Group and Team Dynamics
Group and Team Dynamics: Why Study Groups?

• Almost any position in the sport and exercise field requires understanding of the processes and dynamics of groups.

• NBA coach Pat Riley: “Teamwork is the essence of life.” NBA great Michael Jordan: “Talent wins games, but teamwork wins championships.”

• We must consider the nature of sport and exercise groups.
What Is a Group?

• Group: Two or more people who interact and exert mutual influence on each other and share the following characteristics:
  – A collective sense of identity
  – Distinctive roles
  – Structured modes of communication
  – Group norms
Theories of Group Development

• The linear perspective
• The cyclical (life cycle) perspective
• The pendular perspective
The Linear Perspective

• Forming: Familiarization, formation of interpersonal relationships, development of team structure

• Storming: Rebellion, resistance to the leader and to control by the group, interpersonal conflict

(continued)
The Linear Perspective (continued)

• Norming: Development of solidarity and cooperation; group conflicts resolved
• Performing: Channeling of energies for team success
The Cyclical (Life Cycle) Perspective

• Development of groups is similar to the life cycle—birth, growth, and death.

• Emphasis is on the terminal phase of the group’s existence.

• As the group develops, it psychologically prepares for its own breakup.

• This model is especially relevant for groups and teams that last 10 to 15 weeks.
The Pendular Perspective

• Shifts that occur in interpersonal relationships during the growth and development of groups.

• Groups do not progress through linear phases.
The Pendular Perspective (continued)

• Stages of group development
  – Orientation
  – Differentiation and conflict
  – Resolution and cohesion
  – Differentiation and conflict
  – Termination
Group Structure

- **A role** consists of the set of behaviors required or expected of the person occupying a certain position in a group.

- **Formal roles** (e.g., coach, instructor, captain) are dictated by the nature and structure of the organization.

- **Informal roles** (e.g., enforcer, mediator) evolve from the group’s dynamics or interactions among group members.
• Both role clarity and role acceptance are critical for team success.

• Role conflict exists when role occupant does not have sufficient ability, motivation, time, or understanding to achieve goal.
Group Structure (continued)

• Group norms

  – A norm is a level of performance, pattern of behavior, or belief.

  – Leaders need to establish positive group norms or standards (especially standards or norms of productivity).

    – The standard for effort and performance accepted by the team is called the norm for productivity.

  – Positive norms are important to establish.
Group Structure (continued)

- Modifying team norms
  - The source of the communication is critical in modifying norms—more credible, better liked, similar, attractive, high-status, and powerful individuals are more effective persuaders.
  - Speaking in a rapid (versus slow, deliberate) manner increases persuasiveness.
  - Modifying norms is more effective when both sides of the argument are presented and there are multiple explicitly stated conclusions.
Creating an Effective Team Climate

• *Social support*: Mutual respect and support enhance team climate.

• Social support provides appraisal information, reassurance, and cooperation. It reduces uncertainty in times of stress, aids in mental and physical recovery, and improves communication.
Creating an Effective Team Climate (continued)

• **Proximity**: Closer contact between members promotes team interaction.

• **Distinctiveness**: The more distinctive the group feels, the better the climate.

• Fairness—or a lack of it—can bring a group closer together.

• Greater similarity = closer climate.
Social Support

An exchange of resources between at least two people perceived by the provider and the recipient as intended to enhance the well-being of the recipient.
Functions of Social Support

- Provides appraisal, information, reassurance, and companionship
- Reduces uncertainty during times of stress
- Aids in mental and physical recovery
- Improves communication
Seven Types of Social Support

- Listening support
- Emotional support
- Emotional-challenge support
- Reality-confirmation support
- Task-appreciation support
- Task-challenge support
- Personal-assistance support
Individual and Team Performance in Sport

• While individual ability is important, the individual abilities of team members alone are not good predictors of how a team will perform.

• Steiner’s model
  – Actual productivity = potential productivity - Losses attributable to faulty group processes.
  – Losses result from motivation and coordination.

(continued)
• Implications of Steiner’s model: Role of the coach
  – Increase relevant resources (through training, instruction, and recruiting).
  – Reduce process losses (through enhancing cohesion and emphasizing individual contributions to the team).
How Individual Skills Relate to Group Performance

• The greater the need for cooperation and interaction in a task, the more the importance of individual ability decreases and the importance of group productivity increases.

• Teams of equal ability tend to play best.
Ringelmann Effect and Social Loafing

- Ringelmann effect is the phenomenon by which individual performance decreases as the number of people in the group increases.
- Social loafing is when individuals within a group or team put forth less than 100% effort due to loss of motivation.
Conditions that Increase Social Loafing

• An individual’s output cannot be independently evaluated.

• The task is perceived to be low in meaningfulness.

• An individual’s personal involvement in the task is low.

• A comparison against group standards is not possible.

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Conditions that Increase Social Loafing (continued)

• Other individuals contributing to the collective effort are strangers.

• Teammates or coworkers are seen as high in ability.

• Individual team members perceive their contribution to the outcome as redundant.

• The individual is competing against what he or she believes to be a weaker opponent.
Eliminating Social Loafing

• Emphasize the importance of individual pride and unique contributions.

• Increase identifiability of individual performances.

• Determine specific situations in which social loafing occurs.
Eliminating Social Loafing (continued)

• Conduct individual meetings to discuss social loafing.

• Appreciate each teammate’s responsibilities (assign players to other positions).

• Divide the team into smaller units.
Enhancing Peer Relationships

• Peer relations or relationships with teammates usually stand out as particularly important and meaningful for athletes.

• Therefore, enhancing peer relations is an important aspect of improved group and team dynamics.
Enhancing Peer Relationships (continued)

• Generate cooperative goals in the sport setting.

• Encourage young athletes to engage in their own problem solving rather than expect adults to solve problems for them.

• Enable athletes to engage in shared decision making.
Enhancing Peer Relationships (continued)

• Design sport settings for small group activities and maximum participation.

• Select peer leaders on criteria other than athletic ability (e.g., leadership skills).
Enhancing the Desire for Group Success

• The desire for group success is a team-oriented motive or goal, the basis of which is the team members’ desire to derive pride and satisfaction from the team if it is successful in accomplishing its goals.
Enhancing the Desire for Group Success (continued)

• Strategies for developing the desire for group success
  – Emphasize a pride-in-team approach with a unifying team goal.
  – Ensure that each member’s contribution is valued and recognized by coach and teammates.
  – Place strong emphasis on good leadership from the coach and captains.
Enhancing the Desire for Group Success (continued)

– Actively work to develop both task and social cohesion.

– Encourage unified commitment to the team effort—reward the pursuit of excellence.

– Use effective communication to keep all members feeling part of the team.
Applying Work Team Principles to Sport Teams

- Pre-performance briefing
- Cross-training
- Communication training
- Training for adaptability
- Team self-correction
Transition or Disengagement for Teams

• Ask the key question of how teams are affected by departure of teammates (due to injury, graduation, cutting).

• Facilitate smooth transitions for teams:
  – Clarify role differentiation.
  – Increase individual awareness of disengagement.
  – Facilitate group interaction.
  – Negotiate closure and new group development.
6 Tools You Can Use to Get More Cooperation from Your Team Members

- Common Goals
- Participation in Setting Goals
- Interdependency
- Peer Pressure
- Rewards
- Correct Group Size
Common Goals

• In sports we are dealing with a special type of group – a group that is formed around a common goal and which requires the effort of all members to achieve that goal

• This is called an interdependent group

• Sometimes group members lose sight of their common goals or that they need to depend on each other to achieve their common goals
Common Goals

• When some group members do not have their common goals in mind as the most important focus of their efforts, such as when some of the players start breaking off into their own little group, it is up to the coach to remind them of the goal of being a team that includes everyone.
Participation in Setting Goals

• Team members need to have a voice in what the common goals are, though, in order to fully support the goal.

• So, even if the goals have been defined previously, it is important to ask team members if they want to add to, change, or delete any of the previously defined goals.

• Team members cannot rally around common goals that are not truly common.
Interdependency

• Team members also need to be reminded periodically that they are interdependent

• That is, not any one of them can achieve his/her goal without the help/support of the other team members

• Sometimes an athlete will get a “prima donna” (or “prima don”) complex, where she/he feels like a superstar. But a superstar is one who has lost the sense of interdependency and, because of this, is detrimental to the team’s functioning as a team
Peer Pressure

• Peer pressure is a valuable aspect of team work

• Peer pressure can be both positive and negative

• A coach or an enlightened team member can detect when peer pressure is being used in a positive or negative way and direct it towards appropriate uses
Rewards

• Using positive peer pressure is one way of rewarding appropriate behaviors—those behaviors that contribute to team effort.

• Rewarding the behavior you want to see more of is the best way to see more of that behavior.

• The reward, though, has to be what the individual sees as rewarding.
Rewards

- Something as subtle as the feedback from one’s muscles that lets one know that one has made a good pass can, itself, be a positive reinforcer (reward)
- Or telling a player the positive consequences of engaging in a particular behavior can be rewarding
- Rewards always increase the behavior you want much more than does any “correction” or “punishment”
Rewards

• If you want a team member to stop criticizing other team members, don’t negatively criticize that person.

• Instead, tell the team member he/she will be helping the team more if he/she praises other team members when they are doing something right (and, of course, praise this team member when you see him/her praising another team member).
Correct Group Size

• The size of the group also has an effect on the group’s functioning

• If a group is too small or too large there are impediments to functioning

• For example, a two person group is very stable but has difficulty making decisions because it is limited in the information and resources it can bring to the discussion
Correct Group Size

• A three person group is very unstable. It usually breaks into two people against one, even though these alliances can change over the course of time with a different two person group against one “outsider”

• A four person group tends to break into two 2-person groups, often opposed to each other
Correct Group Size

• A five person group is ideal in the sense of being stable and having a wide variety of information and resources available to it.

• Over 9 people in a group tends to be a problem because not everyone in the group has an opportunity to express their thoughts and be acknowledged as heard.
Correct Group Size

- A large group also is subject to the Ringelmann effect, where the motivation of some members goes down because they feel they can engage in “social loafing”, that is, let others do the work.

- So break down the group into smaller units if you need to have well-functioning decision-making groups.
• Remind team members of the common goal
• Make sure team members participate in goal setting so they are committed to them
• Remind team members that they are interdependent
• Use positive peer pressure
• Use positive reinforcement or reward
• Make sure the size of the group is appropriate to the task at hand