

From The Locker Room to the Boardroom: Developing Leaders Through Sport

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Introduction

The research presented in this paper arises from the author's interest in the populist view that sport develops business skills such as teamwork, leadership and self confidence. Whilst anecdotal evidence to support this theory is multitudinous, empirical evidence is scarce.

A systematic review was identified as the most appropriate method of investigating this concept due to its applicability to a managerial study of this nature. The systematic review procedure has been adapted specifically for research in the social sciences and has been developed to counter the increasingly fragmented and divergent nature of management research. This facilitates efficient information dissemination amongst research groups to better inform policy and practise in the social sciences.

The outcomes of this research have significant implications for stakeholders in the graduate recruitment process (private companies, academic institutions and graduates).

Method

The systematic review identifies key scientific contributions to a question or field and is undertaken in place of a 'traditional' narrative review. It is a method that has transferred from the medical sciences to the management sciences and has been developed specifically to counter the often serendipitous and subjective nature of the narrative literature review. The systematic review could be conceptualised as a positivist framework that allows a highly systematic, transparent and reproducible audit of relevant literature, which is then qualitatively analysed to identify key research outcomes and to inform further research.

The systematic review consists of nine specific steps: forming a review panel, mapping the field of study, producing a review protocol, conducting a systematic search, evaluating studies, conducting data extraction, conducting data synthesis, reporting the descriptive and thematic findings and informing research and practise. Clarification and discussion of these nine stages will form a key part of the presentation.

A systematic review was used in this research study, which focused specifically on a general study of the field of management. This included an overview of leadership theories, participative decision making theory, personality classifications, teambuilding activities, classic management theories (neo-relations, contingency, systems, quantitative, behavioural and classical schools), the concept of power, case studies of highly successful managers, management gurus and the future of leadership theory (transformational, charismatic and transactional leadership, 360° model). This allowed a general overview of the field of management research to be conducted, identifying key emergent themes and facilitating a critical analysis of management theory to take place.

Results and Discussion

The systematic review identified leadership as the most important attribute that future executives must possess, if corporate productivity and efficiency are to be maximised (Smith, 1997). It has been theorised that undergraduates are the leaders and policy makers of the future, and their ability to lead will have far reaching social and economic implications on a global level (Crainer, 2002). However, it has been argued that collegiate and executive level leadership training programmes do not cater sufficiently for the '*new demands of leadership*' (Bryman 1992, Bass 1985, Bennis & Nanus 1985, Tichy & Devanna 1990). A specific type of leadership - transformational leadership – has consistently emerged as a dominant paradigm throughout the review, which forms a key focus of this paper.

The key outcomes of the systematic review can be summarised thus:

1. There is evidence to suggest that the business sector endorses the concept of a positive link between sports and business and that sports experience is viewed favourably in the graduate recruitment process.
2. Evidence of a sports business link is fundamentally anecdotal in nature and has no empirical basis. This concept clearly requires empirical research to assess its validity, in order to inform policy making and graduate recruitment practises.
3. The systematic review identified leadership as the most important and desired skill demanded by the business sector.
4. Transformational leadership emerged as the dominant leadership paradigm within the systematic review, and was observed to correlate closely with other key leadership and management models.
5. It was further identified that transformational leadership appears to lead to optimal levels of leadership performance when combined with emotional intelligence.
6. There is evidence to suggest that aspects of transformational leadership and emotional intelligence may be learnt through sports participation. A number of studies show that sports participation leads to acquisition of skills associated with emotional intelligence and transformational leadership.
7. The Multi-Factor Leadership questionnaire (MLQ) and triangulation of research methods have been identified as the most appropriate means of investigating whether sports develops transferable skills that can be effectively utilised in a business environment.

References

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