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CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH AMERICAN SPORT AND EXERCISE PSYCHOLOGY: TEAM BUILDING IN SPORT

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ABSTRACT: Conceptualized as a process intervention, team building strategies have been used in sport to enhance the cohesion or unity of a team through the development of task and social aspects. To date, team building has been utilized in various settings such as physical education classes, exercise settings, recreational sport, and elite sport. Team building interventions have demonstrated improved performance, increased adherence levels, and enhanced interpersonal relationships. This paper will provide an overview of research about team building in sport and will recommend future strategies to sport researchers and practitioners from across the globe who intend on implementing team building activities into their repertoire.

KEYWORDS: Team building; Team unity; cohesion; social; task; coach.

DESARROLLOS ACTUALES DE LA PSICOLOGÍA DEL DEPORTE Y EL EJERCICIO EN NORTEAMÉRICA: LA CONSTRUCCIÓN DE UN EQUIPO EN DEPORTE

RESUMEN: Conceptualizado como un proceso de intervención, las estrategias de construcción de equipos han sido utilizadas en el deporte para fortalecer la cohesión o unidad de un equipo a través del desarrollo de tareas y aspectos sociales. Hasta ahora, la construcción de equipos ha sido utilizada en varias situaciones, tales como las clases de educación física, situaciones de ejercicio, deporte recreacional y deporte de élite. Se ha demostrado que las intervenciones en construcción de equipos han dado como resultado un aumento en el rendimiento y en los niveles de adherencia y unas mejores relaciones interpersonales. Este artículo ofrece una visión general de la investigación sobre la construcción de equipos en el deporte y recomienda estrategias para los investigadores en esta área y practicantes de todo el mundo que tratan de implementar actividades de construcción de equipos en su repertorio.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Construcción de equipo; Unidad del equipo; Cohesión; Social; Tarea; Entrenador.

DESENVOLVIMENTOS ATUAIS DA PSICOLOGIA DO DESPORTO E DO EXERCÍCIO NORTE-AMERICANA: A CONSTRUÇÃO DE EQUIPAS NO DESPORTO

RESUMO: Conceptualizadas como um processo de intervenção, as estratégias de construção de equipas têm sido utilizadas no desporto para melhorar a coesão ou unidade de uma equipa através do desenvolvimento de aspectos sociais e relativos às tarefas. Até à data, a construção de equipas tem sido utilizada em vários contextos, tais como o das aulas de educação física, o do exercício e atividade física, o do desporto de lazer e do desporto de elite. Intervenções no sentido da construção de equipas permitiram melhoria da performance, aumento dos níveis de aderência e melhoria das relações interpessoais. Este artigo irá fornecer uma visão geral da investigação sobre a construção de equipas no desporto e irá recomendar estratégias futuras para os investigadores e praticantes de desporto de todo o mundo que tencionem implementar atividades orientadas para a construção de equipas no seu repertório.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Construção de equipas; Unidade da equipe; Coesão; Social; Tarefa; Treinador.

Despite its intuitive appeal, many coaches and athletes are still unclear about the definition and proper use of team building and related activities (Bloom, Stevens, & Wickwire, 2003). It is far more complex than going to dinner with teammates, initiation practices with rookies, or travelling on road trips. Conceptualized as a process intervention, team building has been defined from several different perspectives, including as "a team intervention that enhances team performance by positively effecting team processes or team synergy" (Hardy & Crace, 1997, p. 4). Along the same line, Widmeyer and Ducharme (1997) stated that the objectives of team building are group maintenance (performance) and locomotion (cohesion). Similarly, Stevens (2002) defined team building as "the deliberate process of facilitating the development of an effective and close group" (p. 307). Brawley and Paskevich (1997) defined team building as a method to help a group achieve four objectives: a) satisfy the needs of team members; b) increase team effectiveness; c) improve working conditions; and d) enhance team cohesion. Another approach views team building as a method of assisting a team to promote an increased sense of unity and cohesiveness and enable the team to function more smoothly and effectively (Newman, 1984). Although there have been several definitions advanced by numerous researchers, all these definitions have a common element. That is, team building is defined within the context of sport as a method to facilitate consistent and effectual teamwork through the development of task (i.e., achieving the group's goals) and social (i.e., developing and maintaining social relations) cohesion (Loughead & Hardy, 2006) that is intended to improve individual and/or team outcomes such as performance or an athlete's satisfaction.

In his book detailing the ups and downs of the Los Angeles Lakers' 2003-04 NBA basketball season, coach Phil Jackson (2004) offered insight into the factors he considered important in winning a championship:

> *I still sense a lack of cohesiveness, the oneness every team requires to win a title. There are always signs -- anticipating when a teammate will be beat on defense, trusting someone will be in a designated spot, displaying an unwillingness to lose. So far, I haven't seen any of these, and time is running out. Achieving oneness does not guarantee success, but it greatly increases a team's chances… The team closest to that oneness is usually triumphant (pp. 169-170).*

Beyond this type of comment and many other anecdotal accounts of coaches discussing the importance and value of team cohesion, several researchers have also argued that team unity or cohesion is one of the cornerstones for helping teams achieve a common goal (e.g., Bloom et al., 2003; Pain & Harwood, 2009; Yukelson, 1997). In fact, empirical research has indicated that coaches feel cohesion is directly linked to improvements in team performance and success (Bloom et al., 2003; Carron, Bray, & Eys, 2002). One of the most effective ways for coaches to improve team cohesion is through the implementation of team building activities (Bloom et al., 2003). According to Woodcock and Francis (1994) an effective team building program can lead to the following six outcomes: 1) team leadership being coherent, visionary, and acceptable, 2) team members understanding and accepting their responsibilities and roles, 3) team members dedicating their efforts to the team's goals and objectives, 4) a positive, empowering climate surrounding the team, 5) team members making better use of their time and resources during meetings, and 6) team members being able to identify and correct team weaknesses.

In sport, team building interventions have been utilized in both recreational (Newin, Bloom, & Loughead, 2008; Prapavessis, Carron, & Spink, 1996; Senécal, Loughead, & Bloom, 2008) and elite environments (Bloom & Stevens, 2002; Dunn & Holt, 2004; Pain & Harwood, 2009; Stevens & Bloom, 2003; Voight & Callaghan, 2001) and have generally led to improved team cohesion and team functioning (e.g., intra-team communication). Moreover, research has shown that team building interventions have produced many positive results such as improved performance (e.g., Gould, Guinan, Greenleaf, Medbery, & Peterson, 1999; Pain & Harwood, 2009; Voight & Callaghan, 2001), increased levels of cohesion (e.g., Estabrooks & Carron, 1999; Spink & Carron, 1993), and enhanced interpersonal relationships (e.g., Bloom & Stevens, 2002; Dunn & Holt, 2004; Newin et al., 2008). Furthermore, sport psychology practitioners working with the United States Paralympic program recently suggested that team building sessions devoted to the development of team cohesion were viewed as helpful and effective for athletes with a disability (Moffett, Dieffenbach, & Statler, 2009).

The purpose of this article is to explain the often misunderstood topic of team building. This paper will provide an overview of research about team building in sport and will present strategies to assist sport researchers and practitioners who intend on implementing team building strategies. It will conclude by listing anticipated future trends in this area of applied sport psychology.

Model of Team Building

Given that the goal of team building is to enhance cohesion, Carron and Spink (1993) developed a team building model for sport that focuses on the development of cohesion by manipulating the team's environment, structures, and processes. The conceptual model consists of inputs, throughputs, and outputs. Inputs are the team environment (e.g., making the team feel distinct) and team structure (e.g., establishing team norms and role clarity/acceptance). The team processes (e.g., team goals and sacrifice, enhancing intra-team communication) are the throughputs, and cohesion is the output in the model. The distinct factor refers to strategies that enhance the uniqueness of the group and help athletes develop a sense of "we" (e.g., wearing team clothing). In the team structure category, team norms and roles have been targeted as ways of promoting cohesion by enhancing mutual interdependence and conformity (e.g., having players say their role in front of coaches and teammates). As for the team processes category, individual sacrifices have been suggested as a way to increase cohesion. When individual team members make sacrifices for the team (e.g., blocking shots in ice hockey, which increases chance of injury), their commitment to the team increases, and cohesion is subsequently enhanced.

Research using Carron and Spink's team building model.

The empirical-based evidence for using the Carron and Spink (1993) team building framework is compelling in sport (e.g., Newin et al., 2008; Senécal et al., 2008) and will be explained later in this section. Interestingly, their conceptual model was first utilized in an exercise setting (Carron & Spink, 1993, 1995; Spink & Carron, 1993). Carron and Spink (1993) examined the influence of team building strategies on exerciser satisfaction and perceptions of cohesiveness with university-sponsored aerobic and aqua fitness classes. The authors implemented team building interventions in eight fitness classes while nine other classes were assigned to a control condition and treated as a standard exercise class. Specific intervention strategies to increase team cohesion included posters/slogans for the class, a group t-shirt, group goals to lose weight together, selection of one's own spot for the workout, and the use of partner work. Results revealed exercise participants exposed to team building interventions expressed higher individual attractions to the group-task than individuals in the control condition. Also, exercisers in the team building condition were more satisfied with their fitness class experience than those in the standard exercise class.

Similarly, Spink and Carron (1993) examined the impact of a team building intervention program on exercise adherence. Results revealed members of the team building condition had significantly higher perceptions of the task cohesion dimension of individual attractions to the group-task than did the control group. Moreover, there were significantly fewer drop-outs and late arrivals in the classes with the team building condition. Carron and Spink (1995) also examined how team building influenced perceptions of cohesiveness in small and large exercise classes. Findings revealed the intervention offset the negative effects that increased group size had on cohesion. Specifically, no differences in perceptions of cohesiveness were found between participants in groups of less than 20 participants and participants in groups of more than 40 participants. Recently, Bruner and Spink (2010, 2011) successfully implemented a team building intervention program to a group of exercise participants aged 13-17 years. Exercise leaders created and implemented team building activities with the youth participants. It was found that the team building intervention improved group cohesion, group task satisfaction, and adherence behaviors in this population.

In sport, Newin et al. (2008) created and implemented a season-long team building intervention program for youth ice hockey players. Their team building activities were adopted from a program used by physical education teachers designed to solve intellectual, physical, and emotional problem-solving tasks and challenges while emphasizing elements of fun, cooperation, communication, and adventure (i.e., Glover & Midura, 1992; Midura & Glover, 2005). They assessed coaches' perceptions of the effectiveness of the team building intervention program using a qualitative approach. Among their conclusions, coaches believed athletes enjoyed the team building activities. Further, the coaches believed that the team building program helped to develop and refine life skills, such as working together as a team to accomplish common objectives.

Likewise, coaches felt their own communication and motivational skills improved as a result of their involvement in the team building program. All of the coaches mentioned they would participate in the team building program if it was offered again, even though most were initially anxious about their involvement in it. A related finding emerged from Senécal and colleagues (2008) who used a quantitative methodology to examine high school basketball teams exposed to a team building goal setting intervention. Among their findings it was found that the experimental group held higher perceptions of cohesion than teams receiving no team building strategies.

It should be noted that all of the studies mentioned in this section had one common thread—they used Carron and Spink's (1993) conceptual framework for team building. In the inaugural Coleman Griffith address (a keynote presentation delivered annually at the Association for Applied Sport Psychology), Carron (1993) highlighted the importance of theory, research, and intervention, and argued that these three elements should be equal, complementary, and mutually dependent on one another. As Lewin (1951) noted, "there is nothing so practical as a good theory" (p. 169).

Team Building Approaches

Using the Carron and Spink (1993) team building model as a basis, sport psychology consultants can deliver team building intervention programs using two delivery methods. The first method has been labelled the indirect approach, whereby the sport psychology consultant implements the team building program through the coach and in turn the coach implements the program to the team. The protocol used in the indirect approach is a four-stage process consisting of an introductory stage, a conceptual stage, a practical stage, and an intervention stage (Carron & Spink, 1993). The purpose of the introductory stage is to provide the rationale for the importance of team building along with the benefits derived of a highly cohesive group (Carron et al., 1997). For example, the benefits such as increased task and social interactions, increased communication, enhanced group stability, greater role acceptance, and greater performance can be highlighted (Carron & Spink, 1993). The introductory stage is important given that past research has shown that coaches showed greater motivation towards a team building program if they understood the basis of it (Carron & Spink, 1993). The second stage, the conceptual stage, serves as an opportunity to explain the Carron and Spink team building model. The objective of explaining the model is to help coaches understand the elements that fall into a cohesive group. As for the third stage, the practical stage, the coach becomes an active agent by developing specific strategies with the consultant that could be used in the team building program (Carron & Spink, 1993). In this stage, the main goal is to develop and create specific team building strategies that will enhance aspects of the team structure, team environment, and team processes. Using the strategies developed in the previous step, the fourth step, intervention stage, is when the coaches implement their respective team building programs. The duration of the program can vary across situations and settings where it is implemented (Carron et al., 1997).

The second approach to team building has been labelled the direct approach and has primarily been advocated in sport (Stevens, 2002). The major difference in the direct approach (compared to the indirect approach) is that the sport psychology consultant works directly with athletes in terms of forming a partnership while implementing the team building program (Carron et al., 1997). Yukelson (1997) developed a four stage protocol for implementing the direct approach in sport. The first stage, assessment of the situation, is where the sport psychology consultant gains an understanding of the dynamics surrounding the team. To do so, the sport psychology consultant talks to the coaches, athletes, and support staff to learn about the team. The sport psychology consultant also becomes familiar with the atmosphere surrounding the team and the quality of interpersonal relationships between team members. In the second stage, called education, the sport psychology consultant describes the rationale underlying the team building program by explaining to the team members that the main objective is to "enhance team chemistry [cohesion] while getting everyone to work together toward common goals" (Yukelson, 1997, p. 87). The third stage, brainstorming, is where team members identify areas for team improvement. The following question can be asked by the sport psychology consultant: "What can and what do you want to accomplish this season, and what will it take to get you there?" (Yukelson, 1997, p. 88). From there, an action plan is developed in the fourth stage, and implementation of team building activities occur.

A specific type of direct approach to team building has been called the personal-disclosure mutual-sharing approach (Dunn & Holt, 2004; Holt & Dunn, 2006). In this approach, the consultant facilitates a discussion whereby team members disclose personal stories and information that was unknown to their teammates. The research using this approach has primarily used qualitative methodology. In general, the results have shown that when athletes disclosed personal information with their teammates there was a sense of higher perceptions of cohesion, better communication between teammates, and a higher degree of trust and confidence in self and teammates (Dunn & Holt, 2004; Holt & Dunn, 2006; Pain & Harwood, 2009).

Regardless of the team building method (direct vs. indirect), the objective remains the same: to develop team cohesion. Recently, Martin, Carron, and Burke (2009) completed a meta-analysis examining team building in sport and found that both methods were equally effective in enhancing team cohesion. Advantages to utilizing an indirect approach to team building included reduced time commitment for the sport psychology consultant, particularly when there was a geographical barrier between consultant and the coaching staff. Another advantage of the indirect approach was the consultant has the opportunity to educate and empower the coach directly since this individual will ultimately implement the team building strategies. Advantages of the direct approach to team building included the active attempt to empower team members throughout the process, the ability to purposely shape the team building program to the needs of the team, as well as allowing a trained sport psychology consultant to lead team sessions.

Perhaps, the best approach depends on the situation. For example, a sport psychology consultant may be better suited for team building activities that focus on complex psychological/mental factors, particularly if problems with the coach exist. However, the coach may better implement team building activities which center on physical or social dimensions, of which they are more intimately connected than an outside person. Or perhaps the answer is to follow Loughead and Hardy's (2006) suggestion of adopting a mixed method approach that contains elements from both the indirect and direct approaches to team building, thus making for a more complete and comprehensive method of team building.

Future Directions in Team Building Research

Given that team building research is still in its infancy, there are several avenues for future research based on previous findings. Examining some of these may help future academics and practitioners with their team building research and activities.

One possible area for future team building research is the use of experimental or quasi-experimental designs. To date, some studies have found no increase in perceptions of cohesion after implementing a team building intervention. This does not necessarily mean that the team building interventions were ineffective. It is possible that while cohesion was not enhanced, perhaps it was maintained during the course of the season. The idea of maintaining cohesion levels throughout the season would be consistent with a recent finding from Senécal et al. (2008). In their season-long team building intervention program using team goal setting with female high school basketball teams, the authors randomly assigned teams to either a team goal setting condition or a control condition. Results revealed that levels of cohesion for athletes in the team goal setting condition remained stable, while athletes' perceptions of cohesion in the control condition decreased over the season. Without the use of a quasi-experimental design, Senécal et al. would have concluded that the team building intervention had no influence on cohesion. It is possible that there was a ceiling effect when dealing with some teams in that they already started off with high levels of cohesion. In fact, this might have been what happened with Bloom and Stevens (2002) season-long multidimensional team building intervention with a University equestrian team. Consisting of an intervention that included sessions focusing on role behavior, social support, team leadership, social interaction, and clarification of team goals, the pre- to post-program perceptions of team cohesion were stronger, yet a significant increase in team cohesiveness was not found. It is not known whether the results were attributable to the relatively small sample size (n = 45) or whether cohesion was maintained throughout the season as occurred with Senécal et al. In fact, Brawley and Paskevich (1997) emphasized that team building interventions should be tested in comparison to an equivalent control group (i.e., no team building intervention).

Another area of future research is the use of mixed methods. Typically, team building intervention research has utilized either a quantitative (e.g., Prapavessis et al., 1996; Senécal et al., 2008) or qualitative (e.g., Dunn & Holt, 2004; Newin et al., 2008) methodology. Another approach rarely used that could yield interesting findings is mixed methods. Bloom and Stevens (2002) used a mixed methods approach whereby quantitative aspects included athletes rating of cohesion and the qualitative portion focused on the effects of the team building program as a whole. The findings showed no quantitative increase in cohesion levels, while the qualitative portion of their study revealed "an improvement in team harmony and closeness over the course of the season. In particular, the athletes felt more support from teammates at competitions and that the cliques were disappearing" (p. 6). This type of approach may provide researchers with the opportunity to get a holistic picture on the effectiveness of team building interventions.

A third opportunity for future research is related to the duration of the study. Some studies (e.g., Pargman & De Jesus, 1987) have assessed the effects of team building on perceptions of cohesion over a relatively short-term period (i.e., less than 8 weeks). For example, Pargman and De Jesus evaluated the effect of a team building intervention using team goal setting on cohesion over the course of a round robin tournament lasting less than a week on male high school intramural basketball teams. In their meta-analysis on team building, Martin et al. (2009) found no effect of team building interventions in studies lasting less than two weeks. However, Martin et al. found positive effects of team building in studies lasting between two and 20 weeks. Given this discrepancy in the number of weeks, it would be worthwhile to examine how long it takes for cohesion to develop in team building settings. Further, it has been suggested that the assessment of team building interventions in sport should require a minimum of a season for any meaningful, enduring changes to be validly assessed (Brawley & Paskevich, 1997).

A fourth area of future research is the examination of the number of team building strategies that have been implemented. On the one hand, several researchers (e.g., Bloom & Stevens, 2002; Carron & Spink, 1993; Prapavessis et al., 1996; Spink & Carron, 1993; Stevens & Bloom, 2003) have concurrently implemented multiple intervention strategies designed to enhance cohesion such as team goal setting, team leadership, team communication, clarification of roles, and social support. Given that the intervention strategies were implemented concurrently, the relative contribution of any one strategy could not be determined. In contrast, some studies have implemented only one team building intervention and assessed its influence on cohesion (e.g., Senécal et al., 2008). Martin et al. (2009) found that the use of several team building interventions concurrently was less effective than interventions focused on only one type of intervention. Future research should examine what is the optimal number of team building strategies that can be implemented at any one time.

A fifth area could be to examine the type of team building activities used. A look at the team building research in both sport and exercise reveals a wide variety of team building activities, goals, and approaches employed. It is difficult to say whether the lack of coherence in team building interventions has affected the outcome. For example, Martin et al. (2009) characterized team building interventions into four different areas: just goal setting, combination of psychological topics, interpersonal relations, and adventure programs. The ideas where the team building activities came from have also varied. For example, Newin and colleagues (2008) adopted the Team Building through Physical Challenges (Glover & Midura, 1992; Midura & Glover, 2005) approach to their intervention study on youth ice hockey teams. Interestingly, this approach had previously been used with high school physical education students. As a result, future research could examine which team building interventions affect various types of outcomes.

To summarize, team building activities have been used in exercise, sport, and physical education environments to increase cohesiveness. Through direct and indirect approaches, sport psychology consultants working with coaches, exercise leaders, and teachers have utilized specific strategies to increase team togetherness for athletes, exercisers, and students. Related outcomes have been increased cohesion, performance, adherence, and self-concepts. Moreover, despite the different settings and strategies, one commonality remains: the value and support of team building activities from those who have been exposed to them. The goal is to one-day reach the same conclusion as Neuman, Edwards, and Raju (1989) in their meta-analysis of over 100 studies in business and industry. Their results indicated that of all the interventions used to improve worker satisfaction, team building was the most effective technique.

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