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An exploratory study of team captains' leadership role during sports competition of universities students-Athletes in Ghana

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Abstract

The study explore student team captain's leadership experiences during sports competition. 37 Universities team captains (23 males & 14 females) were purposively sampled from five sports (soccer, athletics, badminton, tennis & table-tennis). Leadership Practices Inventory of 30 items, with six items loading practice of 5-points Likert-scale rarely (1) – frequently (5) yielded a reliability ($\alpha = 0.74$). Research question and two hypotheses were tested. Mean, standard deviation and Analysis of Variance used at .05 significant level. Results shows that enable others to act with and encourage the heart mean were higher than other practices. Findings reported a significantly higher use of two out of the five leadership practices: Inspire a shared vision $F(1, 35) = 7.499, p < .05$ and challenge the process $F(1, 35) = 4.755, p < .05$, while there was gender significant higher use of four out of the five leadership practices: challenge the process $F(7, 36) = 8.078, p < .05$, Inspire a shared vision $F(7, 36) = 6.289, p < .05$, encourage the heart $F(7, 36) = 5.299, p < .05$ and model the way $F(7, 36) = 4.316, p < .05$, with the male reported a higher mean than female counterpart. The needs to help individual develop a philosophy that places importance on developing captains as leaders.

Keywords: Gender, leadership practices, athletic environment, Team captain

1. Introduction

Society today collectively believes that acquiring leadership skills is the key to self-improvement as well as employability. Leadership has become perhaps the most talk about issues in organization and business, heralded as both the cause of and solution to most of the problem facing contemporary society [2]. It is a concept that allows for both horizontal and vertical applications to human behaviour. Northouse defined leadership as process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal [12].

Individuals at early young stages who exhibit leadership skills are often identified and encouraged to continue on a path that may end in prominent positions. In addition, individuals can apply their leadership skills to a variety of areas at any given point during their lifespan, whether it be parentally, vocationally, recreationally or socially. The study of leadership has been conducted in many different contexts to education, business and sport [20, 12, 2, 15].

The athletic environment has been identified as a naturalistic setting for psychological research, particularly for behavioural assessment [19]. Researchers assert that observing, recording, and analyzing leadership behaviours in a sports setting is advantageous to development [16]. Empirical studies on leadership generally focus on individuals in appointed or elected positions such as teachers, principals, managers, politicians, CEOs, and coaches. Often, the most prominent leader in team sports or sports discipline is the team captain apart from the coach.

Despite its importance, leadership in athletes is only beginning to receive significant empirical attention [18, 17, 3]. Thus, the athlete leader role is unique because the position can be acquired through distinct routes such as appointment, election, or emergence. Thus, it is difficult to state that an athlete leader is the captain of the team as the most skilled athlete on the team, or the athlete that provides the most emotional support. Depending on the team that the athlete is affiliated with, the individual may have been appointed by the coach, been elected by teammates, long serving or oldest member, or emerged during the course of a season into the position of leader.

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These leaders, often referred to as team captains, benefited from the opportunities provided by leading athletic teams. Thus, leadership dimensions include decision making processes, teaching and learning activities used in practice situations, the type and frequency of feedback provided, motivational techniques and relationship strategies [7]

These experiences may offer differing potential for students to learn and practice leadership skills. Dupuis, Martin, and Loughhead; Hall, Forrester and Borsz; Grandzol, Perlis and Draina in their studies of intercollegiate athletics and campus recreational sports found peer leaders in these activities develop leadership skills [3, 6, 5]. Due to differences between organizations and their contexts, there is need for research on specific involvement areas [4, 10].

According to Dupuis, Martin, and Loughhead reported that team captains engage in various behaviours designed to improve team climate, norms, and functioning [3]. They found captains mentored younger team members, structured team activities, served as a communication bridge between coaches and their players, modeled standards, and engaged in other critical leadership behaviours. Further, Loughhead and Hardy found that peer leaders exhibited leadership behaviours that were distinct from their coaches [11]. Their study indicated that team captainship offers opportunities where student athletes can practice leadership skills. Thus, the captain can function as liaison between the coach and the rest of the team [3].

The direct application of leadership behaviours found with one well-known leadership position alone most likely can clarify some elements associated with athlete leader behaviours, such as varying views on leadership across genders and different ethnic groups, but probably cannot completely explicate the athlete leader role. Effective leadership is a concept shown to be important for successful team performance in the fields of business, education, and sport. The present study examine leadership practice of students athlete who take on leadership positions as team captain in varsity sports and whether there were differences based on the gender type of teams the students athlete led during competition.

1.1 Research Question

RQ: What is the leadership practices of team captain during sports competition?

1.2 Hypotheses

The following hypotheses was tested

1. There is no significant difference in the team captains' leadership practices.
2. There is no significant difference in the male and female team captains leadership practices.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Participants

Thirty-seven team captains purposively participate from seven Universities competing in the Ghana Universities Association Games. These captains represented the interdependent varsity sports of soccer, athletics, badminton, table-tennis and tennis. Thirty-seven captains completed the questionnaire for a completion rate of 100%. Of these were 23 male and 14 female team captains. The sample was small, but allowed for correct identification of medium to large effect sizes. The participating institutions unanimously reported they did not offer formal leadership training for their team captains. Demographic characteristics are provided in the results Table 1 below.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of participants

| | Team Captains | |
|--------------|---------------|-------------|
| | Count | Percent (%) |
| Gender | | |
| Male | 24 | 62.2% |
| Female | 13 | 37.8% |
| Age | | |
| 17-20 | 3 | 8.1% |
| 21-24 | 24 | 64.9% |
| 25-28 | 9 | 24.3% |
| 29 and Above | 1 | 2.7% |
| Sports | | |
| Athletics | 10 | 27.0% |
| Badminton | 7 | 18.9% |
| Soccer | 10 | 27.0% |
| Table-tennis | 5 | 13.5% |
| Tennis | 5 | 13.5% |

2.2 Instrument

The Leadership Practice Inventory (LPI: Kouzes & Posner, 2005) adopted to collect data and measures broad leadership practices that are transferable to any context, not just sports. The Student LPI consists of 30 behaviour-based items, with six items loading on each practice: (a) model the way, (b) inspire a shared vision, (c) challenge the process, (d) enable others to act, and (e) encourage the heart. Respondents indicate their frequency of a specific behaviour on a 5-point scale ranging from "rarely" to "frequently." The inventory's directions are self-explanatory. Scores were derived for the leadership practices by summing the scores for the six items within the particular dimension, yielding a score from 6 to 30. Higher scores represent more frequent use of the specific leadership practice. The internal reliability scores for the five practices obtained are between .72 and .80.

2.3 Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Team captains voluntarily participated by completing the LPI. Team coaches collected the data by distributing the instruments, confidentiality statements, and demographic questionnaires. Coaches may have influenced the captain responses to the survey, but the effect would have been minimal. They only handed out the surveys. Participating captains completed the surveys at their own time and returned their instruments to a repository without their coach's purview. Data collected were analysed using a one way Analysis of Variance to determine whether there was a mean differences among groups for the five leadership practices test at .05 significant level.

3. Results

Descriptive statistics were calculated for team captains on the five leadership practices measured by the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI). Table 2 presents the group means and standard deviations (on a 30-point scale) for each leadership practice of team captains and table 3 summarizes the results of statistical analyses using the one way Analysis of Variance. Table 4 presents the group means and standard deviations (on a 30-point scale) based on gender (male & female) for each leadership practice of team captains. Table 5 summarizes the results of the statistical analyses using the one way- ANOVA.

3.1 Research Question 1: What is the team captains' leadership practices during sports competition?

Table 2: Group Means and Standard Deviations of Participants

| Leadership Practices | N | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|------------------------|----|---------|----------------|
| Model the Way | 37 | 24.2162 | 3.38407 |
| Inspire a Share Vision | 37 | 23.7838 | 3.22434 |
| Challenge the Process | 37 | 23.6757 | 3.34211 |
| Enable Others to Act | 37 | 26.8108 | 1.99775 |
| Encourage the Heart | 37 | 25.6757 | 3.10961 |

Table 2 above shows the results of group means and standard deviation of participants with enable others to act having higher mean of $M = 26.81$, $SD = 1.99$, follow by encourage the heart with $M = 25.67$, $SD = 3.10$, model the way reported $M = 24.21$, $SD = 3.38$, while Inspire a share vision with $M = 23.78$, $SD = 3.22$ and challenge the process with $M = 23.68$, $SD = 3.34$. This results shows that team captains reported higher use of the practices of enable others to act and encourage the heart more than the other practices.

3.2 Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the team captains' leadership practices?

Table 3: Summary of a One Way Analysis of Variance Measures (ANOVA) for the Leadership Practices of team captains.

| | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|-------------------------|----------------|----------------|----|-------------|-------|------|
| Model the Way | Between Groups | 33.314 | 1 | 33.314 | 3.077 | .088 |
| | Within Groups | 378.957 | 35 | 10.827 | | |
| | Total | 412.270 | 36 | | | |
| Inspire a Shared Vision | Between Groups | 66.037 | 1 | 66.037 | 7.499 | .010 |
| | Within Groups | 308.233 | 35 | 8.807 | | |
| | Total | 374.270 | 36 | | | |
| Challenge the Process | Between Groups | 48.099 | 1 | 48.099 | 4.755 | .036 |
| | Within Groups | 354.009 | 35 | 10.115 | | |
| | Total | 402.108 | 36 | | | |
| Enable Others to Act | Between Groups | 12.312 | 1 | 12.312 | 3.280 | .079 |
| | Within Groups | 131.363 | 35 | 3.753 | | |
| | Total | 143.675 | 36 | | | |
| Encourage the Heart | Between Groups | 8.223 | 1 | 8.223 | .847 | .364 |
| | Within Groups | 339.885 | 35 | 9.711 | | |
| | Total | 348.108 | 36 | | | |

$P < .05$

The table 4b results above reported that a significantly higher use two out of the five leadership practices: Inspire a shared vision $F(1, 35) = 7.499$, $p < .05$ and challenge the process $F(1, 35) = 4.755$, $p < .05$. This practice may be more applicable to a team sport environment where team success rest upon effective interaction among members. Challenge the process encourages leaders to take risks and challenge the status quo. This practice may be more applicable to a team sport environment where team success rest upon effective interaction among members. Challenge the process encourages leaders to take risks and challenge the status quo. Due to the necessity of interaction, perhaps team leaders seek innovative ways to improve the team more often to enable the team's succeed. No differences were found among team captains on model the way, enable others to act, or encourage the heart.

3.3 Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in the leadership practices of male and female team captains during sports competition?

Table 4a: Group Means and Standard Deviations of Male and Female Team Captains

| | Leadership Practices | N | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|------------------------|----------------------|----|-------|----------------|
| Model the Way | Male | 23 | 24.96 | 3.23 |
| | Female | 14 | 23.00 | 3.40 |
| | Total | 37 | 24.21 | 3.38 |
| Inspire a Share Vision | Male | 23 | 24.82 | 2.84 |
| | Female | 14 | 22.07 | 3.17 |
| | Total | 37 | 23.78 | 3.22 |
| Challenge the Process | Male | 23 | 24.56 | 2.91 |
| | Female | 14 | 22.21 | 3.60 |
| | Total | 37 | 23.68 | 3.34 |
| Enable Others to Act | Male | 23 | 26.26 | 1.86 |
| | Female | 14 | 25.07 | 2.06 |
| | Total | 37 | 25.81 | 2.00 |
| Encourage the Heart | Male | 23 | 26.04 | 3.36 |
| | Female | 14 | 25.07 | 2.64 |
| | Total | 37 | 25.68 | 3.10 |

Table 4b: Summary of a One Way Analysis of Variance Measures (ANOVA) of Gender for the Leadership Practices of team captains.

| | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|-------------------------|----------------|----------------|----|-------------|-------|------|
| Model the Way | Between Groups | 390.437 | 29 | 13.463 | 4.316 | .026 |
| | Within Groups | 21.833 | 7 | 3.119 | | |
| | Total | 412.270 | 36 | | | |
| Inspire a Shared Vision | Between Groups | 360.437 | 29 | 12.429 | 6.289 | .009 |
| | Within Groups | 13.833 | 7 | 1.976 | | |
| | Total | 374.270 | 36 | | | |
| Challenge the Process | Between Groups | 390.441 | 29 | 13.463 | 8.078 | .004 |
| | Within Groups | 11.667 | 7 | 1.738 | | |
| | Total | 402.108 | 36 | | | |
| Enable Others to Act | Between Groups | 131.509 | 29 | 4.535 | 2.609 | .095 |
| | Within Groups | 12.167 | 7 | 1.738 | | |
| | Total | 143.676 | 36 | | | |
| Encourage the Heart | Between Groups | 332.941 | 29 | 11.481 | 5.299 | .014 |
| | Within Groups | 15.167 | 7 | 2.167 | | |
| | Total | 348.108 | 36 | | | |

$P < .05$

The table results above reported that a significantly higher use of four out of the five leadership practices: challenge the process $F(7, 36) = 8.078, p < .05$, Inspire a shared vision $F(7, 36) = 6.289, p < .05$, encourage the heart $F(7, 36) = 5.299, p < .05$ and model the way $F(7, 36) = 4.316, p < .05$. Thus, there was statistical significant differences found in leadership practices between male and female team captains with the having a higher mean value of model the way $M = 24.96$, inspire a shared vision $M = 24.82$, challenge the process $M = 24.56$ and encourage the heart $M = 26.04$ respectively than the female counterpart.

4. Discussion

The team captains reported significantly higher use of the practices of inspires a shared vision and challenge the process. The results agrees with Beam *et al.*,^[1] that team members cede more decision making and responsibilities to their leaders. Inspire a shared vision requires leaders to create a vision for their organization and enlist the help of others. The findings consistent with Kouzes and Posner^[8] that regardless of task dependence, captains reported similar frequency of actions such as role-modeling desired behaviours, building trust, empowering followers, and celebrating contributions. Thus, the finding partially in contrast to previous studies such as Beam *et al.*^[1] which found higher preferences for behaviours such as positive feedback by sport student-athletes. However, their study utilized a different instrument and measured preferences for coaching behaviours, while this study measured team captain leadership behaviours; it did not gauge whether team members equally desired the behaviours.

The key findings of this study was team captains' usage of all five leadership practices during the sports competition. This support past investigations that found peer leaders in sports develop leadership skills^[3, 6, 5]. It reaffirms the potential for the captain position to enhance student-athletes' leadership skills. There was statistical significant differences found in leadership practices between male and female team captains in four out of the five leadership practices. The results did not agrees with Posner^[14] that found that demographic variables such as gender were not a source of difference. This finding increases the chances captain experience is the sources of observed differences. Thus, has implications for leadership educators. It demonstrated that students can learn to become better leaders through practicing leadership^[13]. This shows that students involved in sports peer role increased the use of the various leadership practices, regardless of the type of team, despite not enrolled in a formal leadership course and not partake in a formal reflection process. Thus, helps the leadership experience of being a team captain, with a formal course process would lead to greater gains in leadership skills. The findings of this study must be viewed in light of its limitations, since it was exploratory, based on a small sample, and only one sports competition of the mini-Universities games. Researchers should consider larger sample sizes and include other competition levels.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Sports leadership and the potential benefits of doing leadership are important considerations for leadership educators, but little research has addressed the leadership of team captains. Findings from this study indicate that student-athletes serving as team captains develop leadership skills. Sports team captains reported higher use of two leadership practices (inspired a shared vision & challenge the process), which may indicate a greater leadership challenge in team sports. Further

investigations are needed for more understanding of team captain leadership practice, and the unique contributions that practical leadership experiences offer students-athletes taken such position without formal education.

5.1 Recommendations

Based on the outcomes of this study the following recommendations are made:

1. Help individual captain to develop a philosophy that places importance on developing as leaders.
2. Assist in cultivating youth leadership in captains and learn to lead.
3. Educate and discuss what leadership involves in general as role model, fostering acceptance of team goals, and treating teammates as individual uniquely valuable contributors.
4. Explain to captains their roles and duties involve, and the approach that will be taken when working in such position.
5. Discuss with captains how the leadership skills they learn can transfer beyond sport.

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