Critically Evaluate The Relationship Between Team Cohesion and Performance in Competitive Sport.

Within sports performance or sports situations, groups are visible to any level, whether they are competitive, spectative, administrative or managerial. Bass (1960) defined a group as a collection of individuals whose existence as a collection is rewarding to the individual. This may ultimately be associated with sporting success when placed in a sporting situation, however socialisation may be the reward gained from any spectators. It could be therefore important to distinguish a team from a group, Weinberg and Gould (1999) highlighted that a team shows more obvious interaction than that of a group. Furthermore Weinberg and Gould (1999) suggested that a collective identity is a distinguishing characteristic for teams. Such examples may come as team names, reputations or rankings.

A team although has to survive and work together in order to establish success. The force that holds the team together was described as cohesion. Many definitions have been put forward to describe this concept. Festinger (1950) described it as the resultant forces, which are acting upon members to remain within the group. Cohesion can be defined on two determining factors: Task cohesion and Social cohesion. Weinberg and Gould (1999) addresses task cohesion as the degree to which members work together to achieve common goals, i.e. winning a match or championship, or simply meeting pre set goals. Whereas social cohesion is the degree to which members of a group like each other or interact with each other (Weinberg and Gould, 1999). In highlighting the two factors of cohesion Festingers definition

could have been regarded as being too narrow and therefore Carron (1998, in press.) defined cohesion as "A dynamic process, which is reflected in the tendency for a group to stick together and remain united in the pursuit of its instrumental objectives and / or for the satisfaction of member affective needs".

It has often been suggested in many studies the effects of cohesion on team sport; (Williams and Widmeyer, 1991; Grieve *et al.*, 2000; Terry *et al*., 2000). The aim of this essay is to critically evaluate the link between cohesion and performance and determining the factors, which may affect the linkage.

In team sports it has been generally assumed that a positive relationship exists between cohesion levels and performance (Carron, 1988; Grieve *et al*., 2000) Relationships between cohesion and performance has been proposed to be 83% positive (Widmeyer *et al*., 1993). Research has however suggested many different factors to the degree of the relationship. Cohesion affecting factors may be explained using a model suggested by Carron (1982). This model identified team factors, personal factors, environmental / situational factors and leadership factors. Ultimately if cohesion can predict performance then the effect must come from one or more of the 4 factors, and throughout research this has been true, as many authors have assessed matters such as group size (Widmeyer, Brawley and Carron. 1990), whereas leadership characteristics such as trust (Dirks, 2000) have been examined.

Situational factors relate to the forces that are holding the group together (Carron and Dennis, 1998). Weinberg and Gould (1999) suggested that group size is one of the situational characteristics that has to be considered. As cohesion is believed to affect performance, and in that very nature groups exist in many different forms throughout sport. The size of the group may actually effect cohesiveness and performance levels. Early research by Slater (1958) suggested that an increase in

group size was linked to lower enjoyment levels within the group. This may be attributable to less responsibility for each individual. Such an increase of group size may also proceed an increase in crowded feelings and lower cohesion levels within the group (Widmeyer *et al*., 1990). Interlinking with the cohesion-performance levels the group size may help support an approach suggesting that cohesion may infact influence performance. Using Steiners (1972) Model of Productivity, a greater group size may increase faulty processes due to a lack of coordinated effort (Ringelman effect). However it could be established that those who have a more cohesive group and therefore will show a more coordinated approach to the task activity will produce a lower level of faulty processes. Further backing up claims that cohesion effects performance in the long-term. A quote by Ben Franklin (1776) may sum up coordinated approach within all aspects of sporting situation. "We must all hang together or assuredly we shall all hang separately." In regards to social loafing and the cohesion / performance linkage, Mullen and Cooper (1994) highlighted that the interaction was an important determination of the linkage. Although in contradicting statements with the paper Mullen and Cooper (1994) suggested that although interaction may be a determining factor of the linkage; interpersonal attraction or group pride could not be suggested as independent predictors of the cohesion-performance link within sport. Situational factors may also relate to what type of sport the team is involved in (Lander and Lueschen, 1974).

Most research within sports has been completed on those who participate in a team, although as mentioned previously a team could be as little as 2 members. In a golfing situation or in individual sports cohesion still does occur, but usually between opponents, such sports as regarded as co-active. Whereas team sports are referred to as interactive sports. Studies have been conducted on such groups, to see if

differences exist to try and summarise a cohesion performance effect. (Kozub and Button, 2000; Grieve *et al*., 2000; Williams and Widmeyer, 1991). Kozub and Button (2000) studied both rugby and swimming teams and summarised that cohesion is more important for interacting teams in a cohesion-performance situation and furthermore the team attractiveness may be increased by success. Research has earlier predicted a negative cohesion-performance for coacting sports (Brawley, Carron and Widmeyer, 1987). Although Williams and Widmeyer (1991) hypothesised against previous beliefs and their results showed a positive relationship between cohesion and performance. On the opposite stance of interacting team sports Grieve *et al*., (2000) examined basketball teams and the effect of cohesion and in contrast to previous evidence (Mullen and Cooper, 1994) the authors found a negible effect for a cohesion performance relationship. Others who have examined interactive groups found a more positive relationship (Williams and Widmeyer, 1991; Mullen and Cooper, 1994; Widmeyer and Martens, 1978) therefore with such varying results, the other factors of cohesion may be more appropriate to explaining the cohesion-performance relationship. In a similar vein to the interacting – coacting hypothesis,

Personal factors relate to more specifically the individual within the sporting group (Weinberg and Gould, 1999). These may come in the form of motivation, satisfaction or commitment (Carron and Dennis, 1998). The relationship between motives and cohesion level was examined by Eisler and Spink (1998), in which the psychological motivation was measured for a group of intercollegiate basketball players. Eisler and Spink supported the belief that the cohesiveness of a team around a task may influence to an extent the perceived psychological motivation in a neutral or a positive situation. In translation towards sporting environments and the predicted cohesion-performance link may be effected by motivational factors. This was backed

up by Widmeyer and Williams (1991) who found that member satisfaction was the major determinant of both task and social cohesion amongst golfers. Williams and Widmeyer (1991) highlighted that motivation of individuals may also be a problem that has to be addressed.

The motivation problems may arise from the perception of the task. Perception of the task ahead may possible influence cohesion and also the individuals perception of cohesiveness may be related to an adherence issue factor (Prapvessis and Carron, 1997) such an adherence issue may be more applicable in the formation stages of a group. However problems with perception of cohesiveness may be that of an expectancy effect, which may underestimate any challenges to cohesion (Dirks, 2000). However personal factors may also include such factors as anxiety, which to an extent may be detrimental to performance. (Weinberg and Gould, 1999) Prapavesis and Carron (1996) found that C.S.A.I (Competitive State Anxiety Inventory) A-state responses were a consequence of cohesion.

It must be addressed that some individuals do not just participate for the success, they may participate for the social for the enjoyment and although this may possibly cast doubts over the sources of cohesion, but as Donnelly (1994) highlighted that sports groups are more than reflections of society they are actually the creation of people.

Team factors relate to the stage and status of the group (Carron and Dennis, 1998). Teams may exist in a minimal form, however Tuckman (1965) suggested that every team would undergo the same 4-stage development process to ensure its survival:

Forming: The formation stage is the initial "come together" of the group members who wish to form a team. Members of the team consider social comparisons or

evaluations within each other to find the strengths and weaknesses of each individual (Weinberg and Gould, 1999). During this stage outcasts often find themselves pushed away from the group. Trials at football or any other sporting institution may be viewed as a formation stage, as those who manage to process through the initial stage would be classed as successful trialists or applicants. It is only once the forming stage has been established that the interpersonal skills / relationships and indentifications are formed (Weinberg and Gould, 1999).

Storming: The next stage consists of the brainstorming session which could be referred to as storming, and this stage is often characterised by a rebellion within the group. Natural leaders will be become apparent and routines established to attempt to curtail any such rebellion by the group individuals. Tempers and relationships between members often become frayed during this stage as battles for places in the team and for natural leaders to establish themselves within the still developing group. Weinberg and Gould (1999) suggest that during this stage it is important that the coach should try to communicate with the members of the group.

Norming: Consisely, norming is the situation were conflicts within the groups are resolved and the team begins to emerge from its scattered framework. Although during this time, processes which may ultimately increase performance in the long run may become apparent via use of individual contribution awareness (Anshell, 1994).

Performing: In this stage team members band together to channel their energies for team success (Weinberg and Gould, 1999). It has to be remembered that a team is an actual process and though at any stage it could lose an individual.

As Tuckman suggested that the 4 stages of development exist, it is believed that the complex interaction of players, coaches and performance may unwittingly influence cohesion (Brawely, 1990). Throughout the formation of a team, teams show different levels of cohesion throughout development. A team although has to survive and work together in order to establish success. It is feasible to expect those teams in the initial stage of development to show a lower level of performance as all constituent parts of the team are being formed. Research about the changes of cohesiveness and performance during the different stages suggested by Tuckman (1965) remain elusive. This could possibly be due to an inconsistent nature of a group during its development, due to transfers or squad rotation. Such a long-term stable experiment may not therefore be plausible.

Leadership factors may include the leadership style adopted and the behaviours that the leader exhibits (Weinberg and Gould, 1999). Carron (1993) suggested that clear communication would ultimately increase cohesion amongst the group. Different styles of leadership may be adopted by the leader of the group, such styles may be autocratic, democratic or *laissez faire*. Research into the effects on the different types of leadership on cohesion was carried out by Carron in 1988 and he found that a democratic style was more suited than that of an autocratic style, however it may be believed that a *laissez faire* approach may increase social cohesion but actually decrease task cohesion and therefore influence performance. Other factors such as trust towards the leader have been investigated, Dirks (2000) investigated trust and found a positive relationship between trust and team performance, in linkage with cohesion it could possibly substantiate beliefs that a more cohesive group is a more trustful group.

When looking at cohesion, authors have been quick to suggest that a higher level of cohesion leads to a more advantaged performance (Widmeyer *et al.,* 1993). Although the direction of causality approach may ultimately suggest that is it an increased performance which that produces increased cohesion or is it increased cohesion, which produces increased performance, (Weinberg and Gould, 1999). This could possibly discount all previous research despite the authors having highlighted the area. A possible way to combat these thoughts would be to address pre and post tests in regards to cohesion to see if performance outcomes do actually affect the cohesion levels and would link into the direction of causality concern. Despite its possible damaging effect the direction of causality could have on researchers thoughts and attempts to control this, it does provide an opportunity to extend knowledge towards performance outcomes and the effects it may have on cohesion levels which in turn effect performance. It could remain be a forever changing perspective with its resolve being the ultimate answer to any cohesion performance linkage. This follows thoughts by Grieve *et al*., (2000) suggested that the task cohesion and performance reciprocally influence each other. Whereas Kozub and Button (2000) questioned which factor effects the other.

When measuring cohesiveness during each of the study's problems may have arisen. Usually the cohesion is measured by the G.E.Q (Widmeyer *et al*., 1985), using this method was highlighted as a possible problem within studies (Brawley, 1990). This was pointed out, as it was unknown when the effects of cohesion on performance would be noted or become difficult to highlight specific changed when using a correlation system, which is often adopted during many tests. Although a more recent study by Li and Harmer (1996) proposed that the GEQ has adequate factorial validity for measuring group cohesion. Li and Harmer had acted

upon claims by Schultz *et al*., (1994) that the GEQ was an invalid measurement tool for group cohesion.

In conclusion it has been shown that an effect for the cohesion-performance linkage does exist, (Mullen and Cooper, 1994) although the extent to which has been discussed (Grieve *et al*., 2000). It was also found that the relationship between cohesion and performance may have been effected by such factors as suggested by Carron (1982). Problems arising from a causality effect were discussed and it still remains unclear as to which variable actively effects the other. Other limitations regarding administration of the questionnaire for measurement of cohesion have been discussed and the validity of the G.E.Q has been discussed (Brawley, 1990). Overall it may be concluded that research still remains open to the full extent of the relationship.

For future research in this area, the causality effect should be investigated and also authors should attempt to move away from correlational studies, to try and establish more viable results. Research should also be encouraged to examine further the differences between group types (interacting or coacting). Any further research would therefore enhance the understanding between the link of cohesion and performance.

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