

COACHING PREFERENCES OF ATHLETES IN BRUNEI DARUSSALAM AND GREAT BRITAIN: A CROSS-CULTURAL TEST OF THE PATH-GOAL THEORY

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Introduction

Path-goal theory (House, 1971, 1996; House & Mitchell, 1997) postulates that effective leader behaviour is influenced by the characteristics of individual group members and the characteristics of the task to be accomplished, in particular its variability and the degree of interdependence between group members. In the context of sport coaching, Path-goal theory suggests that participants in highly variable, interdependent sports such as soccer or basketball would prefer a more structured, autocratic leadership style than participants in more environmentally predictable, independent sports such as shooting or diving. Previous tests of Path-goal theory in a sport setting have provided partial support for the applicability of the theory to the coaching process (Capitao, 1995; Terry & Howe, 1984). For example, Terry and Howe showed that athletes in independent sports preferred more democratic behaviour and less autocratic behaviour than athletes in interdependent sports.

The first published investigation of cross-cultural variations in coaching preferences (Terry, 1984) found no difference in preferred coaching behaviour between athletes from Great Britain, Canada and the United States. However, subsequent studies that have compared more disparate cultural settings (i.e., Japan and Canada) have shown significant cross-cultural variability (Chelladurai et al., 1987, 1988). Brunei Darussalam lies close to the equator on the northern part of Borneo and exists as a Malay Islamic state. Despite its historical link with Europe, Brunei is perhaps as culturally different from Great Britain as it is possible to be. There are no published investigations of the psychology of Brunei's athletes.

The first purpose of the present study was to test selected propositions of Path-goal theory in the context of coaching behaviour. The second purpose was to investigate cross-cultural differences in coaching preferences between athletes in Brunei Darussalam and Great Britain.

Methods and Procedure

Participants

Two independent samples of athletes, matched for age, gender and type of sport, participated in the study. Sample 1 comprised 159 athletes from the national sport teams of Brunei Darussalam, with a gender breakdown of 110 males (69.2%) and 49 females (30.8%). Participants' ages ranged from 12 - 60 yr. ($M = 28.76$ yr., $SD = 10.02$ yr.) with 90% in the range 16 - 50 yr. Participants' years of experience in their sport ranged from 1 - 35 yr. ($M = 7.13$ yr., $SD = 6.16$ yr.) with 90% in the range 1-14 yr. The sports represented in Sample 1 were boxing, karate, pencak silat, taekwondo, cycling, swimming, track and field, traditional boat race, darts, golf, lawn bowls, snooker, tenpin, badminton, squash, table tennis, tennis, basketball, hockey, sepak takraw, soccer and water polo.

Sample 2 comprised 220 athletes from university and club teams in the London area. There were 156 males (70.9%) and 64 females (29.1%). The age of participants ranged from 15 - 84 yr. ($M = 28.06$ yr., $SD = 12.93$ yr.) with 90% in the range 19 - 52 yr. Participants' years of experience ranged from 1 - 44 yr. ($M = 10.24$ yr., $SD = 7.22$ yr.) with 90% in the range 1 - 19 yr. The sports represented in Sample 2 were boxing, judo, jujitsu, karate, taekwondo, aerobics, cycling, rowing, speed skating, swimming, track and field, triathlon, diving, golf, gymnastics, lawn bowls, shooting, surfing, badminton, squash, tennis, basketball, cricket, Gaelic football, hockey, lacrosse, netball, rugby, and soccer.

For the purpose of testing Path-goal theory, participants were grouped on the basis of the degree of task variability and task interdependence in their sport. The four groups of participants were high variability/low interdependence (e.g., karate, squash; $n = 112$), high variability/high interdependence (e.g., basketball, soccer; $n = 118$), low variability/low interdependence (e.g., swimming, golf; $n = 123$) and low variability/high interdependence (e.g., rowing, traditional boat race; $n = 26$).

Instrumentation

Preferred coaching behaviour was assessed using the Leadership Scale for Sports (LSS; Chelladurai & Saleh, 1978, 1980). The LSS is a 40-item questionnaire of five subscales, referred to as training and instruction behaviour (13 items), democratic behaviour (9 items), autocratic behaviour (5 items), social support behaviour (8 items) and rewarding behaviour (5 items). All items are preceded by the phrase, "I prefer my coach to ..." (e.g.,

“see to it that athletes work to capacity”). Responses are given on a five point scale from 1 = never to 5 = always. Bruneian participants completed the LSS either in English ($n = 72$) or a Malay translation ($n = 87$). There was no significant difference in scores on any LSS subscale between the two versions. Reliability (alpha) coefficients in the present study were acceptable for training and instruction behaviour (alpha = .77), democratic behaviour (alpha = .72), social support behaviour (alpha = .74) and rewarding behaviour (alpha = .72) but did not reach the criterion value for autocratic behaviour (alpha = .49). The results for autocratic behaviour should therefore be interpreted with caution. Alpha coefficients for the Malay version of the LSS ranged from .53 (autocratic) to .79 (training and instruction)

Procedure

For the Bruneian sample, all data were collected at the Hassanal Bolkiah National Stadium. For the British sample, data were collected at practice sessions or in a classroom environment. No incentives for participation were offered to either group, although following the data collection the Brunei athletes each received a watch from HRH Prince Hj. Sufri Bolkiah to commemorate their participation. For both samples the general purpose of the investigation was explained and confidentiality of responses was assured. Given that the present study assessed the influence of type of sport on coaching preferences there was potential for confusion among athletes who participated in more than one sport. All participants were therefore asked to nominate their major sport and to express their coaching preferences for that sport alone.

Results

Normality checks showed that the data met the assumptions of the statistical procedures used. Group comparisons showed that the age and years of experience of the Bruneian and British participants did not differ significantly nor did the gender and type of sport distributions. Mean scores for the whole sample showed that, in general, participants expressed a preference for their coach to display training and instruction behaviour “often”, democratic behaviour and social support behaviour “occasionally”, and autocratic behaviour “seldom” (see Table 1). MANOVA revealed a main effect for gender (see Table 2) with follow-up tests showing that males prefer more autocratic coaching behaviour (effect size = .41) than females, a finding consistent with the extant literature. A main effect for culture also emerged. Follow up tests showed that Bruneian athletes prefer more training and instruction behaviour (effect size = .63), democratic behaviour (effect size = .63), and social support behaviour (effect size = .76) than their British counterparts.

With regard to Path-goal theory, no main effect for task variability was evident but a main effect for task interdependence and an interaction effect between variability and interdependence were identified. Follow-up tests showed that athletes in sports where tasks are performed independently of others (e.g., golf, shooting, martial arts) prefer more democratic behaviour (effect size = .40) and social support behaviour (effect size = .30) than athletes in interdependent sports (e.g., basketball, hockey, soccer). The interaction effect showed that in sports of high task variability (e.g., tennis, water polo) athletes who perform independently prefer more training and instruction behaviour than athletes who perform interdependently, whereas in sports of low task variability (e.g., rowing, swimming) the reverse is true. No interaction effect between culture and task variables emerged.

Table 1
Coaching Preferences of Athletes (N = 379) Grouped by Sex, Culture and Task Characteristics

Group	<i>n</i>	TRA		DEM		AUT		SOC		REW	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Whole sample	379	4.30	0.43	3.56	0.57	2.63	0.70	3.19	0.68	4.22	0.61
Male	266	4.30	0.43	3.54	0.59	2.71	0.70	3.21	0.71	4.20	0.62
Female	113	4.29	0.42	3.61	0.54	2.42	0.66	3.11	0.58	4.25	0.59
Brunei	159	4.46	0.41	3.77	0.52	2.73	0.77	3.49	0.64	4.16	0.64
Great Britain	220	4.19	0.40	3.41	0.56	2.55	0.64	2.97	0.61	4.26	0.58
High Variability	230	4.32	0.40	3.55	0.59	2.67	0.72	3.23	0.71	4.24	0.61
Low Variability	149	4.27	0.47	3.58	0.56	2.56	0.67	3.11	0.62	4.18	0.61
High Interdep.	144	4.28	0.44	3.42	0.57	2.61	0.69	3.06	0.61	4.28	0.56
Low Interdep.	235	4.31	0.42	3.65	0.56	2.64	0.71	3.26	0.71	4.18	0.64

Note. TRA = Training and instruction behaviour, DEM = Democratic behaviour, AUT = Autocratic behaviour, SOC = Social support behaviour, REW = Rewarding behaviour.

Table 2
 MANOVA of Coaching Preferences: Effects of Sex, Culture and Task Characteristics

Source	Wilks	df	p
Sex	0.93	5, 371	.003
Culture	0.77	5, 371	.000
Task Variability	0.98	5, 371	NS
Task Interdependence	0.96	5, 371	.03
Sex x Culture	0.97	5, 371	NS
Culture x Task Variability	0.98	5, 371	NS
Culture x Task Interdependence	0.99	5, 371	NS
Task Variability x Task Interdependence	0.96	5, 371	.01

Note. Wilks = Wilks' lambda multivariate statistic, NS = not significant.

Discussion and Conclusions

The present results offer partial support for the Path-goal theory to the extent that small-to-moderate effects in the anticipated direction were shown to be associated with task interdependence. However, there were no differences in coaching preferences associated with task variability. The relevance of the Path-goal theory to the coaching process requires further investigation. The moderate-to-large differences between Bruneian and British athletes were consistent with the proposal (Chelladurai et al., 1988) that cultural differences are an important situational variable in the coaching process and should be considered carefully in future cross-cultural investigations. Some potential limitations of the present study should be acknowledged. Firstly, level of performance has been shown to influence coaching preferences (Terry, 1984) and may have confounded the observed cultural differences. The Brunei participants were all national squad athletes whereas, to account for differences in sporting standards between Brunei and Great Britain, the British sample were mostly sub-international performers. Secondly, although the initial validity coefficients of the Malay version of the LSS were encouraging its psychometric integrity is unknown. Thirdly, the present study was based on the assumption that athletes develop a preference for specific coaching behaviours but it is possible that some participants had only experienced one style of coaching and simply expressed that style as their preferred coaching.

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