



Role of Group Dynamics in Team Sports

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Abstract:

A team is a group. Teams differ a bit from groups though. A team is any group of people that work together to accomplish a shared goal. Team members and team dynamics have to depend on and support each other to accomplish a shared goal. You can recognise team dynamics by looking for the forces that influence team behaviour. The individual ability of each team member is important; however the ability of the individuals in a team is not a good predictor of how a team will perform. Getting a group of athletes to perform as a team is not always easy. The factors that draw athletes to a team and help them remain united in order to achieve a common goal, is referred to as team cohesion. In order to develop team cohesiveness, coaches need to identify what are the contributing factors for their specific team.

Rather than assume, coaches should work with the team to identify clear team outcome goals (ie. the 'big picture' goals) and then discuss what process goals need to be set in order to achieve these objectives. Coaches often make the mistake of allowing team goals to be vague and imprecise. Having established team goals it is important for coaches to sit down with each athlete and set individual goals. Sometimes individual goal-setting is ignored within team sports as it is viewed as unnecessary. By establishing individual goals with team members, coaches are emphasizing the importance of each athlete's contribution to the overall team success.

GROUP DYNAMICS

A group is two or more persons who are interacting with one another in such a manner that each person influences and is influenced by each other person.

For a collection of people to be defined as a group, the members must:

- interact with one another
- be socially attracted to each other
- share goals or objectives
- have a shared identity which distinguishes them from other groups

Please cite this Article as : ASHVIN M.CHANDEL , Role of Group Dynamics in Team Sports : Indian Streams Research Journal (June ; 2012)



The social mixing of a sports club is termed "Social Cohesion" and a group with shared formal goals who are normally successful as a group is referred to as "Task Cohesion".

GROUP DEVELOPMENT

The development of a group normally goes through the following stages Forming - the group gets together and a level of formality is common

Storming- heightened tension associated with competition for status and influence

Norming - rules and standards of behaviour are agreed

Performing - group matures to a point where it is able to work together as a team

There are many different forms of interaction in a group. We have social interaction (formation of friends) and task interaction (the way the members co-operate to achieve goals)

COHESION

This is the extent to which members of a group exhibit a desire to achieve common goals and group identity. Research tends to support the view that high interaction teams need high task cohesion to be consistently successful, whereas for moderate or low interaction teams cohesion is less important to success.

LOAFING

Loafing is the tendency for individuals to lessen their effort when they are part of a group - also known as Ringelmann effect. Causes of loafing in a team have been attributed to individuals:

- perceiving others to be working less hard than themselves thereby giving them an excuse to put in less effort
- believing that their own efforts will have little effect on the outcome
- disliking hard work and assuming that their lack of effort will not be noticed
- feeling "off form" and believing team mates will cover for their lack of effort

PERFORMANCE

For a group to perform at its highest level of performance, methods and strategies need to be applied which will improve group productivity and reduce loafing. The subsequent effect will be to improve cohesion and develop positive group dynamics.

TEAM DYNAMICS

A team is a group. Teams differ a bit from groups though. A team is any group of people that work together to accomplish a shared goal. Team members and team dynamics have to depend on and support each other to accomplish a shared goal. [Dynamics](#) are affected by [responsibilities](#) and have a direct [result](#) on [productivity](#). You can recognise team dynamics by looking for the forces that influence team behaviour.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A GROUP AND A TEAM

Getting a group of athletes to perform as a team is not always easy. Just because a group of athletes may train and compete together under the direction of the one coach that does not automatically define that collection of individuals as a team. Rather, a group of athletes becomes a team when they all possess a common identity, have shared goals and objectives, exhibit structured patterns of interaction and communication, and most importantly consider themselves to be a 'team'. When self-categorisation is present, that is, when the collection of athletes start referring to themselves as 'we' versus 'they', coaches can feel confident that a team is beginning to emerge!

GETTING A GROUP TO BECOME A TEAM

A common problem for many coaches is how to get a group of athletes, often of varying fitness or skill levels, to perform as a team. Many great coaches have emphasized that having a group of extremely talented athletes does not guarantee a successful team, but rather that success is more often the result of a group of



athletes of lesser talent who chose to work together to achieve a shared team outcome.

TEAM COHESION IS CRUCIAL FOR TEAM SUCCESS

The factors that draw athletes to a team and help them remain united in order to achieve a common goal, is referred to as team cohesion. In order to develop team cohesiveness, coaches need to identify what are the contributing factors for their specific team. It is also important for coaches to understand that there are often numerous factors that result in a team's cohesion that these factors change over time, and will be different for each team. Having established the factors contributing to a team's cohesiveness, coaches can use this information to further build cohesion.

TEAM GOALS

Given that a key differentiation of a group from a team is having shared goals and objectives, it is important for goals to be established with and communicated to all team members as early as possible. Coaches should work with the team to identify clear team outcome goals (ie. the 'big picture' goals) and then discuss what process goals need to be set in order to achieve these objectives.

Basic rules when setting team goals include:

- Goals should be specific and measurable.
- Goals should be challenging, yet realistic.
- Process goals (ie. stepping-stone goals)
- Continually review these goals.

Having established team goals it is important for coaches to sit down with each athlete and set individual goals. Sometimes individual goal-setting is ignored within team sports as it is viewed as unnecessary. By establishing individual goals with team members, coaches are emphasizing the importance of each athlete's contribution to the overall team success. Additionally, individual goal setting allows goals to be set according to the ability level of each individual.

TEAM ROLES

Regardless of the ability level of the athlete within the team, all team members should have a clearly defined role. Team guidelines are best determined by the athletes themselves, not set and enforced solely by the coach. By encouraging the athletes to define what they expect from one and another as members of the same team, it allows the athletes to experience ownership and therefore increases the likelihood of adherence. It is always important to document the agreed upon guidelines, perhaps as an unofficial 'team contract'.

CONCLUSION

Effective teams do not just happen, they are meticulously put together consisting of a group of highly skilled, highly motivated individuals who have a clear picture of their goals and can receive clear and tangible evidence of their achievements. A highly charged environment will attract high performers who are looking for success. Success builds on success; therefore, a group's reputation is also a major selling point. There must be an opportunity for individual success within the framework of the group's goals. There must be recognition of professionalism from co-workers, peers and the outside world. These are the factors that contribute to winning sports teams and there is no reason to think that other groups will respond any differently.

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