Charismatic, Transformational, and Visionary Dimensions in Sport Leadership

Toward New Paths for the Study of Coach-Athlete Relationships

By A. Rui Gomes, Sara Almeida e Sousa, and José Fernando Cruz

THE 1970s AND 1980s MARKED THE BEGINNING OF NEW APPROACHES to the study of leadership. Such perspectives tried to integrate different principles and assumptions, from the most classic ones, such as the trait personality, to the situational and interactive/integrative approaches (Bryman, 1992; Fiol, 1999; Yukl, 1989). Illustrative of such attempts and the most visible proposals were those of Charismatic Leadership Theory (House, 1977), Theory of Transforming Leadership (Burns, 1978), Charismatic Theory (Conger & Kanungo, 1987, 1998), Full Range of Leadership Model (Bass, 1985, 1998), as well as other authors who developed Visionary Leadership's Theories (see Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Kouzes & Posner, 1987; Sashkin, 1988). The last decades have been dominated by this new "wave," interested in leaders' charismatic and transformational ability and skills on their relationship with coworkers, even when facing extreme crisis situations or highly external competition (Rego, 1998).

Previous research on this subject seems to indicate that these leaders have the ability to achieve exceptional results mainly in the following areas: (1) reformulating beliefs about the organization's values and ideological references; (2) presenting

innovative solutions and strategies to solve significant problems; (3) driving radical changes; (4) involving everyone in the organization's mission; (5) assuming higher levels of confidence and efficiency in work; (6) demonstrating availability to sacrifice personal interests when necessary; and (7) efficacy in critical moments of social pressure or crisis. In addition, organizations managed by charismatic, transformational, or visionary people (according to such theories) seem able to achieve more positive changes in their members and on the final performance, satisfaction, and commitment levels (see Avolio, 1999; Avolio & Bass, 1988; Bass, 1990; Bass & Avolio, 1994, 1999; Brown & Dodd, 1999; Howell & Frost, 1989; Podsakoff et al., 1990; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993; Shea, 1999).

Almost three decades after these approaches' initial formulations, it's possible to point out many studies on several economical and social situations and contexts (e.g., clinical and health organizations, management and business, educational and military). So, it seems reasonable to explore the possibility of transferring and applying these principles to the sports context. In the sport leadership context, the larger conceptual and practical contributions are due to initial research studies with the Multidimensional Model of Leadership (Chelladurai, 1984), the Mediational Model of Leadership (Smoll & Smith, 1984), and the Coaching Model (Côté, Salmela, Trudel, Baria, & Russell, 1995). These proposals and models have made significant contributions in the field of sport psychology, and continue to hold interest today. Nevertheless, they offer only partial and sometimes insufficient relevance to the more recent developments in leadership research, that mainly concentrate on the analysis and study of individuals with an extraordinary ability to guide others, leading them to believe that they have the ability to obtain higher performance levels and to accept new work principles and beliefs (see Bass, 1985; Conger & Kanungo, 1987).

Recently, using the example of American baseball, Hawkins and Tolzin (2002) explored sports activities as a suitable context to develop transformational leaders. The team's day-to-day life is dynamic and constantly changing, so it is not possible to predict exactly what will be the athletes' final results. In that sense, the professionals (e.g., coaches, sports managers) must be able to create working environments where risk and creativity are compensated (e.g., giving autonomy to the athletes) and to demonstrate ability to control eventual performance deficits that may influence other elements, as well as collective efficacy.

Despite all the optimism, when we look at the research published in this area, we find a lack of works in sport contexts. Such a gap seems curious in face of the great enthusiasm shown by the other applied fields' researchers. On the other hand, some of the studies that tried to analyze the prevalence of transformational leadership in sport programs' managers found distinct results: some of them suggest transforma-

tional leadership's importance, while others raise doubts concerning its utility (see Bourner & Weese, 1995; Doherty & Danychuck, 1996; Kent & Chelladurai, 2001; Wallace & Weese, 1995; Zacharatos, Barling, & Kelloway, 2000). That's why it seems important and makes us think that it can be a good question for present and future research.

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Searching for some answers, Yusof (1998) analyzed the relation between the transformational behaviors of Canada's sports managers and coaches' professional satisfaction. He applied the Transformational Leadership Behavior Inventory (TLI) from Podsakoff et al. (1990) and a satisfaction measure developed by Weiss, Dawis, England, and Lofquist (1967; MSQ—Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire). The results positively related the two dimensions: managers with higher transformational leadership values had coaches with higher satisfaction experiences. According to the author, these data suggest that transformational leadership is effective when explaining relationships in sports, and that in sports managers should be encouraged to study transformational leadership.

Doherty (1997) observed the impact of certain sports managers' characteristics on the leadership behaviors they assumed in consulting with coaches. Using the long version of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-5X) developed by Bass and Avolio (1997), Doherty concluded that coaches attributed more transformational leadership characteristics (charisma, inspirational motivation, and individualized consideration) to female managers who were also considered to have lower levels of management-by-exception (passive). This last characteristic was referred as being more common in male managers. Doherty judged these results somewhat surprising: women normally present higher levels of individualized consideration (because they are more perceptive), but here they also scored high on the other transformational leadership subscales, when compared to their male colleagues. The second variable analyzed the importance given to the managers' age: the youngest were also seen as more transformational than those with more work experience. According to Doherty, these data weren't surprising, as it's more natural for younger managers to easily adapt and accept new transformational dimensions established by the suggested model. Finally, higher levels of efficiency and extra effort related to coaches were also granted

to the youngest managers and their female counterparts. In summary, Doherty states that the leaders' academic level (which didn't present statistically significant differences) and their work experience didn't represent relevant aspects when explaining transformational leadership. On the contrary, questions related to gender and age showed effects on the coaches' perceptions concerning their managers' leadership, making believe that not everyone can have a transformational impact on others.

More recently, Zacharatos et al. (2000) tried to understand the transformational leadership effects on young men's development, using the MLQ (5X). In a study of 112 athletes (average age fifteen) in different sports, they assessed the youngsters' perceptions of parents', teams', and athletes' transformational leadership. Then the coaches evaluated each athlete according to the same leadership dimension as well as in other areas related to sporting development in athletic and competitive terms. They drew some interesting conclusions. The fact that young athletes were able to identify transformational behaviors in their parents showed the possibility of perceiving and using this essential variable of Bass's model (1985) at a young age. The athletes were also able to use these behaviors in their relationships with others—i.e., those who evaluated their parents as engaging in frequent transformational actions tended to show the same posture and be evaluated by their coaches accordingly. However, results suggested differential effects between mother and father, as this modeling effect was attributed overall to the father figure. This study's conclusions indicate the relevance of a transformational parent-child relationship, and suggested that this interaction might have a possible positive effect on the behaviors that teenagers engage in in other life contexts.

Despite these encouraging results in applying the transformational model in sport fields, such studies are few when compared to those done in other applied domains. This gap becomes much more significant when we consider the evidence that transformational leaders have on important variables such as effort, satisfaction, and commitment of their coworkers, as well as on the final performance of their organization.

A curious fact is that none of the research summarized above studied transformational leadership through a coach's point of view or "lens." There seems to be a clear preference for the effects produced by the sport managers. While not wishing to ignore the role of coaches, however, we cannot put aside the relevance of coaches as a source of transformational behavior because they are responsible for the athletes' work, representing one of the key elements in sport performance.

Attempting to study this kind of effect, a recent study (Gomes, 2005) with 1,700 Portuguese athletes from different sports and competitive levels provided some evidence for the relevance of the coaches' transformational dimension.

In a first stage, an instrument that evaluated six leadership styles was developed (Multidimensional Leadership Scale for Sports—MLSS). Results distributed around three main domains: charismatic and transformational components (motivation/inspiration and social support), transactional leadership (negative and positive feedback), and decision making and power management (democratic behavior and laissez-faire; see Gomes & Cruz, 2006). The MLSS was then compared with two other measures: (1) the Group Environment Questionnaire (Carron, Widmeyer, & Brawley, 1985; Cruz & Viana, 1993), which evaluates four cohesion dimensions (group integration, task and social; and personal attraction toward the group, task and social); and (2) the Satisfaction Scale (Chelladurai et al., 1988; Cruz & Viana, 1993), which evaluates three main areas (satisfaction with leadership, satisfaction with membership and team performance, and satisfaction with personal performance).

> ## NONE OF THE RESEARCH STUDIED TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP THROUGH A COACH'S POINT OF VIEW OR "LENS."

Using stepwise multiple regression analysis, the results showed that among all coaches' leadership styles, motivation/inspiration was the best predictor of athletes' perception of cohesion and satisfaction levels, with the motivation/inspiration dimension predicting 50 percent of variance associated with satisfaction with leadership. In a second set of analyses, differences in the evaluation of leadership styles and the experience of cohesion and satisfaction were taken into account, considering five variables: (a) gender; (b) competitive level (junior and senior); (c) amount of time working with the current coach (over one year and less than one year); (d) type of sport (interdependent and independent); and (e) winning records (with and without relevant sport results). The study of the interaction effects between all dimensions was made using independent-samples t-test (for winning records and amount of time working with the current coach), as well as Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA's) (for gender differences, maturity level, and type of sport practiced).

In general, the results showed that athletes in individual sports tend to make a more positive evaluation of their coaches' leadership styles (more motivation/inspiration, social support, positive feedback, and democratic behavior and less negative and laissez-faire) and to experience more significant cohesion and satisfaction levels (when compared to athletes in team sports). Concerning gender differences, one of the major findings relates to how athletes perceive coaches' decision-making

styles. While male athletes in both team and individual sports reported similar perceptions of their coaches' willingness to accept feedback, female athletes showed a significant difference by type of sport. Females in individual sports reported that their coaches were very accepting of feedback (scoring even higher on this than male athletes), while female athletes in team sports reported that their coaches were not so accepting of feedback.

When the amount of time working with the present coach was considered, the group having more than one year of experience with a particular coach revealed higher levels in one of the leadership scales (social support) and three cohesion scales (social and task personal attraction toward the group, and social group integration). Finally, the athletes with best sports results with the present coach describe them with more "positive" leadership patterns (higher frequencies on positive feedback, motivation/inspiration, and social support, and lower frequencies on laissez-faire and negative feedback). Also, they showed higher levels of cohesion (in every dimension considered) and satisfaction with the leadership, as well as membership and team performance (Gomes, Cruz, & Sousa, in preparation).

Among other implications, what seems relevant from this study is the need for additional research exploring the application of charismatic and transformational leadership (due to the potential relevance of motivation/inspiration and social support) in order to develop evaluation and intervention methods and strategies with sport coaches. In addition, the study seems to support the idea that charismatic and transformational approaches may be applied in the sport contexts, making it fundamental when studying the coaches' influence on athletes' behaviors. For example, the MLSS's motivation/inspiration dimension has given positive indications on a better understanding of leadership in sports, because it seems to be the variable with most contribution to explain the variances associated with cohesion and satisfaction.

The study of the coach-athlete relationship should take account of recent developments in leadership studies, in particular leaders' influence on workers' ideas and convictions. Individuals able to lead others to better achievement and performance levels (sometimes further than they imagined possible), as well as individuals who inspire others through clear and established principles and goals, cannot be only a unique or exclusive interest and application for business and management. On the contrary, we think that the way competitive sport activities are planned and organized (asking athletes to "try as hard as they can" or "playing to the limits" in order to achieve the established goals) should be a rich ground to develop and promote this kind of leadership. This is also in line with the appeal stated by Chelladurai (1993, 1998) when he suggested the limitation and need for improvement of the multidimensional leadership model for a better understanding of this construct in sport contexts.

This is also in line with another study made by Gomes and Cruz (in press), which used in-depth interviews of high-performance Portuguese coaches in an attempt to understand their perceptions of coach-athlete relationships, as well as their practice and exercise of leadership in sport. Using the qualitative analysis procedures suggested by Côté, Salmela, and Russell (1995), such studies also show evidence for charismatic and transformational models and principles of top level and efficient coaches. More precisely, the analysis identifies common perspectives underlying the work of coaches: (a) functioning as change agents in coping with limitations and adversities in their organizations and teams (assuming a clear transformational role); (b) presenting and specifying what they want from the work group in clear and simple ways (and transmitting a strong belief in what they think to be the best routes to their desired goals); (c) functioning as role models of the ideas and strategies they defend; (d) motivating and inspiring athletes, giving a meaning to each task that must be executed, as well as stimulating group "spirit" and being optimistic in overcoming difficulties; (e) encouraging and valuing positive interactions with team members in competition (emphasizing their skills improvement); (f) being selectively open to team members' participation in the decision-making processes; and (g) focusing on the positive aspects of technical instruction, teaching, and knowledge diffusion, both in competitive and practice situations.

> ## " THE STUDY OF THE COACH-ATHLETE RELATIONSHIP SHOULD TAKE ACCOUNT OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN LEADERSHIP STUDIES, IN PARTICULAR LEADERS' INFLUENCE ON WORKERS' IDEAS AND CONVICTIONS. "

Considering these statements and the dimensions recommended by some authors (Bass, 1998; Bass & Avolio, 1994, 1997; Chelladurai, 1990; Woodman, 1993), we think that future investigation on managers' and coaches' leadership styles should be centered on the following main domains: (1) social support (interest in athletes' personal lives and ability to express feelings); (2) charisma (function as a role model that is admired, respected, and trusted by athletes); (3) inspirational motivation (ability to establish challenging and stimulating goals for athletes and teams and to be enthusiastic and active when defining tasks); (4) intellectual stimulation (ability to question the standard strategies that athletes use in training and competition—the cognitive domain of leadership); and (5) technical influence and teaching competence

(ability to help athletes learn and improve physical, technical, tactical, and psychological competencies). In addition to this transformational role of the coach, two major areas of action and intervention also deserve more attention from future research: (a) decision making, including power management processes (e.g., democratic, autocratic, and laissez-faire behaviors); and (b) communicational or interpersonal coach-athlete strategies and processes (e.g., positive and negative feedback, assertiveness). These domains play key roles in helping researchers better understand how coaches manage and lead athletes and teams.

In summary, based on our research thus far with a large pool of Portuguese athletes, it seems clear that future research should pay particular attention to how charismatic and transformational models can be applied to sports and, particularly, to the roles and functions of coaches. Future research should study the changes that coaches are able to introduce in athletes' ideals and values, as well as in the sport policies and strategies followed by the teams they coach. Attempting to study leadership in sports without attending to these dimensions will handicap efforts to understand interpersonal coach-athlete dynamic processes. Future research efforts, thus, can gain better insights by following the guidelines and principles used in other applied domains and theoretical perspectives. If we consider other important dimensions of coaches' actions and behaviors (e.g., transmitting values and ideals, stimulating the athletes' motivation and creativity), better routes for sport-applied practice and psychological interventions seem evident and fruitful. In addition to developments in scientific inquiry, this approach can be a promising contribution to the recent claim for diversification in the athlete-coach relationship research, by applying "well established theory from other psychological and related disciplines" as well as promoting "more field-based research" (Poczwardowski, Barott, & Jowett, 2006, p. 127).

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