

Original Article

Leadership style of Greek soccer coaches

GIOLDASIS ARISTOTELIS^{1,3}, KAMENOV KALOYAN², BEKRIS EVANGELOS³

¹ Faculty of Earth and Life Sciences, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, NETHERLANDS.

² Faculty of Psychology and Education, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, NETHERLANDS.

³ Department of Physical Education and Sport Science, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, GREECE.

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Abstract:

The leadership style is a factor which affects the performance of a person or a group of people (Vincer & Loughhead, 2010). The aim of the current study was to examine the leadership style of Greek soccer coaches and how their personal characteristics affect it. Also, the researchers examined the relationship between the leadership style and the team level or the team performance. Chelladurai (1978) developed the Multidimensional Model of Leadership which describes the leadership style of coaches in sports and how it is related to the group performance and player satisfaction. According to Chelladurai and Saleh (1978, 1980), five factors define the leadership style of the coaches. Training and instructions, democratic behavior, autocratic behavior, social support and positive feedback describe the leadership style. Many studies about leadership showed that it is related to the players' participation, motivation, fun, anxiety, emotional burnout, and cohesion (Amorose & Smith, 2003; Hollebeak & Amorose, 2005; Price & Weiss, 2000). There are also great differences on leadership style among soccer coaches according to their personal characteristics. Furthermore, there are important differences among the perceptions, the needs and the preferences of the players for their coaches (Bosse et al., 2003; Çakioğlu, 2003; Sherman et al., 2000; Vargas-Tonsing et al., 2004). The sample of the data were 67 soccer coaches aged 33 to 59 years old ($M=43.84$, $SD=6.31$) who completed the Greek version for the coaches of the Leadership Scale for Sports (Chelladurai & Saleh, 1980). The other variables were measured by improvised scales. The statistical analysis showed that coaches perceive themselves as providing greater amounts of training and instructions, democratic behaviors, and social support. Also, there were differences among coaches on their leadership perceptions according to their characteristics.

Key words: leadership, coach, soccer, age, experience

Introduction

Coaching is a term that people use in many aspects of everyday life as business, psychology, life and sports. The leadership style of any coach is a major factor which affects the performance of a person or a group of people, directly or not (Vincer & Loughhead, 2010). There are almost as many definitions as the researchers who attempt to define the concept. Most of the definitions have in common behavioral characteristics of influencing individuals and groups (Bass, 1990). Barrow (1977) defined the leadership as the behavioral process of influencing individuals and groups toward set goals (p.232). Nowadays, Whitmore (2003), defined leadership as the way to unlock a person's potential so as to maximize its own performance. Adding that, leadership is also helping people to learn rather than teaching them. Leadership was also defined as the professional partnership between a qualified coach and an individual or a team that support the achievement of extra-ordinary results, based on goals set by the individual or team (ICF, 2005). But which kind of leader-coach is the most appropriate so as to achieve the highest performance. Many years, the researchers are trying to give an answer to this question (Reilly, 2003). Chelladurai (1978) developed the Multidimensional Model of Leadership, which suggests that the congruence among actual leader behaviors, the players' preferences, and the situation's requirements have a positive influence on group performance and players' satisfaction. Chelladurai and Saleh (1978, 1980), used the Leadership Scale for Sports so as to examine the leadership style of the coaches. They developed two versions of the Leadership Scale for Sports for the players (perceived and preferred leadership style), and one for the coaches (self-perceived leadership style).

The Leadership Scale for Sports consists of five factors which describe the coaching behaviors. Training and instruction is a coaching behavior which emphasize on improving the players' performance through the hard training of skills, techniques and tactics. Democratic behavior is a coaching behavior which allows greater players' participation to the decision making for team goals, training methods and other sport

characteristics. Autocratic behavior is a coaching behavior which the leader takes the decisions by his own and highlights his personal authority. Social support is a coaching behavior according to which leaders concern for the welfare of their players by creating positive atmosphere and warm interpersonal relationships among the team members. Positive feedback is a coaching behavior which the leaders reinforce the players of the team about their individual and team performance by giving them advices and rewards. Many studies have been conducted about the leadership style of the coaches and how it affects the individuals and the team as a whole. The players' satisfaction that is necessary for the wellbeing of a team is positive related to the factors training and instruction, democratic behavior, social support and positive feedback (i.e. Chelladurai et al., 1988; Hollembeak & Amorose 2005; Riemer & Chelladurai, 1995; Wuerth et al., 1999).

Furthermore, the players who perceived their coaches as giving more training and instructions, social support, and positive feedback presented higher levels of participation, motivation and fun, and lower levels of anxiety and emotional burnout (i.e. Hollembeak & Amorose, 2005; Price & Weiss, 2000). Also, the leadership factors training and instructions, democratic behavior, social support, and positive feedback are positive related to the cohesion which is negatively related to the autocratic behavior (Chul & Howe, 2001; Gardner et al., 1996; Turman 2003). According to Hollembeak and Amorose (2005), positive feedback improves the relationship between the players and the coaches, social support does not affect the relationship, while the autocratic behavior affects negatively the relationship. Positive feedback influences the ability, the efforts and the performance of the players (Amorose & Smith, 2003). Moreover, kids and parents perceive the positive feedback and training and instructions as the most important coaching behaviors (Martin et al., 1999). As far as the leadership preferences of the players many personal factors as sex, age, experience, field position, level, psychological characteristics etc, affect their needs. Although, the players prefer higher levels of positive feedback, training and instructions, and democratic behavior (Sherman et al., 2000), in a study in soccer the researchers concluded that the players prefer more autocratic behavior from their coaches (Çakioğlu, 2003). According to the age and the experience of the players, younger players prefer higher levels of training and instructions and less social support than mature players (Chelladurai & Carron, 1983). Also, younger and less experienced players prefer lower levels of autocratic behavior from their coach (Hastie, 1993), higher levels of positive feedback, democratic behavior and social support (i.e. Hastie, 1995; Horne & Carron, 1985; Neil & Kirby, 1985; Riemer & Chelladurai, 1995; Wuerth et al., 1999). As far as the level of the players, the higher level players prefer training and instructions and autocratic behavior (Bosse et al., 2003; Hastie, 1995; Wuerth et al., 1999). When coaches examine their own leadership style, they perceive their behavior as consulting by providing great amounts of training and instructions and social support (Lii et al., 2002; Vargas-Tonsing et al., 2004). However, they perceive themselves as providing higher levels of training and instructions, democratic behavior, social support and rewards than their player perceive (Hanson & Gould, 1988; Horne & Carron, 1985; Salminen & Liukkonen, 1996).

On the other hand, another study concluded that the perceptions of both players and coaches about the leadership style are similar (Vargas-Tonsing et al., 2004). According to their personal characteristics, younger coaches are described as more active, although they present more autocratic behaviors (i.e. Liukkonen et al., 1996). Furthermore, as the coaches become more experienced they reduce their human-focused behavior (Liukkonen et al., 1996). More experienced coaches support their players with more training and instructions than the less experienced coaches (Sherman & Hassan, 1986). Most of the players described positive feedback, training and instructions and democratic behavior as the coaching behaviors that they prefer more (Sherman et al., 2000). The aim of the present study was to examine the leadership style of the Greek soccer coaches and how their personal characteristics (age, experience, length of time in the team) affect their perceptions. Furthermore, how it is related to the final league performance of the team and the level of the team. There is a literature gap in the research of Greek coaches in soccer. Many studies about the leadership characteristics have been conducted but there is a lack of knowledge in Greek population in soccer.

Method and material

Participants

In the current study 67 soccer coaches of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Greek amateur leagues participated. The participants' age ranged from 33 to 59 years old ($M= 43.84$, $SD= 6.31$).

Assessment test

Leadership style

For the needs of the study the researchers used the Greek version for the coaches of Leadership Scale for Sports (Chelladurai & Saleh, 1980; Ageloniadis, 1995). The questionnaire consist of 40 questions which measure the five factors of leadership: training and instructions (1, 5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 23, 26, 29, 32, 35, 38), democratic behavior (2, 9, 15, 18, 21, 24, 30, 33, 39), autocratic behavior (6, 12, 27, 34, 40), social support (3, 7, 13, 19, 22, 25, 31, 36) and positive feedback (4, 10, 16, 28, 37). The answers were given in a 5-point Likert scale from (1) poor to (5) excellent. The Cronbach alpha of the factors were .84 for training and instructions, .84 for democratic behavior, .57 for autocratic behavior, .61 for social support, and .77 for positive feedback.

Age, experience, length of time in the team

The coaches completed improvised scales about their age, experience, and length of time in the team. The coaches divided according to their age in young-aged (from 33 to 40 years old) and old-aged coaches (from 41 to 59 years old), according to their experience in less-experienced (from 24 to 48 months) and more-experienced coaches (from 180 to 348 months) and according to their length of time in the team in short-length (from 6 to 12 months) and long-length coaches (from 36 to 144 months).

Coaching level, team performance

The researchers compared leadership style in different level of team coaching, low-division and high division teams. Furthermore, they compared the leadership style as far as the final league ranking of each team in the end of the season.

Research planning

The researchers contacted the coaches of the teams so as to explain them the aims of the study and take the permit of attending to the survey. Then the researchers met the coaches who agreed to participate in the study and gave them the questionnaires. The coaches completed the questionnaires by their own before the first match of the season and they arranged a new appointment with the researchers so as to give these back.

Results

The Cronbach alpha for the Leadership Scale for Sports was satisfied for the five factors of leadership. The table 1 presents the Cronbach alpha of the current study.

Table 1 - Cronbach alpha of the Leadership Scale for Sports

Leadership	Cronbach alpha
Training and instructions	.81
Democratic behavior	.83
Autocratic behavior	.62
Social support	.67
Positive feedback	.80

The fig. 1 shows the descriptive statistics about the leadership style of Greek coaches. Greek coaches perceive themselves as providing more democratic behavior, training and instruction, and also social support. On the other hand, positive feedback and autocratic behavior are characteristics that Greek coaches do not use frequently.



Fig. 1 - Leadership style of Greek coaches.

The fig. 2 shows the differences between the young-aged and old-aged coaches. The analysis showed the existence of statistic significant differences between the two categories of coaches for the four of five factors of leadership, training and instructions ($p < .05$), democratic behavior ($p < .001$), autocratic behavior ($p < .001$) and social support ($p < .001$). On the other hand, the differences between young-aged and old-aged coaches about the factor of positive feedback were not statistic significant ($p = ns$). The coaches who were younger presented higher levels of training and instructions and autocratic behavior, lower levels of democratic behavior and social support, while positive feedback differences were not statistic significant.

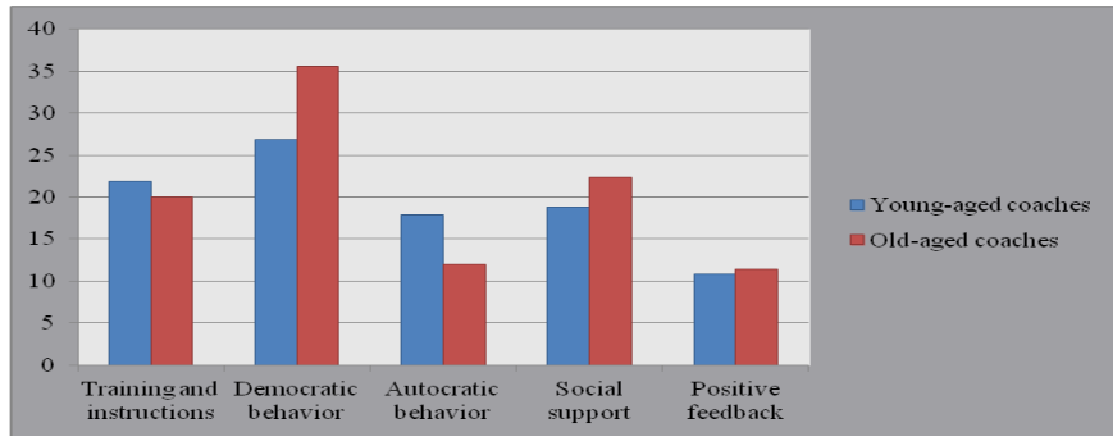


Fig. 2 - Age of the coach and leadership style.

The fig. 3 shows the differences between the less-experienced and more-experienced coaches. The analysis showed the existence of statistic significant differences between the two categories of coaches for the three of five factors of leadership, democratic behavior ($p < .01$), autocratic behavior ($p < .005$), and social support ($p < .05$). On the other hand, the differences between less-experienced and more-experienced coaches about the factors of training and instructions and positive feedback were not statistic significant ($p = ns$). The coaches who were less-experienced presented higher levels of autocratic behavior, lower levels of democratic behavior and social support, while training and instructions and positive feedback differences were not statistic significant.

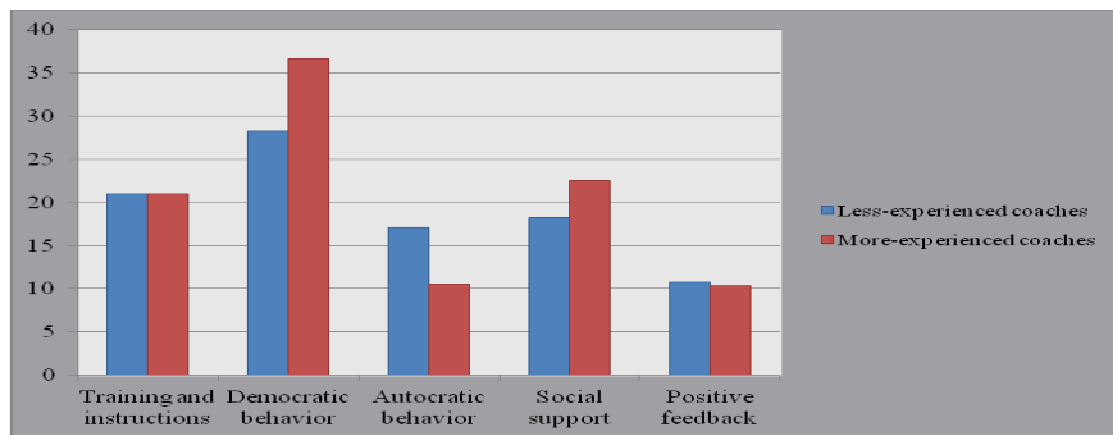


Fig. 3 - Experience of the coach and leadership style.

The analysis showed that there was no statistic significant differences between short-length and long-length coaches ($p = ns$), low-level and high-level coaches ($p = ns$) and also low-ranking and high-ranking teams ($p = ns$).

Discussion

The current study examined the leadership style of Greek coaches, which factors affect the leadership style of the coaches and how it is related to the level and the final team performance. The questionnaire presented good internal consistency for the factors training and instructions, democratic behavior and positive support in Greek soccer coaches. On the other hand, autocratic behavior and positive feedback presented questionable to acceptable values of internal consistency (Field, 2000). The values of internal consistency were similar to previews studies which used the questionnaire Leadership Scale for Sports (i.e. Agelonidis, 1995). It is clear from the descriptive statistics that coaches perceive themselves as providing higher levels of democratic behavior, training and instruction, and social support. This finding is supported by the literature (i.e. Vargas-Tonsing et al., 2004). According to the age, the results showed that younger coaches provide players with more training and instructions, and autocratic behavior, while democratic behavior and social support are ignored.

Concerning the factors of autocratic behavior and the training and instructions the findings are similar to previews studies which support that younger coaches emphasize in these behaviors (i.e. Liukkonen et al., 1996). Also, more recently findings in soccer support that coaches must provide more autocratic behavior as players prefer this kind of leaders (Çakioğlu, 2003). According to the experience, the results showed that coaches with less experience present autocratic behavior and provide less social support. The literature review supported the findings concerning the less human-focused behavior (Liukkonen et al., 1996). In contrast to previews studies,

the differences among less and more-experienced coaches as far as the training and instructions and also the positive feedback behaviors were not significant (Sherman & Hassan, 1986). Although, perceptions of coaches and players about leadership style are similar (Vargas-Tonsing et al., 2004), some differences with previous studies might be explained by the differences that appear between the coaches' self-perceptions and their actual behavior. Also, the small number of the sample comparing to the high number of the total coaches of amateur leagues, might explain the fact that there were no differences between coaches of different team level and performance.

Conclusions

The leadership style that Greek soccer coaches use is similar to the preferences of their players. They use more training and instructions, democratic behavior, and social support. These types of behaviors develop the satisfaction and motivation of the players, the cohesion of the team, and reduce their anxiety and burnout levels. On the other hand, coaches use low levels of positive feedback although it is necessary for the wellbeing of the players and the team. Future research must be focused in the differences between the coaches' and players' perceptions about the leadership style of Greek soccer coaches.

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