

STUDIES IN PHYSICAL CULTURE AND TOURISM  
Vol. 17, No. 4, 2010

SEDIGHE HEYDARINEJAD, OMID ADMAN  
Physical Education and Sport Science Faculty, Shahid Chamran University of Ahwaz, Iran

**RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COACHING LEADERSHIP STYLES  
AND TEAM COHESION IN FOOTBALL TEAMS  
OF THE IRANIAN UNIVERSITY LEAGUE**

**Key words:** leadership styles, team cohesion, football players.

ABSTRACT

The present study was aimed to examine a relationship between coaching leadership styles and team cohesion in football matches of the Iranian university league (2008). The research methods included correlative description and a field study. The data gathering tools were the Leadership Behavior Description Questionnaire (Hemphill & Coons) and Group Environment Questionnaire (Carron, Widmeyer & Bradley). Descriptive statistics and the Pearson correlation coefficient were used in statistical analysis. The results showed that, from the player's point, 2.5% of studied coaches featured a task-oriented leadership style, 88% a relationship-oriented leadership style, and 9.5% a combined leadership style. A significant and positive correlation was found between the combined coaching leadership style and relationship-oriented leadership style and team cohesion. However, the correlation between the task-oriented coaching leadership style and team cohesion was non-significant.

INTRODUCTION

Coaches are the ones who are able to understand athletes and their play in the climax. They know exactly how to teach athletes to try hard in compliance with the rules of the game. Coaching is a behavioral process in which a coach pressures athletes to perform their desired responses [1]. However, coaching is much more than what a coach tells athletes to do. A good coach also knows also what things he or she should tell the athletes about and how [7]. Martinez [5] believes that coaching differs considerably from any other jobs. It is a hard, expectation-generating profession, which requires a variety of special skills [5]. One important aspect of coaches' decision-making is the right selection of coaching styles and methodology, i.e. the ways of making decisions, choosing learnt

skills and strategies, organizing training and competition, maintaining team discipline, assigning roles and positions to athletes in the decision-making process, making efforts to satisfy athletes' needs and creating an appropriate motivational climate and team cohesion [6, 14]. It is obvious that there are many coaching styles, but none alone leads to desirable success. Chelladurai et al. [8] found that outstanding athletes cared more about gaining knowledge from their coach than maintaining personal communication with him, although young and less advanced athletes need, in fact, more emotional support. Therefore, when adopting an appropriate leadership style, coaches should always consider athletes' emotional needs and team cohesion. During training or competition, many situations require crucial leadership which encompasses control of information and guidance.

---

**Correspondence should be addressed to:** Sedighe Heydarinejad, Physical Education and Sport Science Faculty, Shahid Chamran University of Ahwaz, Iran, fax: +986113336316, e-mail: heydari\_s@scu.ac.ir.

In most sports situations, the coach makes the final decision and can obtain much information during players' training or rest. Chelladurai et al. [9] defined five coaching leadership styles: training and instruction, democratic, autocratic, social support, and positive feedback.

As processes affecting team cohesion and solidarity have always been taken into consideration by sport psychologists, who believe that setting a common goal on which the group's efforts can be focused is vital for success. The feeling of togetherness or group cohesion is considered a key feature of any team. Gardner et al. [10] stressed the importance of studying the relationship between coach's behavior, team cohesion and team success. In team sports success is achieved when team members work together in an effective and coordinated manner [17]. Here, the role of coach as leader and coordinator is more specific, and his/her leadership style contributes to the development of team cohesion and coordination. Carron (1982) believes that cohesion is a dynamic process manifesting itself in the group's tendency to pursue their common goals and objectives in a cohesive manner [2]. Ramezaninezhad et al. [15] discriminates between: 1. social cohesion, i.e. the extent to which the group allows individuals to reach their desired goals; and 2. task cohesion, i.e. the extent to which teams and their individual members reach their goals. Widmeyer et al. [20] in their review of over 30 studies on relationships between cohesion and performance, found that 83 percent of the reviewed studies showed there was a strong, significant and positive correlation between cohesion and performance, and that teams with a high level of group cohesion achieved high performance results. Carron et al. [5] in their overview of cohesion research studies reported a significant correlation between team performance and team cohesion. Yuosof [21] revealed a significant relationship between the coach's behavior and team cohesion, and also showed that coaches who demonstrated democratic, training and instruction, social support and positive feedback leadership styles, tended to have athletes with higher group cohesion levels on their teams. Michallisin et al. [12] observed a correlation between the coach's behavior, team cohesion and overall team performance, and that the coach's behavior can indirectly affect athletes' performance through positively influencing the development of team cohesion. Stashevky et al. [19] claim that

transactional leadership entails a higher group cohesion level as compared with transformational leadership. Chang et al. [6] stated that task cohesion and social cohesion could positively influence all aspects of team performance. A study carried out by Rang [17] revealed a significant difference between levels of group cohesion of successful teams and unsuccessful teams. It also showed that that coaches who followed the training and instruction, democratic, social support and positive feedback leadership styles, achieved a high cohesion level in their teams, whereas no significant correlation was noted between the coach's autocratic leadership style and team cohesion level. Ramezaninezhad et al. [15] demonstrated that soccer coaches follow more the leadership style of training and instruction and less the democratic leadership style, and that there were significant differences between leadership styles of coaches of the Iranian football premier league. In addition, task and social cohesion was shown to have a significant positive correlation with the training and instruction, democratic, social support and positive feedback leadership styles, and a negative one with the autocratic leadership style. The results of Moradi's study of basketball teams [13] showed that leadership style is an important factor relative to group cohesion and success of sports teams. His research results revealed a significant correlation between the training and instruction, social support, positive feedback and democratic leadership styles with the cohesion level of basketball teams. Again, no significant correlation was noted between the authoritative leadership style and the level of team cohesion.

Today, many coaches believe that the basic principle of the successful selection of players, especially for team sports, is the level of athletes' individual skills which directly determine their total performance. These coaches are often unaware of factors affecting the players' global team performance. No doubt, many factors are involved in this field, one of which can be lack of team cohesion. Football is a team sport which demands from players a much higher level of team cohesion as compared with other sports, because of its total team nature. Different research results concerning the priority of leadership styles and their correlations with team cohesion seem to be related to the diversity of sports teams (on the collective and individual levels) as well as to athletes' levels of sport participation (different competitive levels).

On the other hand, due to cultural differences, the range of use of leadership styles by coaches may vary in different countries.

The development of competitive sports in Iran, especially at the university level, raises a number of valid research questions. Which leadership style is used more frequently by football coaches of the Iranian university league? What is the level of group cohesion in Iranian university football teams? Is there a relationship between leadership style and team cohesion? And finally, can the efficiency of Iranian university football teams (including coaches, managers and players) be determined by the appropriate selection of a coaching leadership style?

## METHODS

The study sample consisted of football players of the Iranian university league (2008) from 11 teams, each with 18 players (198 players in total). All participants were given the study questionnaires; however, only 158 participants returned their questionnaires. Three questionnaires were used to gather research data:

- a) a self-made questionnaire for demographic characteristics, including participants' age, university team playing experience, participation in college tournaments, and club playing career;
- b) the Leadership Behavior Description Questionnaire by Hemphill & Coons (1966), originally developed as a project at the Ohio State Leadership Studies, later revised by Halpin and Stogdill [11]. The LBDQ identifies Initiating Structure and Consideration as two fundamental dimensions of the leader's behavior. Initiating Structure refers to the leader's behavior in delineating the relationship between himself and the members of his group, Consideration refers to a behavior indicative of friendship between the leader and members of the group. In this research, the final version of the questionnaire (1966) was used for to distinguish between three coaching leadership styles: task-oriented, relationship-oriented and combined. The questionnaire contained 40 items (task-oriented style – 15 items, relationship-oriented style – 15 items, combined style – 10 items), with a five-point Likert scale, that described specific ways in which a

leader/coach behaves. The respondents were asked to indicate the frequency with which each type of behavior was exhibited by their leader/coach. Using Cronbach's alpha, the reliability coefficient of the questionnaire was calculated at 0.84;

- c) the Group Environment Questionnaire by Carron, Widmeyer and Bradley (1985). The GEQ, which assess two dimensions of group cohesion: task cohesion and social cohesion, contains 18 items (task cohesion – 9 items, social cohesion – 9 items), scored on a 9-point Likert scale [3]. Each item is either positively stated or negatively stated. The score for each category is calculated by summing the indicated values and dividing it by the number of items in a given category. Using Cronbach's alpha, the reliability coefficient of the questionnaire was calculated at 0.72.

The LBDQs and GEQs were distributed at the end of the group round of the Iranian university football league, to avoid effects of positive or negative reasoning (win/loss) in the later knock-out round. After training, the coaches or assistant coaches gathered a team together and distributed the questionnaires among the players. The players completed first the LBDQ questionnaire and then the GEQ individually and anonymously, and the coaches had no access to individual data sheets.

To estimate the normal distribution of data, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test was used. Descriptive statistics were used for description of some findings, and interference statistics methods and Pearson correlation coefficient were used for hypothesis testing. The level of statistical significance was set at  $p \leq 0.05$ .

## RESULTS

I. Description of participants' individual characteristics (Tab. 1). The participants' mean age was 22.6 years, length of playing career on a university team – 2.4 years, length of playing experience in college tournaments – 2.2 years, and club playing career – 4.4 years.

II. Description of findings related to coaching leadership styles and team cohesion level (Tab. 2). From the players' viewpoint, 2.5% of their coaches followed the task-oriented leadership style, 9.5% – combined leadership style, and 88% relationship-oriented leadership styles. Figure 1

shows a comparison of team cohesion results in eleven soccer teams under study. The minimum and maximum levels of average task cohesion were 36.3 and 46 for the 9<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> teams, respectively; the minimum and maximum levels of average social cohesion were 33.2 and 42.7 for the 6<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> teams, respectively. Overall, the minimum and maximum values of average total team cohesion were 71.3 and 88.6 for the 9<sup>th</sup> team and 3<sup>rd</sup> team, respectively.

III. Testing of research hypotheses. The Pearson correlation coefficient was used to test correlations between the three examined leadership styles and team cohesion. The correlation coefficient and significance level of the correlation between the relationship-oriented coaching leadership style and team cohesion were  $r = 0.612$  and  $p = 0.001$  (Tab. 3), which indicated a statistically

significant positive correlation ( $p \leq 0.05$ ). The correlation coefficient and significance level of the correlation between the task-oriented coaching leadership style and team cohesion were  $r = 0.111$  and  $p = 0.721$ , i.e. a non-significant correlation ( $p \leq 0.05$ ). The correlation coefficient and significance level of the correlation between the combined coaching leadership style and team cohesion were  $r = 0.602$  and  $p = 0.009$ , i.e. a statistically significant, positive correlation was noted ( $p \leq 0.05$ ).

**Table 1.** Means, standard deviation and minima and maxima of players' demographic characteristics

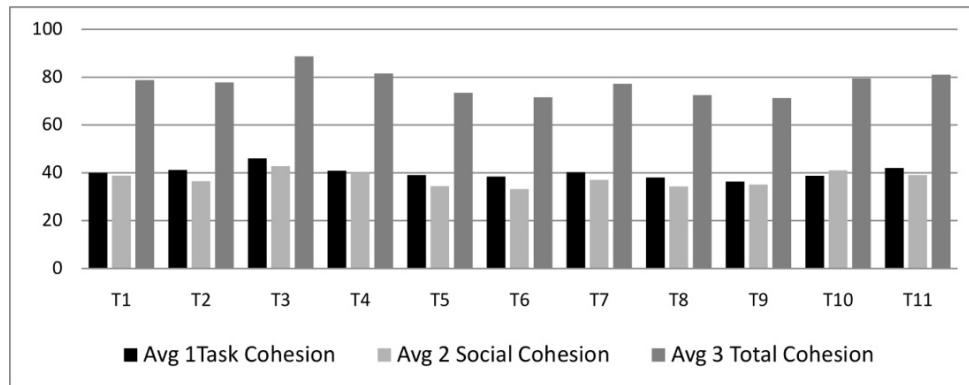
Maximum	Minimum	SD	Mean	Characteristics
33	18	2.37	22.6	Age
7	0	1.38	2.4	Length of playing career on a university team
7	0	1.60	2.2	Length of playing career in college tournaments
15	0	3.56	4.4	Length of playing career in a sports club

**Table 2.** Distribution of coaching leadership styles

Cumulative percentage	Percent	Frequency	Leadership styles
88	88	139	Relationship-oriented
90.5	2.5	4	Task-oriented
100	9.5	15	Combined
	100	158	Total

**Table 3.** Pearson correlation coefficients between leadership styles and team cohesion

Criterion variable	Predictor variable	Statistics	Correlation coefficient (r)	Statistical significance (p)	Number
Team cohesion	Relationship-oriented leadership style		0.612	0.001	139
Team cohesion	Task-oriented leadership style		0.111	0.721	4
Team cohesion	Combined leadership style		0.602	0.009	15



**Figure 1.** Comparison of average task cohesion, social cohesion and total cohesion levels of eleven Iranian university football teams

## DISCUSSION

The findings of the present study reveal a significant positive correlation between the relationship-oriented coaching leadership style and team cohesion. The relationship-oriented leadership style involves behaviors which represent mutual respect, trust and relations between management and staff with an emphasis on pure philanthropy. It can be thus concluded that coaches who attain higher scores from the subscales of the relationship-oriented leadership style also achieve better cohesion levels of their teams. These findings correspond with many other authors' study results [10, 13, 15, 17, 21]; however, they differ from the results of Michallisin and Karau [12] and Stashevsky and Koslowsky [19].

Other results of the present study indicate a non-significant correlation between the task-oriented coaching leadership style and team cohesion. Factors such as strict and inflexible behavior of coaches, emphasis on organizational goals, insistence on success in all circumstances, belief in unilateral decisions, hard and grueling expectations of the players, lack of organized communication with team members and being interested in an authoritative setting lower the cohesion level in teams led by task-oriented coaches. These findings correspond to the study results obtained by Moradi [13], Ramezanezhad et al. [16], Rang [17] and Yuosof [21]; however, are contrary to those of Michallisin and Karau [12] and Stashevsky and Koslowsky [19].

The results of the present study also revealed a significant positive correlation between the combined coaching leadership style and team

cohesion. One of the reasons for this positive relationship is the coach's flexibility, regarded as one of key features of the combined leadership style, which is applying different ways of behavior to suit different situations. In the combined leadership style, the leader pays close attention to the followers' needs and problems as well as organizational goals. These findings remain in agreements with the results of Gardner, Shields and Bremer [10] and Rang [17], but are contrary to those of Stashevsky and Koslowsky [19].

The style of leadership is one of predictor variables of group cohesion, and a coach's behavior seems to significantly affect his or her team cohesion. In particular, coaches who more frequently follow the relationship-oriented and combined leadership styles lead more cohesive teams. However, the players' understanding of the coach's leadership style and team cohesion can be also moderated by other factors such as team success and the place of players in the first or the second lineup. Team success can also depend on the relationship between cohesion and leadership style. For example, someone who is a member of a successful team may consider his team to be highly cohesive, and rank his coach's relationship-oriented and combined leadership styles higher, and task-oriented leadership style lower. Based on the findings of the present study and considering the correlation between the relationship-oriented leadership style and team cohesion levels, coaches can make improvements of the performance of individual athletes and teams with the use of appropriate leadership styles, through increasing their understanding, support and appreciation of players. With their expertise, training skills and

educational techniques (tactics and strategies) coaches are able to create fully cohesive sports teams. Therefore, within any team, both coaching leadership styles and group cohesion appear to influence team performance. The results of the present study point to the following conclusions: (a) there is a significant, positive correlation between leadership styles and group cohesion; (b) a high level of cohesion in a given team leads to this team's success.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] Anshel M.H., *Sport psychology: From theory to practice*. (4<sup>th</sup> edition), San Francisco, CA: Benjamin Cummings, 2003.
- [2] Carron A.V., Cohesiveness in sport group: Interpretation and considerations, *Journal of Sport Psychology*, 1982, (4): 123-138.
- [3] Carron A.V., Widmeyer W.N., Brawley L., The development of an instrument to assess cohesion in sport team: the group environment questionnaire, *Journal of Sport Psychology*, 1985, (7): 244-266.
- [4] Carron A.V., Colman M.M., Wheeler J., Stevens D., Cohesion and Performance in Sport: A Meta Analysis. *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 2002, (24): 168-188.
- [5] Carron A.V., Team cohesion and team success in sport, *Journal of sport science*, 2002, (20): 119-126.
- [6] Chang A., Duck J., Brodia P., A multi-dimensional approach to the group cohesion – group performance relationship. *Small Group Research*, 2006, (37): 327-350.
- [7] Chaw M., Bruce L., Leadership and cohesion in sport team, *Journal of Sport Psychology*, 1999, (10): 102-111.
- [8] Chelladurai P., Carron A.V., Athletic maturity and preferred leadership, *Journal of Sport Psychology*, 1983, (2): 34-53.
- [9] Chelladurai P., Saleh S., Dimensions of leadership styles in sports: Development of leadership scale, *Journal of Sport Psychology*, 1980, (5): 371-380.
- [10] Gardner D.E., Shields D.L., Bremer B.J., The relationship between perceived coaching behaviors and team cohesion baseball and softball players, *The Sport Psychologist*, 1996, (10): 367-381.
- [11] Hemphill J.K., Coons A.E., Development of the Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire, The Ohio State University, Bureau of Business Research. Monograph No. 88, 1957.
- [12] Michallisin M.D., Karau S.J., Leadership activation of team cohesion as a strategic asset: An empirical simulation. *Journal of Business Strategies*, 2007, (24): 68-79.
- [13] Moradi M., The relationship between coach's styles and group cohesion in Iran basketball clubs professional league, *Kinetic Journal*, 2004, (29): 5-16.
- [14] Murray N.P., The differential effect of team cohesion and leadership behavior in high school sports, *Individual Differences Research*, 2006, (4): 216-225.
- [15] Ramezaninezhad R., Hoseini K.M., The relationship between coach's leadership styles and team cohesion in Iran football clubs professional league, *Brazilian Journal of Biomotricity*, 2009, (3): 111-120.
- [16] Ramezaninezhad R., Hoseini K.M., Dadban M.S., Shafiee S.K., The relationship between collective efficiency, group cohesion and team performance in professional volleyball teams, *Brazilian Journal of Biomotricity*, 2009, (3): 31-39.
- [17] Rang C.O., The relationship between group cohesion & leadership style & win/loss record in collegiate soccer player. Unpublished thesis. San Diego State University. USA, 2002.
- [18] Riemer H.A., Chelladurai P., Development of the athlete satisfaction questionnaire, *Journal of Sport Exercise Psychology*, 1998, (20): 127-156.
- [19] Stashevsky S.H., Koslowsky M., Leadership team cohesiveness and team performance. *International Journal of Manpower*, 2006, (27): 63-74.
- [20] Widmeyer W.N., Brawley L.R., Carron A.V., The effect of group size in sport, *Journal of Sport and Exercises Psychology*, 1992, (49): 372-380.
- [21] Yuosof A., The Relationship between Perceived Coaching Behaviors and Team Cohesion among Malaysian national junior Athletes. Sports Academy, Universiti Putra, Malaysia, 2007.