Perceived Leadership Behavior in Sports: The Interaction between Individual Differences and Task Characteristics

Hasan Birol YALCIN, Ph.D.

Abant Izzet Baysal University – School of Physical Education and Sports, Bolu, Turkey
E-mail: yalcinhasanbirol@gmail.com

Abstract: The concept of leadership is perhaps one of the most extensively researched topics in sport studies. Therefore, the present study examined athletes' perceptions towards their coaches' leadership behavior. Within this broader thrust, the sub-group differences defined by gender (an individual characteristic), task type (a situation characteristic), and gender by task type (their interactions) were investigated and compared. The five perceived leadership behaviors assessed by using the Leadership Scale for Sports (LSS) were training and instruction, democratic behavior, autocratic behavior, social support and positive feedback. The internal consistency for sub-scales of perceived version of LSS ranged from .58 to .89 in the study. The subjects of the study were 128 females and 294 males university athletes from eight different universities. The multivariate analysis for task dependence variables showed that there was statistically significant difference between interdependent sports and dependent sports among university student athletes, Wilks' lambda = .85, $F(5,416) = 5.79$, $p < .05$. Similarly, the multivariate analysis also indicated that the grouping variables of male interdependent sports, female interdependent sports, male dependent sports, and female dependent sports were found to have significant effect on the LSS, Wilks' lambda = .91, $F(5,416) = 3.11$, $p < .05$. Follow up univariate analysis were performed only on task dependence and the interaction of gender and task dependence, because the multivariate test was not significant for gender. Leadership behavior in sports plays an integral role in the success of athletes' performance and athletic teams. Based on the findings of the present study, athletes, coaches and researchers will have better understanding as to the importance of coaching leadership behaviors and the interaction between individual differences (gender) and situational characteristics (task dependence).The results were further discussed and elaborated.
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1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of leadership is perhaps one of the most extensively researched topics in sport studies. Even though, many definitions and models of leadership have been proposed and statistically tested, interest in studying sport leadership continues to grow. There have been many definitions of leadership in the sport literature. And almost all the definitions of sport leadership refer three important components; (1) a behavioral process, (2) interpersonal in nature, (3) aimed at influencing and motivating group members towards organizational goals (Chelladurai & Saleh, 1980). As it can be inferred from the above statement, in leadership the attention is on what the leader does rather than what the leader is. Therefore, the critical element of leadership is to enhance group members' performance and their satisfaction.

Recent attempts to study sport leadership phenomena have emphasized the significance of the interaction of individual and situational determinants in the pursuit of leadership effectiveness (Ghofrani, 2012). In other words, effective leadership is a function of both situational and individual characteristics has gained general acceptance among researchers (Chelladurai, 1984). This interactional tendency is characterized by recent leadership models such as contingency, theory (Fiedler 1973), the path-goal theory (House, 1971) and the multidimensional theory (Chelladurai & Saleh, 1980).

Fiedler's Contingency Model of Leadership (1973) postulates that the success of either task-oriented or interpersonally-oriented leadership is dependent on the favorableness of the situation which is defined by (a) leader-member relations, (b) task structure, and (c) leader's position power. Leader-member relations refer to the nature of the relationship between leader and the member of the group. If the leader and the group members have a high degree of trust and respect and the members like and admire the leader, the leader-member relations are assumed to be good (Chelladurai & Kuga, 1996). In coaching context, it is proposed that coaching may foster more favorable leader-member relations because of the small size of athletic teams, the lengthened contact between the leader and member, and voluntary participation (Chelladurai & Kuga, 1996). Task structure refers to the extent to which the group's task is well defined (Fiedler, 1973). When the group task is easily understood and the goals are

clearly defined, it is said that the task is well or highly structured. Since goals are clearly defined and readily measurable in coaching (e.g. win-loss record, and standings); this situation may be more favorable for coaches. Position power can be summarized as the power is vested in the leader's position. If the leader has the power or control over sanctions, the power position of the leader is greater or stronger. Thus, the greater the power position of the leader, the greater the favorableness of the situation for the leader.

The underlying assumption of House's (1971) path-goal theory of leadership is that the role of the leader is only supplemental. This theory focuses mainly on the needs and desires of the members. It attempts to clarify how leadership should clean out the path of members to desired goals or rewards. The responsibility of the leader is to provide clarity of goals, preciseness of procedures, guidance and support. The next proposition of the theory is that motivational function of leadership is the function of the situation. That is, leader behavior could be varied according to the nature of the tasks which may be routine or interdependent. In sum, House's path-goal theory of leadership places greater emphasis on members, their ability, and their personal dispositions than on other factors affecting leadership (Chelladurai, 1993).

Along the similar lines, Osborno and Hunt (1975) extends the path goal theory by investigating the leader's adaptations to the conditions of wider organizational system and the leader's reactions to the needs, desires, and pressures of the group members. Adaptive-reactive theory proposed that group members (followers) respond mainly to the reactive behaviors of the leaders which can be categorized as discretionary influence of the leader (Osborno and Hunt, 1975).

Chelladurai (1978, 1993) developed the multidimensional model of leadership (MML) which is a synthesis of some of the above situational theories to leadership. The MML incorporates three stages of leader behavior – required, preferred, and actual. The MML classifies the antecedent variables which determine these leader behaviors into leader characteristics, member characteristics, and situational characteristics. Further, group performance and satisfaction are proposed as the consequences in the model. The basic assumption of the MML is that performance and satisfaction are functions of the congruence between actual and required behaviors and the leader behaviors preferred by the athletes. The model further suggests that numerous antecedents which in turn influence the behavior, include situational, leader characteristics, and member characteristics.

Chelladurai and Saleh (1980) developed the leadership scale for sports (LSS) in conjunction with the assumptions of the multidimensional model of leadership so that the construct of the MML would be adequately tested. The LSS has 40 items representing five dimensions of leader behavior (Table 1). Chelladurai and Saleh (1980) reported perceived version of internal consistency estimates (Cronbach's alpha) of .93 for Training and Instruction (13 items), .87 for Democratic Behavior (9 items), .79 for Autocratic Behavior (5 items), .86 for Social Support (8 items), and .92 for Positive Feedback/Rewarding Behavior (5 items). The response pattern of the LSS refers to the frequencies of the behavior exhibited by the coach in five sub-scales: (1) always, (2) often – 75% of the time, (3) occasionally – 50% of the time, (4) seldom – 25% of the time, and (5) never.

The LSS has been widely used to measure leadership in sport. The scale has also been utilized to study relationship between leadership and other variables. In the sport literature, the LSS has mainly served to study (a) athletes' preference for specific behavior (Chelladurai & Carron, 1981; Chelladurai, 1984; Chelladurai et al., 1988; Hastie, 1995; Horne & Carron, 1985; Sherman , Fuller & Speed, 2000), (b) athletes' perceptions of their coaches' behavior (Chelladurai & Saleh, 1980; Chelladurai et al., 1988; Horne & Carron, 1985) and (c) coaches' perception of their own behavior (Bennett & Maneval, 1998; Brooks et al., 2000; Dwyer & Fischer, 1988; Horne & Carron, 1985; Salminen & Luikkonen, 1994).

Furthermore, the LSS has generated reliable and valid results in different countries such as Japan (Chelladurai, et.al., 1988), Norway (Hoigaard, Jones & Peters, 2008), Singapore (Pyun, Kwon, Koh & Wang, 2010). Upon the conceptual framework of the multidimensional model of leadership, there have been many research studies on MML by using LLS to examine the effects of member and situational characteristics on the leadership as well as satisfaction of athletes. Member characteristics included gender differences (Jambor & Zhang, 1997; Pyun et al., 2010), maturity (Turman, 2001) and personality (Chelladurai et al., 1988). Similarly, situational characteristics studied task attributes (Chelladurai et al., 1988; Pyun, et al., 2010), sports type (Yalcin, 2011) and culture (Chelladurai, et al., 1988). However, there is no research study related to perceived leadership defined by gender and task characteristics in Turkey. The present study examined athletes' perceptions towards their coaches' behavior. Within this broader thrust, the sub-group differences defined by gender (an individual characteristic), task type (a situation characteristic), and gender by task type (their interactions) were investigated and compared.

Table 1 Dimensions of Leader Behavior in Sports

Dimension	Description
Training and instruction	Coaching behavior aimed at improving athletes performance by emphasizing and facilitating hard and strenuous training; instructing them in the skills, techniques, and tactics of the sport; clarifying the relationship among the members; and structuring and coordinating the members' activities.
Democratic behavior	Coaching behavior that allows greater participation by the athletes in decisions pertaining to group goals, practice methods, and game tactics and strategies.
Autocratic behavior	Coaching behavior that involves independent decision making and stresses personal authority.
Social support	Coaching behavior characterized by a concern for the welfare of individual athletes, positive group atmosphere, and warm interpersonal relations with members.
Positive feedback	Coaching behavior that reinforces an athlete by recognizing and rewarding good performance.

Adapted from Chelladurai & Saleh (1980). Reprinted with permission of the author.

Gender Differences in Coaching Leadership

Several researchers investigated the athletes preferred leadership behavior based on gender have demonstrated inconsistent findings. Previous studies reported that female athletes expected less autocratic and social support leadership than did male athletes (Chelladurai, 1993; Terry, 1984). Female athletes, on the other hand, preferred more democratic leadership behavior from their coaches than did male athletes (Chelladurai, 1993; Chelladurai, Haggerty & Baxter, 1989). That is, female athletes are willing to participate in decision making. More recent study revealed that college level male athletes expressed significantly greater preferences for autocratic and social support, while female intercollegiate athletes expressed significantly greater preferences for training and instruction. However, Sherman, Fuller and Speed (2000) stated that both males and females athletes responded with the same order in terms of preferences in leadership behavior of coaches. Similarly, Todd and Kent (2003) reported that even though males scored higher in perceived vocal leadership, there was no statistically significant difference between females and males. The results of Todd and Kent's (2003) study also revealed that the females are tend to score higher in perceived leadership by example. However, Chelladurai, Haggerty and Baxter (1989) examined decision style preferences among university basketball athlete and reported a lack of significant differences among males and females basketball players. The differences in the findings between males and females athletes suggest the need for additional research.

Task Type

Chelladurai and Carron (1981) categorized tasks in sports context as independent, coactively dependent, proactively-reactively dependent, and interactively dependent. Task dependence can be described as the degree of interaction an athlete has with others during execution of the task (Chelladurai, 1984). For the purpose of this study, task dependence classified as independent tasks and interdependent tasks. Independent tasks do not require teammates to interact for task completion such as tennis and cross country (Grandzol, 2011). In other words, in sport setting, an individual sports is considered as an independent sport that there is no interaction with others. On the contrary, in interdependent tasks, an athlete must interact with teammates for successful task completion such as football and basketball (Grandzol, 2011). That is, an interdependent task requires high interactions with others in the team. In the MML approach, task dependence is considered as an antecedent factor of situational characteristics which in turn has an effect on athletes' perceived and preferred leadership behavior. (Riemer & Chelladurai, 1995).

METHOD

Participants and Sample Size

The subjects of the study were 128 females and 294 males university athletes from eight different universities. These eight universities were comparable in size, location and the emphasis placed on intercollegiate athletics. In order to further ensure comparability, the selection of participants was restricted to athletes participating in sports that were offered in eight universities and in which coaching was offered at least two times a week. The interdependent sports included were basketball, volleyball, and soccer. The independent sports were track and field, swimming, and badminton.

It must be noted that sample size of the study would impact the statistical analysis by either making it in sensitive or overly sensitive (Hair et al., 1995). Accordingly to the table provided by Hair et al., (1995), four hundred twenty two respondents would be sufficient to test the significance level (alpha level such as .01, .05 or .001), power (probability of correctly rejecting the null hypothesis when it is false), and effect size (estimate of the degree to which the phenomenon being studied exists in the population.

The final form of the questionnaires with cover letter (including purpose of the study and requesting voluntary participation) were distributed to selected subjects. With the permission of either team mangers or coaches, the questionnaires were administered in a group setting. Not all of the questionnaires were complete, therefore; the degrees of freedom varied across analysis due to missing data. The age of the final pool of respondents ranged from 18 to 24 years. There were 294 males and 128 females. The distribution of the subjects according to sports is as follows; soccer (n=98), basketball (n=62), volleyball (n=69), track and field (n=71), swimming (n=68), and badminton (n=54).

Instrumentation

As indicated previously, the Leadership Scale for Sport (Chelladurai & Saleh, 1978, 1980; Chelladurai & Carron, 1981) was used to asses perceived leadership behavior by university athletes. This scale assesses five dimension of coaching behavior with 40 items– Training and Instruction, Social Support, Positive Feedback, Democratic and Autocratic Behavior (Table 1). For the purpose of this study, Turkish version of perceived leadership scale for sports was used (Yalcin, 2011). Yalcin (2011) reported the internal consistency for sub-scales of Turkish version of LSS ranging from .61 to .87. Similarly, Reimer and Chelladurai (1995) indicated that psychometric properties and the internal consistency estimates for the perceived version of the LSS were adequate.

RESULTS

The purpose of the present study is to examine university athletes' perception towards their coaches. Within this broader thrust, the study investigates the effects of gender, task dependence and gender by task dependence on five sub-scales of the perceived version of LSS. The descriptive statistics for gender and task dependence including internal consistencies of LSS and gender by task dependence are presented Table 2 and Table 3 respectively.

Reliability of the Perceived Version of the LSS

The reliability of each of the five sub-scales of the LSS was examined using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the five dimensions was: (a) Training and Instruction Leadership Behavior, $\alpha = .89$; (b) Democratic Leadership Behavior, $\alpha = .82$; (c) Autocratic Leadership Behavior, $\alpha = .58$; (d) Social Support Leadership Behavior $\alpha = .79$; (e) Positive Feedback Leadership Behavior, $\alpha = .81$ (Table 2). The reliability coefficients were consistent with previous findings (Chelladurai, 1993; Chelladurai & Reimer, 1998). The reliability for Autocratic Leadership Behavior was low in the current study, supporting previous findings (Chelladurai, 1993, Pyun et al., 2010) and did not meet the .70 cut-off level (Nunnally & Berstein, 1994). Hence, subsequent findings in the present study involving this factor should be interpreted with caution.

Multivariate Analysis of Variance

The multivariate analysis showed that there were no statistically significant differences between male university student athlete and female university student athletes, Wilks' lambda = .89, $F(5,416) = 1.86$, $p > .05$. However, for task dependence variables, statistically significant difference was detected between interdependent sports and dependent sports among university student athletes, Wilks' lambda = .85, $F(5,416) = 5.79$, $p < .05$. Similarly, the multivariate analysis also indicated that the grouping variables of male interdependent sports, female interdependent sports, male dependent sports, and female dependent sports were found to have significant effect on the LSS, Wilks' lambda = .91, $F(5,416) = 3.11$, $p < .05$. Follow up univariate analysis were performed only on task dependence and the interaction of gender and task dependence (Table 4), because the multivariate test was not significant for gender.

Table 2. Means, Standard Deviations (in parentheses) and Cronbach's Alphas of Leadership Measures for gender and task dependence

Perceived Leadership Behavior	Cronbach's alphas	Male (n=294)	Female (n=128)	Interdependent Sports (n=312)	Independent Sports (n= 116)
Training & Instruction	α = .89	3.78 (.68)	3.92 (.61)	3.86 (.70)	3.75 (.69)
Democratic Behavior	α = .82	3.31 (.76)	3.42 (.79)	3.35 (.78)	3.32 (.72)
Autocratic Behavior	α = .58	2.91 (.59)	2.80 (.61)	2.86 (.62)	2.77 (.66)
Social Support	α = .79	3.05 (.78)	3.10 (.76)	3.12 (.79)	2.97 (.69)
Positive Feedback	α = .81	3.62 (.76)	3.79 (.70)	3.68 (.75)	3.61 (.68)

Table 3. Means and Standard Deviations (in parentheses) of Leadership Measures for gender by task dependence

Perceived Leadership	Male Interdependent Sports (n=208)	Female Interdependent Sports (n=104)	Male Independent Sports (n=67)	Female Independent Sports (n=49)
Training & Instruction	3.67 (.69)	3.92 (.61)	3.82 (.72)	3.71 (.72)
Democratic Behavior	3.34 (.78)	3.42 (.79)	3.41 (.70)	3.34 (.69)
Autocratic Behavior	2.79 (.66)	2.80 (.61)	2.77 (.71)	2.68 (.52)
Social Support	3.09 (.76)	3.10 (.76)	2.89 (.55)	2.84 (.73)
Positive Feedback	3.60 (.81)	3.79 (.70)	3.65 (.68)	3.63 (.72)

The results of the ANOVA tests for the variable of task dependence showed that only social support indicated statistically significant difference ($p < .05$). That is, university athletes of interdependent sports perceived their coaches to be more socially supportive than the others. It should be noted that the effects size of this finding was very small (only 4 %). Along the similar lines, univariate ANOVA analysis indicated significant differences in training and instruction and social support leadership behaviors ($p<.05$) for the interaction effects of gender by task dependence. In other words, the interaction effect was not significant on the sub-scales of democratic, autocratic and positive feedback leadership behaviors. Because significant interaction was detected, Tukey HSD was performed for training and instruction and social support leadership behaviors. For training and instruction sub-scale, the female-athletes who were in the group of interdependent sports had a significantly higher mean scores (M= 3.92) than the male interdependent sports athlete (M=3.67) ($p<.05$). Next, for social support sub-scale, the results showed that the male interdependent sports athlete (M=3.09) significantly scored higher

than both male independent (M=2.89) and female independent (M=2.84) (p<.05). Lastly, the female interdependent athletes had a significantly higher mean score (M=3.10) than both male and female who participated in independent sports (p<.05).

Table 4. Results for Univariate ANOVAs for Task Dependence and Gender by Task Dependence

	Task Dependence		Gender by Task dependence	
Leadership Behavior	F	η^2	F	η^2
Training & Instruction	1.84	.004	3.66*	.03
Democratic Behavior	1.02	.001	1.24	.009
Autocratic behavior	.99	.001	.77	.005
Social Support	13.96*	.04	5.78*	.04
Positive Feedback	.63	.002	4.01	.03

*p < .05

DISCUSSION

This study was concerned with investigating the effects of individual differences, situational characteristics and their interaction on sport leadership. In the present study, the Leadership Scale for Sports which was well developed by Chelladurai and Saleh (1980), was utilized to compare university level students perceptions on their coaches. More specifically, this study was an attempt to investigate athletes' perceptions on leadership behavior based on gender and task dependence. The study was also concerned with the interaction between individual (e.g., gender) and situational characteristics (e.g., task dependence) associated with leadership behavior in coaching sports. In other words, comparisons were made on the basis of the university level student athletes' perceived leadership behavior on gender by task dependence. This would help us to better understand the phenomena of leadership behavior at college level in which would help coaches and sport managers to improve athletes' performance and satisfaction (Chelladurai, 1993; Reimer & Chelladurai, 1995).

Previous research studies by using either perceived version of the LSS or preferred version of the LSS reported contradictory findings. While some of them suggested that male athletes scored high on autocratic type of leadership than female who had higher scores on the dimension of democratic behavior than males (Chelladurai, Haggerty & Baxter, 1989; Terry, 1984), the other studies reported that male and female athletes did not significantly differed in the perception of their leadership behavior (Sherman et al., 2000; Todd & Kent, 2003). The findings of the present study are similar with the second notion, in the sense that male and female university level athletes did not differ in their perceived leadership behavior towards their coaches. One possible explanation of this finding is that coaches are well respected and considered experts in their sports in Turkey. That is, because it is embedded in Turkish culture, the young and students have great respect for their elders, teachers and coaches. Therefore, student athletes in Turkey are not accustomed to questioning their coaches; they just follow orders or instructions.

In the literature, it was stated that task dependence is an important factor with potential implications on practice environment, relationships with coaches and teamwork (Grandzol, 2011). Terry (1984) indicated that university independent sport athletes had significantly higher preferences scores for democratic leadership behavior. On the other hand, Chelladurai and Saleh (1978) reported no significant differences in university physical education student's preferences for democratic leadership behavior based on task dependent. Previous research studies were also interested in task dependence as an independent variable effecting leadership behavior such as task type (Beam et al., 2004) and culture (Chelladurai et al., 1988) stating significant associations with leadership behaviors. Similarly, the present study found significant differences between perception of interdependent sports athletes and independent sports athletes for the variable of task dependence. That is, university

athletes of interdependent sports assessed their coaches to be more socially supportive than independent sport athletes. This finding is consistent with the results of Pyun et al., (2010) . When task dependence increases, coaches should increase social support for their athletes (Chelladurai, 1993).

The results of the present study demonstrated that the interactions between gender and task dependence on training and instruction and social support leadership behavior were significant. One possible explanation with regard to differences on training and instruction would be providing specific directions to each athlete by the coaches of female interdependent sports (Pyun et al., 2010). Pyun et al., (2010) stated that if athletes possess low level of technical qualities, task oriented behavior by coaches would be more effective. In the case of social support leadership behavior, the findings of the study indicated that the male and the female interdependent sports athletes had significantly higher scores than both male independent and female independent sports athletes. Based on assumption developed by Chelladurai (1993), the different perceptions in social support leadership behavior between interdependent and independent sport athletes might be explained by the different level of task dependence.

A note of caution on the findings of significant differences among groups. While several differences were statistically significant, the practical significance of those differences was minimal. The association between any grouping variable and any of the dependent variable was weak (i.e., $\eta^2 < .05$ in all cases). Nevertheless, the findings highlight the significance of an athlete's perception rather than the objective nature of the leadership behavior. As Chelladurai et al., (1999) noted, even though the roles (leadership behavior) of coaches can be analyzed from an objective perspective, the athletes perceptions of the leadership behavior determine how personally attractive the leadership behavior is. Therefore, any research studies interested in assessing leadership behavior in sports must consider the athletes' perception.

It must be noted that there are several limitation of the present study. The first limitation of was the fact that all data were self reported by university athletes; therefore, the LSS scores may have been overrated and not reflective of actual leadership behavior. Future research attempts should compare athletes' perceptions to coaches' perceptions of their own leadership behavior. Next, future studies should analyze a variety of different sport settings because of the moderating effect of type of sport as independent or interdependent and open or closed sports. Finally, the present study only used the perceived version of the LSS, future research studies should explore all versions of the leadership behaviors to compare perceived version to preferred version of the LSS with the outcome of performance and satisfaction.

As mentioned earlier, leadership behavior in sports play an integral role in the success of athletes' performance, athletic teams, and satisfaction. Based on the findings of the present study, athletes, coaches and researchers will have better understanding as to the importance of coaching leadership behaviors and the interaction between individual differences (gender) and situational characteristics (task dependence).

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Corresponding Author:
Dr. Hasan Birol YALCIN
School of Physical Education and Sports
Abant Izzet Baysal University
Golkoy Campus,
Bolu 14280, Turkey
E-mail: yalcinhasanbirol@gmail.com

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