

The Effects of Leadership Styles in Sports

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Abstract

This paper will discuss several different leadership styles in connection to organizational theories, and examples of each that can be found throughout leadership cases in sport. Although opinions differ on some of the aforementioned definitions and theories, most of the formal definitions of leadership styles and organizational theories are widely regarded and agreed upon by scholars and psychologists in the field of organizational leadership. Most of the research contains information from *Organizational Behavior in Education*, written by Robert G. Owens and Thomas C. Valesky.

Leadership is something that has been prevalent in society for as long as humans have kept written record. The Romans had emperors, the Ancient Greeks had gods and those who they felt possessed godly powers on earth, and the British still to this day have the Monarchy.

Leadership is “exercised when persons with certain purposes mobilize, in competition or in conflict with others, institutional, political, psychological and other resources so as to arouse and satisfy the motives of the followers” (Burns, 1978). In addition, scholars on the subject all agree on two central characteristics that define leadership:

1. Leadership is a group function: it occurs only when two or more people interact.
2. Leaders intentionally seek to influence the behavior of other people (Owens, Valesky, 2007).

In sport, there is one central goal; to win. Conflict evolves naturally, as the opposing team’s aim is also to win. Therefore, one can see that it is necessary for sports teams to have leadership, as the players are interacting with one another and working toward a common goal. All sports teams have leadership, but the leadership style varies greatly throughout team, sport, and region. Leadership styles, in combination with internal and external factors, play a big role in the outcomes, traditions, and legacies of a sports team.

In order to discuss how leadership affects team sports, one must first understand the different leadership styles. *Adaptive* leadership is best described by the leader’s ability to identify and deal with change. Adaptive leaders use techniques that are different from what most people would deem as ‘normal’. The Bureaucratic View of Leadership suggests that bureaucratic leaders can help followers in times of need, but do not allow their followers to learn and grow in way that will make them better able to problem solve on their own. Unlike bureaucratic leaders, *Transforming Leadership* suggests that “leaders work with followers in ways that change both

leaders and followers so that over time they perform at increasingly higher levels of functioning than they achieved initially”. Transactional Leadership is defined by quid pro quo mentality, where leaders are always looking to gain something tangible in return for their services. Robert G. Owens writes, “moral leadership emerges from and always to the fundamental wants, needs, and aspirations of the followers”. (Owens, Valesky, 2007).

Jock Stein

One example of Bureaucratic Leadership in sport is Glasgow Celtic Manager Jock Stein. Stein managed the team from 1960-1972. As a boy, he grew up dreaming of playing for his boyhood heroes, Glasgow Celtic. Jock accomplished that goal in 1956, but sadly had his playing career cut short due to injury. The club decided to help keep him around, and gave him a start in his coaching career. He became the manager of the reserve squad in 1958, and it quickly became apparent that he had a knack for the job. He was recruited by Dunfermline Football Club in 1960 and managed the team for several years, before being offered the head coach position at Glasgow Celtic.

At the time of Stein’s start, Celtic had established a rich history. Since the club’s creation in 1888, the organization had won many league titles and raised a lot of money for the Irish immigrants living in Glasgow. This was the reason the club was formed in the first place. Edgar Schein, Psychologist and notable mark in the field of organizational development, indicates that three main internal factors affect the formation and development of organizational culture: organizational, management, and personnel factors. Stein changed many elements of all three of these factors without hesitation, including: strategy, goals and values, creation of creative

atmosphere, innovation policies, rapid growth, and increase in company's revenue (Schein, 1991).

Jock loved the club as it was, but knew it could do more. He came in with new ideas, training ground expectations and decided to change the entire face of the club. At the time he was met with some resistance. The club had been very successful, so many did not understand why he would make such drastic changes. Jock saw a club that had done very well but had huge room to grow and despite the resistance set about to accomplish that. His followers (the players) were expected to follow his lead, even if it would mean a tough transition. The team was asked to give up some things that had become a part of their rituals and routines, in exchange for other things that Stein believed would make the club better and stronger.

Stein wrote an autobiography titled, "Mr. Stein". The book gave a detailed account of his life, his thoughts, and the things that drove him to be the most successful coach in the club's 130-year history. From 1962-1971 Jock and Celtic Football club won nine consecutive league titles in a row; a record that continues to be the most consecutive number of league titles won by any professional soccer club. He also became the first British coach to win the European Cup, which is the most prestigious trophy in club football. What is perhaps more impressive, is the fact that he accomplished this feat with 11 players, all of whom stayed within a 15-mile radius of Glasgow and Celtic Football Clubs stadium. This has never been accomplished by any other professional team in any sport. Would the Patriots have won their most recent Super Bowl titles if they could only recruit in New England? Tom Brady certainly would not have been able to help the team out. What about The Chicago bulls if they could only recruit players from Chicago, ruling out Michael Jordan? This just shows the level of play, coaching, and belief that was instilled in the club at this time. As the 1967 Celtic team lined up across from their opponents

Inter Milan from Italy in the final, one of the Celtic players Jimmy Johnstone turned around after looking at the Italian giants standing across from them, with their hair oiled back and their muscular tanned bodies imposing a threatening figure and said to his coach, “Boss, they look like film stars, what are we doing here?”.

Jock Stein replied, “Yeah they do, but can they play?” This may seem like such a simple off the cuff statement, but it immediately put a sense of belief into the Celtic players. Celtic went on to win the game 2-1, in one of the most remarkable sporting achievements of all time. Ever the humble man, Jock credited the victory to the players and to the fans. Jock wrote in his biography that he would never have left Celtic, but he was not considered for position of manager initially because he was not a Catholic. The club owners quickly made an exception after seeing his triumphs at other clubs, and the rest is history. (Crampsey, 1986)

The New Zealand All Blacks

While some leaders in sport choose to make dramatic changes to internal factors, and bring in a totally nuanced form of leadership from what the team has experienced in its history, other programs choose to maintain a certain style of leadership, so as not to upset such rich tradition in which the successes (and failures) have been founded upon. In the book *Legacy*, Author James Kerr, educates readers on the true lengths and depths that the New Zealand Rugby Team have gone, and will continue to go to in order to maintain a culture of excellence. The team is better known by the name “All Blacks”, and are the world's most successful sporting outfit. They are undefeated in over seventy-five percent of their international matches over the last one-hundred years. The All Blacks derive their leadership primarily from their team

captains; not from managers or coaches. This, in combination with their traditions and rituals, makes them an excellent example of moral leadership in sport.

When other teams come to face the New Zealand rugby team they come face-to-face with the 'Haka'. This is a ritual war-like dance that has been going on for generations. It was originally used from one warrior to another in order to start a battle and show respect for, but also try to intimidate the opponent. The natives believe that the Haka takes strength from *Tipuna*, and "summons the ancestors to watch over and protect you". Kerr writes, "It summons them to aid us in our struggle here on earth with the sound of Ngunguru, the low rumble of the earthquake: *'Tis death! Tis death! I May die! I May die! Tis life! Tis life! I may live! I may live!'*".

He then describes how different teams face the Haka in different ways. Some come up to the half field line and stand to watch it. Many try to maintain a stern face; they have no expression, or they try to growl back at the Haka to show they are unafraid. Others do their own chant and try to outdo the New Zealand players. Some teams even ignore the Haka completely, and continue to go about their business and prepare for the upcoming contest.

The Haka is certainly one of the most inspiring, yet terrifying pre-game rituals in all of sport. It builds comradery between the leaders (the team captains), and the followers (the rest of the players). It also allows all members of the team to gain a sense of power and importance. These feelings are not meant to be exclusive to just the team leaders. Everyone plays a key role in the Haka, as it would not be nearly as intimidating if it were only performed by the leaders. It is a prime example of moral leadership, as it shows that there is "a genuine sharing of mutual needs, aspirations, and values". (Owens, Valesky, 2007).

The All Blacks handle their leadership and responsibilities in a manner different from most other teams. They call it “Sweeping the Sheds”. It derives from the actual duty of sweeping the sheds (changing rooms) after practice. This duty is performed by the most senior members of the team, whereas traditionally these types of duties are performed by the newest/youngest players. A few of the All Blacks captains will stay behind when everyone else has left and clean their locker room until it is immaculate. This holds everyone accountable, and the players are very careful about how they treat their locker room because of it.

The New Zealand way of doing things is unique to their organization but the captains take great pride in their organization, they lead by example and love not only their country but their brand of brother that they go to battle with. (Kerr, James, 2013)

The All Blacks Today

Something changed in the climate and what had got them to the dance in the first place slipped from their culture. Hard work and ‘doing more’ than everyone else had been a staple in the All Blacks way of doing things, but this had faded away slowly and the All Blacks now produced under par performances and won games mainly because of their talent and not their work ethic.

Bo Schembechler

Bo Schembechler is the man who is credited with turning the University of Michigan football program from an average mid conference team to the most winningest program in College Football. Schembechler, prides himself in being a blue collar hard working man. He takes his coffee black and he always wants to do the right thing. Schembechler enjoyed a fast rise

in the coaching ranks, going from Presbyterian to Bowling Green before in 1956 landing as an assistant on the Northwestern staff. From there he would be an assistant at Ohio State which over a 5-year period he would learn what it takes to be a head coach. He would eventually end up at University of Michigan where his rise to legendary status would begin.

John Bacon best describes the rise of Bo Schembechler:

The Michigan team that Schembechler walked into in 1969 was not the glistening football machine that we have come to know today. Schembechler inherited a program that had gone 51-42-2 overall and 32-34-2 in the Big Ten the 10 previous seasons with exactly one Big Ten title.

Schembechler promised change within five years. He also famously pledged that, “Those who stay will be champions”, and, he delivered. In fact, he over-delivered in his first season, authoring the win that forever changed the Michigan program and put it on an upward trajectory that it still follows to this day: an upset of Ohio State.

In Bo’s book, *Prepare to Lead*, he stresses the importance of a leader’s passion.

Throughout his book he continually talks about how important he feels passion is to a leader and how the players he leads react to that passion. He compares it many times to being a General in the army who leads his troops into battle. Bo’s style is another prime example of Bureaucratic leadership. He rules with a firm, fair hand. His blue collar back ground is full of hard work and doing the right thing and he wants to see that in his own players. With all this being said, he definitely carried a “my way or the highway” mentality.

Bo was also a huge proponent of goal-setting. He encouraged his teams to write out goals for the season; both team and individual goals. The players were required to have their goals with them at all times, serving as a constant reminder of what they were working for.

While he had a lot of endearing qualities, there were some that maybe weren't so admirable as well. Specifically, his approach to treating his players harshly and equally. He was once quoted saying, "I'm going to treat you all the same. Like Dogs!" (p. 31). Many disagree(d) with his 'old school' methods. They were harsh and not for the faint of heart, but there are lessons to be learned from this leader of men, and lessons that served him very well in a successful career spanning 30 years. (Bacon, 2007)

In bringing such drastic change to the University of Michigan, Schembechler began an organizational culture, in which he reinvented and redefined the four subsystems that make up the general system of social action; biological organisms (the players), personality system (team interactions), social system (the team in relation to the University as a whole), and the cultural system (the newfound culture that all future Michigan athletes will now succumb to). (Myhaylyova, Bannikova, 2017)

Conclusions and Future Study

Leadership is something that is often looked over in sport. The research has indicated that many of a team's highs and lows come from influential leaders that they have at the time of their success. Leadership does not always have to come in the way of a coach, it can be an on-the-field leader or even a member of the backroom staff. There are several types of leadership in which players and teams respond to, each slightly different from one another, depending on the internal and external factors present, personalities, and level of team chemistry.

Future studies should focus on which types of leadership styles best allow players to respond in a positive manner more frequently. Future studies should also look at how this differs across countries and cultures. Why do some players need to be yelled at and live in a world of fear in order to perform at their peak? Why, on the other hand, do some players react negatively to that style of leadership and prefer the more encouraging approach in order to feel motivated to perform? These are questions that should be answered through future research.

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