

# Chapter 10

Psychological aspects that optimise performance

## Playing in a team



### What you need to know

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- understand the dynamics of group performance
- define the factors that affect group performance
- understand how the role of the leader is important in helping the team

### Team dynamics

A group is a collection of individuals who work together to achieve a common goal. In sporting terms this could mean your hockey team, which trains and plays together each week in the hope of winning the league. According to Steiner, the success that such a team achieves is based on the following formula:

$$\text{actual productivity} = \text{potential productivity} - \text{faulty processes}$$

Learn your definitions. Many short exam questions will ask for the meaning of such terms as potential productivity and actual productivity.

**Top tip**

Actual productivity refers to the result; potential productivity is the best performance the team could achieve if everything went just right; and the faulty processes are the factors that make things go wrong. In other words, the 1–0 win in our last league game (actual productivity) is based on our best possible performance (potential productivity) minus all the things that went wrong during the game (faulty processes).

The potential of the group could be improved by simply having the best players, but the coach should remember that it is how such players interact and work together that produces the best results. Some teams

**Actual productivity:** the result; the level of attainment on the task.

**Potential productivity:** the group's best possible performance, influenced by interaction and player quality.

**Faulty processes:** the factors that reduce group potential, such as poor coordination, social loafing (page 84) and the Ringlemann effect (page 84).

**Key terms**

get fantastic results with average players who give their best and work for each other, while other teams have great players but do not always win. Faulty processes affecting a team include coordination problems, lack of cohesion and lack of motivation from some team members.

## Stages in group formation

According to the psychologist Carron, a group or team is formed over time by passing through four stages, sometimes known as antecedants:

- The **forming stage** — members of the group develop an affinity with each other based on their desire to share a common goal. In sport this could happen, for example, at the first training session undertaken by a group of players who are hoping to be selected for the college rugby team. After the first training session, the players might begin to socialise with each other when they meet in the college recreation area and a bond between them begins to form.
- The **storming stage** — differences of opinion and conflicts within the group may begin to surface. In the college rugby team example, it may emerge that two players are trying to get into the team in the same position and a rivalry develops between them.
- The **norming stage** — the group or team members begin to resolve their differences and settle down into a team with long-term potential. The two players trying out for the same position might solve the problem by agreeing that one of them should play in a different role, a role with which they are now familiar.
- The **performing stage** — finally, the team begins to fulfil its potential and concentrate on achieving its goals. Regular fixtures are fulfilled and the team members enjoy playing their chosen sport.

## Cohesion and coordination within the team

**Coordination** problems — seemingly small issues relating to timing and effective communication — can have a significant impact on sports performance. A defender who fails to communicate effectively with fellow defenders might end up leaving an attacker free and giving away a goal. Poor tactics and strategies also result in coordination problems. For example, the players in a basketball team might be instructed to use a one-on-one defence when the individual speed of some of the opponents means it would be better to operate in a zone.

Coordination problems within the team affect group cohesion. **Cohesion** is defined as the degree to which members of a team unite to achieve a common goal. There are two types of cohesion:

- **Task cohesion** involves the group members working together to achieve a goal.
- **Social cohesion** is about how individual team members get on.

### Tasks to tackle 10.1

The four stages of group formation are forming, storming, norming and performing. Imagine that you are about to join a local hockey team. Describe the characteristics of each of the four stages of formation that you may experience from when you first join the team.

**Interaction:** working

together to achieve a goal.

**Coordination:** work and effort that is timed and matched to produce success.

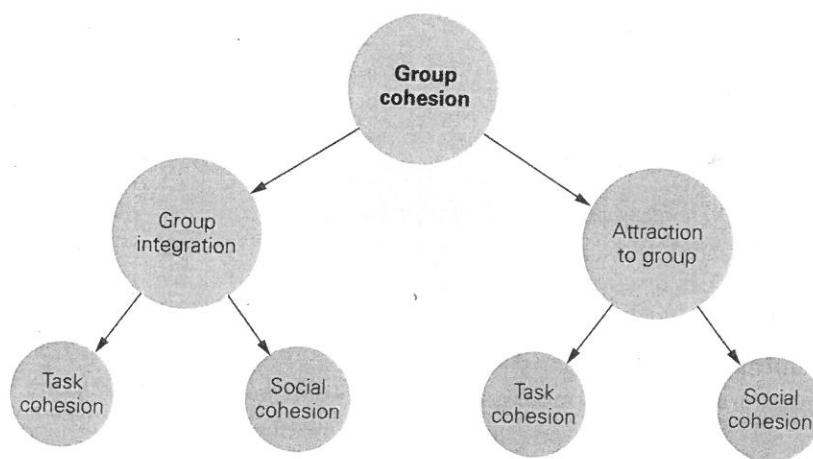
**Cohesion:** the degree to which members of a team unite to achieve a common goal.

Key terms



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**Figure 10.1** The task and social cohesion of individuals combine to give group cohesion

More advanced exam questions might ask you to account for the influence of task cohesion *and* social cohesion on team success, so make sure you can describe the importance of both. Remember that task cohesion alone can produce results, but is best accompanied by social cohesion.

#### Top tip

Generally, the best results are achieved when both task cohesion and social cohesion occur, and there is little doubt that successful teams show a high degree of cohesion. Nevertheless, even if some members of the team do not get on socially, they can still produce excellent results with task cohesion alone. Personal differences can be put aside in order to achieve results. Social cohesion does, however, help to promote group interaction.

Both types of cohesion are involved in attraction to a group, and integration within it. Figure 10.1 shows how a player could be attracted to a team for social reasons, to meet and work with others, and for achievement reasons — they like working as a team and think this team will be successful. Once in the group, the player has to integrate with other team members to get the task done — a defensive player needs to communicate with fellow defenders to make sure no goals are conceded, for example.

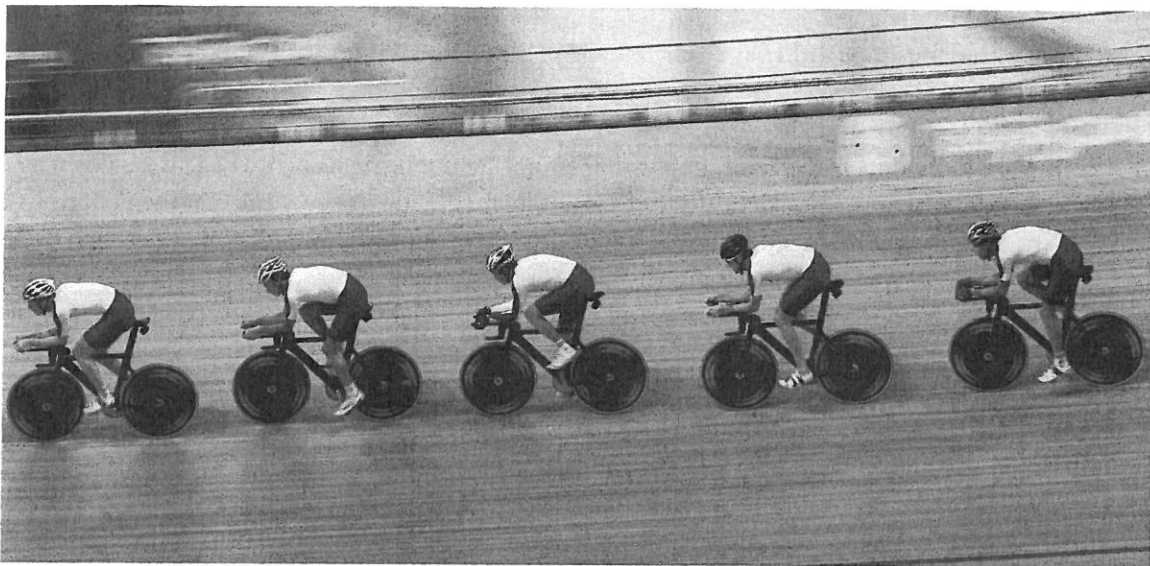
#### Tasks to tackle 10.2

Make a list of the factors that you think could affect team cohesion. For each factor that you identify, state whether you think it affects task cohesion, social cohesion or both. For example, the personality of the players in the team is a factor that could influence social cohesion.

#### Influences on cohesion

There are a number of factors that affect both group cohesion and coordination. These factors may be seen as the forces acting on the group that keep the group together.

The type of sport is important in this regard. Sports such as marathon running depend on the individual



Some sports require high levels of coordination to avoid both failure and injury

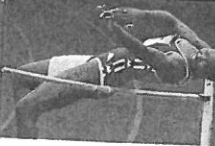
athlete and do not need much coordination with others. Team sports such as netball, on the other hand, require a high degree of coordination and cooperation and the interaction of team members is important. There is also more potential for things to go wrong in a team because it is more likely that someone will make a mistake. Sports that are performed in a pair, such as tennis doubles, require interaction and cohesion. Think how vital it is for a double sculls rowing pair to get their mutual timing right. Timing is also important in team coordination. When a set move is performed in rugby it is important that all the players time their runs to perfection.

The personalities of the players also influence cohesion. It is important that the members of the team get on socially and that their personalities 'gel'. Imagine a group of extroverts all vying for attention within the group — a mix of both loud and quiet personalities is better for group harmony.

The rewards on offer can affect team morale and motivation. The desire to win a major cup game will tend to bind the team together in the drive for success. Personal differences are often forgotten in order to achieve success. In other words, the cohesion related to the task is stronger than the cohesion related to social aspects.

Cohesion and coordination are also affected by past success and the probability of future success. If a team has already beaten a particular opponent in the cup, then the players may well look forward with confidence to playing the same opponent again in the league — the good chance of a win will bring a desire to play.

Leadership can also affect team coordination. The captain should encourage and reward the team, with player of the match incentives for example.



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#### Social loafing

A lack of effort by individual team members is called **social loafing**. This can have an effect on team cohesion and performance because it reduces the motivation in the team as a whole. Social loafing can occur when:

- an individual player feels that his/her efforts are not being recognised. This is known as a lack of performance identification. Players might give up if they think that their efforts will not change the result. If the team is losing 5-0 with only a couple of minutes to go there might be no point in trying.
- there is no reward on offer, such as a player of the match award. If the players lack confidence or motivation they might be more prepared to leave it to others to do all the work.
- the players perceive that others are not trying. They might think 'If she isn't putting any effort in, why should I?'
- the team captain is a poor leader and fails to encourage the team
- there is a perceived lack of ability. If a player feels that he/she is not as good as some others in the team, there may be a tendency to leave the majority of the work to the better players.

Social loafing is not desirable within a team so the coach should employ tactics to reduce its effect. The best way to prevent social loafing is to highlight individual performance and one of the best ways to achieve this is to use statistics. The number of tackles, the

Extended exam questions may ask you to suggest factors that influence a group's potential or to account for faulty processes. Make sure you understand the concept of social loafing and the factors that influence cohesion.

**Top tip**

number of assists and the success rate of shots are all examples of data that players can be given after the game to provide feedback and show that they have been noticed. The coach should also make sure that players are encouraged and motivated during the game and that suitable rewards are on offer. Most clubs have a player of the year award to maintain motivation throughout the season. Confidence could be raised by pointing out the contribution players have made to the result and making them feel responsible, at least in part, for any success. In other words, success should be attributed internally.

Finally, the coach should set goals for the players and perhaps give them a specific role to play in the game, such as marking a certain opponent or playing in a wider position. Any goals that are set should be realistic and achievable and may represent an improvement on the last performance, such as to make three more tackles.

#### The Ringlemann effect

This theory suggests that the larger the group the less the collective group effort. Ringlemann performed an experiment using a 'tug of war' trial and discovered that a team of eight did not pull eight-times harder than one individual. This suggests that there might be motivational problems in a team when players think that they can leave it to others to cover for them and hide within the team.

Ultimately, cohesion in sport is affected by a constantly changing mix of influences.

## Leadership

Some of the most successful teams in sport have won major cups and trophies because they have been managed, coached or captained by an influential leader. Think of the success of Manchester United under the 23-year reign of Sir Alex Ferguson from 1986 until the time of writing.

A leader is someone who can influence others towards achieving goals. There are two types of leader in a sports group:

- An **emergent leader** is one who comes from within the group and assumes responsibility for the role or can be elected by the members of the club. In a sixth-form rounders team it could be that the captain is chosen by the players and coach. He/she is usually a player from year 13 who has played for the team in year 12 and already knows how the team works best. Although unity and the status quo is maintained, there might be a lack of fresh ideas.
- A **prescribed leader** is appointed from outside the group, in the way that the English Football Association appointed Fabio Capello as England manager in 2007. Such a leader may bring a fresh approach and give new impetus to the team, but could disrupt team unity and cause a few upsets. Sometimes players leave a club when a new prescribed leader is appointed.

**Emergent leader:** a

leader appointed from within the group.

**Prescribed leader:** a leader

appointed from outside the group.

**Leader characteristics:** the qualities that facilitate good leadership.

Key terms

Leaders will emerge or be appointed because they have **leader characteristics**. A good leader will have motivational skills to encourage the team to keep playing when they are losing or are involved in a difficult game. A leader usually has charisma and is well respected by the team. Sometimes the leader needs the ability to empathise — to listen to the needs of the group and to operate with the consensus of opinion. A leader must have good communication skills, so that tactics and strategies are adhered to by all the players. Usually leaders are experienced in their chosen sport and can pass this experience on to others. Finally, a leader should be able to adjust his/her style of leadership to suit the task in hand. There are a number of styles to choose from.

### Leadership styles

The **autocratic** or task-oriented style of leadership is when the leader takes charge and dictates to the rest of the group, who have no say in the way the task is undertaken. By contrast, in the **democratic** or person-oriented style of leadership, the leader empathises and listens to the group members before making a decision on how the task should be done.

**Autocratic style:** the

leader makes all the decisions and gives the group formal instruction.

**Democratic style:** the leader

listens to the group members and involves them in decision making.

Key terms

Fiedler's contingency model is summarised in Figure 10.2. According to this model, the choice of either the autocratic or the democratic style depends on how good or how favourable the situation is, and the leader should therefore choose the correct approach according to the situation.

The autocratic style is best when the situation is highly favourable and also when the situation is highly unfavourable. In a favourable situation, the leader is strong and well respected, the task is clear and the team members get on well and understand each other's play. There is no need to spend time discussing tactics, the team accepts and gets on with the decision of the captain. For example, if a netball team has a set play for moving the ball up towards the opposition goal and all the players know this well-rehearsed play, individuals will simply obey the captain's call to execute this move.

An unfavourable situation is one in which the team cannot agree on the tactics to be used, does not follow the instructions from a weak leader, or the task is unclear. A team facing unknown opponents in a hostile away game needs a strong leader to tell them what to do. A group in which the players are uncertain or arguing among themselves may need to be told the best strategy to adopt.

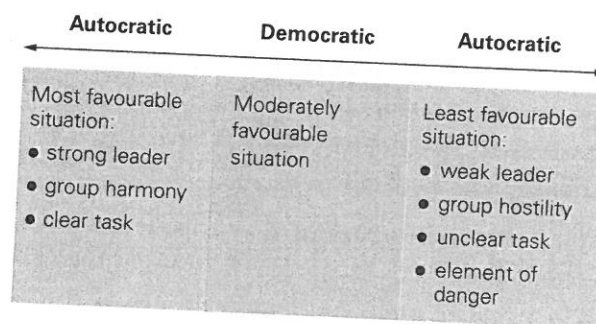


Figure 10.2 Fiedler's contingency model

The democratic approach is best in a moderate situation, where a group is well established but there is scope for new ideas. In this case it may be best to sit down and discuss tactics with the team before a match.

Many exam questions on team dynamics are based on diagrams. Make sure you know and understand the diagrammatic models based on the work of Fiedler and Chelladurai and that you can explain the key phases of each model.

**Top tip**

Other styles that the leader can use include the **rewarding style**, when the leader gives incentives such as a player of the match award to motivate the team. Praise and encouragement may also be used to keep the team playing to the best of its ability. A **social support style** involves the coach or captain offering individual advice or feedback to particular players to help them improve their game.

During training sessions, a coach may put the players through their paces by setting up and

organising a number of specific skills and drills. This structured and often essential part of leadership is called a **training and instruction style** of leadership.

Sometimes the leader may find it appropriate to take a step back and just let the group get on with it. This laid-back approach is called a **laissez faire style** of leadership. It can be used when the team members are experts in the task and know exactly what they are doing, or when a new coach has been appointed to lead a team and needs to stand back and assess what level his/her new charges are at.

One of the essential qualities of leaders is that they can adapt their leadership style to suit the situation. We have already seen how leaders might choose either the autocratic or the democratic style according to how favourable the situation is, but they may also need to take into account the features of the group or individual they are coaching as well as their own characteristics and preferences before choosing the style in which they want to operate. For example, in a dangerous situation, such as when coaching a contact skill such as a tackle, the leader may want to use an instructive and autocratic style to ensure correct technique and reduce the risk of injury. With beginners, to make sure they learn the basics, the style may be instructive and autocratic, motivational and rewarding. With experts, the leader may step back a little and ask for the democratic input of the group or even let them get on with things in a laissez faire style.

It has therefore been suggested that the best leadership style to use depends on three main influences:

- the situation
- the leader
- the group

Chelladurai's multi-dimensional model (summarised in Figure 10.3) suggests that if the leader can adapt the style of leadership to best fit all three of these influences then it is more likely that a rewarding and satisfactory performance will result. In other words, if the style of leadership chosen is equal to the requirements of the group and the demands of the situation, the better the performance is likely to be.

A final consideration of leadership in sport is the debate over whether leaders are born or made. This debate reflects a nature versus nurture approach to sports psychology. Some argue that people are born with characteristics, such as charisma and motivational skills, that make them

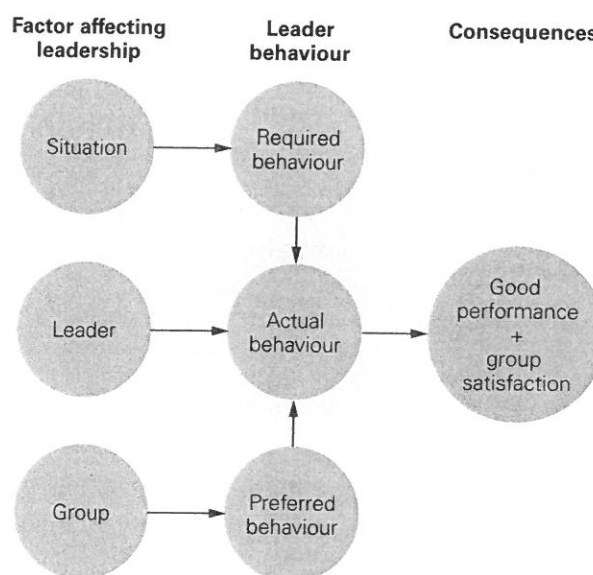


Figure 10.3 Chelladurai's multi-dimensional model of leadership styles





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almost natural choices as captains or coaches. Others argue that such characteristics are learned and that good leaders are usually those with experience of the game. Perhaps the best approach is to accept a combination of both nature and nurture theories — that leaders are indeed born with essential leadership characteristics and that these characteristics are used in accordance with the circumstances under which the group will operate.

#### Tasks to tackle 10.3

Look again at the styles of leadership listed on pages 85–87. For each style, give a sporting situation in which you would use that style, and give a reason for your choice. For example, you might choose to use an autocratic style of leadership in a dangerous situation, such as swimming, especially if you were coaching beginners.

It is essential that you know the situations in which autocratic and democratic leadership styles are used and that you can describe what you mean by a favourable and an unfavourable situation. Make sure that when you answer a question on the factors influencing leadership style you include not only situational factors but also the influence of the group and the leader's characteristics. Make sure that you give an example and an explanation from each of the three influences on leadership according to Chelladurai, namely situation, leader and group.

**Top tip**

#### Practice makes perfect

- 1** Elite performers sometimes train on their own and sometimes as part of a group. How would you distinguish between a group and a collection of individuals? (3 marks)
- 2** Team players are often influenced by a leader who helps them to achieve an active and healthy lifestyle. Distinguish between a prescribed and an emergent leader and describe the characteristics that may be necessary for effective leadership in sport. (5 marks)
- 3 (a)** Look at this model of group performance:  
$$\text{actual productivity} = \text{potential productivity} - \text{faulty processes}$$

What is meant by the term potential productivity? (1 mark)
- (b)** What are the influences that can combine to produce faulty processes in a team? (3 marks)