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THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A SUCCESSFUL LEADER IN A FOOTBALL CLUB

Abstract

Leadership is one of the most important factors for success of every organised group. It is usually defined and studied as an interactive process, which influences an individual and the whole group in reaching the stated goals. The leadership in a football club influences guiding the group, providing information, decision making, developing interpersonal relations, motivating players, etc. A leader is not to be confused with a manager, who is in charge of the budget, the assistant pesonnel, planning, organising, etc. Although leaders sometimes have these same obligations, the leadership does not entail just a specific pattern of behaviour, but also the skill of fulfilling the vision. In the present paper, different approaches to leadership are analysed, and then the characteristics of a successful leader in a football club are considered. Special emphasis is placed on the impact which every leader has on his or her followers. Our analysis showed that the following are the most important characteristics of a successfu leader in a football club: intelligence, self-confidence, decisiveness, passion, sociability and morality.

Key words: leader, coach, football, traits, group.

INTRODUCTION

In Serbian language, there are different terms related to leader and leadership, such as *rukovodilac* and *rukovođenje*, and the terms *lider* and *liderstvo* are used more and more often. Not so long ago, the terms *rukovodilac,* instead of *vođa,* and *rukovođenje,* instead of *vođstvo,* were well-established. Foreign terms are often used instead of the Serbian ones: *lider* (from English 'leader') instead of *rukovodilac* (*vođa*) and *liderstvo* (from English 'leadership') instead of *rukovođenje* (*vođstvo*). The distinction between these terms has been clarified in our literature on psychology (Rot, Krstić, Bojanović et al.).

If we do not go further into details about the distinction among the aforementioned terms, it seems that using the terms *rukovodilac, vođa, lider i menadžer* synonymously is not a major mistake. The terms *rukovođenje, vođstvo, liderstvo* and *menadžment* can also be used synonymously. In accordance with the spirit of the Serbian language and leadership in sport management, the terms *rukovodilac* and *rukovođenje* are more adequate, but the growing number of foreign papers where the terms *lider* and *liderstvo* are preferred show otherwise (cf. Čokorilo and Milošević, 2013: 29).

Leadership is most often defined as *a process where an individual influences the group for the purpose of achieving the common goal*. The key terms of this definition are: *process, influence, group, goal*.

Being a *process* leadership is not just a feature of the leader, but a transactional event, happening between the leader and his or her followers – the leader influences the followers and is influenced by them.

As an *influence,* leadership is related to the way in which the leader effects the followers. Without influence there is no leadership in a fundamental sense.

Group is the place where leadership takes place. Therefore, leadership involves influence on a group of individuals who have a common goal (a small working group or a big working group which comprises the whole organisation).

As *goal*-directedness, leadership entails directing a group of individuals towards achieving a goal or purpose. So, leaders direct their energy towards individuals, who strive to accomplish a goal together (cf. Northouse, 2010: 341).

The definition shows that the leadership phenomenon is first and foremost an interpersonal process of interaction, and that it has a multidimensional nature, which is how the majority of contemporary theorists understands and studies it.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Descriptive, analytic-synthetic method was used in this paper. Using this method, we analysed the leadership phenomenon in different groups, as well as different approaches to the study of it. In the light of this, we regarded leadership in a football club as an important factor for sport group interactivity. Besides the analysis of the representative scientific and expert literature in this field, our own practical experience related to leadership in school, family and football club has been very useful.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Different approaches to the study of leadership

Leadership is an important factor for the structure and dynamics of every sport group. In the broadest sense, it can be regarded as an activity process, which influences individuals and groups in achieving the stated goals. Leadership defined in this way contains several important elements, such as directing a group, providing information, decision making, developing interpersonal relations, motivating, etc.

So, a leader is a person who knows the direction which the group is taking. He or she establishes the strategies for achieving the goal. It is not just about the vision of the goal, but also the everyday conceptualisation and motivation to bring this vision to reality, to achieve success of the whole team through individual success.

As already stated, leader is not to be confused with a manager, who is mostly in charge of planning, organising, the budget, the assistant pesonnel, etc. Despite the fact that leaders sometimes have these same obligations and that many coaches become excellent managers, leadership entails skill necessary for the development of players and progression of team.

There are very different understandings of what leadership is, and they emerged in numerous scientific fields with very different starting population. Dealing with this issue, Stogdill (1974) divided all leadership theories into six big groups: theories about leader's characteristics, situational theories, theories which place emphasis on leader's personality and situational factors, interaction theories (expectations), exchange theories and humanistic theories.

Franceško (2003) singles out two types of leadership (*rukovođenje*) theories and talks about them in more detail. First, there are theories where leadership is regarded as social interaction, and then there are those containing the idea about the importance of cognitive factors in leading people. Based on this criterion, she dealt with the following theories: *theories about leader's characteristics, situational theories, contingency models, transactional theory, theory of human nature and attribution theory*.

Weinberg and Gould (1999) dealt with four modalities of research on sport leadership: *character-related, behavioural, interactional and multidimensional.*

Northouse (2010) analysed a range of different approaches to studying leadership in general: *the approach based on traits* (intelligence, self-confidence, decisiveness, honesty, sociability, the five-factor model of personality, emotional intelligence), *the approach based on skills* (technical skills, interpersonal skills, abstract thinking skills), *the approach based on style* (leadership based on authority and obedience, friendly leadership, indifferent leadership, balanced leadership, team leadership), *situational approach* (leadership styles, developmental stages), *coordinated leadership theory* (leadership styles, situation features), *theory of path to success* (directive leadership, supportive leadership, cooperative leadership, achievement-directed leadership), *theory of exchange between the leader and a member, transformational leadership, team leadership, psychodynamic approach* (transactional analysis, Sigmund Freud and types of personality, Carl Gustav Jung and types of personality, sixteen types and leadership), *women and leadership* (gender and leadership styles, gender and successfulness in leadership), *culture and leadership and leadership ethics*.

Maxwell (Maksvel) (2007) lists 21 qualities of a true leader. We will name a few: *character, charisma, competence, courage, passion, responsibility, self-discipline, teachability, vision.*

3.2. Empirical research on leadership in a sport group

As the previous analysis showed, the approach based on traits (intelligence, self-confidence, decisiveness, honesty, sociability, dominance, emotional intelligence, etc.) is mentioned in each of the aforementioned classifications of leadership. Personality, its traits and capabilities are also put into focus or included implicitly in all other modalities of study of leadership in every group, including a sport group. This was a good enough reason for us to search for those qualities, which are assumed to make a successful leader of a football club.

At first, the approach based on personality traits established the characteristics of great leaders, then it was modified for the purpose of acknowledging the impact of situation on leadership, and today it is again a topical issue so that the key role of traits in successful leadership can be emphasised.

In two of his papers (1948 and 1974), Stogdill gave an overview of research papers which deal with the role of personality traits in leadership.

In his first paper, he analysed more than 124 research about traits of a leader, conducted between 1904 and 1947. He found that what distinguishes an average individual in the role of the leader from an average member of a group are the following traits: intelligence, readiness, insight, responsibility, initiative, perseverance, self-confidence and sociability. The results of the analysis showed that an individual does not become a leader just because he or she has certain characteristics, but because the charactersitcs he or she has must be important in the situation in which the leader acts.

In his second paper, Stogdill analysed 163 research, conducted between 1948 and 1970. In comparison to the first paper, this one is more balanced when it comes to the description of the role of traits in leadership. Although the first paper implies that leadership

is mostly determined by situational, and not personality factors, the conclusion drawn in the second paper is that personality and situational factors are decisive for leadership.

Mann (1959) conducted similar research, in which he examined more than 1,400 data about personality and leadership in small groups. He placed less emphasis on the impact of situational factors on leadership. He concluded that personality traits can be applied in order to distinguish leaders form the persons that are not leaders. These traits are: intelligence, masculinity, adaptability, dominance, extroversion, conservativism.

Ogilvie and Tutko (1966 and 1970) concluded, though without sufficient documentary proof, that a profile of a typical coach contains the following traits: decisive, authoritative, capable of handling the pressure from fans and the media, emotionally mature, realistic when it comes to the future and independent thought.

Based on an overview of 27 studies, Lord, De Vader and Alliger (1986) concluded that the leadership phenomenon is closely related to three central traits: intelligence, typical masculinity (agressiveness, decisiveness) and dominance. They obtained these results by using more advanced methods (meta-analysis) and they strongly advocated the view that personality traits can be systematically used in different situations in order to disinguish a leader form a person who is not one.

Based on the qualitative synthesis of previous research, Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991) concluded that leaders are not like other people and that what makes them different are these six traits: initiative, motivation, honesty, self-confidence, cognitive abilities, knowledge about the task.

Table 1 shows traits and features of a leader, found in major research in this field.

Table 1: Research about traits and features of a leader (according to Northouse, 2010: 18)

Stogdill (1948)	Mann (1959)	Stogdill (1974)	Lord, De Vader, Alliger (1986)	Kirkpatrick & Locke (1991)
Intelligence Readiness Insight Responsibility Initiative Perseverance Self-confidence Sociability	Intelligence Masculinity Adaptability Dominance Extroversion Conservativism	Achievement Perseverance Insight Initiative Self-confidence Responsibility Tendency to cooperate Tolerance Influence Sociability	Intelligence Masculinity Dominance	Initiative Motivation Honesty Self-confidence Cognitive abilities Knowledge about the task

3.3. Dominant traits of a successful football coach

For the purpose of better understanding the traits of a leader, we systematised most important traits and features which every great leader and every successful coach of a football club should have. These traits are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Dominant traits (features) of a successful football coach

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│         Intelligence         │
│       Self-confidence        │
│         Decisiveness         │
│           Passion            │
│          Sociability         │
│           Morality           │
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Being a general mental ability to learn new things, solve problems, deal with new situations, *intelligence* positively correlates with successful leadership. Outstanding verbal and perceptive abilities, as well as the abilities to make conclusions are what makes an individual a better leader. Although being a smart coach is a good thing, research show that his or her intelligence should not differ too much from that of the players he or she is coaching. Coaches with more advanced abilities may have difficulties in communication with players, because their ideas are too advanced for the players to understand and accept them. In recent years there has been a growing interest in emotional, spiritual, social, creative and sport intelligence. It seems that emotional intelligence has special importance for football coaches, since they have to be able to recognise their own emotions, as well as those of the people that they are coaching, so that they could control both.

Self-confidence can be described both as a personality trait of a coach (the degree of belief in success) and as a state (the faith that coaches have in themselves at the given moment). Self-confidence is usually reflected in readiness, decisiveness, self-assurance, etc. Self-confident coaches are not afraid of different situations, so they can often produce a positive effect or turn a negative score into a positive one in the decisive moments of victory. The situations where things turn against them, they see as a challenge and react even more decisively. In these situations, they are "cool", it is hard to upset them, they are resistant to stressful and frustrating situations, always have positive attitude about themselves and they believe in the victory. Despite the fact that even the coaches with great self-confidence sometimes lose matches, and therefore their self-confidence, they do not allow this to "suppress" their faith in themselves and thier own values (cf. Čokorilo, 2009: 77).

Decisiveness is a desire to carry out the task and it comprises features such as initiative, perseverance, dominance and desire. Decisive coaches have strong willingness to impose themselves, they are proactive and persevering when it comes to facing obstacles. Decisiveness includes displaying dominance in the situations where there is a need for directing the followers (cf. Northouse, 2010: 20).

Passion is the first step towards success and nothing can replace the impact that this factor has on the life of a leader, especially a sport leader, because sport is, unlike many other things – a passion. No sport leader can be great unless he or she likes and is passionate about what he or she is doing. Passion is fuel that boosts and strengthens our will and makes impossible things possible. The zeal in the heart and soul brings everything in a human life alive. This is why passionate football coaches with less professional expertise are more successful than those who have expertise, but lack passion. In the end, passion can be "practised": *Ask yourself how strong your desires are. Think of your first love. Be around passionate people – passion is contagious* (cf. Maxwell, 2007: 83-86).

Sociability refers to seeking desirable social relations, which the leader establishes with the members of a sport club. Marked sociability is a characteristic of leaders who are friendly, open, courteous, tactful and diplomatic. Such leaders are sensitive to other people's needs and show concern for their well-being. They have well developed interpersonal skills and they establish cooperative relations with their followers.

Morality of a leader primarily refers to characteristics of honesty and trust. Moral coaches stick to their principles and take responsibility for their actions. This makes other people trust them, because they can be trusted to fulfil their promises. They are loyal, reliable and they do not cheat. They have a range of positive virtues: fairness, sincerity, courage and lack of vices: cowardice, egoism, dishonour, etc. (cf. Northouse, 2010: 20-21).

CONCLUSION

The characteristics of a leader that have been considered in this paper lead to conclusion that there are some dominant personal characteristics which make a leader successful no matter the situation. To put it simply, José Mourinho would not be such a great leader just in football, but also in other sports, as well as in business, politics, etc. Based on the systematisation and analysis of different points of view in numerous papers regarding characteristics of a successful leader, we assume that the personality traits (features) most important for a leader and a football coach are the following: intelligence, self-confidence, decisiveness, passion, sociability and morality. The characteristics mentioned and discussed do not dispute the importance of other characteristics mentioned in this paper. They too can be related to successful leadership. We think that the six traits that we presented in more detail significantly contribute to leader's (coach's) successfulness. There are different views and approaches to study of skilfulness in sport leadership besides those about dominant personal characteristics. However, the majority of these approaches acknowledge certain personality traits (they can be helpful to leaders if they possess them), but they need not be absolute guarantee for successful leadership. In the modern development of sport leadership, it is indisputable that other models are also important, first and foremost those which besides leader's characteristics acknowledge situational factors, leader's behaviour and traits of the sport group members (cf. Čokorilo, 2009: 200-202). it is an empirical fact that football coaches who are experts and who exhibit democratic behaviour, support players and give positive information, are successful in creating teams which are more attached and united, which makes it possible for them to obtain better results. Every team, and especially that which loses, needs more social support, whose immediate purpose is increasing and maintaining players' motivation. Generous support from the coach, rewards for certain kinds of behaviour and democratic way of making decisions generally correlate with pleasure and success of sportsmen.

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