

Team Cohesion and Its Role in Sporting Success

Dr. Jose Mathew^{1*} Mrs. Anju Jose² Dr. R. Srinivasa³

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Physical Education, College Veterinary and Animal Sciences, Kerala Veterinary and Animal Sciences University, Pookode, Wayanad, Kerala

²Anju Jose, Teacher, Swargarani School, Rajarajeswari Nagar, Bangalore

³Professor, Department of Physical Education, University College of Physical Education, Bangalore University, Bangalore

Abstract – A complete mental and physical preparation is the result of sacrifice and self-discipline. It is easy to be average, but tough to be the best. Sporting arena at present acknowledges and appreciates sportspersons who can consistently exhibit superior performance, who is focused to be at his/her best and emerge successful. In sport it is widely acknowledged that a group of individuals working well together is significantly more effective than a group of individuals working independently of one another. Cristiano Ronaldo and Gareth Bale may be about to do great work when running with the ball for Real Madrid and score some pretty amazing goals however in the interest of team success the whole of the team needs to do their jobs at the height of their abilities to ensure success. Tuckman's Stages of Group Development (1965) Forming, Storming, Norming, and Performing. It's always going to be challenging to take into account why people are attracted to team scenarios. Some find a sense of achievement whilst many individuals can be socially attracted to groups and therefore the sport is not one of the most important factor in their participation. There are a large number of factors which function as determinants of sports team cohesion. One way of defining these is to break them down into personal, team, leadership and environmental factors associated with being a member of a team and their subsequent consequences.

Key-words: Team Cohesion, Sports, Performance, Success

INTRODUCTION

In any team, sport success is often determined by how well a group of individuals work together within a group as a cohesive unit. We have all heard interviews where coaches have stated that their team simply did not play well together on a particular occasion and seen where players often become too focused on their individual glory than that of their team. A great Michael Jordan quote regarding teamwork and group cohesion, "Talent wins the games, but team work and intelligence wins Championships"

A complete mental and physical preparation is the result of sacrifice and self-discipline. It is easy to be average, but tough to be the best. Sporting arena at present acknowledges and appreciates sportspersons who can consistently exhibit superior performance, who is focused to be at his/her best and emerge successful.

Today, there is very little difference in the players' physique, talent and ability. But all these aspects should be directed towards the best performance, for

which one should possess a great deal of mental strength as an individual and cohesiveness incase of a team. Most performance problems that athletes or team performers struggle with are not the results of poor conditioning, inadequate coaching, and lack of physical skills or technical ability. It is not a unusual seen that, a strong membered team loosing hollow to a less fit team just because of lack of understanding between the players.

How Can We Define Cohesion In Sport?

The Oxford English Dictionary defines cohesion as "The action or fact of forming a united whole." Back In 1950 Festinger Schacter and Back formed a definition through forces which act upon members to remain in the group based on two classes. 1. The assertiveness of the group through the need for individuals to interact with other group members and 2. Means control related to the associated benefits of being within the group

Great Examples Of Group Cohesion In Sports

- Sports clubs having open days to encourage players to bond with the supporters
- Rich Froning winning an event at the Cross Fit World Championships then walking back down the field to encourage his fellow competitors on
- Pre-season team building camps⁽¹⁾ used by teams with new members to help develop group cohesion.
- Manchester United clawing back from 1-0 down in the 1999 Champions League Final to beat Bayern Munich 2-1 in the final 3 minutes of the game.

Team Work In Sports

In sport it is widely acknowledged that a group of individuals working well together is significantly more effective than a group of individuals working independently of one another. Cristiano Ronaldo and Gareth Bale may be about to do great work when running with the ball for Real Madrid and score some pretty amazing goals however in the interest of team success the whole of the team needs to do their jobs at the height of their abilities to ensure success. Whether it's Xabi Alonso sitting back to control possession or Pepe putting in the tackles to thwart opposition forwards. Every team must have a structure.

The Psychology of How a Team is Formed

Tuckman's Stages of Group Development (1965) Forming, Storming, Norming, and Performing.

Forming is the first stage and refers to the birth of the group. (Sometimes referred to as 'Dorming') There are numerous ways a team can be put together from a group of children all being at the same primary school to a lavish Russian Oligarch attempting to buy in the seemingly best players from across the world for his latest project. Within the forming stage there will be emphasis on working out the logistical aspects of the group such as positions and individuals tend in general to be on their best behaviour to avoid initial conflicts and bad impressions.

The Storming phase is where the honeymoon period is over and the boat starts to sail into some pretty rough seas. This stage can be one of difficulty as members of the team are starting to find their individual voices and begin to contribute differing perspectives on how success can be achieved which not all team members will agree with. A good manager will allow creativity to be developed and a

level of required critical analysis. This is the stage where conflicts between team members can easily escalate and potentially cause problems regarding the development of an effective team in the long term.

The Norming stage brings together all the different ideas and perspectives from the storming stage to create shared values for the team in terms of a particular mission statement, objectives (Whether it's avoiding relegation in the first year at Premiership football level or making a push for a European competition spot the following year), as well as helping the members to develop a clear view on their roles and responsibilities within the team environment,

When a team is Performing, they are at their highest capabilities. Productivity will be high and communication levels good to avoid potential pitfalls of conflict. For this stage to be reached it is believed that all of the members of the team should have passed through the previous stages of effective team development.

How Can We Measure Team Cohesion?

It's always going to be challenging to take into account why people are attracted to team scenarios. Some find a sense of achievement whilst many individuals can be socially attracted to groups and therefore the sport is not one of the most important factors in their participation

It is possible to classify team cohesion based on the task at hand and social factors associated with being part of a team.

Task cohesion occurs where individuals identify with some specific group goals and are able to push towards success in achievement. Such examples could be winning the Super Bowl or promotion to a higher division.

Social cohesion occurs where the attractiveness of the group and social interaction are the most important aspects of involvement in the team. The sense of togetherness is often what defines these teams (Bollen and Hoyle, 1990)

As there are a significant number of factors which influence an individual's participation within a team Carron, Widmeyer and Brawley (1985) developed the Group Environment Questionnaire (Often referred to as GEQ) which focuses on four dimensions of team cohesion.

- Group Integration- Task (GI-T)

- Group Integration- Social (GI-S)
- Individual Attraction to the Group- Task (ATG-T)
- Individual Attraction to the Group- Social (ATG-S)

The Group Environment Questionnaire is used by many sports psychologists to assess team cohesion due to its favourable psychometric analytic properties.

Team Cohesion for Coaches

Application- Coaches must be aware of the importance of development of both social and task cohesion in their teams to ensure buy-in from all members of the team. No member's motivating factors are the same.

Factors Determining Team Cohesion In Sport

There are a large number of factors which function as determinants of sports team cohesion. One way of defining these is to break them down into personal, team, leadership and environmental factors associated with being a member of a team and their subsequent consequences.

Personal Factors Determining Team Cohesion

- Personal satisfaction derived from team membership
- Experience reinforcement. Similarity of experience shown to team members
- Visible external competition and threat.

Team Factors Determining Group Cohesion

- Success of the team both present and past.
- Aspects of communication experienced within the team.
- Shared goals.
- Competitive nature of individuals in achievement of goals as part of a team.
- Similarity of group members' attitudes and values
- Difficulty of entry into the team (In tight knit communities).

Leadership Factors Determining Team Cohesion

- The establishment of cohesion.
- Establishment of role models, team leaders and managers.

Environmental Factors In Group Cohesion

- Affected by group size.
- Weather conditions can leader to sense of togetherness.

Performance Consequences and Team Cohesion

One of the key questions sports psychologists ask is whether team cohesion can lead to improved performance. The consequence in absolute performance measurement is simple- Does the team win, or lose?

Psychologists can register whether a win is outright and absolute, or relative to previous performance last week or last year. In an absolute analysis a rugby team may not have won the World Cup last occasion, but relatively speaking they may have progressed further than they had previously achieved.

In some teams cohesion can be directly related to levels of sporting performance. Whether it's league position or team belief. Success sells and individuals buy into the structure leading to team stability and subsequent performance effectiveness. The direction of causality, is one of difficulty. Does team cohesion lead to success in sports? Or does a degree of success foster improved team cohesion? Whilst there is a likelihood that heightened levels of cohesion improve on field play it is also likely that improved performance helps to develop further team cohesion. When your team is winning you feel on top of the world and more at ease with your team mates despite their inherent faults and falacies.

Additional Cohesion Psychological Factors To Consider

Whilst previous research has emphasised the relationship between cohesion and performance there are many other factors of potential significance to the team environment.

• Team Satisfaction

As cohesion refers to groups, satisfaction refers to the individual members of a group. There have been two models proposed. One hypothesis as symbolised below shows a circular relationship hypothesis where cohesion leads to success, which

subsequently leads to feelings of satisfaction amongst team members. A second hypothesis (Model B) hypothesizes that performance success leads to higher levels of group cohesion which subsequently leads to greater satisfaction levels. In reality a coach or team leader building group cohesion will add elements of individual satisfaction and team performance benefits as studies have shown clear positive relationships between member satisfaction in cohesive groups and negative impact of non-cohesive groups, whether in business or sport. (Hogg 1992).

Conformity Within Successful Teams And Groups

Whether it's a group of friends or a sports team. Studies have found that the higher the cohesiveness of a group, the more influence the group will have on its individual members. This includes a greater pressure to conform to the perceived norms of the group through a whole manner of factors from attitudes to choice of clothing and productivity output.

Group Stability And Cohesion

Group stability can refer to the length of time members have been part of the group or the turnover of group members. The transfer system in soccer can cause havoc on team cohesiveness. In many studies it's been shown that teams which experience fewer line up changes during the course of a season tend to be more successful than those whose line-ups are constantly changing. Despite this managers have often worked through policies of constant rotation of players.

High levels of cohesiveness can also help to protect against and allow better resistance to disruptions so as personal changes or enforced new members.

Group Goal Setting As A Cohesiveness Tool

In a team or group environment goals are usually set as a whole for the group. These refer to the clear objectives of the group in teams of performance and refer to a shared vision. It has been found that group cohesiveness is enhanced when the group has been engaged in the process of goal setting. Member satisfaction with team goals enhanced team cohesion although over the course of a competitive season levels of cohesion can differ within a team environment.

As with any goal setting. The SMART analogy is often used. Team Goals Must Be ,Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Time framed.

CONCLUSION

The many individual, group, and environmental factors that affect the athletic performance of a team make it difficult to isolate the effects of a single variable such as cohesion. Although there is considerable research to support the idea that a team members who are close to one another socially and trust that their teammates are performing as well as they can will themselves perform better and win more games, designing and applying strategies that apply this research and demonstrate improved performance can be problematic. Individual attitudes, personalities, motivation, and beliefs as well as skill levels, individual injuries that impact performance, the role of the coach and how the coach is perceived by different players, the quality of the competition—all these factors play a role in the outcome of each game. However, performance in sports requiring individuals to cooperate with and support fellow players is affected by relationships and attitudes, and, as a coach, the investigator will continue to seek out ways of supporting team performance through strategies that promise to improve players' attitudes and confidence in their own skills and their support for their teammates.

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Corresponding Author

Dr. Jose Mathew*

Assistant Professor, Department of Physical Education, College Veterinary and Animal Sciences, Kerala Veterinary and Animal Sciences University, Pookode, Wayanad, Kerala

E-Mail – josemathew3373@gmail.com