



Women Leadership Development in Sports Participation

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ABSTRACT The question of whether leadership is teachable has received considerable attention in the academic and practitioner arenas. Organized women athletic team participation offers students a different experiential venue that many argue develops leadership. The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between organized sports team participation and leadership skills. Women leadership skill levels were measured for 60 female students. Using ANOVA and correlation analysis we found no systematic association between the number of seasons of sports team participation and the level of any particular leadership skill. The findings caution recruiters and other persons making personnel decisions against using this past behavior as an indicator of these or any other leadership skills. By showing a preference for athletes, recruiters may bypass persons who would be a good fit for a position.

KEYWORDS :**Introduction**

The question of whether leadership is learnable has received considerable attention in the academic and practitioner arenas. Doh (2003) presented the perspectives of several prominent management educators on this topic. He concluded that several aspects of leadership might be enhanced through various learning experiences. Additionally, it was suggested "leadership skills are best acquired as part of a practical, experiential educational program" While most leadership educators are referring to traditional, faculty-led educational programs when discussing leadership skill development, persons from another part of the college campus argue that their programs are also instrumental in leadership development. Organized athletic teams offer the student a different experiential program that many argue develops leadership. Ewing, Gano- Overway, Branta, and Seefeldt (2002) argue that sport contributes to learning the skills and values necessary to succeed in education, in the workforce and throughout life. Dupuis, Bloom, and Loughead (2006) analyzed semi-structured interviews with former university team captains. They concluded that team captain experiences developed interpersonal characteristics, verbal interactions, and task behaviors—all elements of leadership.

Relationship between sports team participation and leadership development, the measures used in many of these studies also may be questioned. Some of the leadership measurement instruments used in those studies focused on leadership within a sports team, and thus may not be generalized to leadership in a different context. The current study examines the relationship between organized sports team participation and leadership skills, employing a valid means of measuring several dimensions of leadership. The study addresses the following research questions.

Q1: Do organized sports team participants differ in their leadership skills from those who did not participate in similar teams?

Q2: Are increasing levels of participation in school-sponsored and college women sports teams associated with increasing levels of leadership skills?

Q3: Does the nature of the sport have an effect on the level of leadership skills developed?

Methods**Participants**

Women leadership skill levels were measured for 60 female students. The Assessment exercises used in this study included the following simulations:

- An in-basket exercise.
- Group discussions.
- Oral presentation exercise.

One advantage of using assessment methods is that it allows for the measurement of a multidimensional array of skills associated with the leadership construct. Nine independent factors (dimensions) were measured in the current study, including (a) planning, (b) analysis, (c) judgment, (d) delegation, (e)

maximizing performance, (f) individual Leadership, (g) teamwork, and (h) communication.

Fundamentals of Leadership Dimension Definitions

Planning and Organizing/Work Management – Establishing a course of action for self and/or others to accomplish a specific goal; planning proper assignments of personnel; appropriate allocation of resources.

Analysis/Problem Assessment – Securing relevant information and identifying key issues and relationships from a base of information; relating and comparing data from different sources; identifying cause-effect relationships.

Judgment/Problem Solving – Committing to an action after developing alternative courses of action that are based on logical assumptions and factual information as well as take into consideration resources, constraints, and organizational values.

Maximizing Performance – Establishing performance goals; coaching performance; providing training; evaluating performance.

Individual Leadership/Influencing – Using appropriate interpersonal styles and methods to inspire and guide individuals (i.e., direct report, peers, and superiors) toward goal achievement; modifying behavior to accommodate tasks, situations, and individuals involved.

Teamwork/Collaboration – Working effectively with team/work group or those outside the formal line of authority (e.g., peers, senior managers) to accomplish organizational goals; taking actions that respect the needs and contributions of others; contributing to and accepting the consensus; subordinating own objectives to the objective of the organization or team.

Communication – Expressing ideas effectively in individual and group situations (includes nonverbal communication); adjusting language or terminology to the characteristics and needs of the audience.

Women Sports Team Participation. Each participant completed a survey requesting the number of seasons played in each of 10 sports on a formal team the high school or college level. In addition, we added that university's "club" and "sports academies" sports to the list and an open-ended question was available for participants to amend the list.

Analysis

We carried out a single variable ANOVA where the dependent variables were the women leadership dimension scores and the grouping variable was team participation. For significant ANOVA, follow-up univariate analyses were carried out. Finally, we examined the correlation between the number of seasons played and the level of women leadership skill for each of the nine leadership dimensions measured.

Results

Table 1 lists the variables' means, standard deviations, and ranges. There is wide variance for all variables, giving us confidence that even though our sample consisted of persons motivated and talented enough to pursue students their current skill level varied considerably.

Table1:Means,Standard Deviations and Rangesfor women Team Participation and Assessment Center Skills Results(N=60)

Variables	Mean	SD	Range
Age(years)	26.9	5.7	21-53
InteractiveSportTeamParticipation			
Total(HighSchoolandCollege)	3.66	4.46	0-15
CoactiveSportTeamParticipation			
Total(HighSchoolandCollege)	2.01	3.00	0-12
AllSportTeamParticipation			
Total(HighSchoolandCollege)	5.67	5.27	0-20
AssessmentCenterSkillDimensions(1=low5=high)	2.28	.79	1- 5
Planning	2.64	.76	1- 4
Analysis	2.26	.66	1- 5
Judgment	1.95	.80	1- 4
Delegation	2.35	.89	1- 5
MaximizingPerformance	2.84	.92	1- 5
IndividualLeadership	2.91	.77	1- 5
TeamworkCommunication	3.48	.62	2- 5

Table2.Mean Leadership Skill Levels for Women Team Participants and Non-Participants

Leadership Dimension	Team Participants		Non-Participants		t
	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.	
Planning	2.24	.76	2.38	.87	-.959
Analysis	2.69	.75	2.51	.80	1.214
Judgment	2.22	.62	2.36	.78	-1.081
Delegation	1.92	.78	2.03	.87	-.709
MaximizePerformance	2.33	.89	2.40	.92	-.350
IndividualLeadership	2.86	.97	2.79	.78	.396
Teamwork	3.02	.69	2.60	.88	2.989**
Communication	3.46	.61	3.51	.63	-.443

Table 2 provides results that related to first research question – Q1: Do sports team participants differ in their leadership skills from non-participants. Sports team participation measured as a dichotomous, categorical variable is defined as those persons who reported one or more seasons of participation. Team participants differed from non-participants in only one skill: teamwork: $F(1,139) = 9.936, p = .003$

Univariate tests confirmed that the only statistically significant differences were again for teamwork. For teamwork, participants' mean score on this dimension was 3.02, while non-participants averaged only 2.60 ($t = 2.989, sig. = .003$). Non-participants scored significantly higher ($t = -1.76, sig. = .08$) While the differences for the other seven dimensions were not statistically significant, it is interesting to note that average scores for non-participants on planning, judgment, delegation, maximizing performance, and communication were higher than the average score for team participants. Subsequent analyses of this data defining participation by varying levels of team experience yielded similar results.

Table3 Correlation Between Number of Seasons Women Sport Participation and Leadership Skill Level (n=60)

Variables	M	SD	Plan	Anal	Judg	D'gat	Perf	IndLe	T.W	Commu
TotalSeasons	5.67	5.27	-.027	-.010	-.021	-.143	-.051	-.006	.129	-.019
TotalInteract	3.66	4.46	.030	.000	-.008	-.117	-.007	-.049	.091	-.031
ive SportsSeaso										
ns										
TotalCoactiv	2.01	3.00	-.090	-.017	-.024	-.072	-.077	.082	.085	.014
eSportsSeaso										
ns										
Basketball	0.86	1.78	-.055	-.037	.066	-.094	-.003	.111	.009	.152
Baseball	0.85	1.83	.072	.040	.040	-.032	.117	-.088	.053	-.156*
/Softball										
Football	0.96	2.11	-.087	-.044	-.033	-.084	-.118	-.056	.079	-.018
Soccer	0.54	1.45	-.033	.000	-.150	.022	-.007	-.094	-.079	-.072
Track/	0.71	1.66	-.028	-.040	-.050	-.033	-.015	.145	.168	.093
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Table 3 lists the correlations between length of team participation and leadership skill levels. This analysis provides information relative to two of the research questions – Q2: Are increasing levels of participation associated with increasing levels of leadership and Q3: Does the nature of the sport affect the skills developed? The only sports individually analyzed were those in which some participation was reported by at least 15% (n = 25) of the study's participants.

The resulting correlations reveal no systematic association between the number of seasons of sports participation and the level of any particular leadership skill. Only increased participation in track/cross country was associated with an increased level of teamwork ($r = .168, p < .05$). Increased participation in baseball and softball was negatively correlated with communication skills ($r = -.156, p < .01$), while increased soccer participation was negatively associated with judgment skills ($r = -.15, p < .01$). Grouping sports into the interactive and coactive categories did not result in increased participation having any statistically significant association with any leadership skill level Summary Few differences exist between sports participants and non-participants regarding The women leadership skills measured in this study. Team participants differed significantly from non-participants in only one skill: teamwork. Sports team participants demonstrated higher teamwork skills. Those who did not participate in school sports demonstrated higher written communications skills. Increased levels of participation are not associated with differing levels of leadership skills. The nature of the sport is not generally associated with skill development.

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