

Research Progress on Authentic Leadership and Athletes' Training and Competition Satisfaction

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Abstract: *The leadership style of a coach in competitive sports plays a significant role in influencing an athlete's mental health, emotional well-being, and long-term success. Unfortunately, the repeated instances of coach misconduct have led to a crisis of trust among athletes and posed significant challenges to the management of sports teams. As a result, the ethical conduct of coaches has become a central topic of discussion in the field of competitive sports. The article reviews studies on the concept and measurement of authentic leadership, the influence of authentic leadership on individual psychology and behavior, the concept and measurement of training and competition satisfaction, the influencing factors of training and competition satisfaction, and the influence of authentic leadership on athletes' training and competition satisfaction, with the goal of providing references for provide a theoretical reference for improving the authenticity of coaches' leadership behavior and promoting athletes' satisfaction in training and competition.*

Keywords: *Authentic leadership; Training and competition satisfaction; Athlete*

1. Introduction

In the realm of competitive sports, coaches and athletes alike share a common vision and goal of winning championships and achieving internationally recognized athletic feats. Success in competitions can evoke a sense of accomplishment and honor for athletes and coaches, and may even result in rewards. However, as competitive sports become increasingly professionalized and commercialized, leadership behavior of many coaches has begun to deviate from the guiding principles of "fairness, impartiality, and transparency" in sports. These coaches often conceal their true intentions during the leadership process, abusing their authority for personal gain and neglecting the future development and training of athletes and teams. This unethical behavior, which disregards moral principles, has caused lasting harm to the physical and mental well-being of athletes. Recent research indicates that coaches who exhibit authentic leadership qualities can provide significant psychological support and mental resilience for the growth and development of athletes, and therefore play a crucial role in enhancing athletes' satisfaction.^[1]

2. Authentic Leadership

2.1 The concept of authentic leadership

Henderson et al.^[2] proposed the concept of leader authenticity, defining it as "leaders being able to acknowledge individual and organizational behavioral outcomes to the greatest extent, not manipulating subordinates, and allowing subordinates greater room for self-development". It was not until 20 years later that authentic leadership began to receive widespread attention from the academic community. Based on this, George et al.^[3] first introduced the concept of authentic leadership in a practical context. He believed that authentic leaders should possess optimistic goals and positive values, and their integrity can lead subordinates to create a comfortable, stable interpersonal relationship and work environment. Avolio et al.^[4] suggested that authentic leadership is the process of combining leaders' positive psychological capital with organizational situations, where leaders can inspire subordinates' self-awareness and self-regulation abilities by setting an example, thus promoting mutual self-development. Subsequently, Avolio et al.^[5] further defined authentic leadership as those who have a deep understanding of their own thoughts and behaviors, recognize their own values, morals, knowledge, and talents, are confident, optimistic, hopeful, resilient, open-minded, and possess noble

character. Therefore, based on the above conceptual definitions, authentic leaders are those with clear self-awareness, understanding their beliefs and values, and are able to act candidly in accordance with their beliefs and values.

2.2 Measurement of authentic leadership

Currently, scholars have extensively explored and developed the definition, internal structure, and associated measurement tools of authentic leadership. The "Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ)" compiled by Walumbwa et al.^[6] is extensively utilized. He categorizes authentic leadership into four dimensions: self-awareness, internalized morality, relational transparency, and balanced processing. The scale comprises 16 items and demonstrates outstanding reliability and validity levels. Although the research on authentic leadership started relatively late in China, many scholars have developed high reliability and validity scales. Xie^[7] developed a set of authentic leadership scales suitable for the Chinese context based on previous research. The scale consists of 5 dimensions and 23 items, mainly including subordinates' orientation, leadership traits, integrity, rule-following, and honesty. Through validation, it was found that the scale exhibited high reliability and validity. Subsequently, Zhou^[8] optimized and integrated the scales of Walumbwa and Xie and proposed a 4-dimensional scale of authentic leadership, which includes internalized moral perspective, honesty, subordinates' orientation, and leadership traits, totaling 17 items. Through research, the scale achieved a high level of reliability and validity.

In the realm of sports, Bandura et al.^[9] revised the description of the authentic leadership questionnaire originally developed by Walumbwa. This scale evaluates coaches' authenticity across four dimensions, encompassing balanced processing (e.g., "carefully listening to different viewpoints before reaching a conclusion"), internalized moral perspective (e.g., "demonstrating beliefs consistent with actions"), relational transparency (e.g., "accurately expressing intentions"), and self-awareness (e.g., "seeking feedback to enhance interpersonal interactions"). Primarily, this scale systematically analyzes and evaluates the authenticity of coaching behaviors by surveying athletes' perceptions of coaching leadership. The scale employs a 5-point Likert scale and demonstrates high reliability.

2.3 The impact of authentic leadership on individual psychological

At present, scholarly investigations into authentic leadership behavior can be categorically classified into two levels: individual and group. The assessment of the authenticity of the perceived leadership style is primarily carried out by followers. The perception of authentic leadership at the individual level can be divided into two major categories: psychological and behavioral. Research on the psychological aspects of subordinates mainly focuses on subordinates' attitudes, such as job satisfaction, job involvement, and organizational attachment. Avolio et al.⁵ discovered through studies that authentic leadership can effectively promote subordinates' emotional attitudes and positive behaviors, generating positive effects through individual and organizational identifications. Wong et al.^[10] proposed that authentic leadership directly influences individual identification, and its impact on organizational identification necessitates the mediating effect of individual identification for further manifestation. Gardner et al.^[11] found through research that authentic leadership not only actively promotes their own happiness but also indirectly influences subordinates' satisfaction through five mechanisms: positive emotional contagion, social exchange, organizational identification, autonomy, and positive behavioral modeling. Similarly, following a survey of 179 employees from 62 companies, Jensen found that authentic leadership behavior demonstrated by superiors during the leadership process exerts a positively promoting influence on their job happiness, job satisfaction, and organizational identification.

In the field of sports, authentic leadership exhibited by coaches also plays a significant role in enhancing athletes' satisfaction, attitudes, and efficacy. Bandura et al.^[9] conducted research on college athletes and found that athletes' perception of coaches' authentic leadership indirectly predicted athletes' commitment and enjoyment in sports through autonomy and trust. In other words, coaches demonstrating authentic leadership behavior are worthy of athletes' trust, which inspires athletes' autonomy. Consequently, they may experience genuine enjoyment in the sports participation process, leading to increased engagement. Foreign scholar Bosselut et al.^[13] discovered through research that athletes' perception of coaches' authentic leadership can have a positive effect on their psychological ownership. When a player regards a team as "their own," they are likely to surpass their personal abilities, concurrently, this ownership is also strengthened through their perception of authentic leaders.

2.4 The impact of authentic leadership on individual behavioral

In the realm of behavioral research, existing studies have predominantly focused on examining the influence of the core innate traits of authentic leadership on subordinates' positive behaviors such as innovative behavior, voice behavior, and job performance. Fred et al.^[14] found in his study that a sincere leadership style can positively facilitate subordinates' job involvement and organizational citizenship behavior. Neider et al.^[15] also noted that the intrinsic morality of authentic leadership prompts leaders to lead by example and fosters a greater sense of psychological safety among subordinates through "exemplary leadership," encouraging them to take on more tasks to a certain extent, thereby stimulating a stronger motivation for innovation and fostering innovative behaviors that go beyond their job requirements. With the positive impact of authentic leadership on employee behavior and organizational development, Chinese scholars have gradually begun to focus on the positive benefits generated in the process of authentic leadership. Xie^[16] found that authentic leadership can significantly increase subordinates' trust in their direct leaders, consequently enhancing their job performance. Kong Fang et al.^[16] based on previous research, developed a cyclical interaction mechanism between authentic leadership and subordinates, indicating that subordinates perceive authentic leaders as role models for learning and emulating, and through learning from the leader's honest, friendly, and consistent leadership style, they increase the authenticity of their inner qualities, thereby fostering positive organizational citizenship behavior.

3. Training and competition satisfaction

3.1 The concept of training and competition satisfaction

The concept of athlete satisfaction originates from the study of job satisfaction in organizational behavior. Hoppock^[17] first proposed the concept, suggesting that job satisfaction is an emotional attitude formed by individuals perceiving external situations through physiological and psychological aspects. Edwin et al.^[18] defined job satisfaction as a "positive emotional state that individuals exhibit towards their work." Meanwhile, Vroom (1982) treated job satisfaction and work attitudes as interchangeable concepts, defining them as "an emotional tendency that an individual maintains towards their role in the workplace." Currently, scholars have provided comprehensive interpretations of the definition and concept of athlete satisfaction in training and competition and have presented their own distinct viewpoints. Chelladurai et al.^[19] put forward that athlete satisfaction is an emotional state that athletes experience after systematically evaluating the training process, organizational aspects, and participation outcomes, which holds significant value for the psychological health and growth of athletes. Zhang et al.^[20] pointed out that training and competition satisfaction, as a specific aspect of life satisfaction, is a psychological feeling formed by athletes after a series of complex cognitive evaluations related to their own sports experiences, including organization, processes, and outcomes. Besides its fundamental position in theoretical research, training and competition satisfaction is also regarded from a practical perspective as an important indicator for measuring athletes' psychological feedback on their stage-wise training and competitive states, facilitating the timely diagnosis and assessment of athletes' psychological conditions and providing scientific and accurate information and data support for adjusting training plans and athlete development.

3.2 Measurement of training and competition satisfaction

Chelladurai et al.^[21] conducted a comprehensive and rigorous investigation into athletes' training and competition satisfaction, categorizing the dimensions into three criteria: 1) results orientation or process orientation; 2) individual level or team level; 3) task level and social level. Subsequently, Riemer et al.^[21] developed and refined the "Athlete Satisfaction Questionnaire (ASQ)" based on this research. The ASQ primarily comprises 15 dimensions and 56 items that capture athletes' perceptions of satisfaction with various aspects including sports performance, sports teams, sports organizations, coaches, and personal fulfillment. Furthermore, Weiss et al.^[22], drawing on the distinctive attributes of college athletes, delineated satisfaction measurement into six dimensions encompassing athletes' assessments of training conditions, intensity, methods, teammates, sports team management, and institutional recognition.

Based on prior research, substantial efforts have been exerted by Chinese scholars in the development and investigation of tools for evaluating athletes' satisfaction. Suet et al.^[23] compiled a measurement tool suitable for assessing the level of training satisfaction among Chinese university

athletes. This comprehensive tool encompasses athletes' satisfaction across four dimensions, including training status, coach factors, personal circumstances, and logistical support. Additionally, Xie Bin^[24] developed the "Athlete Training Satisfaction Scale" comprising four subscales and the "Athlete Competition Satisfaction Scale" comprising two subscales, totaling 44 items across four parts: satisfaction with sports organization, self-satisfaction, satisfaction with coaches, and satisfaction with teammates. Furthermore, Zhang et al.^[25] adapted the "General Life Satisfaction Scale" into the "Training and Competition Satisfaction Scale (TCSS)," modifying the term "life" to "training and competition" to align with the assessment of athletes' training and competition scenarios. The scale employs a single-dimensional framework, consisting of six items and utilizes a Likert 7-point scoring method, where a higher score indicates greater satisfaction among athletes.

3.3 Factors influencing of training and competition satisfaction

The satisfaction stemming from training and competition significantly impacts the physical and mental health growth of athletes. The influence of coaches' leadership styles on the athletic and psychological states of athletes carries significant importance. Recent research into the satisfaction of training and competition has principally examined antecedents such as coach behavior, coach-athlete relationships, and trust in coaches. Robinson et al.^[26] categorized athlete satisfaction into training and competition satisfaction and identified a certain correlation between these types of satisfaction and athletes' mental state, coach leadership behavior, and team relationships. Reimer et al.^[27] discovered that athlete satisfaction serves as a crucial psychological indicator for coaches to adjust coaching behaviors, improve training effectiveness, and manage sports teams. Effective coaching leadership plays a vital role in fostering team cohesion, athletes' sense of belonging, satisfaction, athletic engagement, and competitive performance. Liao^[28] researched the impact factors of training and competition satisfaction among college athletes, revealing a meaningful correlation between college athletes' satisfaction and coach training and teaching behaviors, authoritarian behaviors, leadership behaviors, expectations for social support behaviors, and democratic behaviors. Social support and democratic behaviors positively predict college athletes' training and competition satisfaction, while authoritarian behaviors are negatively correlated with college athletes' training and competition satisfaction. Xie Bin^[29] noted that the level of athletes' training and competition satisfaction is influenced by the degree of care from others. Coaches' daily management behaviors, democratic behaviors, and others not only enhance athletes' satisfaction with training and competition, but also play an important role in improving athletes' self-efficacy and self-regulation.

In summary, the perceptions of coach leadership behaviors among athletes are important predictors of athlete satisfaction, playing a crucial role in the physical and mental development of athletes and the improvement of athletic performance. Therefore, exploring the underlying mechanisms of athletes' training and competition satisfaction is vitally important for the sustained development of athletes' sports careers.

4. The relationship between authentic leadership and training and competition satisfaction

4.1 Theoretical support

Affective Events Theory (AET) concerns itself with individual affective reactions, affective events experienced during the work process, and the relationship between attitudes and behaviors, emphasizing the structure, primary triggers, and outcomes of these reactions.^[30] The theory posits that the stability of work environment characteristics is an important external cause of positive and negative work events, as well as individual affective reactions, and that personal inherent traits play a significant moderating role in this process. Moreover, the emergence of affective reactions additionally influences subordinates' attitudes and behaviors. There are two pathways by which affective reactions influence individual behaviors: (1) the direct effect of affective reactions; (2) the indirect effect, namely, affective reactions → attitudes (such as job satisfaction) → behaviors. Building on this framework, Weiss^[31] further classified behaviors into two categories: the first category comprises behaviors directly driven by affective reactions. For example, emotional reactions of distress and annoyance from being criticized by a superior may directly lead to behaviors such as tardiness or absence from work. The second category includes behaviors indirectly driven by affective reactions, which are precipitated by the impact of these reactions on work attitudes; this is also known as attitude-driven behaviors. For instance, a subordinate's resignation may not result from a momentary emotional impulse but rather from the cumulative effect of negative emotions, precipitating substantial changes in work attitudes,

such as job satisfaction and organizational identification, leading to negative evaluations like "I have no prospects for development in this team" or "I don't belong to this team."

Literature review reveals that the integrity, authenticity, and credibility of authentic leaders play a key role in maintaining high-quality leader-subordinate relationships and organizational atmospheres. This positive dynamic and organizational environment enable authentic leaders to further inspire followers' commitment, motivation, and positive affect, thereby fostering the emergence of their positive behaviors.^[32] Moreover, authentic leaders excel in self-reflection, recognizing their strengths and weaknesses with clarity, and often demonstrate openness to others' opinions when making decisions, avoiding subjective assumptions. This leadership approach can engender notable self-awareness in subordinates, enhance their self-perception and intrinsic motivation, and lay a robust psychological groundwork for the development of satisfaction.

4.2 The impact of authentic leadership on training and competition satisfaction

Current research suggests that when confronting substantial external pressures, authentic leaders not only preserve genuine and credible leadership behaviors but also foster follower satisfaction through positive psychological capital (comprising hope, optimism, resilience, self-efficacy), role modeling, and nurturing organizational climates.^[33] With positive self-awareness and behavior regulation, authentic leaders adeptly adapt to changes in the external environment and cultivate transparent relationships with subordinates, underpinned by internal moral principles, thus engendering an optimistic and harmonious work atmosphere that favors mutual organizational growth and development. A literature review has revealed that authentic leadership is pivotal in augmenting satisfaction. Job satisfaction reflects an employee's assessment of their work experience and quality, parallel to the concept of training and competition satisfaction. It comprises an emotional reaction formed by athletes through subjective evaluation of their past sporting experiences and acts as an essential psychological barometer for gauging the efficacy of athletes' training and performance under competitive pressures. Houchin^[34] asserts that there is a positive correlation between authentic leadership exhibited by coaches and athletes' emotional responses. Athletes who deem their coaches to be genuine and credible tend to be more motivated in training and competition, and they exhibit higher levels of trust, enjoyment, commitment to sports, and satisfaction, facilitated by establishing positive relationships with their coaches. Bandura posits that coaches who communicate their true thoughts candidly, respect athletes' views and opinions thoroughly, and uphold higher moral standards may engender enhanced recognition and positive emotions among athletes.

5. Conclusion

Authentic leadership, characterized as an emergent leadership paradigm, closely aligns with both the intrinsic character requirements of leaders and the ethical expectations of coaches in the competitive sports arena. Consequently, this study affords theoretical and practical insights that are invaluable for sports teams and organizations in the selection of coaches, and it also deepens management's comprehension and embracement of the authentic leadership paradigm, presenting practicable pathways and strategies for fostering authentic leadership among coaches. Furthermore, the degree of athlete satisfaction exerts a direct influence on athletes' overall proficiency and essential competitive edge, integral to the advancement of competitive sports. This research undertakes a review of authentic leadership and its correlation with training and competition satisfaction, potentially facilitating the enhancement of athlete satisfaction and charting new avenues and directions. However, scholarly inquiry into authentic leadership within the sports domain remains limited. Although prior research has substantiated the substantial positive effect of authentic leadership on athletes' affective dispositions, the underlying mechanisms of its impact are intricate. Exploring how authentic leadership may positively influence athletes' attitudes and behaviors, the range of effects it could engender, and the application of extant research findings to tackle prevailing challenges in coach training and management, constitute critical avenues for in-depth exploration concerning coaching and authentic leadership within the sports domain.

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