

The Relationships Among Role Ambiguity, Team Cohesion, Role Acceptance and Role Satisfaction of Basketball Players

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to determine the nature of the relationships among Role Ambiguity, Role Acceptance, Role Satisfaction and Team Cohesion. It was hypothesized that Role Ambiguity would predict both Role Acceptance and Role Satisfaction and Role Acceptance and Role Satisfaction would predict both Team Cohesion. Participants included 171 male basketball players from Iran basketball super league. Measures included the Role Perception Scale, a Role Acceptance and Role Satisfaction measure and Group Environment Questionnaire. Stepwise multiple regression analysis showed that Role Ambiguity regarding role evaluation was predictive of Role Satisfaction and Role Ambiguity regarding scope of responsibilities was predictive of Role Acceptance. Stepwise multiple regression also showed that Role Satisfaction to be the predictor of Role Ambiguity as well as the only predictor of Team Cohesion with regard to individual attractions to the group-task.

Key words: Role Ambiguity • Team Cohesion • Role Acceptance • Role Satisfaction

INTRODUCTION

A primary focus within the field of sport psychology is to enhance the athletic Experience for those that are involved. In order to enhance the athletic experience, it is important to first be aware of those factors that may impact, both positively and negatively, an athlete's perception of his or her experience. An athlete's role on a team, the clarity of the role and the acceptance and satisfaction with the role may all influence both Team Cohesion and overall Athlete Satisfaction [1]. This study will focus on these relationships. Specifically, this study will investigate if Role Ambiguity predicts Role Acceptance and/or Role Satisfaction and if Role Acceptance and/or Role Satisfaction predict Team Cohesion.

For most athletic experiences, athletes are members of groups or teams. These groups have a strong impact on the members of the group. Although this impact can be both positive and negative, an athlete's involvement in a group is inevitable. Allen and Howe (2005) have defined a sport team (or group) as a collection of two or more individuals who share a common fate, have structured patterns of communication and hold common perceptions about group structure [2].

When looking at sport teams, the substitute player, coach, team captain and team clown all have something in common besides belonging to a team. Each of these persons has a certain role that he or she is expected to fulfill on their team. Roles have been defined by a number of researchers as a set of expectations about certain behaviors for a Specific position in a particular social context [3]. Brawley *et al.*, (2005) noted that in groups whose purpose is to strive towards peak performance, roles make a crucial contribution to the structure of these groups [4].

Although the research on roles in sport groups is growing, much of the research that has been done is drawn from the organizational and business/industrial literature. That being said, the research that has been conducted in the sport domain has highlighted the importance of individual roles within the environment of the sport team [5]. If athletes have specific roles they are expected to fulfill and they do not accept or are not satisfied with these roles, then they may view the team as less cohesive or they may not be satisfied with their athletic experience [6].

Riemer and Chelladurai (1998) defined Athlete Satisfaction as a positive affective state that results from a complex evaluation of the structures, processes and

outcomes associated with the athletic experience [7]. Athlete Satisfaction with sport is important for several reasons. Riemer and Chelladurai (1998) noted some of these reasons, such as the link between satisfaction and performance, the importance of the athlete to athletic programs and the relationship between satisfaction and other constructs in the group dynamics framework (for example cohesion and leadership) [7]. Research has demonstrated a negative relationship between Role Ambiguity and Athlete Satisfaction, but the research has yet to look at other aspects of role involvement and Athlete Satisfaction.

Role Acceptance and Role Satisfaction may have a strong impact on both Team Cohesion and an Athlete's Satisfaction with the sport experience, particularly for athletes in team sports [8]. There has been a fair amount of research up to this point regarding Role Ambiguity, or being unclear about the role one is supposed to fulfill. Research has also examined Role Ambiguity in relation to Team Cohesion and Athlete Satisfaction. However, a player may be clear about the role he or she is supposed to fulfill (low role ambiguity) but not accept that role or not be satisfied with that role. Thus, the athlete's level of Role Ambiguity could in fact predict Role Acceptance and Role Satisfaction. To take this idea another step, the player may be clear about the role he or she is supposed to fulfill, accept this role that has been laid out, but not be satisfied with this role [9]. This player may view the team as less cohesive or may not be satisfied with his or her athletic experience if he or she is not accepting or is not satisfied with the role he or she has to play. In other words, Role Acceptance and Role Satisfaction could predict Team Cohesion and Athlete Satisfaction [10].

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationships among Role Ambiguity/Clarity, Role Acceptance and Role Satisfaction, Team Cohesion and Athlete Satisfaction. The hypothesized model for this relationship is linear and asserts that Role Ambiguity/Clarity predicts Role Acceptance and Role Satisfaction and that Role Acceptance and Role Satisfaction predict Team Cohesion and Athlete Satisfaction. Specific research questions are: (a) Does Role Ambiguity/Clarity predict Role Acceptance and/or Role Satisfaction? (b) Do Role Acceptance and/or Role Satisfaction predict Team Cohesion? I expect that Role Ambiguity will be predictive of both Role Acceptance and Role satisfaction with greater Role Ambiguity predicting less Role Acceptance and less Role Satisfaction. I expect that Role Acceptance and Role Satisfaction will both predict Team Cohesion with greater acceptance and greater satisfaction

predicting greater perceived cohesiveness. I also expect that Role Acceptance and Role Satisfaction will both be predictive of Athlete Satisfaction with greater Role Acceptance and greater Role Satisfaction predicting greater Athlete Satisfaction. Also, given the number of facets of Athlete Satisfaction and based on previous literature, it is expected that the leadership theme of Athlete Satisfaction will have the strongest relationships [11-12].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this study the relationships among Role Ambiguity, Athlete Satisfaction and Team Cohesion were examined using survey measures with male basketball super league players.

Participants included 171 male basketball players from 11 teams at basketball super league in Iran. Their mean age was 25.52 years (SD= 4.330). To recruit participants, the authors contacted with the head coaches at 11 different teams and explained the study. Of the 11 teams contacted, all of them agreed to participate. Upon approval from the coach and the Athletics Director, the purpose of this study was explained to the athletes and informed consent was obtained from those who agreed to participate. The demographic questions asked athletes about their age, sex, the competitive level at which they are currently playing, their starting status on the team, their tenure on the team, their injury status over the past season and their role on the team. The injury status questions asked if they were injured (to the extent that they were kept from competition) at any point during the season and if so how much competition they missed due to the injury. The questions about their role on the team asked athletes to describe their specific task role(s) on the team and responsibilities that go along with fulfilling that role. The purpose of this study was to get the athletes to think of their specific role so they had a frame of reference as they answered the rest of the questions.

Role Ambiguity was measured using the Role Perception Scale developed by Beauchamp and colleagues [13]. This measure is designed to assess each athlete's perception of his or her role on the team. Original alpha coefficients for this scale were 0.93. Role Acceptance and Role Satisfaction were measured using a measure developed by Bray [14]. This measure assesses these as two separate constructs, allowing us to distinguish between Role Acceptance and Role Satisfaction, as well as see how each of these impacts Team Cohesion and Athlete Satisfaction. Original alpha coefficients for this scale were 0.66.

Team Cohesion was measured using the Group Environment Questionnaire (GEQ) developed by Carron *et al.*, (1985). The GEQ consists of four scales, two that measure the player's perceptions of the group as a unit and two that measure the player's personal attractions to the group. Original alpha coefficients were 0.82.

RESULT

Descriptive statistics and alpha coefficients are reported in Table 1 for the subscales of the Role Perception Scale, Role Acceptance and Role Satisfaction measure and Group Environment Questionnaire. Mean scores for the Role Perception Scale, which measures Role Ambiguity, ranged from 6.2 - 6.7 indicating relatively low levels of Role Ambiguity (high role clarity).

These mean scores are consistent with the means of Eys *et al.* [12] in which the offensive and defensive contexts were combined; their mean scores ranged from 7.3-7.6. For the Role Acceptance and Role Satisfaction measure, mean scores ranged from 8.2 - 8.9 indicating high levels of Role Acceptance, Role Satisfaction and Role

Clarity given the scale ranges from 1-10. The Group Environment Questionnaire had mean scores ranging from 3.4-5.0 indicating moderate levels of Team Cohesion given the scale ranges from 1-9. These scores are also slightly below normative values for this scale [15].

Reliabilities for each of the scales were assessed by calculating the internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. For the Role Acceptance measure alpha coefficients for the subscales of role acceptance, role satisfaction and role clarity were .69, .74 and .83, respectively, reflecting very high internal consistency. The Role Perception Scale had initial alpha coefficients of .65 for scope of responsibilities, .79 for role behaviors, .87 for role evaluation and .76 for role consequences. However, one item was removed from three of the subscales due to inconsistency with the other items. For the scope of responsibilities subscale, item 13 was removed which increased the alpha coefficient to .92; for the role behaviors subscale, item 18 was removed which increased the alpha coefficient to .90; and for the role evaluation subscale, item 15 was removed which increased the alpha coefficient to .93. Those items were not used in total scores or further analyses.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for Role Ambiguity, Role Acceptance and Role Satisfaction and Team Cohesion

Scale	Mean	SD	Range	Alpha
Role Ambiguity - Scope of Responsibilities	6.60	0.96	4.40-8.40	.87
Role Behaviors	6.20	0.99	4.40-8.20	.84
Role Evaluation	6.40	1.20	4.00-8.40	.91
Role Consequences	6.70	1.10	1.30-4.00	.93
Role Acceptance	2.20	0.60	1.30-4.00	.88
Role Satisfaction	2.20	0.48	1.00-3.70	.89
Role Clarity	2.10	0.67	0.50-4.00	.93
Cohesion- ATG-T	3.30	0.74	2.25-5.25	.73
ATG-S	3.50	0.87	2.20-5.40	.82
GI-T	5.00	0.58	4.20-6.80	.75
GI-S	4.58	0.85	3.25-6.75	.86

Table 2: Correlation coefficients between Role Ambiguity, Role Satisfaction and Role Acceptance

Role Ambiguity	Role Satisfaction	Role Acceptance
Scope of Responsibilities	.246*	.493*
Role Behaviors	.192*	.541*
Role Evaluation	.362*	.609*
Role Consequences	.349*	.620*

Notes: * Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 3: Correlation coefficients between Team Cohesion, Role Satisfaction and Role acceptance.

Team Cohesion	Role Satisfaction	Role Acceptance
Individual Attractions to the Group-Task	.274*	.293*
Individual Attractions to the Group-Social	.223*	.371*
Group Integration-Task	.155*	.197*
Group Integration-Social	.125	.295

Notes: * Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The Group Environment Questionnaire did not show very strong reliability on any of its four scales. For individual attractions to the group-social, individual attractions to the group-task, team integration-social and team integration-task, the alpha coefficients were .73, .82, .75 and .86. Individual attractions to the group-task (ATG-T) was particularly low (.52) and was not improved by removing any items. Thus, the scores on the ATG-T must be interpreted with caution. The results revealed statistically significant ($p < .01$) relationships between each of the four dimensions of Role Ambiguity and Role Satisfaction and Role Acceptance. Correlation coefficients between the four dimensions of Role Ambiguity and Role Satisfaction and also between each of the four dimensions of Role Ambiguity and Role Acceptance are included in Table 2. As shown in Table 2, correlation coefficients ranged from .125 - .371, indicating moderate and positive relationships.

The results revealed statistically significant ($p < .01$), but relatively low relationships between Role Satisfaction and three of the four dimensions of Team Cohesion. As shown in Table 3, the relationship was moderate and positive for individual attractions to the group-task, low positive for group integration-task and individual attractions to the group-social and there was no relationship between Role Satisfaction and group integration-social aspect of Team Cohesion. The results also revealed statistically significant ($p < .01$) relationships between Role Acceptance and the same three dimensions of Team Cohesion. Again, the relationship was moderate and positive for individual attractions to the group-task, low for group integration-task and individual attractions to the group-social. Again, there was no significant relationship between Role Acceptance and the group integration-social aspect of Team Cohesion.

Stepwise multiple regression analysis was used to determine if Role Satisfaction and Role Acceptance predicted Team Cohesion. Specifically, individual attractions to the group-task were the subscale used because of past research findings. For this analysis, multiple possible predictors, Role Satisfaction and Role Acceptance, were the predictors an individual attractions to the group-task was entered as the dependent variable. Results showed Role Satisfaction to be the only significant predictor of Team Cohesion with regard to individual attractions to the group-task $F(1, 167) = 57.4$, $p < .001$ accounting for 25.6% of the variance.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to determine the nature of the relationships among Role Ambiguity, Role Acceptance and Role Satisfaction and Team Cohesion. Specifically, this study aimed to determine if Role Ambiguity predicted Role Acceptance and Role Satisfaction and if Role Acceptance and Role Satisfaction predicted both Team Cohesion. Overall, all four aspects of Role Ambiguity were moderately related to both Role Acceptance and Role Satisfaction. It is important to note that in the stepwise multiple regression analysis only one predictor was entered for both Role Satisfaction and Role Acceptance, suggesting that the four aspects of Role Ambiguity overlap. This overlap makes it difficult to sort out contributions of the four aspects of Role Ambiguity. However, the results do still provide good support for Role Ambiguity predicting both Role Satisfaction and Role Acceptance. Therefore, it seems that the clearer athletes are with respect to their role on the team, the more likely these athletes are to accept or be satisfied with this role.

This finding has important implications for coaches and researchers who are concerned with factors that lead athletes to either accept or be satisfied with their role on the team. For coaches, it is important that athletes are not only clear about their role, but they are also made to feel that their role is important. For researchers, using the Role Episode Model [16] would be beneficial to examine factors related to why an athlete may or may not accept or be satisfied with his or her role. This model suggests that in the communication of role expectations, the role sender (for example coach) and focal person (for example athlete) go through a cycle of 5 events. Much of the research has looked at Events 3 and 4 in the model, which are related to the focal person's (that is the athlete) response to the role sender (that is the coach), but it would be helpful to examine characteristics of the role sender for a comprehensive understanding of role involvement. For example, future research should look at the factors related to the role sender (for example communication ability or style) that may influence the focal person's willingness to accept or be satisfied with their role.

As expected, Role Satisfaction was a strong predictor of Athlete Satisfaction with regard to leadership. The more an athlete was satisfied with her role, the more satisfied she was with the leadership and the less satisfied the athlete was of her role, the less satisfied she was with the leadership. This is not surprising, as Eys and Turhan

[17-18] noted, given the dominant role that coaches play in the mobilization, development and use of human resources and in the development and selection of strategies and tactics. This finding also has important implications for both coaches and practitioners in the field. If the leadership aspect of Athlete Satisfaction is the most salient variable, then interventions targeted at the athlete's relationship with the coach might prove to be most useful in increasing and maintaining Athlete Satisfaction. Also, interventions that are targeted at the coach and helping the coach increase his or her player's satisfaction with their role could also prove useful. For researchers, it would be useful to examine the other mediating or moderating factors in the Role Satisfaction-Athlete Satisfaction relationship, such as coaching style or gender. This would give coaches and practitioners a better overall understanding of this relationship. What is surprising is the fact that Role Acceptance did not seem to be a significant predictor of Athlete Satisfaction in this analysis. Given the high correlation ($r = .566$) between Role Acceptance and Athlete Satisfaction, it could be that there was overlap with Role Satisfaction. As a result, coaches still need to be cognizant of factors that could lead their athletes to accept their role on a team.

It is difficult to draw certain conclusions about the relationship between Role Acceptance and Role Satisfaction to Team Cohesion given the lack of reliability of the cohesion subscales. Keeping that in mind, Role Satisfaction was predictive of individual attractions to the group-task component of Team Cohesion. This finding, interpreted with caution, shows that the more satisfied athletes are with their roles, the more cohesive they are in terms of their attraction to the group's tasks. Future research should examine this relationship more thoroughly given the relationship of cohesion to performance and other group constructs.

Surprisingly, the results of this study did provide strong support for Role Acceptance and Role Satisfaction being measured as separate constructs. However, it is important to note that in filling out the Questionnaires, the athletes were asked to describe their role on the team. This is a subjective question and given the number of roles an athlete may have, the athletes may have simply picked the role they were most comfortable with. It would be interesting for future researchers to have the coach describe the athlete's role and then have the athlete answer the Questionnaires based on the prescribed role. Also, some athletes may be unclear of what their coach

sees as their role, so they may have simply listed a role that is clear to them. That being said, it is still important that Role Acceptance and Role Satisfaction be measured separately.

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