

Effective Basketball Leadership and its link to Team's Success.

Abstract

This study investigates the impact of Effective Basketball Leadership (split into two halves: Coach Leadership and Player Leadership) on a team's outcomes, particularly their success rate measured by their Win:Loss ratio, while also examining mediating variables of team chemistry and positive athlete perceptions. The purpose of this study is to identify if the skills, behaviors, and traits of basketball leaders influence the Win:Loss ratio teams. This comparative research study was conducted through a qualitative closed-response survey on NCAA Basketball Teams, all of whom made the conference championship game, to measure effective coach leadership, effective player leadership, team chemistry, and perceptions.

Introduction

Legendary Champion Head Coach Mike Krzyzewski on being a leader: "I get a group of people who are talented to commit to excellence and to work together as one. That's where it starts. Different talents, same commitment."

What is a team? What makes a team successful? What is the difference between winning teams and losing teams? Peter G Northouse defines a team as a group of interdependent individuals coordinating efforts together toward a shared goal (Northouse, 2015). Previous literature has revealed that certain factors are important respective to what makes a successful or efficient team. Google scholars did a two-year study

investigating the question of what makes an effective team respective to their workplace and identified 5 elements of successful teams: psychological safety, dependability, structure and clarity, and meaning (google.com). In a literature review done by researchers at Edith Cowan University, 6 factors of successful teamwork were identified: commitment to team success and shared goals, interdependence, interpersonal skills, open communication, and positive feedback, appropriate team composition, and commitment to team processes, leadership, and accountability (Tarricone and Luca 2002).

Using previous literature and years of basketball experiences, this study defines the most essential factors for a winning basketball team, assuming sufficient athletic giftedness, sport training, knowledge, and drive are:

- I. Adequate talent, and the proper usage of talent
- II. Clearly defined vision
- III. Team chemistry
- IV. Positive athlete perceptions
- V. Effective basketball leadership

While I believe all the factors that have been identified play an integral role in the determination of the outcomes of a team for a given season, effective leadership is the single most important variable. As shown through the literature, many of the other variables are able to be swayed one way or the other by this single variable of leadership. Furthermore, through experiences and observations by the researcher, it has been

deducted that leadership influences winning because a team's performance typically mirrors the effectiveness of the coach and player leader. There typically is a gaping hole in the success of a team when leadership is lacking. Winning starts from the core and leadership is that core. In basketball, this leadership is that of the coach and the athlete leader, often times this athlete is deemed to be the "captain."

In the following pages, this paper will investigate the theory that effective basketball leadership, which is defined for the purposes of this study as the union of effective coach leadership and effective player leadership (see Figure 1), increases the team outcomes of team chemistry and positive perceptions which then increases the success of a team measured by games won given sufficient talent is on the team.

Terminology and Background

This paper uses a widely accepted definition of coaching effectiveness: "the extent to which coaches can implement their knowledge and skills to positively affect the learning and performance of their athletes." (Kavussanu et al 2008). Furthermore, effective coaching is defined as "the ability to apply and align coaching expertise to particular athletes and situations in order to maximize athlete learning outcomes." (Cote and Gilbert 2009).

Another term that will be used throughout the study is "efficacy" and its different forms. Efficacy concerns belief. Bandura uses the following as an example: "people do not judge that they will drown if they jump in deep water and then infer that they must be poor swimmers. Rather, people who judge themselves to be poor swimmers will visualize

themselves drowning if they jump in deep water.” (Bandura 1997) This theory simply explains how belief or perceptions has an influence on outcomes. Self-efficacy or personal efficacy is one’s belief in his or her own ability to succeed at a given task or in a situation. Coach efficacy is simply the coaching version of this same theory; it is “the extent to which coaches believe they have the capacity to affect the learning and performance of their athletes.” (Feltz et al 1999). Collective efficacy and Team efficacy are two closely related terms that concern the individual team members’ judgment of their team as a whole (Bandura, 1997). Bandura says collective efficacy is the “group’s shared belief in its conjoint capability to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given levels of attainment” (Bandura, 1997).

For this study, I have defined effective basketball leadership as a shared process between effective athlete leaders and effective coach leaders. The terms “athlete leader” and “player leader” can and will be used interchangeably in this paper. Effective coaches use their knowledge, traits, skills, and behaviors to influence athlete and team outcomes on a vertical level and effective player leaders use their traits, skills, and behaviors to influence athlete(teammate) and team outcomes. When the leadership is effective, both the former and the latter influence outcomes in a desirable manner.

Two of the team outcomes that are influenced by effective basketball leadership are team chemistry and positive athlete perceptions. For the purposes of this study team chemistry will be defined as the cohesion, confidence, trust, and shared identification among members of a team. Athlete perceptions are the thoughts, understanding, and

feelings of an athlete about his or her experience with the team respective to the relationships developed, the behaviors of coaches, captains, and teammates, and overall on and off-court experiences with respect to his or her team.

Thus, this study is an investigation of effective basketball leadership. Due to the observations of the researcher of a phenomenon that occurs of leadership making or breaking a team as a unit, as well as the individual athlete's motivation and love for a sport. Leadership, when effective, positively influences team chemistry and athlete perceptions, which in turn influences winning games. This paper theorizes that athletes' positive perceptions/feelings of the team experience have a determining effect on factors like the level of effort, mindfulness, and passion of an athlete. Teammate chemistry will help the amount of communication that you get from athletes and the athlete's willingness to do things that they wouldn't usually do or do not want to do just for the sake of their care for their teammates. The hypothesis that is to be tested is based upon the theory that effective leadership directly helps create a positive experience and a cohesive team and these then will impact the number of wins a team attains. When the leadership, team chemistry, and perceptions suffer, so does the team, regardless of the talent level of the team because the outcomes of these three variables influence the ability of a team to win a game. Thus, the answer to the question of "Why do talented teams lose games?" or "How can similarly talented teams have such different seasons?" is ultimately "Leadership."

Literature Review

I think that in any group activity, whether it be business, sports, or family, there has to be leadership or it won't be successful. – 10x NCAA Championship Coach John Wooden

The impact of leadership on quantifiable measures of the success of sports teams respective to the most easily identifiable and arguably most important goal of playing a sport: winning games, has been greatly overlooked. The literature has identified that the role of coaches is to exert influence on the behaviors of athletes (Horn, 2008). Furthermore, the impact of leadership on team cohesion (Worley et al. 2020; Caperchione et al., 2011), team identification (De Cuyper et al., 2016), athlete outcomes (Cote & Gilbert 2009), and its relationship with athlete perceptions (Atkinson 2016; Kavussanu 2008) has been measured, but there is a lack of research investigating whether or not there is a correlational link between effective leadership and winning.

As stated before a definition of coaching effectiveness that has been established is “*the extent to which coaches can implement their knowledge and skills to positively affect the learning and performance of their athletes*’ (Kavussanu et al, 2008). The sign of an effective coach, however, is that they use their knowledge, skills, and behaviors to develop the 4 C’s of athlete outcomes: Competence, Confidence, Connection, and Character (Cote and Gilbert 2009). A scale was developed by Feltz et al (1999) to measure the extent to which coaches feel they are effective coaches, or in other words, the extent to which they feel they have the capacity to impact the learning and performance outcomes of athletes. This scale is called the Coaching Efficacy Scale. This scale has four areas concerning coaching efficacy: Technique, Game Strategy,

Motivation, and Character Building. Technique efficacy concerns the instructional and diagnostic skill of a coach. Game strategy concerns the ability of a coach to lead a team through specific game situations during competition. Motivation concerns the influence of a coach on the psychological mood and psychological skills of their athletes. Character Building concerns the personal development and positive attitudes towards the sport of their athletes. (Feltz et al 1999).

Literature has suggested that athlete perceptions influence coaching effectiveness (Horn 2008), however, this paper proposes the opposite. The researcher submits that the extent to which a coach can implement their knowledge and skills to have a positive effect, in other words: coaching effectiveness, is based upon that coach's ability to use and display the skills and behaviors of an effective coach respective to the sport of basketball, thus making him or her an effective leader for his or her team.

Basketball Teams

Literature has previously revealed different elements that play integral roles in effective teams. This essay suggests and seeks to explain how effective leadership, ultimately, is the largest facilitator and mechanism in many of these previously identified factors of successful teams, respective particularly to basketball programs.

II. Clearly Defined Vision

Tarricone and Luca (2002) identified that “one of the essential elements of a team is its focus toward a common goal and a clear purpose.” This is an essential theory to be

applied to all sports teams because a clear purpose and goal give athletes a mark to try to press towards. Effective basketball leaders are the facilitators in envisioning and defining the roles and goals with respect to this aspect of team building.

III. Team Chemistry

Team cohesion and reliable interdependence are other factors that are identified as important for teams (Google, Tarricone and Luca, 2002; Kraus et al, 2010; Vincer and Loughhead, 2010; Muthiane et al, 2015; Paris, 2015; Fransen, 2017; Salcinovic et al, 2022; Fransen, 2023). Literature has shown that leader behaviors exert an influence on team cohesion (Caperchione et al, 2011; Worley et al 2020).

IV. Athlete Perceptions

Literature has investigated the relationship between leadership behaviors and athlete satisfaction and perceptions, determining that the behaviors of leaders on sports teams have an influence on the collective efficacy of a team, as well as their satisfaction and perceptions of their experience with their team which then influences team effectiveness. (Atkinson, 2016; Fransen et al, 2017)

Basketball Leadership:

"Bad teams, no one leads. Average teams, coaches lead. But elite teams, players lead." -

P.J. Fleck

Successful basketball teams win games. Effective coaches lead their programs in a way that influences the likelihood of this desired outcome to happen. However, it is

important to note that there is more to effective basketball leadership than just the coach. An integral role in effective basketball leadership is the athlete-leader. As previously mentioned, this study provides a definition of effective basketball leadership as a shared process between effective athlete leaders and effective coach leaders. Literature has extensively explored the coach, however, athlete leadership has been researched more in recent years and it has been identified as an important factor for successful teams.

Coach Leadership:

“I absolutely believe that people, unless coached, never reach their maximum capabilities.” – Bob Nardelli

Roles of a Coach:

Coaches are thought to serve the primary leadership role on a sports team. The most simplified summary of a coach's role is to: 1) develop athletes into better players and people and 2) win games. Coaches fulfill this role by designing practices, offering feedback on mistakes and successes, having a vision for the team, strategizing game plans, encouraging and disciplining athletes, and making adjustments during games, amongst various other micro-tasks. Effective coaches use their skills, knowledge, and behaviors as tools to navigate the fulfillment of their role.

Effective Coaching and Coaching Efficacy

Effective coaches positively influence outcomes of performance, team cohesion, athlete's self-efficacy, collective efficacy, and the athlete's perceptions about the experience amongst other outcomes. In the same way that Albert Bandura explained that people

drown because they believe they cannot and will not be successful at swimming, it is likely that basketball coaches probably will not be successful if they do not believe in their ability to be effective. Effective coaches have high coach efficacy. However, sometimes, ineffective coaches can have high coach efficacy as well. The difference is in the fact that while both effective and ineffective coaches can believe that they can positively influence their athletes, the athletes of effective coaches believe in the effectiveness of their coach as well.

Skills, Traits, Behaviors, and Outcomes of Effective Coach Leadership

“The best leaders are warm and demanding” - NBA Head Coach Brad Stevens

Coaching is ultimately a profession of leading and managing athletes towards desired outcomes and increased expertise. An important perspective for a university-level coach to maintain, though, is that their athletes are individuals, as in human beings, before they are athletes. At the D1 level of basketball, skill is not the leadership problem that needs to be solved, it is instead the question of “How do I get this team of skilled individuals to act as one, maximizing their strengths and minimizing the impact of their weaknesses?”

Effective coaches display a certain set of skills, traits, and behaviors in their coaching practice to influence the outcomes aforementioned in earlier paragraphs by creating an environment where there is a high standard, but also room for mistakes. In Figure 2, some important skills, traits, behaviors, and outcomes of coaching leadership are shown. An essential trait of an effective coach is to be a “warm demander.” A sports psychology blog, using theories from leadership scholar Amy Edmonson, defined a warm

demanders as individuals who create an environment with the winning combination of high standards and high psychological safety; in which, the author writes that the standards of the coach spur on the “need to change and get better,” while the love of the coach provides the safe space to undergo that process. (Basketball is Psychology, 2019).

See Figure 4

Effective coaching allows the athlete to exit the mindset that “I’m listening to you [coach] because you are my head coach and I have to” into the realm of “I’m listening to you because I value and heed your guidance, advice, and suggestions because I trust your coaching.” Effective coaching takes players from the realm of “I’m participating in these practices, workouts, etc. to get finished with it and they are assigned” to the realm of “I am doing these activities to grow, because this is necessary and will help my team achieve our goal, and I can give better effort and make mistakes because it is safe to do so.”

Player Leadership

“On good teams coaches hold players accountable, on great teams players hold players accountable.” — Joe Dumars

Athlete leadership is a fundamental aspect of a successful basketball team. A player leader or athlete leader is defined as ‘an athlete, occupying a formal or informal role within a team, who influences a group of team members to achieve a common goal’ (Loughead et al, 2006). It has also been studied that “a highly gifted player in a key position on a team of an interdependent sport can raise the perceived team efficacy of

mediocre teammates (Bandura 1999), and as stated before, increased efficacy is associated with better team outcomes (Fransen et al., 2012). Studies have revealed that shared leadership is an essential part of effective basketball leadership because it is rare for one leader to be able to fulfill all of the duties necessary for effective basketball leadership (Vincer et al., 2010; Fransen et al., 2012; Fransen et al., 2017; Fransen et al., 2020). It is important to have both vertical, top-down influence and horizontal, equal-level influence. This paper suggests that athlete leaders serve as the bridge between the team of players and the coach and, through their horizontal influence, are unequivocally important to a winning team.

Roles of Player Leaders:

The literature shows that athlete leaders play an integral role in the team environment. Where the Coach offers vision and sets standards, the player leader exemplifies the standard and paves the way in terms of “buy-in” to the coach’s plans for the team. Where the coach upholds the standard through discipline, the player leader offers accountability to teammates.

Skills, Traits, Behaviors, and Outcomes of Effective Coach Leadership:

Athlete leaders, just like coach leaders, often display a distinct set of traits, have special skills, and display certain leadership behaviors that are different from the average team member, and through these areas, they exert influence on their teammates and team outcomes. See Figure 3.

Methodology:

To test the hypothesis of this study that effective basketball leadership directly influences the Win:Loss ratio of a team mediated by team chemistry and positive athlete perceptions, two NCAA D1 Women's basketball teams were used as the sample. [Will put information about average age, race, and how many participants after the surveys have been completed]. Based upon the literature and the hypothesis of this paper, this study sought to measure the following: first, the effectiveness of the coach leadership; second, the effectiveness of player leadership; third, the team chemistry of the two teams; and lastly, the perceptions of the team members about their experience.

In this study, a modified Coaching Efficacy Scale (CES) was used as a means to measure effective coach leadership and effective player leadership. This Scale developed by Feltz uses a 10-point Likert Scale from 0 (*not at all*) to 9 (*extremely*) to measure responses. The questions from this questionnaire were asked like "How effective is your coach in his or her ability to... [x]?" when administered to participating team members(players and staff) about the head coach. The questionnaire for the head coach read like so: "How effective are you in your ability to... [x]?" The questionnaire included all items from Feltz's CES to measure the coach's motivation, game strategy, technique, and character-building skills. The scale was modified by adding 12 items about the behaviors of a coach concerning the realms of team cohesion, psychological safety, vision, communication, and accountability. These statements were rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Examples of items are "My coach upheld the set standard this season", "My coach encourages and arranges team bonding activities...", and "I feel a sense of closeness to my coach."

There was a separate modification used for effective player leadership due to the differing roles that the coach and player leader have. This modification of the CES that this study names The Perceived Effective Basketball Leadership Skills and Behaviors Scale (for Players) involves 26 items about the skills and behaviors of the player leaders on a team. A clarification was made on this section of the questionnaire for the participants. It was cautioned that when thinking about the player leadership of their team, participants should not confine this to just the “captain” of the team, but instead should give responses about any team member(s) that they perceive as a leader. This modified scale involved questions like “To what extent do you consider your team leader to have and show what you personally think are good leadership qualities?”, “How effective is your team leader at holding [you and your] teammates accountable?”, “To what extent do you feel a sense of closeness with your team leader(s)?”, and “To what extent do you consider your team leader to be a role model?”

Thus, the head coach was administered a survey about his or her own effectiveness, the effectiveness of the player leadership, and team chemistry. The coaching staff was administered a survey about the effectiveness of the head coach, the effectiveness of the player leadership, and team chemistry. Lastly, players were administered a survey about the effectiveness of the head coach, the effectiveness of the player leadership, team chemistry, and about their perceptions. All questions were asked respective to the 2022-2023 season.

The survey was given to three entities of each program in an attempt to triangulate responses for better accuracy. This study operates under the rationale that those being led by effective leaders will have a high belief in their leader's abilities.

To measure teammate chemistry, a modified Group Environment Questionnaire (GEQ) was used. This survey was developed by Albert Carron et. al in 1985 as a measure of cohesion in sports teams. All of the original items were used; the modification was that there were 5 questions added by the researcher of this study. The original GEQ includes questions like “Our team is united in trying to reach its performance goals” and “Some of my best friends are on this team.” The modification includes questions like “Using this scale of 1 (“I”) to 10 (“Us”) please rank the feel of your team this season.”

To measure the perception of experience, 4 items were used and athletes were instructed to rate how much they agree or disagree with each one. The questions were: “My experience with this team has been rewarding and worthwhile”, “I enjoy being a part of this team,” “I enjoy being under the leadership of my coach,” and “I enjoy experiencing the influence of the leadership of my team leader(s) or team leader.”

Analysis:

[awaiting survey results for a more complete analysis]

Thus far, the team with a 15:16 Win-Loss Ratio is scoring lower than the team with a 26:7 Win-Loss Ratio with respect to effective basketball leadership. Team chemistry overall has scored lower, however, the perceptions have not been completely consistent. I will be taking polls until April 22nd.

Alternative Explanation

“Talent wins games, but teamwork and intelligence win championships.” –

Michael Jordan

Respective to basketball, it is easy to theorize that what matters most is skill and talent. This study seeks to prove that leadership trumps talent because both of the teams investigated in this study were participants in their respective conference’s championship game. This proves that both teams statistically and respective to talent had what it takes to produce success in terms of on-court basketball play. However, basketball is a game of synergetic effects so what really matters is that the parts of the team operate as one entity. Furthermore, having too much talent is a phenomenon that exists. So, having an excess much talent is good on paper, but the reality is that it could take away from the collective behaviors necessary for successful teams like selflessness, sacrificing individual accomplishments, and accepting the role that the coach gives, even if the player does not agree.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

There are a few limitations that the author of this study has identified. The first of which is the novelty of the modifications, and the lack of statistical support for the modifications. Next, another limitation would be the length of the survey. The survey measures up to four variables, depending on whether the participant is a player or a coach, and due to the extensive nature of the variables, the participants could have experienced responder’s fatigue.

Future research could benefit from more concerning a clear definition of what factors make a *winning* sports team. Much of the research goes into athlete outcomes, or

team outcomes like cohesion or efficacy, but not actual measures and comparisons with the results of the season. Furthermore, respective to leadership, the investigation of the impact of shared leadership in the realm of basketball, or even sports in general has been investigated in a very limited manner. Future researchers could benefit from the use of the Win:Loss ratio in their data analysis because this could provide leadership scholars and coaches everywhere with a better understanding of what practically works.

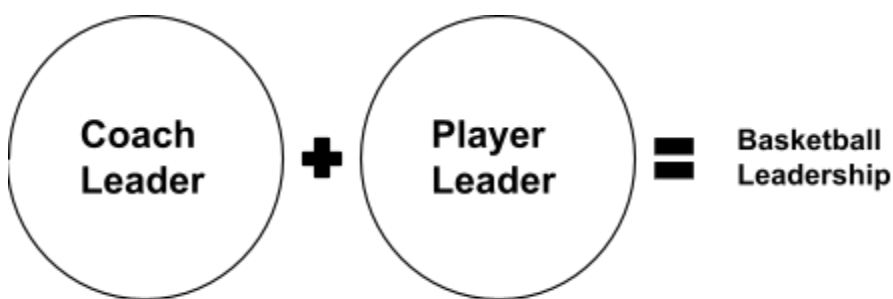


Figure 1

Coach Leadership

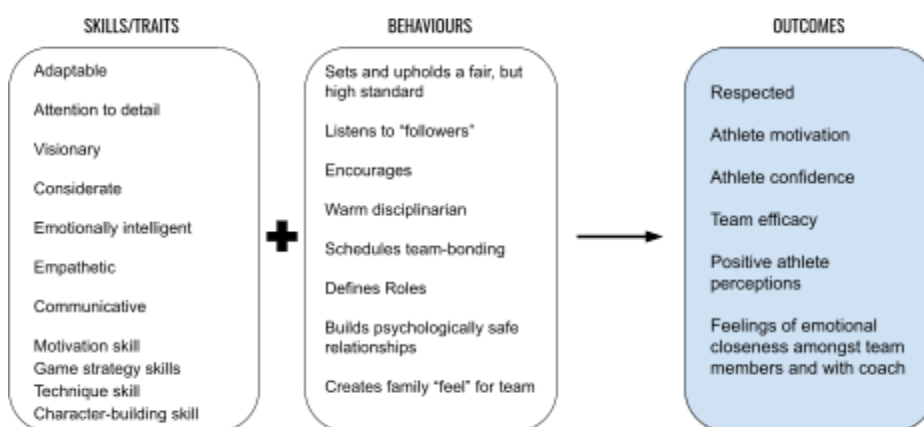


Figure 2

Athlete Leadership

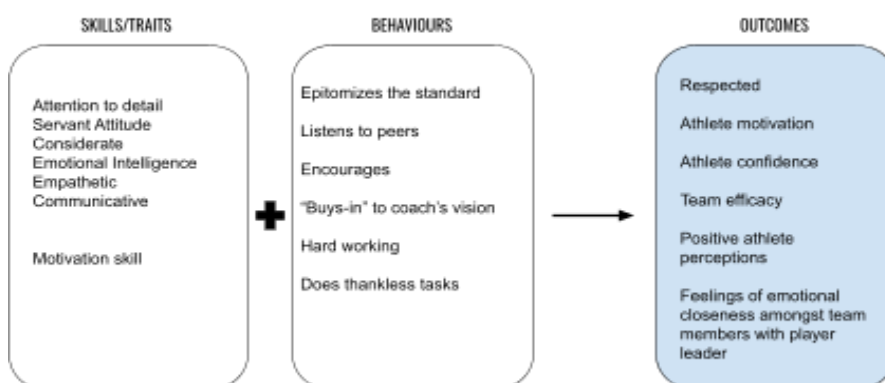


Figure 3

	Low Standards	High Standards
High Psychological Safety	<i>Comfort Zone</i>	<i>Learning & High Performance Zone</i>
Low Psychological Safety	<i>Apathy Zone</i>	<i>Anxiety Zone</i>

Figure 4

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