

Science, Movement and Health, Vol. XVIII, ISSUE 2 Supplement, 2018
September 2018, 18 (2 supplement): 264 - 269
Original article

THE INFLUENCE OF INTERPERSONAL SKILLS ON PROFESSIONAL SUCCESS IN PERFORMANCE ATHLETES

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Abstract

Problem statement. Sports life is full of trials, the moments of tension that a performance sportsman needs to invest and master to achieve positive results. Based on each person's skills, motivation, and values that each person can promote can make professional athletes' success

Purpose of study:

1. It is presumed that there is a positive correlation between professional recognition and interpersonal skills of high school students;

2. It is presumed that there is a positive correlation between the desire to challenge and leadership.

Research methods. The research was based on three surveys that have aimed to identify on-cognitive skills, value questionnaire and motivational dominant questionnaire. Respondents were instructed to complete the questionnaires appropriately to situations most frequently encountered in every day life.

Findings. To validate the hypothesis we used Pearson correlations on a sample of 33 performance athletes, 15- to 17-year-old high school students from the 9th and 10th grades.

Conclusions. The results of the study show that there is a positive correlation between the desire to challenge and the leadership ability and between professional recognition and interpersonal skills in the sense that people who are recognized as sporting achievements have developed and the interpersonal skills through which they successfully carry out the tasks they have received. The desire for increased challenge leads to a good leadership ability, the individual being able to guide, encourage and support the members of the group in the sports activities unfolded.

Key words: professional success, values, interpersonal skills, leadership, willingness to challenge.

Introduction

In order to provide an explanation for the concept of "interpersonal skills", it is important for the beginning to understand what the terms "skills" and "interpersonal" mean. To begin with, by skill we understand a "natural and acquired disposition to perform certain tasks." (Sillamy, 2000, p. 33). Through their skills, individuals differentiate themselves from the efficiency point of view. Skills are classified into different types, such as intellectual, sensorial or motor skills. Also, both general functions, such as attention or judgment, along with the certain dispositions of an individual, are considered to be skills. (ibid.). In this sense, we understand that skills are the natural ability of a person, innate or acquired over time, through which he/she can perform certain activities and actions in different contexts of everyday life.

Regarding the concept of "interpersonal", it refers to a series of relationships that are manifested among certain individuals and that represents a whole frame in the context of which we can identify our need to interact with others, to affiliate to certain groups of people (Sintion, 2009). At the same time, we

understand that an interpersonal relationship is a direct and conscious psychic interaction, based on a reciprocal and complex connection that must involve at least 2 people (ibid.).

Once these two concepts have been explained, the "interpersonal skill" can be identified in what Argyle called "social competence", which he defined in the sense of an individual skill needed to produce the desired effects on others in social contexts (Argyle, 1984, apud. Hayes, 2002). At the same time, a similar definition is offered by Honey for "interactive skills", which he finds as the skills people use in interpersonal encounters to "arrange" the interlocutors' behaviors to match their goals (Honey, 1988, apud. Hayes, 2002). So, as the two definitions have a common face, particularly the ability to behave in such a way that you can increase the probability of achieving the desired goals, we can conclude that "interpersonal skills" can be defined as the ability to manifest behaviors that are directed to objectives and which people use in interpersonal interactions for achieving a goal (ibid.). We can also say that interpersonal skills consist of the individual's natural ability to successfully perform activities that require interaction with others,

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* the abstract was published in the 18th I.S.C. "Perspectives in Physical Education and Sport" - Ovidius University of Constanta, May 17-19, 2018, Romania
Received 10 march 2018 / Accepted 5 may 2018

and that this capability offers people who have it the ability to interact effectively with others and, at the same time, the ability to work in a team (Miclea, et al., 2013).

Regarding professional recognition, it is necessary to mention what we mean, from a psychological perspective, when we talk about "recognition". Thus, it is defined as: "in perception, the identification phase; a process (...) of memory. We distinguish spontaneous recognition and discourse recognition involving reasoning schemes, comparative analysis, using some indexes and confronting mental patterns with the structure of the object." (Sillamy, 2000, p. 604). When we think of the term "professional," we understand an aspect related to the profession of that individual. Practically, "professional" refers to the form of the specialized activity of an individual, through the company, which aims to satisfying the individual's needs and capitalizing on his / her capabilities (ibid., p. 551). Recognition has a much stronger impact when it is perceived at a personal level, and when that happens, the concept becomes personalized so that it can fit into individual circumstances and particularities, which happens when recognition is related to a designated behavior (Geller, 2016).

Therefore, we can say that professional recognition consists of identifying and appreciating the value or worth of a person in his / her profession. The person's consideration is based on his / her activity, and the professional recognition consists precisely on this consideration of value. The need for professional recognition is manifested by the desire to be respected and admired by others, and in order to achieve this desire, the person is aware that he / she has to be distinguishable and competent in the field in which he / she activates (Miclea, et al., 2013).

Managing ability consists of leading and guiding a group of people, both formal and informal, taking over the responsibility of the group's work on one's own. Through that capacity, the individual is able to guide, encourage and support members of the group in their activities. Individuals demonstrating such capacity want to be in a leading position in a group, as leaders. (ibid.). Viewed from the perspective of a social construct, leadership is a particular feature of social constructs built by people (Bligh & Meindl, 2005). Thus, leadership is a process by which an individual (or a group, an organization) performs a process of control in a social system on individuals or on their activities within an organized effort (Neveanu, 1978). Leadership involves identifying and specifying all purposes and means, informing the group in a complete and timely manner, optimizing decisions and control (ibid.). According to H. Laswell and A. Kaplan, leadership "refers to both formal and affective power. Where the former is present, but too little affective power is exercised, we are talking about formalism rather than leadership." (H. Laswell și A. Kaplan, apud. Neveanu, 1978).

Desire represents a "tendency that become conscious of its own object", which is born out of a certain frustration (Sillamy, 2000, p. 106). Moreover, desire is a human tendency that seeks to achieve satisfaction through a certain emotional state or towards various actions, being an "emotional activation oriented towards its object." (Neveanu, 1978, pp. 212-213). At the same time, regarding the desire, Neveanu states that: "Although this object is conspicuously seen or projected, desire is not yet a volunteer act, but it appears as a precondition for it." (ibid.).

Regarding the "challenge", we understand that it can be explained as a difficult situation whereby an individual can test his abilities and skills to overcome it or to meet the demands imposed by it. At the same time, the individual can see the challenge as a possibility to accomplish goals, which is possible only through the use of the skills they have in order to identify the opportunities and the work plan and then put them into practice. Hence, we can conclude that the desire to challenge lies in the need to carry out activities with a high degree of difficulty, that test the capabilities and qualities of the individual. Individuals with such a desire are looking for risky activities that require that planning, monitoring and realization strategies are drawn up in a complex way (Miclea, et al., 2013).

Sample and methods

The sample of the survey consists of 33 persons, both males (21 persons) and females (12 persons), aged between 15 and 17, high school students at the "Nicolae Rotaru" Sports School of Constanta, grade 9th and 10th, performance athletes in various sport fields, such as tennis, table tennis, rugby, gymnastics, football, free wrestling, weightlifting, dance and handball.

The methods used in the study consisted of four questionnaires aimed to assess interests' evaluation, to identify non-cognitive abilities, personal values, and motivational dominants.

The interests' evaluation questionnaire

This questionnaire aims to identify and measure the interests of a person, in the sense of his / her crystallized preferences for various fields of activity or knowledge. The questionnaire contains 60 items, with three alternative answers: "0" for "I do not like", "1" for "I'm indifferent" and "2" for "I like it". The questionnaire identifies the artistic, conventional, entrepreneurial, social, realistic, and investigative interests, each of which is expressed through 10 items. The questionnaire does not require a time limit for being completed.

The non-cognitive abilities evaluation questionnaire

The questionnaire serves to identify non-cognitive skills that contribute to the success of the individual. It includes physical and sensorial abilities, as well as self-regulation and relationship skills (Miclea & Călinici, 2008). The questionnaire identifies seven types of non-

cognitive skills, considered to be most relevant for both vocational counseling and performance prediction, as follows:

1. Physical skills;
2. Psychomotoric skills;
3. Visual skills;
4. Hearing skills;
5. Musical skills;
6. Artistic skills;
7. Interpersonal skills.

Thus, the questionnaire contains 58 items: 10 for physical abilities, 10 for psychomotoric, 6 for visual abilities, 6 for hearing, 8 for musical, 8 for artistic and 10 for interpersonal ones. The alternative answers are offered by a Likert scale, where "1" means "very weak" and "5" means "very good". At the same time, the questionnaire can be applied both individually and in groups, without specifying a certain amount of time to complete it. Therefore, through this questionnaire we can identify the following elements: the ability of each athlete to successfully achieve objects of aesthetic value (artistic skills); the ability to capture and process auditory stimuli (auditory skills); the ability to interact in a positive way with others and to have a good team working capacity (interpersonal skills); the ability to successfully solve tasks that require reception, production or use of musical sounds (musical abilities); the ability to efficiently solve tasks that require manual dexterity, motor coordination, accuracy and speed in reactions (psychomotor skills); the ability to successfully solve tasks where the visual processing of the stimuli (visual skills) (Miclea & Călinici, 2008).

The personal values evaluation questionnaire

The questionnaire contains 21 items, and aims to identify the personal values of each individual, values that guide them in their daily lives. The questionnaire highlights 6 types of values: a) **professional recognition**, which is the need to be respected and admired by others; b) **autonomy**, which is the need to have freedom and diversity in their own actions; to make decisions on their own; c) **social relations**, represented by the need to create, develop and maintain positive relationships with other people; d) **investigative interests**, which involve an attraction for research and investigation in various forms and in various fields; the need to work with ideas, to explore, to understand different things and events to solve abstract problems, to be involved in scientific research; e) **social interests**, involving interpersonal relationships; they are an attraction for the way people understand and teach; the need to work with others; d) entrepreneurial interests represent a preference for the moments that allow the initiative and the opportunity to coordinate their own activities or the activities of a group (ibid.).

It does not require a specific time for completion, and the answers are provided through a Likert scale, from 1 to 5, where "1" means "very little like me", and "5" means "resembles very much with me."

The "Motivational dominants" Questionnaire

The motivational dominants questionnaire aims to identify the dominant elements within the individual's motivation in its activities. It highlights four factors:

1. **The need for power (Leadership)** – the desire to influence others, mobilizing them for success or manipulating them for personal interest);
2. **The need for accomplishment (Expertize)** – the desire to excel in their engaging activities);
3. **The need for affiliation (Networking)** – the desire to establish and manifest friendship with others; the desire to work with pleasure in a pleasant team);
4. **The Need for Existence (Subsistence)** – the concern of the person for the basic needs of existence) (Ticu, 2004).

The questionnaire contains 32 items, the answer being given, as before, by a Likert scale. However, the scale within this measurement is from 1 to 7, where "1" means "never agree", and "7" means "always agree". Also, the questionnaire does not have a time limit to be completed.

Objectives and hypothesis

The objective of current research is to identify the human skills that influence professional success in performance athletes, but also to identify the relationship between the respective skills and the professional success, in order to understand the way in which these elements manifest themselves. Thus, the assumptions of the research are as follows:

Hypothesis 1: We assume that there is a positive correlation between professional recognition and interpersonal skills.

Hypothesis 2: We assume that there is a positive correlation between the desire to challenge and the leadership skill.

4. Results

Given that the primary objective of this study is to identify the skills that influence professional success in performance athletes, one of the skills we have identified as of significant importance is the interpersonal one, which implies the individual's ability to interact in an effective and beneficial way with the people around him, but also to work with other individuals, especially in the team. Therefore, forwards, we are going to present the results obtained for our first hypothesis, but we will also identify the reasons behind the relationship between the two elements, as well as the way they influence one another.

Hypothesis 1: We assume that there is a positive correlation between professional recognition and interpersonal skills.

As you can see below (Figure 1), the first hypothesis of this study is statistically confirmed, with a positive correlation between professional recognition and interpersonal skills, highlighted by the Pearson

coefficient, of 0.346. This confirms that the correlation is valid at a significance level where $p = 0.05$.

Correlations

		Interpersonal skills	Professional recognition
Interpersonal skills	Pearson Correlation	1	,346*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,049
	N	33	33
Professional recognition	Pearson Correlation	,346*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,049	
	N	33	33

Figure 1

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Given the statistical confirmation of the hypothesis, the question arises: "What are the reasons for this positive correlation between professional recognition and interpersonal skills?" To begin with, we understand that professional recognition is an important aspect in the performance of athletes, as each of them wishes to be admired and appreciated for its capabilities. At the same time, given the fact that the professional recognition shows the individual's need to capitalize on his skills and achievements, we can easily deduce its existence in the values of an athlete. Also, interpersonal skills are a key element in the career of a performance athletes for both individual sports and team sports.

First of all, let us look at the athletes who practice individual sports. They are alone on the battle mat, on the ground or in the ring, but behind that moment is all the work done to reach that point. When we say activity, we refer to the trainings and sacrifices that athletes do during their career, which are done through teamwork. Of course, behind any athlete there are some people who influence and prepare him / her to achieve the desired performance. The current study does not aim to identify the people who have the strongest influence on the athlete, but how the interpersonal ability allows him / her to achieve the desired performance, implicitly professional recognition. Thus having interpersonal skills facilitates communication with the coach, psychologist or sports doctor, which gives the athlete the ability to understand much easier and perhaps in a much wider perspective what he has to do, how to play, the way in which he has to train, his strong points, but also the weak ones, what he needs to improve in his game, aspects that can be essential in achieving performance. Looking at the relationship between the athlete and the coach, the existence of interpersonal skills gives the athlete the opportunity to develop a positive relationship with his / her coach, as well as an ability to listen and understand how to train in order to achieve his /her goals. Regarding the relationship between sportsman and psychologist or sports physician, interpersonal skills allow effective communication and mutual understanding, which is an extremely important element in achieving performance. For example, the

athlete is in a difficult time in his / her career after a defeat. His / her interpersonal skills can help him / her overcome that period by developing the interrelation capacity with his psychologist who can identify the problems at that time, the capabilities, and resources needed to overcome them, by default, allowing him / her to achieve the desired performance.

Secondly, let's look at the athletes who practice team sports. As we all know, communication is the most important aspect within a group, furthermore in the context in which that group targets a common goal. The existence of interpersonal skills allows the athlete to develop his / her teamwork through the positive development of relations with his / her teammates, but also of the group cohesion, in the absence of which it is not possible to achieve any type of performance in a sport team. Moreover, interpersonal skills allow the effective conduct of both training sessions and matches, facilitating interpersonal knowledge among teammates to identify each person's abilities, to maintain morale at a high level, to communicate and to develop work capacity in team.

Hence, the positive correlation between interpersonal skills and professional recognition is explained by the relationships that the athlete develops with people who influence their ability to achieve performance. Once the athlete has the ability to work with others, to listen to them, to understand them, to develop a positive and beneficial relationship with them, then he / she can expect a significant increase in the chances to obtain performance, implicitly in being recognized in the professional field in which he /she operates. The effective way of training, both between teammates and between the athlete and the coach, allows for performance, which is also true for other people behind a sportsman such as a psychologist or sports doctor.

Hypothesis 2: We assume that there is a positive correlation between the desire to challenge and the leadership skill.

As in the case of the first hypothesis, this second hypothesis of the research is statistically validated by calculating the Pearson coefficient (Figure 2), which has a value of 0.437, indicating a strong correlation, where $p = 0.05$.

Correlations

		Challenge	Leadership
Challenge	Pearson Correlation	1	,437*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,011
	N	33	33
Leadership	Pearson Correlation	,437*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,011	
	N	33	33

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Figure 2

In any athlete we find the desire to challenge, because sport is a challenge through self-indulgence or achievement of certain performances. Through the desire to challenge, we understand the need to carry out activities with a high degree of difficulty, testing the capabilities and qualities of the person. The desire to challenge is to look for risky activities, which require that planning, monitoring, and realization strategies be elaborated in a complex way. Once this explanation has been given, we can deduce that in the life of an athlete, risk, planning and realization strategies, abilities and skills testing, the high degree of difficulty in training or competition is fundamental in his / her career. Leadership, as a need for power, for influencing others, is relevant in the life of an athlete, especially in the careers of sportsmen who practice team sports and hold the title of captain of these teams. As the status of captain involves the leadership and coordination of a team in the matches played during the sporting activity, then the desire to challenge is justified.

It is certainly difficult to lead a group of people to achieve success in their activities, and although we are tempted to think that it is much easier in a team sport, we can say that it becomes harder as the group grows. The leader of a team faces a real challenge, being forced to cope with the psychological peculiarities of each colleague, such as personality, temperament or character, so as to create and stabilize group cohesion and understanding between all team members. The team leader aims to guide them towards achieving performance, maintaining a high level of morale, even in difficult or negative situations for the team, maintaining positive relationships between them, and facilitating communication between them. Considering that we mentioned the concept of communication, the team leader must be able to interact effectively with each colleague in particular, but also to communicate so that each team member can understand what he / she has made to achieve the desired performance. A team leader must be able to know each member's capabilities, know how team members relationships evolve, identify team problems and the real reasons behind those problems so that they can clear them, solve interpersonal conflicts, value each player to co-operate and be able to constantly highlight the team's success. All this is a challenge, as it is extremely difficult to bring a group of people to

the stage of cooperation, even if the purpose is common.

Therefore, the positive correlation between the desire to challenge and the need for leadership lies precisely in the difficulties an athlete has to overcome in order to lead his /her team to victory or the achievement of the set goals, implicitly to achieve performance, facing all the difficult organizational activities of the group and of maintaining morale and the high level of cohesion.

Conclusions

In conclusion, interpersonal skills influence the skills needed by an athlete to achieve performance in the sport they practice in that they enable the athlete to interact effectively with both teammates and other staff members, (coach, doctor, psychologist, etc.), which creates a positive relationship between them and, moreover, helps achieve performance. At the same time, interpersonal skills create a facilitating communication between the athlete and his or her teammates or team members so that they can interact more effectively with each other but, more than that, they can accurately understand what they have to do in order to achieve that performance. Also, through interpersonal skills, the individual manifests the ability to work in a team, which is a key element in achieving performance. Regarding the desire to challenge, which exists in the life of an athlete particularly through the performance he /she wants to achieve, the direct relationship with the need (but also with the driving ability) to lead is explained by the needs that an athlete must meet and by the difficulties they face, in order to maintain the cohesion of the team as well as the moral level, to identify the capacities of each member, the existing problems and the reasons behind them, to eliminate them and to cooperate with them team and coordinate it in order to achieve the desired performance.

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