impact team cohesiveness, which can in turn influence performance outcome (Burke *et al.*, 2011). For instance, when leaders implement transformational leadership behaviors, leaders foster trust and motivation which leads to greater athlete engagement, and everyone working toward team goals. Conversely, autocratic leadership can deter teamwork and performances as athletes display lower self-efficacy (Kniffin *et al.*, 2021). In addition, the beliefs and values that sports managers demonstrate are relevant in constructing leadership styles, which can influence motivation and team dynamics (Zawacki-Richter *et al.*, 2019). Understanding these connections can increase leadership practice and ultimately performance outcomes in competitive sporting contexts.

DIFFERENT LEADERSHIP STYLES IN SPORTS TEAMS

How leaders lead in sports teams affects the team as a whole and the extent to which they function as a team. Leadership has many different forms, autocratic, democratic, and transformational leadership, to name a few. Each has its advantages and disadvantages in terms of teamwork in sports. For example, an autocratic leader can make decisions without discussion, and can provide direction during briefings, and given the tense environment of sport, it may help to have some involved in decision-making and direction; however, autocratic leadership may limit players' freedom and creativity. Alternatively, a democratic leader will seek team member input and support open communication and discussion which builds trust and togetherness among players; however, it may not be able to provide rapid decisions and actions. Research in this area suggests that leaders who focus on the mental aspects of these leadership styles are important – so leaders who understand how motivation, responsibility, trust, and resilience can help to better enhance sport performance instead of just physical performance (Venkatesh Babu and Venkatesan, 2024; Zejin, 2024) [Table 1]. Ultimately, understanding how leadership styles overlap with team dynamics will help to position individual athletes and teams to reach maximal performance in the competitive environment of sport.

INFLUENCE ON TEAM DYNAMICS BY COACHING

Coaches can influence how teams come together in both group cohesion and task. To what extent the coach influences these interactions can be very impactful on how effective the team is, as evidenced by studies of group behaviour in sport teams. It is critical that as a coach you recognize player interest is important in both team social and task, as evidenced in research examining football teams of different age levels that shows player interest

in the social and task components can change (Carron *et al.*, 2002). Coaches who are able to create a social element to a welcoming environment would be able to positively influence players' mental experiences and potential performance through having stronger communication and control of emotions. The recognition of mental elements within team dynamics can give coaches spaces that not only influence the athlete's motivation but trust and cooperation, all pertinent to being successful as a team.

EFFECTS OF LEADERSHIP ON TEAM MOTIVATION AND MORALE

Effective leadership has a profound impact on team motivation and morale, both of which are crucial for optimal performance in sport (Franklin, 2016). Leaders with transformational characteristics often promote team morale by establishing a shared vision and a sense of purpose among the team members. This is particularly valuable in times of stress, when maintaining motivation assists in preventing burnout and disengagement (Edú-Valsania *et al.*, 2022). Research also demonstrates that when leaders provide support to athletes in their teams, it enhances not just their immediate experiences of performance but also fosters loyalty and commitment to the team in the long term, both of which are essential for maintaining team cohesion (Rasool *et al.*, 2020). In contrast, poor leadership can lead to decreased morale because team members may feel unappreciated or unsupported, which can lead to decreased performance overall.

Consequently, the quality of leadership is critical in influencing the management of psychological, situational factors related to individual motivation and team cohesion.

GROUP COHESION AND PSYCHOLOGY

There are a variety of studies that identify important effects of group cohesion on sports teams and performance. Group cohesion contributes to an individual sense of belonging which encourages individuals to work (sport) together as a team and ultimately positively impacts team processes and performance. Recent studies indicate that high levels of group cohesion within athletes lead their increased ability to achieve flow, lower competitive anxiety, and perform well under intense physical and mental stress (Datcu *et al.*, 2024). Group cohesion is an important indicator of performance at the team level, in addition to things like productivity of individual players and effectiveness of coaches, that all contribute to clubs win percentage (Marcos *et al.*, 2010). It also contributes positively mental health of athletes by forming strong relationships with teammates, which says meaningful things about the overall team and organization in sport or athletics. These

Table 1: Leadership styles' impact on sports team performance (Venkatesh Babu and Venkatesan, 2024)

Style	Description	Impact	Effectiveness (%)
Autocratic	Direct and authoritarian approach, making decisions unilaterally	Can lead to quick decisions but may decrease team morale over time	65
Democratic	Encourages team participation in decision-making processes	Promotes team cohesion and satisfaction, potentially improving performance	85
Laissez-Faire	Minimal direct supervision, allowing team members to make decisions	Can foster creativity but may result in a lack of direction and accountability	50
Transformational	Inspires and motivates team members through a shared vision	Often leads to high levels of motivation and team performance	90
Transactional	Focuses on clear structures and rewards for achievement	Effective for routine tasks but may not foster innovation or creativity	70

factors are essential to maximizing training practices and team building because of their importance to well-being, individual and team success.

DEFINITIONS AND FORMS OF GROUP COHESION

Group cohesion is a key aspect of team dynamics, which refers to the bonds between members that influence their connection to each other, their willingness to interact with team members, and their commitment to shared goals. Groups can consider two forms of group cohesion: Task cohesion, or the degree to which team members work together to accomplish a common goal, is critical to performance in competitive sports. Social cohesion, or how team members feel about one another and the associated emotions that develop a sense of belonging within a team, shape how team members can provide emotional support or meet social needs. Task and social cohesion are often related, so strong social bonds often elicit better task solicitation, which should improve outcomes (Grossman *et al.*, 2022). Understanding these two kinds of group cohesion allows coaches and sport psychologists being develop plans on how to promote both type of cohesion ultimately improving the effectiveness of the team as well as the individual experiences, motivation and satisfaction as studies suggest that teams who are more cohesive, handle challenges with less difficulty and have notably improved motivation and satisfaction (Carron *et al.*, 2002).

THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN COHESION AND PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES

The association between different aspects of cohesion and performance outcomes for sports teams is essential to understand team processes. Research suggests that teams who are more cohesive likely include more teamwork and trust, which supports the performance process. Cohesion supports athletes' motivation as they are likely work toward team goals and work together which ultimately leads to positive outcomes in their performances. Conversely, low levels of cohesion can lead to isolation and unhappiness, negatively influencing performance and contributing to mental health concerns among athletes, as low social support has been associated with distress (Reardon *et al.*, 2019). As such, high levels of cohesion can support the individual performance of team members while promoting mental health within the sports context. As teams seek to achieve outcomes, effective processes to increase cohesion are important as the process can affect performance outcomes and athlete well-being (Aust *et al.*, 2020).

WAYS TO IMPROVE TEAM COHESION IN SPORTS TEAMS

Individuals working better together as teams in a sport is very important for not only better performance but having a supportive environment. Research suggests factors such as team building, communication strategies, and common goals are essential for building cohesion. Team-building activities assist with establishing relationships among team members and trust, which also promotes increased commitment toward the team goals. Moreover, having clear communication strategies to facilitate appropriate dialog, will assist in making sure all members feel valued and create a culture where members feel comfortable sharing their feedback,

decreasing the likelihood of misunderstanding or conflict. In addition, by having the team focus on common goals, it can not only engage motivation among individual members/team but it can also engage relationships with fellow players as each member strives for the same goals. This teamwork becomes extremely vital within competitive situations, where mental health and well-being are increasingly rewarded for outcomes (Reardon *et al.*, 2019). Overall, these principles create an environment where athletes feel affiliated and motivated, which in turn ultimately affects their performance and success as a team (Styne *et al.*, 2017).

CONCLUSION

Finally, the interrelated relationship of psychological factors contributes significantly to team functioning and performance in sports. The literature reviewed states that dimensions such as teamwork, communication, and management of individual responsibilities are critical to developing an environment conducive to high performance. The literature reveals the importance of conducting mental training specific to a given sport and taking these variables into consideration for both athlete development and team development. Furthermore, understanding leadership styles and external pressures impacting team togetherness provides an understanding of effective management of teams. Overall, understanding psychological factors allows coaches and sporting organizations to employ specific training based on fundamental psychological principles that can lead to enhanced outcomes at competition time. As the field develops, further investigation into additional psychological factors will help build our understanding of team dynamics in sport (Park and Kim, 2022; Zawacki-Richter *et al.*, 2019).

The combination of psychological factors is important in determining team performance in sports. These factors provide meaningful implications for coaching from two important factors like leadership and communication. Most research points to task cohesion being a factor teams with similar objectives and plans typically perform better (Amoroso *et al.* 2021). Furthermore, things such as interpersonal in communication and social cohesion become very important as good communication strengthens trust and teamwork, as well as directly impacts team performance. Further, fulfilling esthetics such as competence, autonomy, and relatedness is an important psychological ingredient for motivating individuals and encouraging engagement in the team environment (Rausch *et al.* 2024). These results imply a need for conscientious considerations which support communication in a team environment because these factors help to improve not only team performance but athletes mental health, emphasizing the significance of psychological dimensions in team sports events.

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