

Analysis of the relationship between coaches, players, and teammates within the Zacos club: Communication, Team Cohesion, Training and Competition

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Abstract

Team sports, such as handball, require a sense of belonging and the commitment of all teammates during training sessions and competitions. Our study aims to closely examine the relationships between these different actors within the Zacos club, focusing on communication, interpersonal relationships between coaches and players, and cohesion among players. A qualitative approach was developed using interviews to collect data from 12 players and two coaches. The results of the study reveal a lack of communication among players and a distancing that creates subgroups within the team. Additionally, beyond the professionalism demonstrated by the coach, the players lamented the coach's emotional swings, which have an impact on their mental state. Communication, the inclusion of all players, and mutual listening are essential for the Zacos team to perform well in sports competitions.

Keywords: Communication; Team Cohesion; Training; Competition

1. Introduction

A team is defined as a group of individuals brought together to perform a task, which constitutes its reason for being and justifies its existence. A team is not a static entity; teamwork is a dynamic process involving collaboration between team members to effectively achieve the independent and interdependent behaviors required to maximize the probability of achieving their goal (Bosselut and Réveillé, 2023).

In other words, a team refers more to the organization of tasks and roles from a functional perspective with a specific goal in mind. In a team, both players and coaches are confronted with learning about group dynamics, all while respecting the ethical rules that are the foundation of all games (Gréhaigne, 2018). Furthermore, the team is organized, which means there is a minimum differentiation between the individuals who make it up. This differentiation is not inherent to individuals and is therefore accidental. On the contrary, it is invented and necessary, and it is a functional differentiation. Organization is, in fact, primarily a distribution of functions, the distribution of tasks to individuals who have grouped together to better coordinate their actions with a view to achieving a common goal. Cooperation between players requires both interaction and shared trust, which are built up gradually over the course of the team's life

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(Gréhaigne, 2018). Thus, the members of a team, composed of two or more social entities, actively and reciprocally participate in joint activities aimed at achieving at least one common goal (Leduc et al, 2022).

Moreover, support for and the work of teammates are only possible with the support of the team coach. In this collaborative environment, the relationship between the coach and the athlete is of paramount importance. Athletes who have harmonious relationships with their coaches report high levels of collective efficacy (Choi et al, 2019) and feel more successful (Sandström et al, 2016). On the other hand, the quality of the Coach-Athlete Relationship (CAR) is likely to have an impact on athletes' motivation. For example, athletes who perceive high levels of closeness, commitment, and complementarity with their coach tend to become more insole in their sport and put more effort into training (McGee and Defreese, 2019).

In the Republic of Ivory Coast, there are several clubs in different disciplines where these different aspects can be observed. Among these sports associations, the Zacos club served as a field of analysis for this coach-athlete relationship. Within the Zacos club's handball team, there have been several instances of disagreement. This disagreement arises from the coach's ranking and a failure to follow the coach's instructions. There are also numerous losses in competitions. Based on communication, the consolidation of relationships between coaches and players, and cohesion among players, this study aims to provide a detailed analysis of the impact of the relationship between the various players within the Zacos club.

2. Method and Materials

The study was conducted in the Republic of Ivory Coast in the municipality of Abobo, located in the district of Abidjan. It is a qualitative cross-sectional study. The empirical approach was based, on the one hand, on observation of the behavior of the players and their coaches and, on the other hand, on an interview guide for the players and coaches. The sample was selected based on inclusion criteria (being a member of the team, regularly participating in training sessions, and being present on the day of the survey) that had been defined in advance for the target population.

Thus, all the players from the Zacos club, as well as their coaches, were interviewed. A total of 16 peoples participated in the study, including 14 players and two coaches. The semi-structured interviews collected data on communication, the strengthening of relationships between coaches and players, and team cohesion. Talcott Parsons' social action theory was used for the analysis, as it provided a better understanding of the mechanisms of communication and interaction between individuals in the context of a sports club. Data collection took place from September 20, 2022, to April 29, 2023.

3. Results

3.1. Communication between coaches, players, and teammates during training and competitions

The players' comments show that the groCommunication allows the coach to discuss strategies and sports techniques with the players, and it allows the players to exchange ideas among themselves in order to implement the coach's instructions. The study data reveal two trends among players regarding communication at the Zacos club. The first trend highlights the formation of cliques and a lack of communication. As one player said:

"During training, cliques form; the girls group together based on affinity, and there isn't much communication. It's the same in competition: those who are close pass to each other and marginalize the other players, even though a team is supposed to play together. If there is no communication and understanding, it is no longer a team." S.P., Player, 23, September 2023 uping of players by affinity has had an impact on cohesion and communication within the team. In addition to this aspect, another player pointed out the lack of communication during training.

"During training, well, we communicate on rare occasions, but most of the time there isn't enough communication because there are quite a few turnovers, and we don't communicate in order to progress with the ball. Well, during competitions, everyone is agitated, everyone has their emotions with the pressure that the coach puts on us, it gets in our way and it's complicated." O.M., Player, 25, September 2023

The lack of open communication between players mentioned in one player's comments undermines training and competitions. Interaction between these teammates is marred by conflictual relationships. Yet effective communication can improve team cohesion, individual and collective performance, and understanding of the club's objectives and strategies.

However, the second trend illustrates active communication during training sessions and competitions. One player's statement expresses this fact.

"Yes, the players communicate during training and competitions."

S.L., Coach, 40, September 2023

For this player, communication is present in the Zacos team. But these quotes reflect two opposing trends: on the one hand, a lack of communication and the formation of cliques that can undermine team cohesion, and on the other hand, active and effective communication during training sessions and competitions, with players sharing information and collaborating on the field. These two contradictory trends have led to decisions being made by coaches. The solution they advocated was to overcome rivalries and improve communication, as one of the coaches surveyed stated:

"Coaches recognize that rivalries exist within the women's team, but they believe that this can be overcome by promoting a healthy competitive spirit and encouraging players to support each other. Improving communication between players during training and competitions is also necessary to foster a spirit of competitiveness and encourage information sharing within the team." T.M., Coach, 39, September 2023

Communication between players is crucial to the team's success. It is important to promote effective communication during both training sessions and competitions. This is why coaches emphasize the need to overcome rivalries within the team in order to foster a spirit of competitiveness and encourage players to support each other.

3.2. Assessment of relationships and team cohesion between coaches and players during training sessions

Relationships and team cohesion between the coach and players during training sessions reveal three opinions based on the players' comments: diversity of opinions on the relationship (coaches and players), the rigidity of the coach's behavior, and communication and understanding. The diversity of opinions on the relationship (coaches and players) is reflected in the varied opinions of the players. Some have a positive assessment, while others express concerns. This diversity may reflect individual differences in expectations and personal experiences. One of the players surveyed stated the following:

"I don't like my teammates' relationship with the coach; they don't behave well, so I don't like it. The coach behaves well, but the players don't." C.M., Player, 20 years old, September 2023

The player criticizes her teammates' attitude towards the coach. Her comments reveal tension within the team, between the players and the coach. The player's second comment is in line with her assessment of the relationship between the coach and the players. She said:

"The relationship between the coach and the players is very good." B.F., Player, 20 years old, September 2023

The transcript suggests that there is a positive relationship between the coach and the players, indicating a harmonious and collaborative working atmosphere, which is important for cohesion within a sports team. In line with the player's comments, the coach's testimony highlights the essential elements relating to the dynamics of the sports team and the relationship between coaches and players.

"In fact, during training, I find that in a team, there needs to be a friendly relationship, which means a lot of expectation. A certain flexibility in the work; that is to say, the coach and the players need to communicate a lot." T.M., Coach, 39, September 2023

The importance of friendliness and expectations are mentioned in the coaches' comments. This remark shows the need for a positive and stimulating environment where team members feel comfortable working together. In addition to this aspect, communication between coaches and players was highlighted. This is an essential pillar for establishing expectations and resolving problems in order to strengthen team cohesion. Also, rigidity in the coach's behavior is the second trend that emerged from the players' comments. One player's statement sums this up:

"Personally, I find the coach to be quite harsh and very strict during training." K.F., Player, 22, September 2023

The players mention that the coach is perceived as being harsh and strict. In this sporting context, strictness may be perceived as necessary to achieve objectives. The third trend highlights communication and understanding. These two

key elements are important in the relationship between coaches and players. However, one player criticized the lack of communication and enthusiasm within the team.

"I don't like the relationship between the coach and the players during training. Often, the coach's temperament puts us in a bad mood. We get the impression that he doesn't know how to manage his emotions." B.A., 23-year-old player, September 2023

This quote highlights the impact of the coach's emotional management, which could have consequences on the players' motivation and physical and mental well-being. It is important to have communication that promotes harmony in order to maintain a satisfactory relationship between the coach and the players.

3.3. Assessment of relationships and team cohesion between coaches and players during competition

This section analyzes the players' comments on their assessment of the relationship and team cohesion between coaches and players. Three indicators emerge from their comments: the pressure and behavior of the coach during competitions, the professional relationship and motivation during competitions, and the impact of the coach's tension and behavior on the team. In terms of the coach's pressure and behavior during competitions, several players say that the coach puts pressure on them during competitions. The coach's behavior can have a negative impact on the team. This is what one player said.

"During competitions, as I said before, the coach puts pressure on us. When he sees that the players he has placed his faith in are no longer performing as he wants them to, or achieving the results he expected, he loses his temper and the whole team suffers." N.S, Player, 26, September 2023

During competitions, there is pressure due to the coach's expectations regarding the players' performance. With regard to professional relationships and motivation during competitions, some players said that the relationships between coaches and players remain professional during competitions, with encouragement and motivation from the coaches. This is evidenced by the comments of one player who said:

"The relationships are strictly professional, with rigor and respect. There are good relationships, the coach motivates the players, and it's beautiful to see." F.G., 22-year-old player, September 2023

The player's comments are in line with those of the coach, who emphasized that:

"During competitions, communication is very important because you have to communicate a lot with the players who are on the field while you are guiding them. When you do that, everything runs smoothly." T.K, Player, 22, September 2023

Here, the decisive role of communication in team performance is highlighted. Real-time communication between the coach and the players on the field can positively influence the course of matches and the results obtained. This communication allows players to react quickly to changing situations on the field. As for the impact of the coach's tension and behavior on the team, many players felt that the coach's tension and behavior during competitions create a stressful and distracting environment, negatively affecting performance. One player's testimony:

"During competitions, we're in a different phase, so there's already stress, and the coaches also have a goal to win. They want us to follow instructions, but stress is a factor that has a huge impact on the team, so it's a bit difficult to follow instructions, and the relationships are a bit strange." C.D, Player, 21, September 2023

These comments show that stress is a predominant factor during competitions. Observations highlight the fact that sports competitions are associated with high levels of stress due to the stakes and performance expectations. The coach's goal is to motivate the team to win the game. The coach's expectations can put pressure on the players, as they must meet these expectations in order to achieve positive results.

4. Discussion of results

This research led to an analysis of the relationship between coaches, players, and teammates within the handball club. The overall results revealed the impact of communication deficits in the sporting context. When human beings cannot communicate, they cannot achieve their goals either. Sport, as a human activity, is no exception to the need for communication. Regarding the relationship between teammates during training and competitions, it is clear that there is a communication deficit between the players within the Zacos team.

This communication deficit between these players leads to a lack of mutual listening and cohesion within the team. This result is consistent with that of the authors (Rhind and Jowett, 2011). Communication is the basis of interactions between players and the coach. When it is not effective and comprehensive, it contributes to conflicts and misunderstandings within the team. This is why authors Rhind and Jowett emphasize the significant impact of communication in limiting perceptual biases. For these authors, the messages we want to convey are not always understood or received in the way we want by our interlocutor. The resulting misunderstandings and/or assumptions can be a source of conflict that is detrimental to maintaining co-orientation in the relationship.

Creating a climate of free and open communication, as well as regularly explaining (during individual interviews, for example) what we think of the other person and the reasons for these perceptions, can therefore be effective strategies for developing and maintaining co-orientation. As for the authors (Shanmugam and Jowett, 2016), they advocate empathetic communication. Indeed, certain communication techniques such as active listening or rephrasing can also be useful strategies for improving empathy and understanding of the other person. Regularly rephrasing an athlete's words can be an important communication tool for effectively conveying a message and has two benefits. For the coach, rephrasing can be a valuable tool for ensuring that the athlete's message is understood correctly. Rephrasing can also help to memorize information. For the athlete, on the other hand, rephrasing can show interest in what they are saying. By rephrasing, the coach indirectly shows the athlete that they are interested in what they have to say.

Conversely, the climate of ego involvement negatively predicted perceptions of operational and social cohesion. In the same vein, Jowett et al (2017) reveal that athletes' perceptions of good-quality relationships, which translated into high levels of closeness and commitment, were better and more robust predictors of a range of coaching behaviors, while high levels of complementarity only predicted positive personal relationships. In addition, high levels of closeness (trust, respect, appreciation) predicted low levels of negative personal rapport. Good-quality coach-athlete relationships provide the context in which athletes interact with their coaches. Athletes who develop strong bonds with their coaches receive better training. Thus, relationships can play a key role in developing effective coaching environments.

In addition, the results of this research showed the existence of tensions between Zacos players. These data are similar to the results of Duret and Augustini (2012). For these authors, in order to earn one's place, endure the ups and downs of the championship, and adjust to the coach's demands, cooperation between teammates is accompanied by rivalries. This reality is very much present within the Zacos team, where players fight to earn their place and compete with their teammates. The team sports context is marked by the complexity of human relationships, where the ideals of cooperation and camaraderie often coexist with more conflictual realities.

The third relevant finding concerned the professionalism of the sports coach. In this regard, at the Zacos club, a balance between rigor, friendliness, and communication during competitions and with coaches was revealed. Authors have indicated that the adoption of emotion regulation strategies by athletes and coaches (Braun & Tamminen, 2019) could influence the perceived quality of ER. Through their work, these authors suggested that the implementation by coaches of emotional regulation strategies perceived as effective by athletes tended to improve the latter's perception of the Coach-Athlete Relationship (CAR). Westfall et al. (2018) show that the results of a multivariate multiple regression indicated that coaches who perceived themselves as committed and had complementary goals with their athletes showed significantly lower levels. The results indicate that coaches should strive to ensure that they have goals that align with their athletes and develop a lasting and committed relationship with their players. In addition, quality feedback that meets athletes' needs and values their strengths improves their satisfaction and provides essential information for coaches and sports organizations (Laliberté, 2022).

Furthermore, author Roux (2022) shows that athletes who perceived a deterioration (high and declining, and low and declining trajectories) in the quality of their relationship with their coach suffered more injuries during the season and had the highest levels of perceived stress at the end of the season. Conversely, athletes who perceived a high level of Coach-Athlete Relationship (CAR) quality throughout the season (high and stable trajectory) were the least injured and experienced the lowest levels of stress.

5. Conclusion

The results obtained in relation to the players' assessment of interpersonal relationships and cohesion within the Zacos team reveal a communication deficit. The causes of this deficit are linked to a lack of cohesion between players and the presence of subgroups within the team. These two factors are decisive; when they are not addressed by the coach, they have an impact on the performance of a sports team. In terms of the player-coach relationship, some players mentioned the coach's emotional management. These emotional swings have an impact on the mental and physical well-being of

the players. However, other players mention the coach's professionalism, highlighting his rigor, firmness, and friendliness during training and competitions. Based on the various results, it is important for the players and coach of the Zacos team to promote communication, active listening among all team members, and conflict resolution. It is also important to develop a team spirit where members feel connected to each other so they can work together. Team development requires organizing social activities outside of training and competitions, encouraging team members to get to know each other personally, and creating a positive and respectful environment.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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