

Transformational Leadership and Sport Commitment: A Study of Iranian High Schools' Football Teams

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between the transformational leadership style of Iranian high school coaches and the sport commitment of Iranian high school football players. This study also examined the effect of age and playing experience on athletes' sport commitment. A total of 270 football players were selected from 31 high school football teams in Iran using the simple random sampling procedure. Instruments of the study were the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) (Avolio & Bass, 1995) and Sport Commitment Model Scale (SCMS) (Scanlan, Carpenter, Schmidt, Simons, & Keeler, 1993). The results of the study indicated that there is a positive and significant relationship between the transformational leadership style of coaches and sport commitment ($r=.419$, $\beta=.478$, ρ value=.001). In addition, the results also showed that there are no significant differences in sport commitment of football players of different ages ($F=1.115$, p value=0.330>0.05) and years of football experience ($F=0.053$, p value=0.948>0.05). Findings of this study suggest that the transformational leadership style is effective in enhancing the sport commitment of Iranian high school football players.

Keywords: Sport commitment, transformational leadership

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years studies on leadership have been carried out in sport settings that refer to the coach as a leader and the athlete as a follower. Coaches can play different roles with different approaches as leaders in their teams. A study conducted by Price (2010,

found that several theories of leadership were used to describe how situational factors, leader-member relations and leader traits signify effective leadership. Beginning with the theory that leaders are born, not made to the contingency theory and the transformational leadership theory, leadership theories have progressed to include countless components related to characteristics of the leader, followers, situation and leader-follower relationship.

The transformational leadership theory accentuates the significance of the leader-follower relationship (Bass, 1985; Bass, 1990; Bass & Avolio, 1993; Bass & Avolio, 1994) making it pertinent to the study of athletic leadership. According to this theory the positive interactions between leaders and followers lead to desirable consequences such as commitment, satisfaction and motivation. This theory does not focus on the characteristics of the leader, followers or situation; rather, it emphasises the development of the relationship between leaders and followers. Therefore, the leader-follower relationship-centred theory finds its strength in the mutual social collaborations of leaders and followers in accomplishing a shared goal (Price, 2010). Transformational leaders try to create motivation, vision and insight in order to increase satisfaction and commitment among their employees (Amorose & Horn, 2000; Chen & Fahr, 2003; Louise & Robert, 2007). The transformational leadership theory is relatively new in sport settings and it has proved to be useful (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Bass (1985) and his colleagues wrote that by altering and influencing followers' beliefs and attitudes, transformational leaders motivate and inspire followers to exceed expectations. According to Bass and Riggio (2006) and Avolio (1999), transformational leadership factors are: (1) idealised influence (attributed), (2) idealised influence (behaviour), (3) inspirational motivation, (4) intellectual stimulation and (5) individualised consideration.

Even though many studies have been conducted in recent years on the transformational leadership theory in different settings such as business, industry, the military and the corporate world (companies), there are very few studies that have examined the transformational and transactional leadership theory in sport (Burton & Peachey, 2009). The limited studies in sport focused on the relationship between transformational and transactional leadership behaviours of sport leaders such as athletic manager, athletic directors and the commitment of subordinates such as coaches (Amorose & Horn, 2000; Kent & Chelladurai, 2001; Javdani, 2002; Chen & Fahr, 2003; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Louise & Robert, 2007; Nikoofar, 2007; Andrew *et al.*, 2010; Hallajy, 2009; Price, 2010). The result of these studies showed transformational leadership behaviours increased subordinates' commitment. However, other studies in sport have obtained conflicting results. Specifically, studies by Pruijn and Boucher (1995), Wallace and Weese (1995), Doherty and Danylchuk (1996) and Javdani (2002) showed that

transformational leadership of superiors had little impact on followers' outcome such as commitment or performance. The inconsistent findings suggest more research is needed to examine the relationship of transformational leadership behaviour on subordinate outcomes such as subordinates' commitment.

Within the context of high school sport in Iran, several authors reported lack of commitment among Iranian high school students in sport participation. Specifically, Hashemi (2010) found out that only 48% of Iranian high school students participated in sport in 2010 as compared to 76% in 2009. The decline in sport participation among Iranian high school students may be due to a lack of sport commitment or the "desire and resolve to continue sport participation in a particular program, specific sport, or sport in general" (Scanlan *et al.*, 1993, p. 6).

Poor leadership has been identified as a possible reason for the decline of sport participation in Iran. For example, Ramezanijad, Hemmatinejad, Mohebbi and Niazi (2010) and Hashemi (2010) suggest the main reasons for the poor results of Iranian national youth teams and national school teams are the coach's leadership role on commitment and satisfaction of players. Noroozi, Koozechian, Ehsani, Feyz and Noroozi (2012) stated that when coaches do not make use of effective leadership styles, they can cause decreased commitment and satisfaction among players. Coaches may invest a lot of money and use different facilities, but if they are not able to satisfy players they cannot expect commitment

from them, thus the result will be a weak team with poor performance (Zardoshtian, 2008).

This study sought to examine the relationship between transformational leadership styles of Iranian coaches and the sport commitment of high school football players. Using high school as the setting since this sport is the most popular sport in Iran (Ramezanijad *et al.*, 2010), this study sought to examine whether Iranian high school coaches who engage in transformational leadership behaviours are able to inspire and empower high school football players to a higher level of commitment than coaches who do not engage in such leadership behaviours.

The following hypotheses were formulated for this study:

H₁: There is no significant relationship between the transformational leadership style of coaches and the sport commitment of high school football players in Iran.

H₂: There is no significant difference in sport commitment of high school football players of different ages in Iran.

H₃: There is no significant difference in sport commitment of high school football players of different football playing experiences in Iran.

METHODOLOGY

The quantitative research approach was adopted for the study. Participants of this study were Iranian high school football

players. The sample of this study was selected from 558 football players who were playing in different Iranian high schools' football select teams (31 teams×18 players=558 players). For determining sample size, the researcher used the Krejcie and Morgan's Table (1975). Based on this table, a total sample size of 234 subjects was determined. The researcher selected 15 provinces through simple random sampling procedure from all 31 Iranian provinces (high school football teams) to increase the confidence level of research results. Finally, participants of this study were 270 (15 teams×18 players=270 players) Iranian high school football players (mean age=17.35 years, standard deviation=0.78.), which was reduced to 255 football players due to missing answers to some of the questions. Therefore, the total number of participants was 255 high school football players who completed all questions in the questionnaire.

The age of the football players ranged from 15 to 20 years (mean age=17.35 years; standard deviation=0.78). The range of football playing experience (year) of football players in the schools' competitions were between 0 (inexperience) to 10 years (mean age=2.66 years; standard deviation=3.04). The age and experience of all participants were categorised. In this regard, the age and

football playing experience of football players were categorised into three groups (Table 2).

The researcher used a standardised back-translation technique (Arbuckle, 2009) to translate the original English version of the two instruments (MLQ and SCMS) into Persian. Then a pilot study was utilised to confirm the capability of the methodological procedure of the research and also to increase the validity and reliability of instrumentations of the study. Results of the pilot study showed that internal consistency of MLQ Rater Form (five transformational subscales) with ranges from 0.80 to 0.89 and SCMS (four subscales) from 0.81 to 0.85 were acceptable.

Statistical Analysis

The main purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between the transformational leadership style of coaches and the sport commitment of Iranian high school football players and to provide a direct model with two variables. The data were analysed using the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using AMOS 18 (Arbuckle, 2009) in order to investigate a model which reflected the purposes of this study. In addition, the one-way ANOVA was used to determine the sport commitment differences in age and football-playing experience category.

TABLE 1
Standardised Regression Weights: Total Direct Model

DV	path	IV	Unstand Estimate	S.E.	Standard Estimate	C.R.	P*
Sport Commitment	<---	Transformational	0.407	0.087	0.415	4.663	0.000

* Significant level at $\alpha < 0.001$

TABLE 2
Football Players' Age and Experience

Experience category	Frequency	Percent	Age category	Frequency	Percent
0-3	178	69.8	15-16	35	13.7
4-6	55	21.6	17-18	213	83.5
7-10	22	8.6	19-20	7	2.7
Total	255	100.0	Total	255	100.0

TABLE 3
Summary of Direct Model Fit
CMIN & GFI

Model	NPAR	CMIN	DF	P	CMIN/DF	RMR	GFI
Default model	19	32.264	26	0.106	1.356	0.026	0.973

Baseline Comparisons & RMSEA

Model	NFI Delta1	RFI rho1	IFI Delta2	TLI rho2	CFI	RMSEA
Default model	0.944	0.922	0.985	0.978	0.985	0.037

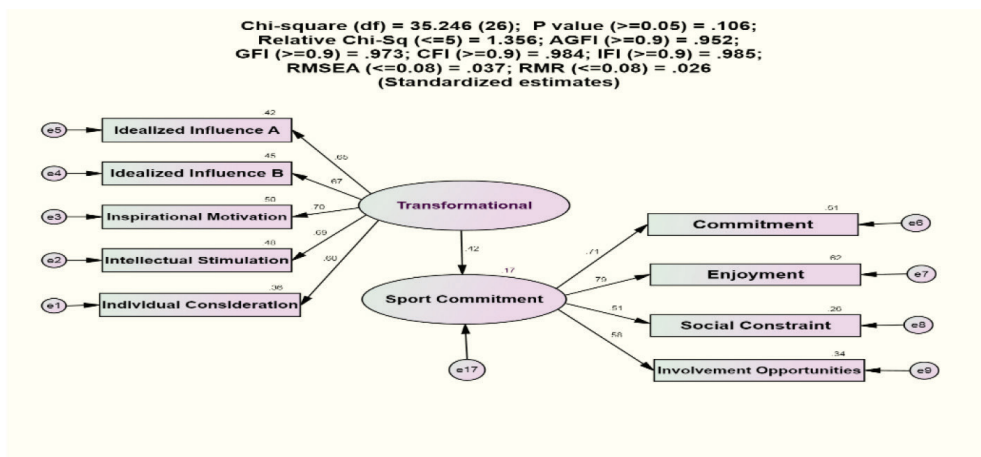


Fig. 1: Direct model

RESULTS

The results in Fig.1 and Table 1 show that the transformational leadership style of coaches significantly contributed towards the prediction sport commitment of high schools' football players (β or Standard Estimate=0.415, B or Unstandardised Estimate=0.407, Standard Error=0.087, Critical Ratio=4.663, $\rho=0.000$). The result based on standard regression weight (β) indicated that when transformational leadership goes up by 1 standard deviation (SD), sport commitment goes up by 0.415 standard deviations. Thus, the first hypothesis was rejected, and it is concluded that there is a significant positive relationship between transformational leadership style of coaches and sport commitment of high school football players in Iran.

Direct Model

Table 3 shows the summary of model fit for direct model. This Table illustrates that the ρ value of the Chi-square test was not statistically significant which would indicate that the data do fit the model well by χ^2 or CMIN (N=255, df=26)=32.264, $\rho=0.106 < 0.05$. Additionally, there are several acceptable indices such as CMIN/DF=1.356 (<3), RMR=0.026(< 0.08), TLI= 0.978(≥ 0.90), IFI=0.985(≥ 0.90), CFI=0.985 (≥ 0.90) and RMSEA=0.037 (< 0.08) that support the model fitting the data. Hence, the fit of this model is adequate.

Based on the direct model, it is estimated that transformational leadership (exogenous variable) as predictor of

sport commitment (endogenous variable) explains about 17% of its variance. In other words, the error variance of sport commitment is approximately 83% of the variance of sport commitment itself. As shown in Fig.1 and Table 2, the direct relationship between the transformational leadership style of coaches and sport commitment was significant ($\beta=0.415$). Based on the result of the SEM using AMOS, the following Standardised Regression Equation can be proposed:

$$H_0: Y = \beta_0 + \hat{e}$$

$$H_A: \hat{Y} = \beta_1 X_1$$

Standardised Regression Equation:

$$\hat{Y} = 0.415X_1 + \hat{e}$$

The one-way ANOVA was used to examine hypotheses 2 and 3. The results showed that there were no significant differences in sport commitment of football players of different ages, $F(2, 252)=1.115$, $p \text{ value}=0.330 > 0.05$. Therefore, the null hypothesis is not rejected (fail to reject H_2 at $\alpha=0.05$). In addition, the results revealed that there were no significant differences in the sport commitment of football players of different football playing experience (three categories), $F(2, 252)=0.053$, $p \text{ value}=0.948 > 0.05$. Therefore, the null hypothesis is not rejected (fail to reject H_3 at $\alpha=0.05$).

DISCUSSION

The findings suggest that the transformational leadership style of coaches would increase sport commitment of Iranian high school football players.

On the basis of the research findings, it can be interpreted that if a coach provided a desired level of transformational behaviour, he would be able to persuade the athlete to resolve or maintain physical activity and sport participation. This result may be due to the abilities of transformational behaviour. Idealised influence (Attributed), idealised influence (Behaviour) and inspirational motivation are three dimensions of transformational leaders that can increase followers' self-confidence, create an excellent vision and strong belief among them for achieving shared goals (Antonakis *et al.*, 2003; Bass, 1997).

By engaging in those behaviours, transformational leaders clearly explain their goals and are able to motivate their followers to get their commitment towards achieving the goals (Bass & Riggio, 2006). In addition, the idealized influence (Behaviour) component of transformational leaders has been reported to be positive in terms of coaches' success in developing emotional ties with their followers. These emotional ties are formed because followers believe that their leader has certain positive characteristics such as perceived power, focus on higher-order values and ideals (Antonakis *et al.*, 2003; Bass, 1997).

Comparing the results of this study with other studies in the literature, it can be concluded that the results are consistent with the proposition of the transformational theory (Bass, 1985; Avolio, 1999; Bass & Riggio, 2006), which suggested that the

transformational behaviour of a leader increases the commitment of his or her followers. The results demonstrated that the transformational leadership style is effective not only in business, industry, the military and education but also in sport settings. Specifically, the results support the proposition by Hallajy (2009) that transformational coaches can effect and predict the sport commitment of handball players.

However, the findings of this study are in contrast to those of Doherty and Danylchuk (1996), who studied the transformational and transactional leadership styles of coaches of athletic departments of universities in Ontario. In their report they indicated that transformational and transactional leadership behaviour of athletic administrators was not related to the commitment of coaches. In addition, Pruijn and Boucher's (1995) findings of Dutch national sport organisations revealed that there was no significant relationship between transformational leadership behaviours and commitment of subordinates.

This study did not find a significant difference between sport commitment and age and also between sport commitment and football playing experience of football players. This may be due to low playing experience. Young players may have less experience than older players. In other words, young, less experienced players may not have sufficient skills and consequently, their individual and

team performance level may decrease. Players that have lower performance and skills than others are less likely to experience success in sport. Therefore, their willingness to continue participating in sport activities may decrease. In addition, sport enjoyment and motivation of players for staying in the team also may decrease. Similar to findings of this study, Lok and Crawford (1999) found that there was no significant relationship between experience and employees' commitment in non-sport settings. This similarity may be due to some correspondence in the concept of organisational commitment and sport commitment such as tendency to work hard and constantly to stay in the organisation.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

From a theoretical point of view, the results of this study reveal the applicability of the transformational leadership theory in sport settings. In other words, the results of the study revealed partial support for the transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1985). In addition, these findings provide evidence that leaders with transformational leadership styles (coaches) tend to influence the commitment of followers (players) (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The results revealed that transformational behaviour is able to predict sport commitment. Therefore, the results of this study not only expand the body of knowledge in sport settings, but also are an effective reason for transformational leadership as a predictor in the sport domain. In other words, the results support several studies that found

a prediction role for the transformational leadership style (Andrew *et al.*, 2010; Hallajy, 2009; Lynn, 2003; Zardoshtian, 2008).

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The results of this study have important implications not only in high school domains, but also in other sport settings such as intercollegiate athletic settings and sport clubs. Practically, the findings of the current study suggest the need for more transformational leaders in school settings and other sport settings. In addition, the results suggest that transformational leadership style can predict sport commitment, thus, coaches can increase sport commitment of the players. Iranian high school coaches who have transformational leadership style would be able to empower high school football players to higher levels of satisfaction and commitment, and hence, higher participation in a particular programme, specific sport or sport in general as stated by Scanlan *et al.* (1993).

Transformational leadership behaviours can be taught (Bass, 1990) through workshops and seminars (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Training football coaches to become transformational leaders should be an important issue for the Sport Department of the Ministry of Education of Iran and the Ministry of sport of Iran. This department should select physical education teachers for coaching positions based on their potential to become transformational leaders. Furthermore, the Football

Federation of Iran is the main facilitator for the teaching of coaches; it should provide lectures, courses and workshops whose primary focus is on following syllabi that include transformational leadership principles with the goal of improving transformational leadership behaviours of coaches. The results will solve the problem that was mentioned earlier by Noroozi *et al.* (2012) who argued that a coach without an effective leadership style can neither increase commitment and satisfaction of players nor enhance the poor performance that was mentioned by Zardoshtian (2008). In addition, the problems of decreased commitment and satisfaction of Iranian high school football players and poor results of high school national teams (Hashemi, 2010) will be solved. Players, having improved their skills and performance by greater participation in training programs and competitions, can achieve better results in competitions.

RECOMMENDATION FOR FUTURE STUDIES

This study recommends the following issues for future investigation:

1. This study focused on five dimensions of transformational leadership style that was developed by Bass and Avolio (1995): Idealised influence (Attributed), idealised influence (Behavioural), inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individual consideration. Future studies could focus on other leadership styles such as the transactional leadership style.
2. The current study included only head coaches. However, we know that athletes are in communication with other coaching staff such as assistant coaches, conditioning coaches and other athletes. These coaches and athletes could probably have an equal and significant role in communication between coach and athletes. Therefore, future studies could focus on the effect of these staff on athlete satisfaction.
3. Future studies could involve other dependent variables such as motivation, self-determining and burn out.
4. Future studies could involve other team sport such as basketball, volleyball, handball etc.
5. Future studies could involve other individual sport such as tennis, table tennis, badminton etc.
6. This study involved male football players; future studies could involve female athletes in different sport.
7. Future studies could examine relationship between leadership behaviours and organisational citizenship behaviour.

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