

Relationship Between Role Ambiguity and Satisfaction in Iranian Elite Athletes

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Abstract

The present study aims to investigate the relationship between role ambiguity and satisfaction in elite athletes. The data was collected through field study. The research sample was considered equal to the population size that consisted of Iranian male and female players in national basketball, handball and volleyball teams (N=92). Role ambiguity was examined using Beauchamp and colleagues' Role Ambiguity Scale (2002) [1]. The scale evaluates every athlete's perception of his/her role in a team. Athlete satisfaction was investigated using Athlete Satisfaction Questionnaire developed by Riemer and Chellandurai (1998) [2]. The study adopted a descriptive-correlational method. Pearson correlation formula and regression analysis were run to analyze the data. The results showed a significant correlation between role ambiguity and elite athlete satisfaction. In other words, with either lower role ambiguity or higher role perception, elite athletes may feel higher satisfaction. Besides, the results of regression analysis revealed that role ambiguity was a significant predictor of satisfaction in elite athletes. Overall, the findings suggest that with lower role ambiguity and clearer perception of individual responsibility and role in a team, elite athletes feel higher levels of satisfaction, hence the betterment of team performance.

Keywords: Role Ambiguity; Satisfaction; Elite Athlete

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Introduction

Due to insufficient attention to psychological factors, athletes are not mentally prepared to participate in competitions though they typically enjoy high levels of physical fitness. Despite good physical fitness, this lack of mental preparation results in athletes' poor performance in competitions. It is observed that when coaches displace the individual players from their usual positions, they make greater mistakes and show a poor performance (Rezaie et al., 2009). Every athlete's role in a team, role clarity, role perception and role satisfaction may all affect team cohesion

and eventual athlete satisfaction. The current study concentrates on these relations, particularly prediction of athlete satisfaction through role ambiguity. The concept of role ambiguity has been defined as the unclear information consistent with situation-specific expectations [3]. In their theoretical model contend that an experience of role ambiguity provokes contradictory reactions in the individual, one of which is thought to be excitement [3]. They reported that role ambiguity might bring about tension, decreased self-confidence, dissatisfaction and low efficiency. Research has shown that role ambiguity is associated with increased physical and cognitive

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anxiety (Beauchamp et al., 2003) and decreased role efficacy [1,5]. Studies have also shown a negative correlation between role ambiguity and athletic performance in the athletes whose role entails a high degree of dependence comparing with the athletes whose role is independent of other roles [6]. Further studies on the issue have shown a positive correlation between role ambiguity and burnout [7], as well as ambiguity among the athletes of various related sports [4]. Abolghasemi et al., (2006) reported a significant negative correlation of role ambiguity [8], role conflict and competitive anxiety with athletic performance and academic success in student athletes, though the correlation was more negative in team athletes than in individual athletes. Rezaie et al. (2009) compared role ambiguity, team cohesion, athletic performance and hardiness between elite and non-elite soccer players. They found a significant negative correlation of role ambiguity with team cohesion, hardiness and athletic performance. Bray et al., (2005) specifically addressed sports teams and examined role satisfaction perceptions as with other role constructs in collegiate basketball players [9]. In their measurement using adapted scales of job satisfaction in organizational psychology, they found a positive correlation of athlete satisfaction with task cohesion, role effect and role importance but a negative relationship between athlete satisfaction and role ambiguity. In another study, Beauchamp and colleagues drew upon related literature to develop the measurement techniques of role satisfaction. They investigated role satisfaction in relation to role ambiguity in rugby and hockey players. The results showed that the mid-season role ambiguity experienced by athletes might predict role satisfaction in the next season. Sport researchers have lately addressed the issue of role ambiguity due to the behavioral and psychological outcomes it brings about. Researchers have developed measurement and theoretical scales to examine this variable in sports teams. Athlete satisfaction is considered as an important factor in role involvement, and satisfaction has been reported as the only significant factor in the literature [10]. Chelladurai (1997) defined athlete satisfaction as a positive emotional factor that intensifies as the athlete evaluates the structure, process and consequences related to his athletic experience [11]. In other words, they consider athlete satisfaction as a reflection of how well athletic efforts deal with personal standards of the athlete. Therefore, the present study addresses the questions “is there any relationship between role ambiguity and satisfaction in Iranian elite athletes?” And “if so, can

role ambiguity be a significant predictor of athlete satisfaction?”

Methodology

The study adopts a descriptive-correlational method. In terms of purpose, the study may be categorized as an applied research. The sample size was considered equal to the population that included a number of 99 male and female athletes in national basketball, handball and volleyball teams. The sample consisted of 22 female and 18 male handball players, 14 female and 10 male basketball players and 15 female and 13 male volleyball players. The research instruments consisted of Beauchamp and colleagues' Role Ambiguity Scale (2002) and Athlete Satisfaction Questionnaire (ASQ) developed by Riemer and Chellandurai (1998) [1,2]. The reliability and validity of either scale were examined and approved. The reliability of Role Ambiguity Scale and ASQ were calculated to be 0.83 and 0.86, respectively, using Cronbach alpha formula. Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was run to examine the normality of the data. Pearson correlation formula was used to examine the relationship between the research variables. Regression analysis was used to examine whether role ambiguity may predict athlete satisfaction. Statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS 19.

Table 1. Correlation coefficients between role ambiguity and athlete satisfaction as well as satisfaction subscales.

Variable and subscales	R	P-value
Athlete satisfaction	0.537	0.000
Individual performance	0.464	0.000
Team performance	0.397	0.000
Individual treatment	0.504	0.000
Personal dedication	0.360	0.000
Training and instruction	0.503	0.000
Ethics	0.428	0.000
Team task contribution	0.364	0.000
Strategy	0.500	0.000
Team integration	0.470	0.000
Team task contribution	0.497	0.000
Team social contribution	0.241	0.021
Medical personnel	0.221	0.034
Budget	0.209	0.045
Academic support services	0.121	0.242

Results

The athletes' mean age and sports experience were calculated to be 23.65±4.51 and 10.25±4.42, respectively. Female and male athletes constituted 59% and 41% of the participants, respectively. Over 53% of the participants had bachelors or higher degrees. Table 1 illustrates the correlation

coefficients between role ambiguity and athlete satisfaction as well as the subscales of satisfaction.

Table 2. Linear regression results to predict athlete satisfaction through role ambiguity.

Source of variation	Sum of squares	Mean squares	df	F	P-value
Regression	6.78	6.78	1	36.48	0.000
Residual	16.73	0.186	90		

As shown in the table 1, there is a significant correlation between role ambiguity and elite athlete satisfaction ($r=0.537$). From among the satisfaction subscales, individual treatment showed the strongest ($r=0.504$) and academic support services had the weakest correlation ($r=0.121$) with role ambiguity, which was not statistically significant.

Table 2 illustrates the results of regression analysis to examine the potential linear correlation between role ambiguity and athlete satisfaction. The results showed that role ambiguity was a significant predictor of athlete satisfaction ($F=36.48, P=0.000$).

Table 3. Correlation coefficients and coefficient of determination.

Adjusted coefficient of determination	R ²	R
0.281	0.288	0.537

As shown in Table 3, the coefficient of determination was calculated to be 0.288, which indicates that 28% of variance in elite athlete satisfaction could be accounted for in terms of role ambiguity.

Table 4. Raw and standard coefficients of regression equation (criterion variable, athlete satisfaction).

Predicting variable	B	Beta	t	P-value
Constant value	0.645		1.34	0.181
Role ambiguity	0.775	0.537	6.04	0.000

Table 4 illustrates the raw and standard coefficients of regression analysis to predict athlete satisfaction using role ambiguity. Considering the level of significance and non-standard regression coefficient, the regression equation may be written as follows:

$$y = 0.775x_1$$

Where x_1 stands for role ambiguity (predicting variable) and Y denotes athlete satisfaction (criterion variable). As to the interpretation of Beta coefficient, we may conclude that a single unit of variation in role ambiguity score brings about 0.537 variations in athlete satisfaction.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study was conducted using previous experience, findings and methods to investigate the relationship between role ambiguity and satisfaction in elite athletes. The results showed a significant correlation between role ambiguity and athlete satisfaction. About 28 percent of athlete satisfaction variance could be accounted for by role ambiguity. In other words, athletes with lower role ambiguity or higher role perception experienced higher satisfaction. This is consistent with the findings of Ghaffari et al., (2009) [12], Bebetos et al. (2007) [13], Abolghasemi et al., (2006) [8], Tubre and Collins (2000) [6], Rezaie et al., (2009), Eys et al., (2003) [10], Bray et al., (2005) [9] and Beauchamp et al., (2005) [14]. Previous studies have also addressed the relationship between role ambiguity and athlete satisfaction or athletic performance, which support the present findings. Eys et al., (2003) also showed that lower levels of perceived role ambiguity are associated with higher satisfaction [10]. However, contrary to expectations, early-season role ambiguity could not predict late-season athlete satisfaction.

Role ambiguity occurs when the individual's role is not clear – when it is not clear what purpose a task or position serves in sports, or what the athletes' responsibilities are. Generally speaking, ambiguity may arise from insufficient training, poor interaction, intentional refrain to provide adequate information or deliberate falsification of information by a colleague, teammate or supervisor. Indeed, role ambiguity turns into stress when it thwarts individual efficiency and progress. Still, stress occurs when people lose their sense of confidence and prediction in their working role. Role ambiguity is one of the sources of stress for athletes. Clearly, when athletes do not know their responsibilities in a game or they wonder if they have met coaches' expectations, they experience stress. This results in both the athlete and coaches' dissatisfaction in the first place and consequently results in poor team performance. Research has shown that role conflict is also another factor that may lead to stress and dissatisfaction. Role conflict may occur when embracing a set of career requirements or a new body of requirements seems contradictory or impossible at all. For example, role conflict occurs in a soccer player whose specialized

role is to play as a defender while the coach displaces him to the midfield or forward position. As a non-sport example, a company accountant may be asked to falsify accounts to reduce the tax burden on the company, hence the development of role conflict in the accountant. Another point to address is that role ambiguity in a team may risk team cohesion. Therefore, when a team fails, athletes may attribute the failure to their teammates. They may also refrain to shoulder the failure responsibility as they did not know their exact responsibilities; thus, team cohesion is disturbed and it may end in subsequent failures. In sum, we may conclude that with lower role ambiguity and clearer team responsibilities, athletes experience higher satisfaction, hence the improvement of team performance. It is thus recommended that both coaches and athletes attempt to clarify the athlete roles, which may bring about higher levels of athlete satisfaction and better team performance.

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