

## Team cohesion and sport performance

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### Abstract

The sports team is a place where relationships are made and broken, sometimes improving the efficiency of the team, other times are reducing it. The coaches translate this state by several notions namely identity, team spirit, complicity, cooperation or cohesion.... etc. The search for this last notion is, for any trainer, a permanent concern. However, the understanding of the phenomena linked to the cohesion of a sports team, in a given situation, can only be conceived from a systemic perspective. In fact, the individual, the team and the environment are the elements that influence the most; the establishment of a network of interaction of individuals facing any task. The concept of cohesion deals with mechanisms that bring together individuals from the same team to be more effective in given situations. This paper is organized around the study of two types of variables: situational or related to the structure of a team. It is shown that cohesion is an essential process that determines performance in collective sport teams. The leadership approach aims to define the role of certain individuals, known as "leaders", in the collective functioning of teams. In relation to sports, we question how athletes perceive the actions of coaches in team sports (Serpa, 1991) in terms of compatibility or preference (Terry 1984) (Carron 1985). Again, these approaches point to the fact that some situations are more compatible with the coaches 'profiles, depending on the characteristics of the leaders.

## 1. Introduction

Several studies have shown a strong relationship between cohesion and performance. According to (Carron & al. 2002), the team's definition will not be victorious. Moreover, (Carron 1998) defined the cohesion of a team as a dynamic process reflected in the tendency of the members of a team to remain close to each other and to remain united in the pursuit of its Objectives and / or satisfaction of their emotional needs.

Publications in the field of sport science are related to situations, so-called "collective" remains numerous and well situated. The publications find an anchor in social psychology regarding the phenomenon of teams, from which they derive their methods. They are adapted to sport science mainly via concepts such as "cohesion" (Widemeyer and Carron1998), and "leadership" (Chelladurai 1990).

Indeed, it is difficult to weld a team to meet a challenge that requires both surpassing and solidarity, in an unusual context.

### 1.1. Literature Review

#### 1.1.1. Cohesion is indeed essential for collective and individual efficiency:

The concept of cohesion deals with mechanisms that bring together individuals from the same team to be more effective in given situations. This paper is organized around the study of two types of variables: situational or related to the structure of a team. It is shown that cohesion is an essential process that determines performance in collective sport teams.

The leadership approach aims to define the role of certain individuals, known as "leaders", in the collective functioning of teams. In relation to sports, we question how athletes perceive the actions of coaches in team sports (Serpa, 1991) in terms of compatibility or preference. Again, these

approaches point to the fact that some situations are more compatible with the coaches' profiles, depending on the characteristics of the leaders, in a meta-analysis, report 66 studies, of which 92% report a positive relationship between performance and operational cohesion. However, the role of social cohesion seems to be set aside. However, we can ask ourselves if the cohesion is identical according to the level of play. One wonders if there is a difference of cohesion according to the level of play of the teams.

Indeed, in so-called "professional" teams, players and managers come to "do their job" without necessarily feeling the need to develop social relations with their teammates. While at the amateur level, the implicit goal of each member of the team is collective success, that is, cohesion plays an important role in achieving performance.

### **1.1.2. The characteristics of cohesion:**

Carron defines team cohesion as "a dynamic process that is characterized by a team's tendency to stick together and remain united in pursuit of its goals".

Another definition is proposed by (Festinger 1950) who defines cohesion as "the set of forces that act on the members to make them remain within the team".

According to these authors, distinct forces act on members to keep them in the team. The first force is the attractiveness of the team, which refers to an individual's wish to have interpersonal interactions with the other members and the desire to participate in team activities.

The second category of force refers to the benefits that a member can derive from his or her association with the team. This second category of force is called the force of the means control.

The research in this field has revealed two concepts that allow us to grasp the link between cohesion and the behaviour of a team: the distinction

between operational cohesion (phases of task execution) and social cohesion. Cohesion is not limited to emotional and social aspects but also refers to the task.

Operational cohesion and social cohesion are two independent components. Operational cohesion is the degree of collaboration among the members of a team in the pursuit of a specific goal.

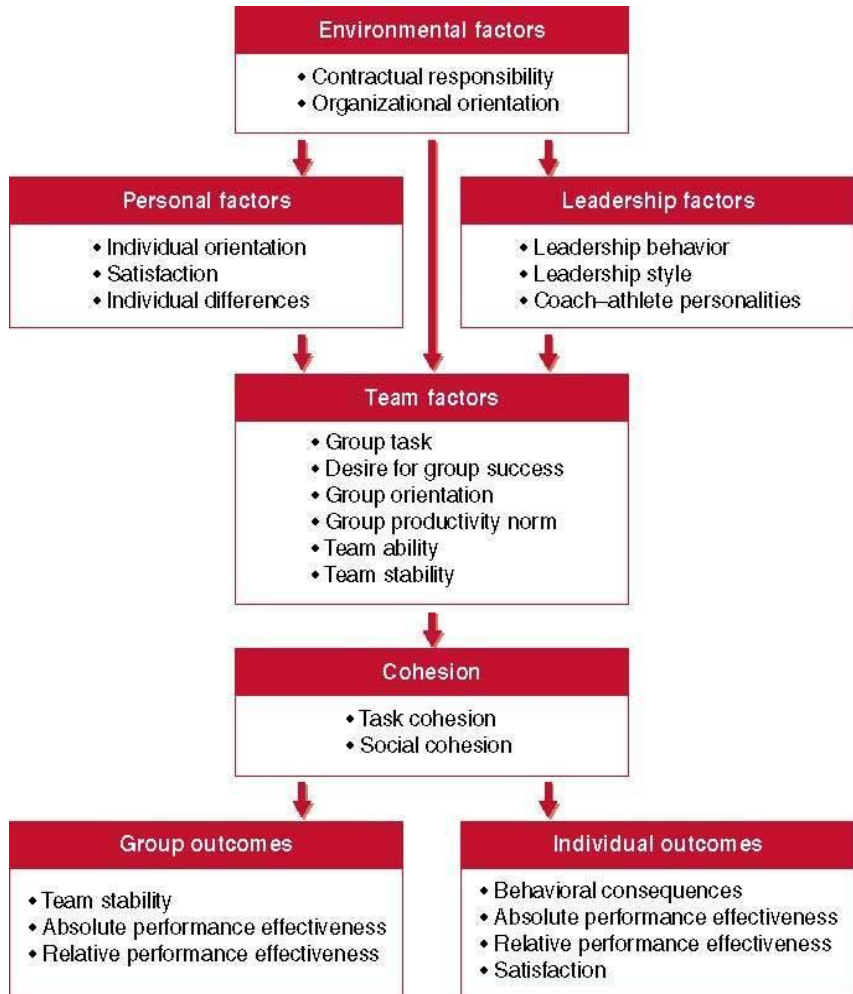
Social cohesion is the degree of attraction among the members of the team and the degree of satisfaction of the members of this team as they evolve together.

These two components are therefore independent, in the sense that the members of a team can strive towards a goal without, there being a strong feelings among the members of the team. The sporting world offers us multiple examples in this sense.

(Carron and Spink 1992) demonstrated that there is a clearer adherence to a physical activity programme when the social cohesion of a team increases.

### **1.1.3. Carron's conceptual model of cohesion of sports teams:**

### the determinants of cohesion



Environmental, personal, team and leadership factors are crucial to the cohesion of a team and cohesion will strongly influence performance.

#### 1.1.4. Cohesion and performance:

The concept of performance is not limited to winning. It encompasses both

positive outcomes and the attainment of set goals. For example, a team may set itself the goal of remaining within the same division, and if achieved, it is considered as a performance. Performance can also be related to the notions of transformation and progression, such as improving topspin in tennis for example.

Research has invariably shown that there is a strong correlation between cohesion and sport performance. This correlation is stronger for operative cohesion. The relationship between cohesion and performance is circular: when cohesion increases sports performance, success reinforces cohesion.

Similarly, sports teams that demonstrate a high level of cohesion, mainly operative cohesion, increase their collective effectiveness (Kozub and McDonnell 2000). However, this cohesion must be homogeneous; that is the whole of the team must be involved and not just the best performers. For example, the cohesion must be strong not only among team members, but also among the substitutes, if the coach wishes to increase his or her team's collective effectiveness.

Thus victory in a competition does not necessarily depend on a constellation of team stars that combine the highest physical, technical, tactical and mental qualities. There are many examples.

For me, I see the team as a complex machine of skills and emotions where it is difficult to evaluate the mechanisms of stagnation and regression. A team works well if there is a consistent share of links, listening, joy of being together, those things that make one transcend naturally. Look at the 2010 Algeria national football team: the links counted more than the skills.

My concern, when I was coach, was always to extract the best relationship potential from a mix of personalities. On the field, there were warriors, artists, strategists.

#### **1.1.5. Cohesion in the sports field:**

Numerous studies conducted on sports show the positive effect of cohesion on performance. Sports teams have a stronger relationship between cohesion and performance than other natural teams (military teams, business teams);

the perception of success or failure is more acute (the results of each team in each pool in each division are disseminated by national or regional media); The sports teams have stronger models of excellence (each tends to reach a higher sporting level) and a feeling of being part of a larger team (membership in a sports team is a major contributor to the social identity of players ).

In addition, the sports sector differs from other areas in that the active participation of members in the formulation of team objectives is not necessarily linked to strong cohesion. The cohesion of a sports team does not depend on the joint development of a team's objectives, which are usually established by the club coach or club president. Thus, in teams, the preferred style of command is the "autocratic" style, where only one person, usually the coach, decides on the choices and behaviours to be followed by the entire team.

We see that the coach's choice is not easy. To summarize, we suggest that among the members of a team, we need a dose of similarity and a dose of difference to get the best cohesion; above all, it is especially important that this approach is accepted and adapted by the coach! Clearly, some coaches design their teams as teams of clones and do not admit any differences. There are many examples: the former coach of the Algerian football team Waid Halilositc did not select a player which refused to obey him, the player refused to be a substitute. The similarity of the members of a team can in turn be influenced by cohesion. The tendency of members of a team to seek a uniformity of opinions, attitudes and commitments within the team is more pronounced in cohesive teams. Thus, those members who deviate in terms of their opinions tend to be more strongly rejected when a team is cohesive.

Similarly, a newcomer provokes the team because he or she risks disturbing the homogeneous balance of the team. Thus, the case of a transparent and resplendent player in one team, following a transfer to another team (or vice versa) is not uncommon. The coach must ensure the integration of the new players by the existing team members as soon as possible. Is it the new

player that takes a year to adapt to the team or does it take a year for the team to accept him or her?

Finally, a distinction between social cohesion and task cohesion (operative) is found in sports. The cohesion-performance relationship observed in collective sports highlights the privileged influence of the task cohesion (operative) without neglecting social cohesion.

## 2.1. Discussion

### **How to develop group cohesion and sport performance:**

Whatever the sector of activity, excellence has become a leitmotiv in which each actor is constantly looking for performance. For many years, excellence has been mainly regarded as an individual process. Nevertheless, behind every individual achievement, every record of an athlete, there is enormous training work carried out with other athletes, technical staff, a manager, etc. Moreover, similarly to the exploits in collective sports, it would be incoherent to consider performance without henceforth focusing on the dominant influence of interpersonal aspects . Thus, in competitive sports, the optimization of team dynamics becomes a major field of activity in the sports psychology sector, as it is recognized as one of the key factors linked to sport excellence.

"A team of champions will never beat a champion team." This maxim illustrates team cohesion , which is then defined as "a dynamic process reflected in the tendency of the team to remain united and bound in the pursuit of its objectives and in meeting the emotional needs of its members"

First, a team can be truly called cohesive if its members take pleasure in working together (social cohesion) and if they work at the same time to achieve a collective goal (operational cohesion). Currently, even though internal management practices tend to evolve within companies, the share of practices devoted to the development of well-being and social relations within a working team is still under-exploited.

Thus, when cohesion occurs, this is often manifested by a rather high operating cohesion through which the members work for the development



of their company or club, whereas they carry out this work in a bland or anxiogenic atmosphere when the collaborators do not like to be together. It will be understood that this profile of interpersonal dynamics is not conducive to long-term corporate performance. The second element that a manager must be aware of is that team cohesion fluctuates over time as various factors increase or decrease its level. Regarding the knowledge of this second element, the managers must then become aware that "nothing is acquired, and everything can still be done".

## 2. Conclusion

However, how? What are these well-known factors of influence?

1. Improve the relationship between coach and athlete: The leadership style of the manager has been recognized for many years as a major source of influence on the functioning of a team, regardless of the field of intervention, a sport or a company. There are three key factors of leadership that promote team cohesion: valorisation, autonomy and partage (V.A.P.) Thus, a manager will largely develop cohesion and productivity in his or her team if he or she leaves a margin of initiative and responsibility to his or her employees; if he or she not only values their results, but also their investment and their state of mind; if he or she remains accessible and open to communication ;and if he or she involves his or her collaborators in certain choices that he or she may have to make.

2. Carrying out collective values it will be difficult to envisage a team as cohesive if it has no common connection. Thus, if the values of the company are generally imposed by the context, it is first and foremost necessary that a manager conveys and shares his or her own values, those in which he or she believes, with all the members of his team. The task will be for each member to share these values, finds him or herself there, and flourish through them. This will make it possible to reinforce the homogeneity of the team through knowledge of what it stands for and thereby strengthen its cohesion.

3. Sharing a common goal: One of the fundamental aspects of team cohesion is the pursuit of a collective goal. Although this can be a variable that is "easily" accessible in collective sport, it becomes much more difficult in the world of a company. The primary motivation of everyone is the basic needs that naturally translate to the professional world through the search for wages. However, although these needs remain an indispensable lever of attractiveness and rewards, the fact remains that remuneration does not guarantee an optimal individual investment. Thus, one of the solutions will be to add the strength of the team to the pecuniary rewards to induce in each employee a moral investment encouraging him or her to adopt individual behaviours that are in line with the objective of the team.

In this sense, some high-level coaches in collective sport do not hesitate to engage in what is called a "sharing of objectives" , in which a discussion is held within the team to determine together the collective objectives (hence the notion of sharing ) and the means to achieve it. Too often, in the corporate world, the manager will have a tendency to impose individual objectives, to the detriment of sharing the objective with all members of the working team. This method in turn involves fundamentally individualistic or even self-oriented strategies on the part of the employees, in a total denial of real collaboration and mutual assistance, and sometimes even of professional deontology

4. Ensuring the working environment: Although the sports world has fully understood the importance of the working environment, too often, entrepreneurial logic hardly combines work and productivity. Thus, as mentioned , the working atmosphere is particularly reflected in the well-being of the members of a group and their social relations.

Finally, it can be concluded that performance is closely tied to the atmosphere or climate that reigns within a group, which is created by the interactions of the coach/trainer with the group members and by fulfilling the different needs of the members of the group.

Thus, the group can be considered as a the space for fulfilling of the

different social, emotional and material needs of individuals. In my opinion, the task of managers and coaches consists of identifying and categorizing the individuals' needs in the first place. The second task, managers and ensure that, the fulfillment of the needs of each member, which can only be achieved by fulfilling the needs of the other members of the same group. Therefore, the main task of the coach or manager is to create interdependence between individuals, their needs, and their objectives.

### **3. Recommendations:**

The recommendations we can mention relate to the following directions:

1. Encourage coaches to develop specific strategies (individual or collective) to reinforce the team's cohesion.
2. Ask the players before the competition to explain to their teammates their roles in the team to be sure that they have assimilated the coach's strategy.
3. Set up, after each match, the difficulties encountered by each player.
4. Know the needs, expectations and objectives of each player to be able to set up a communication strategy by the coach during his interaction.
5. Return to the multidimensional nature of cohesion and performance as well as related tools.
6. Examine the possibility of dynamic and complex relationships between their different components, which implies adopting longitudinal protocols.
7. Consider various variables identified by the literature as possible mediators of the cohesion-performance relationship, including understanding of complex relationships, to allow coaches to consider a more effective practical intervention.

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