

Exploring team cohesion in sport: a critical perspective

I wouldn't want to win five matches out of five and the team lose. I'd happily take no points if we had a European victory.

(Irish three times golf major winner, Pádraig Harrington, on playing for Europe in the 2010 Ryder Cup, cited in Gilleece, 2010)

Chapter 7

Introduction

Few athletes compete alone in their sports. Instead, most of them interact either *with* or *against* other athletes collectively. Indeed, even in quintessentially individual sports such as golf or tennis, competitive action is often assessed or aggregated as a team game (e.g., the Ryder Cup in golf or the Davis Cup in tennis). Furthermore, many top individual sports performers travel and work with support groups of specialist advisers. For example, three times golf major winner Pádraig Harrington had a back-up team of *seven* people when he won the Open Championship in 2007 – a caddie, an agent, a coach, a psychologist, a fitness consultant, a sport scientist and a physiotherapist (Kremer and Moran, 2008a). Top tennis players have similar teams of advisers. Little wonder, then, that when Novak Djokovic lost to Rafael Nadal in the final of the 2010 US Open tennis championship, he congratulated his opponent “*and his team*” (cited in Evening Herald, 2010; *italics mine*). But what exactly is a “team”? And is “team spirit” essential for the achievement of sporting excellence? In relation to this latter question, many athletes and coaches believe in the importance of a sense of collective unity when competing in team competitions. At first glance, there is plenty of anecdotal evidence to support this latter belief. For example, according to Sven-Göran Eriksson, the former Leicester City and former England soccer manager, “the creation of team spirit and the building of ‘the good team’ is ... one of the coach’s most important jobs” (Eriksson, 2002, p. 116). And such team-building by skilful managers can be highly effective. To illustrate, consider the remarkable achievement of Otto Rehhagel’s Greece in winning the European Championship in soccer in 2004 despite the absence of individual star players. Similarly, Barcelona, the 2011 Champions’ League winners, earned universal praise not only for their brilliant passing game but also for their extraordinary team cohesion (see Figure 7.1).



Figure 7.1 Barcelona FC, winners of the 2011 Champions’ League, displayed remarkable team cohesion

Source: Courtesy of Inpho photography

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For players this cohesion is often forged in the crucible of competition. Jeremy Guscott, the former British and Irish Lions rugby player, claimed:

tours are about bonding together ... Success depends on whether you come together or you split into factions ... There were times with this Lions squad when we felt invincible – that we could take on the whole world and beat them.

(cited in Guscott, 1997, p. 153)

Although these quotations seem persuasive, they need to be tested against relevant scientific evidence. In this regard, attempts to forge team spirit have led to some rather bizarre practices (e.g., see Boxes 7.5 and 7.6 later in the chapter). So, do team-building exercises really work? Is it true that young people's involvement in school sports builds their "character" and imbues them with a healthy respect for team spirit? It has long been believed that sport develops leadership qualities. For example, the Duke of Wellington is alleged to have remarked that the battle of Waterloo "was won on the playing fields of Eton" (Knowles, 1999, p. 810). But scandals involving cheating in sport are ubiquitous (e.g., see J. Perry, 2007). Consider the infamous "bloodgate" incident in which a rugby club doctor admitted deliberately cutting the lip of a Harlequins player, Tom Williams, in order to cover up an earlier bogus injury (contrived by having the player bite a fake blood capsule) which enabled a specialist place-kicker to replace him as a substitute at a vital stage of his team's match against Leinster in a Heineken quarter-final in 2009 (Carter, 2010). In order to answer these and other relevant questions, this chapter is organized as follows.

In the next section, I explain how psychologists define key terms such as groups, teams and **group dynamics**. In the third section, I introduce the concept of team spirit, which has been defined operationally by sport psychologists as "cohesion" (also known as "cohesiveness") or the extent to which a group of athletes or players is united by a common purpose and bonds together in pursuit of that objective. This section also examines the measurement of cohesion and its relationship to athletic performance. Given the assumption that cohesion can be enhanced, the fourth section of the chapter investigates the nature and efficacy of team-building activities in sport psychology. In the fifth section, I briefly evaluate the commonly held belief that team sports foster desirable psychological qualities in participants. The sixth section of the chapter outlines some new directions for research on team cohesion in sport. Finally, suggestions are provided for possible research projects in this field.

Unfortunately, due to space restrictions, this chapter is not able to deal with other questions concerning the impact of groups on individual athletic performance. For example, the issue of how the presence of other people such as spectators and/or fellow competitors affects athletes' performance lies beyond the scope of this chapter. This latter topic, which was mentioned briefly in Chapter 1, is called social facilitation, and was first studied empirically by Triplett (1898). Review of research on social facilitation have been provided by Strauss (2002) and Uziell (2007). Similarly, the converse phenomenon of **social loafing** in sport, or the reduction in individual effort seen when individuals work in groups compared to when they work alone (Carron et al., 2009, p. 65), also lies beyond the boundary of this chapter.

Groups, teams and group dynamics in sport

In everyday life, we tend to see any collection of people as a group. However, social psychologists are much more precise in their usage of this term. Alderfer (1977) defined a "group" as "an intact social system, complete with boundaries, interdependence for some shared purpose, and differentiated member roles" (cited in Hackman and Katz, 2010, p. 1210). It is this sense of mutual interaction or interdependence for a common purpose that distinguishes the members of a group from a mere aggregation of individuals. As Hodge (1995) observed, a collection of people who happen to go for a swim after work on the same day each week does not, strictly speaking, constitute a "group" because these swimmers do not interact with each other in a structured manner. By contrast, a squad of young competitive swimmers who train every morning before going to school is a group because they not only share a common objective (training for competition) but also interact with each other in formal ways (e.g., by warming up together beforehand). It is this sense of people coming together to achieve a common objective that really defines the term "team".

According to Carron and Hausenblas (1998), a sports *team* is a special type of group. In particular, teams have four key characteristics – apart from having the defining properties of mutual interaction and task interdependence – that serve to differentiate them from aggregates of strangers (see also Carron et al., 2009). First, they have a collective sense of identity – a "we-ness" rather than a collection of "I-ness". This collective consciousness emerges when individual team members and non-team members agree that the group is distinguishable from other groups ("us" versus "them"). For example, the leaders of the successful Wimbledon soccer team of the late 1980s called themselves the "crazy gang" and their manager Dave Bassett used this self-styled identity as a cohesive force when preparing his team to compete against higher ranked football clubs. Often, this type of social bonding led to enhanced team performance. The former Liverpool player Alan Hansen was amazed at the intimidatory tactics and "all-for-one" spirit which the Wimbledon players showed in the tunnel before they defeated his team in the 1988 FA Cup Final (Hansen, 1999). Second, sports teams are characterized by a set of distinctive *roles*. As Carron et al. (2009, p. 64) explained, group members "develop a generalized expectation for those individuals who through ability or experience assume specific responsibilities". For example, soccer and rugby teams have acknowledged roles for creative players who generate or exploit scoring opportunities as well as for tough-tackling "enforcers" whose job it is to prevent opponents from playing creatively. The third feature of sports teams is their use of *structured modes of communication* within the group. This type of communication often involves nicknames and shorthand instructions for teammates. Fourth, teams develop *norms* or social rules that prescribe what group members either should or should not do in certain circumstances. Individual performers learn to ignore the idiosyncratic routines of their teammates as they prepare for important competitive events. Having explained the key characteristics of teams, a sports team may be defined as

a collection of two or more individuals who possess a common identity, have consensus on a shared, purpose, share a common fate, exhibit structured

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patterns of interaction and communication, hold common perceptions about group structure, are personally and instrumentally interdependent, and consider themselves to be a group.

(Carron and Brawley, 2008, p. 215)

In view of the preceding characteristics, teams are regarded as *dynamic* entities by sport and exercise psychologists (for reviews of research in this field, see Beauchamp and Eys, 2008; Eys et al., 2010). Interestingly, the term “dynamic” comes from the Greek word *dunamikós*, which means “powerful”. Perhaps not surprisingly, certain aspects of team behaviour change over time. Tuckman (1965) has identified four hypothetical stages in the development of any team. In the first stage, *forming*, the team’s members come together and engage in an informal assessment of each other’s strengths and weaknesses. Second, the *storming* stage is postulated in which interpersonal conflict is common as the players compete for the coach’s attention and strive to establish their rank in the pecking order of the team. Third, the *norming* stage occurs when group members begin to see themselves as a team united by a common task and by interpersonal bonds. Finally, the *performing* stage occurs when the members of the team resolve to channel their energies as a cohesive unit into the pursuit of agreed goals. A similar account of the way in which teams change over time has been offered by Whitaker (1999), who identified three stages of evolution: *inclusion* (where new members are preoccupied with how to become a part of the team), *assertion* (where members struggle to establish their position within the hierarchy of the team) and *cooperation* (where members strive to work together to fulfil team goals). Unfortunately, although both of these hypothetical stage models of team development seem plausible intuitively, they have not been validated adequately by empirical evidence.

Having explained that teams are dynamic entities and hence change over time, it is important to clarify what psychologists mean by the term “group dynamics”. In general, sport psychologists use this term in at least three different ways (Carron and Hausenblas, 1998; Widmeyer et al., 2002). First, it denotes the scientific study of how athletes behave in groups, especially in face-to-face situations (e.g., when coaches address players in team talks). Second, “group dynamics” refers broadly to a host of factors (e.g., confidence) that are believed to play a role in determining team performance. Third, this term designates the processes that generate *change* in groups (Cashmore, 2008). It is mainly the second and third of these meanings that are explored in this chapter – especially, the question of how team spirit or cohesion is related to team performance. Let us now explore this idea of team spirit in more detail.

Team spirit or social cohesion: from popular understanding to psychological analysis

It has long been believed that successful sports teams have a unique spirit or sense of unity that transcends the simple aggregation of their individual components. This idea is captured by an old Irish proverb which states “ní neart go cur le chéile” (there is no strength without unity). An example of this unity was the extraordinary sense



Figure 7.2 Team spirit helped the European team to victory over the United States in the 2011 Ryder Cup

Source: Courtesy of Inpho photography

of togetherness displayed by the victorious European team during its 2002 Ryder Cup golf match against the United States. Illustrating this spirit, Darren Clarke, a member of the European team, revealed that “we played as a team, we dined as a team, we talked as a team and we won as a team ... The team spirit this week has been the best that I have experienced in this, my third Ryder Cup” (cited in O’Sullivan, 2002b). This sense of togetherness among Ryder Cup golfers is epitomized by the quotation from Pádraig Harrington at the beginning of the chapter in which he states that he would prefer to sacrifice individual victories for team success (see Figure 7.2). Before we analyse what team spirit means in sport, however, let us pause for a moment to consider the benefits of teamwork in a rather unusual domain—the animal kingdom. Have you ever wondered why birds fly in a peculiar “V”-like formation? According to Mears and Voehl (1994), this pattern is adaptive because as each bird in the “V” flaps its wings, it creates an “uplift” current for the bird behind it. This uplift enables the entire flock of birds to fly significantly further than any of the individual birds could fly alone. But how can this idea of synergy among flocks of bird apply to sports behaviour? In order to answer this question, we need to analyse what team spirit or cohesion means to athletes, coaches and sport psychologists.

Athletes’ and coaches’ views on cohesion

As the quotations at the beginning of this chapter indicate, team cohesion is valued highly by coaches and sports performers. This high regard is supported by research evidence. For example, team cohesion is associated positively with increased

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positive affect, increased effort, decreased role ambiguity, decreased cognitive anxiety and decreased social loading (mentioned earlier) (Statler, 2010). Perhaps not surprisingly, many team managers believe that it can be *enhanced* through instruction and experience. Sam Torrance, the manager of the European Ryder Cup golf team in 2002, sought advice from two successful soccer managers – Alex Ferguson (manager of Manchester United) and Sven-Göran Eriksson (then coach of England) (R. Williams, 2002a) – in an effort to enrich the **task cohesion** and **social cohesion** of his players before the match. The key message delivered by these managers was to treat all the golfers in the team in the same way (R. Williams, 2002c). This principle was appreciated greatly by the players: in commenting on Torrance's captaincy, Pádraig Harrington said, "everybody got the same treatment, there were no stars in the team ... he kept the spirits up all the way" (cited in A. Reid, 2002). By contrast with this egalitarian approach, Curtis Strange, the captain of the US team, showed evidence of preferential treatment for certain players. For example, he allowed Tiger Woods to engage in his customary early morning practice round on his own before the match whereas he insisted that the other players had to practise together. Some studies on university athletes suggests that perceived inequity, or favouritism on the part of coaches towards certain individuals, decreased team cohesion (Turman, 2003).

In addition to believing that team cohesion can be increased (see later in the chapter for some practical techniques in this regard), many athletes and coaches claim that individual performers must learn to subordinate their skills and efforts to the goals of the team. Consider the views of Michael Jordan on this issue. Jordan, who won six world basketball championships with the Chicago Bulls, remarked that "if you think and achieve as a team, the individual accolades will take care of themselves. Talent wins games but teamwork and intelligence win championships" (www.quotesandpoem.com/quotes/listquotes/author/michael-jordan). This view supports the old coaching adage that "there is no I in team" (although – according to the comedian Ricky Gervais's character, David Brent, "there is a 'ME' if you look hard enough" (see www.bioteams.com/2006/02/05/managing_teams_david.html)).

Despite this adage, however, there are situations in which the "I" in teams becomes apparent. As an extreme example of this phenomenon, consider what happens when the *captain* of a team challenges the authority of its coach or manager. Two interesting case studies of this problem occurred in World Cup soccer finals since 2002. The first incident occurred in May 2002 shortly before the World Cup soccer finals in Japan and Korea when Roy Keane, who was then the captain of the Republic of Ireland team, was sent home after a heated argument with his manager, Mick McCarthy. This incident happened in Saipan, the location of the team's training camp for the finals.

By way of background, the relationship between Keane and Mick McCarthy was never cordial. Despite this coolness between the captain and the manager, the team had played very well in qualifying for the World Cup finals. But the relationship between these men changed dramatically in Saipan when Roy Keane gave a controversial interview to a journalist in which he criticized both the training facilities and preparation methods of the Irish squad.

Following this interview, he was summoned to attend a "clear the air" meeting with McCarthy and the rest of the players. At this meeting, Keane not only

questioned the adequacy of the Irish team's facilities (citing a lack of training gear and footballs as well as deficient medical support) but also publicly rebuked his manager in a vitriolic speech. Not surprisingly, this speech and its consequences attracted media coverage around the world. More significantly, it raised a debate about an important psychological issue – namely, whether or not one player's striving for perfection can impede the progress of the team. For the manager (and some of the team's senior players), Keane's speech was inexcusable and had to be punished by instant dismissal from the rest of the tournament. This is precisely what happened. Unfortunately, as no physical injury had been involved in prompting Keane's departure, the dismissal left the Ireland squad one player short of the quota permitted by the World Cup organizers. It also left the players emotionally drained by the shock of losing their captain in such highly controversial circumstances.

Although there are two sides to this incident (e.g., why did the manager not try to resolve his differences with his captain privately or through an agreed intermediary before summoning him to a specially convened squad meeting?), McCarthy's decision to dismiss Roy Keane reflects a popular coaching belief that any potential threat to team harmony must be removed instantly. Weinberg and Gould (2007, p. 201) urge players and coaches "to respond to the problem quickly so that negative feelings don't build up". Similarly Sven-Göran Eriksson, the manager of England, warned about the danger of negative thinking within a squad: "A bad atmosphere can spread quickly, particularly if one of the 'leaders of opinion' in the team represents the negative thinking – the captain, for instance" (Eriksson, 2002, p. 116). Curiously, the Irish team performed exceptionally well during this competition in spite of losing its most influential player, and was defeated in the knockout stages by Spain only after a penalty shootout.

The second incident involving a mutiny by a national soccer team's captain occurred in South Africa in June 2010 when Patrice Evra (captain of France) and the other twenty-two players in the national squad refused to participate in a training session organized by the team's manager, Raymond Domenech, after a heated disagreement about tactics. Following a temporary resolution of this problem, the players returned to training but subsequently performed poorly and France was eliminated from the tournament. Several months later, the French Football Federation suspended Evra and the other perceived ringleaders of the team's rebellion (namely, Nicolas Anelka, Franck Ribery and Jeremy Toulalan). Anelka was suspended for *eighteen matches*, thereby effectively ending his international career (L. Davies, 2010). These two incidents show that team captains can sometimes rebel against coaches on the eve of championship finals, but the outcome of such dissent is not always clearcut. Whereas the Ireland team appeared to "pull together" after its captain's departure, the French squad continued to perform poorly after its mutiny against the national coach.

In this section, we have seen that team spirit or cohesion is important to athletes and coaches. But what progress have psychologists made in understanding and measuring the construct of team cohesion? Also, what does research reveal about the relationship between the cohesion and performance of a team? The remainder of this section addresses these questions.

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Cohesion (or cohesiveness) in psychology

Until now, I have used the term “cohesion” to refer to a form of social bonding between individuals in order to achieve a common purpose. Let us now analyse this term in more depth. According to the *New Penguin English Dictionary*, the word “cohesion” comes from the Latin word *cohaerere*, meaning “to stick together” (R. Allen, 2000). In popular expression, cohesion refers to acting or working together as a unit. In physics, however, the term has a slightly different meaning: it designates the molecular attraction by which the particles of a body are united together (R. Allen, 2000). Psychologists have combined the common sense and physicists’ approach to cohesion when describing it as “the total field of forces which act on members to remain in the group” (Festinger et al., 1950, p. 164). Historically, this definition emerged from psychological research on group integration processes evident in accommodation units for returned US veterans of the Second World War. Apart from Festinger and his colleagues, another seminal figure in research on cohesion was the social psychologist Kurt Lewin, a refugee from German Nazi oppression, who was fascinated by the powerful ways in which groups affect people’s behaviour. Adopting a “field of forces” model of human behaviour, Lewin (1935) regarded cohesion as a set of ties (including forces of attraction and repulsion) that bind members of a group together. He proposed that the main objectives of any group were to maintain cohesion and to enhance performance – two recurrent themes throughout the team cohesion literature.

This idea of cohesion as the “glue” that integrates members of a group was echoed subsequently by sport psychologists but with one important modification – namely, the idea that cohesion is a *multidimensional* rather than a unidimensional construct. Carron et al. (1998, p. 213) defined cohesion as “a tendency for a group to stick together and remain united in the pursuit of its instrumental objectives and/or for the satisfaction of member affective needs”. Based on this proposition, Carron and his colleagues postulated a conceptual framework to account for the construct of cohesion (see reviews by Carron and Brawley, 2008; Carron et al., 2007). In this framework, these researchers proposed that cohesion emerges from two kinds of perceptions: those arising from group members’ perceptions of the group as a totality (“group integration”) and those generated by members’ perceptions of the personal attractiveness of the group (“individual attractions to group”). Put simply, these dimensions reflect a bifurcation between “task” and “social” components of any group. Carron’s analysis of cohesion implies that it is a desirable state; if cohesion reflects people’s tendency to stick together in order to pursue common goals, it should be associated with team success.

But is this hypothesis supported by empirical evidence? I shall address this question later in the chapter. Before that, let us quickly sketch some key features of cohesiveness in sport psychology. First, cohesion is a multidimensional construct. As Carron and his colleagues have suggested, two dimensions of this construct are important – a desire of group members to complete a given task (task cohesion) as well as a need by team members to form and maintain interpersonal bonds (social cohesion). Based on this proposition, Carron et al. (1998) developed a theoretical model of group cohesion similar to that displayed in Figure 7.3.

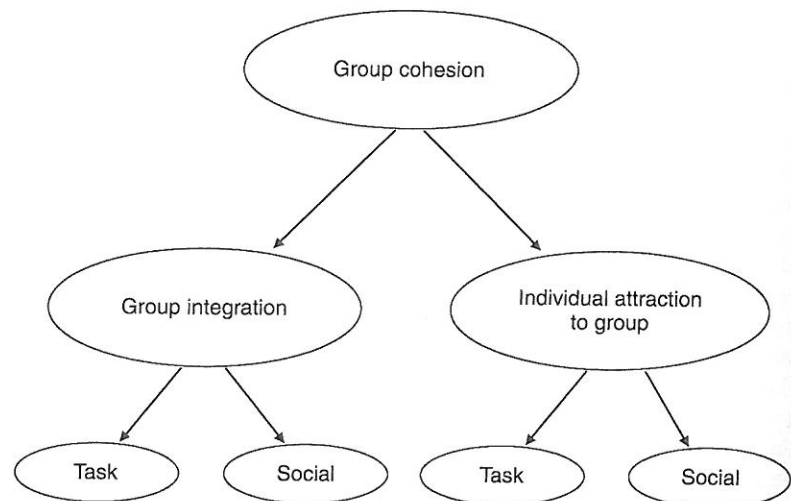


Figure 7.3 Carron's model of group cohesion

Source: adapted, by kind permission, from A. V. Carron, W. N. Widmeyer, and L. R. Brawley (1985) The development of an instrument to assess cohesion in sport teams: The Group Environment Questionnaire. *Journal of Sport Psychology*, 7, 244–266, p. 248

As Figure 7.3 shows, Carron et al. (1998) distinguished between two overarching strands of cohesion: “group integration” and “individual attraction to group”. Group integration represents each team member’s perception of the closeness, bonding and degree of unity in the group as a totality. Individual attraction to the group refers to each team member’s perception of what encourages him or her to remain in the group. Figure 7.3 also shows that both types of perceptions may be divided into “task” and “social” orientations. Combining these various aspects, four dimensions of cohesion were proposed by Carron et al. (1998). These four dimensions of cohesion are group integration-task (GI-T), group integration-social (GI-S), individual attractions to the group-task (ATG-T) and individual attractions to the group-social (ATG-S). According to S. Burke et al. (2008), these four dimensions are believed to account for the majority of variance in cohesiveness. Applying this model to sport, Hodge (1995) and Hodge and McKenzie (1999) suggested that “task” and “social” cohesion are synonymous with “teamwork” and “team spirit”, respectively.

The second characteristic of group cohesion is that it is a *dynamic* process. Cohesion is not a fixed property of a group but changes over time as a function of a number of variables such as the degree of success or failure experienced by the team. A soccer team could score highly on cohesion if it has won a considerable number of games in succession, but this cohesion might diminish if the team were to lose one or two important matches. Unfortunately, despite acknowledging the dynamic nature of this construct, few researchers in sport psychology have monitored changes in team cohesion over the course of a competitive season. One exception to this trend is a study by Holt and Sparkes (2001), who followed a university soccer squad

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throughout a season and found that when the team was eliminated from a mid-season tournament, the players revised their goals for the remainder of the period. This result is not surprising because when a team competes in two tournaments simultaneously, some confusion is likely about which of these tournaments is more important. Holt and Sparkes' (2001) research also shows that team cohesion can vary considerably over a competitive season.

The third property of cohesion is that it is characterized by "instrumentality". People join or become a team for utilitarian reasons, to achieve a common purpose. Finally, Carron et al. (1998) proposed that the construct of cohesion has an emotional dimension which is derived from social relationships and feelings of togetherness among the players. In summary, cohesion is a multidimensional construct whose practical importance for team performance can be gauged from the variety of contexts in which it has been studied, such as in military settings (Ahronson and Cameron, 2007; Siebold, 2006), in the industrial/organizational sphere (Cannon-Bowers and Bowers, 2011; Mathieu et al., 2010) and, of course, in the world of sport (Heuzé and Fontayne, 2002; Rovio et al., 2009).

Despite the apparent clarity of the preceding theoretical analysis, the construct of cohesion has been criticized on both conceptual and methodological grounds (see reviews by Casey-Campbell and Martens, 2009; Friedkin, 2004). First, Casey-Campbell and Martens (2009, p. 235) pointed out that the widespread assumption that group cohesion is a dynamic construct "has still to be tested". Second, Mudrack (1989a, p. 38) noted a dilemma at the heart of this construct – the fact that although cohesion is alleged to be a property of groups, the group itself "as a distinct entity is beyond the grasp of our understanding and measurement". The problem is that the "field of forces" approach to cohesion is difficult to operationalize and the "attractions to the group" approach is conceptually inadequate because "it focuses exclusively on individuals at the expense of the group, and therefore may not entirely capture the concept of group cohesiveness" (Mudrack, 1989a, p. 42). Later in the chapter, I shall return to this thorny issue of how to select the most appropriate unit of analysis (group or individual) when studying cohesion in teams. Third, another criticism of research on cohesion comes from Mudrack (1989a), who complained that studies in this field have been plagued by "confusion, inconsistency, and almost inexcusable sloppiness". To illustrate this allegation, he listed a variety of meanings spawned by the term cohesion. These include interpersonal attraction, group resistance to break-up, a desire to remain in the group, feelings of group membership, and the value that people place on group membership. As these referents do not share many common features, the meaning of the term "cohesion" is elusive. A similar problem was noted by Widmeyer et al. (2002, p. 298) who concluded that "there is no conceptual or theoretical model that can be used as the basis for defining and measuring cohesion". As an illustration of this difficulty, Mudrack (1989b) reported that of twenty-three investigations conducted between 1975 and 1985, no two studies used the same operational indices of cohesiveness. Unfortunately, there has been little progress in achieving a consensus definition of cohesion. Casey-Campbell and Martens (2009, p. 224) lamented the "lack of consistent definitions and operationalizations" in the field. Finally, Shapcott and Carron (2010) highlighted a recurrent conceptual problem in this field in the form of

"reification" – the fallacy of treating an abstraction as a concrete entity. They warned that "reification can arise when individual member responses are summed to reflect a group property without first determining whether some degree of consensus is present" (Shapcott and Carron, 2010, p. 96). For example, they cite the case of two members of a doubles team whose responses are at opposite ends of a continuum of cohesiveness scores. Shapcott and Carron (2010) suggest that it is wrong to reify this property of the team by averaging these extreme scores to indicate that the doubles team has a "moderate" level of cohesiveness. Given such conceptual problems in defining cohesion, what is the best way to measure this construct?

Measuring team cohesion

The profusion of different definitions of cohesion is matched by a plethora of different ways of measuring this construct. Indeed, so plentiful are such measures that Casey-Campbell and Martens (2009, p. 224) remarked wryly that "there are approximately as many methods for assessing cohesion as there are researchers investigating the construct itself". Although the perceived cohesion of a group can be assessed using methods such as **sociograms** (techniques in which members are asked confidentially to name other group members whom they either like or dislike), specially developed self-reports scales are more popular among researchers in this field. One of the earliest of these scales was a measure developed by Martens et al. (1972) called the Sport Cohesiveness Questionnaire (SCQ). This seven-item test requires respondents to rate perceived cohesion in terms of friendship (interpersonal attraction), personal power or influence, enjoyment, closeness, teamwork, sense of belonging, and perceived value of membership. Unfortunately, despite its superficial plausibility or face validity, this test has never been validated adequately for use with athletes. Also, it is limited to the extent that it focused more on social cohesion (or the closeness between players) than on task cohesion (or the degree of common purpose between players). To overcome such limitations, two other measures of team cohesion were developed – the Team Cohesion Questionnaire (TCQ: Gruber and Gray, 1982) and the Multidimensional Sport Cohesion Instrument (MSCI: Yukelson et al., 1984). The TCQ contains thirteen items which provide measures of six different factors: satisfaction with team performance, satisfaction with one's own performance, task cohesion, affiliation cohesion, desire for recognition, and value of group membership. Unfortunately, as with its predecessor, little evidence is available on the psychometric adequacy of this test. The MSCI is a twenty-two-item self-report scale which asks people to rate perceived cohesion in terms of such factors as attraction to the group, unity of purpose, quality of teamwork and valued roles (which is alleged to reflect identification with group membership). As with its predecessor, however, the validity of the MSCI is unknown, and it is hampered by the fact that its items relate only to basketball. Apart from their psychometric shortcomings, the TCQ and MSCI suffer from another problem – namely, a flimsy theoretical basis. This problem arose from the fact that many of their items were borrowed from other instruments without adequate theoretical justification (Widmeyer et al., 2002).

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By contrast with the preceding measures, the Group Environment Questionnaire (GEQ; Carron et al., 1985) has become the most widely used instrument in research on team cohesion. The dominance of this test is attributable mainly to two factors: it is based on an explicit conceptual model of cohesion (e.g., see Carron and Brawley, 2008; see also Figure 7.3) and it has impressive psychometric qualities. The GEQ is an eighteen-item self-report questionnaire scale which purports to measure the four key dimensions of team cohesion described in the previous section. First in this test, which was developed for athletic populations between the ages of 18 and 30 years (Eys et al., 2009), "group integration-task" (GI-T: five items) refers to an individual member's perceptions of the similarity, closeness, and bonding within the group as a whole with regard to the task it faces. It is measured by items such as "our team is united in trying to reach its goals for performance" or "we all take responsibility for any loss or poor performance by our team". Second, "group integration-social" (GI-S: four items) refers to an individual member's feelings about the similarity and unification of the group as a social unit. A sample item here is that "members of our team would rather go out on their own than get together as a team" (reverse scored) or "our team would like to spend time together in the off-season". Third, "individual attractions to the group-task" (ATG-T: four items) designates a team member's feelings about his or her personal involvement with the group's task. It is typically assessed using items like "I'm not happy with the amount of playing time I get" (reverse scored) or "I do not like this team's style of play" (reverse scored). Fourth, "individual attractions to the group-social" (ATG-S: five items) describes an individual team member's feelings about his or her personal social interactions with the group. A sample item to assess this component of cohesion is "I am not going to miss the members of this team when the season ends" (reverse scored) or "some of my best friends are on this team".

Responses to these items are indicated by choosing the appropriate answer on a nine-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (9). Negative items are reverse scored to ensure that relatively higher scores on the GEQ reflect stronger perceptions of team cohesiveness among group members. Not surprisingly, it has become very popular in sport psychology and has been translated into French (Heuzé and Fontayne, 2002). It has also been used in exercise settings. Estabrooks and Carron (1999) investigated the relationship between exercise intentions, attitudes and behaviour among a sample of elderly adults in an exercise group. Results showed that, as expected, both social cohesion and task cohesion were associated positively with the participants' attitudes to, and frequency of attendance at, the exercise classes (for a discussion of exercise psychology, see Chapter 8).

In general, the psychometric characteristics of the Group Environment Questionnaire are impressive (Dion, 2000). Specifically, with regard to test reliability, the internal consistency coefficients of the four cohesion subscales range from 0.64 (in the case of "individual attractions to the group-social") to 0.75 (for "individual attractions to the group-task"). Several studies have reported solid factorial validity and satisfactory reliability (with alpha values ranging from 0.63 to 0.81) for the test (Spink et al., 2010). Perhaps more importantly, Carron et al. (1998) supported the construct validity of the GEQ on the basis of evidence that the four dimensions of cohesion were significantly positively associated with such variables as role clarity

in teams and adherence to exercise programmes. They were also significantly negatively correlated with variables like social loafing – defined earlier in this chapter as a tendency for some people within a group to “slacken off” when working towards a common goal. Unfortunately, reviewers (e.g., Casey-Campbell and Martens, 2009; Dion, 2000) have noted that the factorial structure of the test remains unclear due to equivocal research findings. Whereas Li and Harmer (1996) replicated Carron’s four-factor model in their analysis of cohesion processes in baseball and softball players, Dyce and Cornell’s (1996) factor analysis of cohesion data from musicians yielded a three-factor structure. Specifically, these latter investigators concluded “the results support social-task distinctions ... but not the group integration-individual attractions to the group distinctions” (Dyce and Cornell, 1996, p. 264). Carless and De Paola (2000) also reported a three-factor structure for the GEQ – with these factors being task cohesion, social cohesion and attraction to the group. Similar doubts about the factorial validity of the GEQ were raised by Schutz et al. (1994), who discovered that different factor structures emerged depending on the gender of the participants. In an effort to resolve the criticism that the GEQ is not valid for use with young athletes (those aged under 18 years), Eys et al. (2009) developed the Youth Sport Environment Questionnaire (YSEQ), a measure which appears to have promising psychometric qualities. Taken together, available evidence provided reasonable empirical support the construct validity of the Group Environment Questionnaire.

Before concluding this section, we should consider the issue of the most appropriate level of analysis to adopt in studying team cohesion (see also Dion, 2000). Put simply, is cohesion investigated best as a property of a *group* (Carless and DePaola, 2000), as a characteristic of its *individual members* (e.g., Hogg, 1992), or perhaps as some *combination* of these different units of analysis (e.g., Widmeyer et al., 1985)? Depending on how this question is answered, different interpretations of the cohesion–performance relationship may emerge. In their meta-analysis of the relationship between cohesion and performance, Gully et al. (1995) discovered that the correlations between these variables was stronger for studies that had used the *group* rather than the individual as the unit of analysis. In an effort to resolve this issue about which unit of analysis to use, Carron et al. (2002a) and Carron and Brawley (2008) provided the following practical suggestions for researchers. First, one should consider the research question being asked. For example, if researchers are interested in exploring the relationship between cohesion and individual adherence behaviour in an exercise group, the individual’s perception of group cohesion is crucial. By contrast, if a researcher wishes to explore the relationship between perceived cohesion and team performance in a sport setting, the average level of cohesion in the group is the variable of most interest. Second, cohesion researchers need to consider the type of theory being tested. For example, if such a theory concerns social influences within groups, then the group itself is the most appropriate level of analysis. Third, statistical considerations are important. For example, appropriate statistical procedures need to be used to analyse individual team members’ responses because these responses are nested within groups. Having highlighted the complexity of analysing cohesion, let us now turn to a more practical question. What is the relationship between team cohesion and performance?

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Team cohesion and performance

For many years, sport psychologists have assumed that team cohesion is positively associated with desirable outcomes such as improved communication between athletes/players, increased expenditure of effort and enhanced team success (Carron and Spink, 1993). But is this assumption supported by empirical evidence? Do cohesive teams really achieve more success than teams in which disharmony reigns? Unfortunately, there is no easy answer to this question because the relationship between team cohesion and success is complex. Indeed, there are many anecdotal accounts of sports teams that were highly successful *in spite* of enmity and disharmony between teammates. The former basketball star Dennis Rodman was frequently at odds with his fellow players in the Chicago Bulls team of the late 1990s, yet he managed to contribute significantly to this team's extraordinary success in that era (Weinberg and Gould, 2007). Similarly, there are many examples in soccer of teammates coming to blows during a competitive match. In April 2005, two Newcastle Football Club players, Kieron Dyer and Lee Bowyer, traded punches while playing against Aston Villa. In January 2008, two Arsenal players, Emmanuel Adebayor and Nicklas Bendtner, punched each other during their Carling Cup match against Tottenham Hotspur. Syer (1986) suggested that the existence of friendship-based cliques in a team may sometimes impede rather than facilitate its success (see also Box 7.2 later in the chapter). This speculation has received little or no empirical scrutiny. However, M. Klein and Christiansen (1969) reported that basketball players who were close friends tended to pass the ball disproportionately frequently to each other – often to the relative neglect of team efficacy. But in general, what conclusions have emerged from studies of the link between team cohesion and performance?

Before reviewing the literature on this issue, it is important to comment briefly on the research paradigms used in cohesion research. In general, studies of the relationship between cohesion and success have adopted either a correlational or an experimental research paradigm (Mullen and Copper, 1994). The correlational approach is more popular among investigators in this field and consists of studies in which perceived levels of team cohesion are elicited from individual members and subsequently correlated with team performance or success. Carron et al. (2002a) investigated the relationship between the perceived cohesiveness of elite basketball and soccer teams and their winning percentages in competitive games. Results revealed quite a strong relationship between team cohesion and success, with correlation values ranging between 0.55 and 0.67. The experimental research paradigm, by contrast, involves evaluation of the effect on team performance of some intervention designed to manipulate the level of cohesion in the group. Few studies in the field have used this paradigm, however. A possible explanation for this neglect is that sport researchers tend to be reluctant to use the artificial and ad-hoc groups that are required by the experimental approach. Instead, they prefer to use actual sports teams.

Using the correlational approach, some evidence emerged to indicate that teams could achieve success in spite of enmity between their members. Lenk (1969) suggested that cohesion was not necessary for team success in rowing. Briefly, he investigated the cohesiveness of two teams of German rowers – the 1960 Olympic gold medal winning eight and the 1962 world champions. Although he

did not measure team cohesion explicitly, Lenk (1969) assessed group unity by participant observation of social relationships among team members. The results were counter-intuitive because they showed that team success occurred in spite of considerable disharmony among the rowers. Accordingly, this study refuted the traditional view that cohesion is an essential prerequisite of team success; the results challenged "a thesis that seems to have been taken for granted ... [namely that] only small groups, which are low in conflict, or highly integrated can produce especially high performances" (Lenk, 1969, p. 393). Subsequently, he concluded that "sports crews can, therefore, perform top athletic achievements in spite of strong internal conflicts" (Lenk, 1977, p. 38). Of course, as critical consumers of research, we should be cautious about extrapolating too boldly from the results of this study for at least two reasons. First, it is possible that these results are attributable partly to the nature of the sport of rowing. To explain, Syer (1986) noted that it is not too damaging for members of a rowing eight to dislike each other because each one of them has a specific task to perform and is focused on the cox rather than on each other. Thus no matter how much bickering the rowers engaged in with each other, the nature of their sport prevented them from forming cliques that might impede collective performance of the task. Second, Carron et al. (1998) reinterpreted Lenk's results on the grounds that although the rowers in the study had not been socially cohesive, they had been *task* cohesive. So, Lenk's research findings are ambiguous as they have different meanings depending on which aspect of cohesion one examines.

Despite its flaws, Lenk's (1969) study was pivotal in challenging the assumption that cohesion is crucial to team success. Some subsequent studies (e.g., Melnick and Chemers, 1974) found no relationship between cohesiveness and team success whereas others discovered negative relationships between these two variables (e.g., Landers and Luschen, 1974). Research by Carron and Ball (1977) and J. Williams and Hacker (1982) found that team cohesion was associated positively with athletic performance. A review by Widmeyer et al. (1993) claimed that 83 per cent of studies in this field corroborated a positive relationship between team cohesion and performance. Most of these studies found that athletes in successful teams tend to perceive their team as scoring highly in cohesion whereas the converse is true among athletes of unsuccessful teams. But a note of caution regarding this relationship was expressed by Aronson et al. (2002). Briefly, these researchers observed that team cohesion facilitates success *only* if the task facing the team requires close cooperation between members. Furthermore, they warned that team cohesion can impair performance if members of a group are so close emotionally that they allow their social bonds to obscure their critical awareness.

Overall, sport psychologists have shown that the relationship between team cohesion and performance is neither simple nor predictable. Let us consider each of these two points separately. First, as the work of Aronson et al. (2002) indicates, the cohesion-performance relationship is mediated by a host of intervening variables. Consider how the type of sport played may moderate the cohesion-performance relationship. Carron and Chelladurai (1981) speculated that in interactive sports (e.g., basketball, soccer), where team members have to rely on each other, cohesion is likely to be associated with enhanced team success. By contrast, in co-active

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sports, where athletes play for a team but where individual performance does not depend on teamwork (e.g., golf, rifle-shooting), team cohesiveness should either have no effect or be associated with less team success. This theory was challenged by Matheson et al. (1995), who failed to discover any significant interaction between team cohesion and sport type (a finding supported by Mullen and Copper, 1994). A subsequent review of the literature by Carron and Häusenblas (1998) concluded that in general, team cohesion is positively associated with performance. Similarly, as indicated earlier in the chapter, Carron et al. (2002a) reported that in a large sample of athletes ($n=294$) from twenty-seven different basketball and soccer teams, cohesion was correlated positively with team success (with r values ranging from 0.55 to 0.67). Nevertheless, other variables that are believed to mediate the cohesion–performance relationship include such factors as goal clarity and acceptance (Brawley et al., 1987) and “collective efficacy” or group members’ shared beliefs in their conjoint capacity to organize and execute actions to produce a desired goal (Bandura, 1997). According to Feltz and Lirgg (2001), teams with a relatively high degree of team self-efficacy beliefs should perform better, and persist longer when behind, than teams with lower levels of such beliefs. But a team’s collective efficacy is thought to be more than the simple aggregate of individual levels of self-efficacy (Spink, 1990). Not surprisingly, therefore, the relationship between team cohesion and performance may be moderated by this intervening variable of collective self-efficacy.

The second counter-intuitive conclusion from the research literature is that team cohesion may be a *consequence* rather than a cause of team success. In other words, the relationship between cohesion and performance may be *circular* rather than linear. This possibility is supported by Mullen and Copper (1994) who concluded that “although cohesiveness may indeed lead the group to perform better, the tendency for the group to experience greater cohesiveness *after* successful performance may be even stronger” (Mullen and Copper, 1994, p. 222; *italics mine*). If this is so, perhaps there is some truth in the old idea that “team spirit” is what a team gains *after* it achieves success! A review by Casey-Campbell and Martens (2009, p. 228) concluded that “existing research appears to provide evidence that the ‘performance leads to cohesion’ effect seems to be stronger than the ‘cohesion leads to performance’ effect”. A critical perspective on the issue of distinguishing between cause and effect is presented in Box 7.1.

Box 7.1 Thinking critically about ... the direction of causality in cohesion–performance research

Every psychology student is taught that “correlation does not imply causality”. In other words, just because two variables are related to each other does not mean that one *caused* the other. After all, there could be a third, confounding factor which is the real cause of the correlation in question. Nevertheless, certain correlational research designs allow investigators to draw conclusions about causal relationships between variables in the absence of experimental manipulations or controls. To illustrate, a “cross-lagged panel correlation” research design (Rozelle and Campbell, 1969) can provide useful clues to the

question of causality. Briefly, this design is based on the assumption that analysis of the pattern of correlations between variables at different times (note that the term "lagged" means that there is a time-lag between the collection of some of the correlations) allows certain inferences to be drawn about possible causal links between these variables. In particular, if one variable causes another, it seems likely that it should be more strongly related to the second variable *later* in time – because it is assumed that causes take time to produce effects. Using this cross-lagged research design, Bakeman and Helmreich (1975) measured cohesion and performance in water-sports teams on two separate occasions. Results showed that "first-segment" cohesiveness was highly associated with "second-segment" cohesiveness but not with second-segment performance. Accordingly, these authors concluded that team cohesion was not a good predictor of team performance but that successful performance may have contributed to the development of strong cohesiveness.

Critical thinking questions

Why is it important for researchers to indicate the precise time at which team cohesiveness and performance data were collected? Can you think of any flaws in the logic underlying cross-lagged panel research designs? If performance influences cohesion more than cohesion influences performance, what mechanisms could explain this finding? What are the practical implications of this idea that performance affects team cohesion?

Apart from the preceding conclusions, what other findings have emerged from the research literature on cohesion and performance? One way of answering this question is by augmenting narrative reviews (i.e., those in which researchers draw informal conclusions from reviewing relevant evidence) with meta-analytic reviews of available research. As indicated in Chapter 2, a meta-analysis is literally an analysis of analyses, or a quantitative synthesis of published research on a particular question (e.g., "Does team cohesion affect athletic performance?") in order to determine the effect of one variable on another variable across many different studies and samples. The extent of this effect is indicated by the effect size statistic – a number which represents the average strength of the effect in standard score units, independent of sample size. Using this statistical technique, Mullen and Copper (1994) examined forty-nine studies of groups derived from a broad cross-section of settings including industrial, military, social and sport psychology. At least five conclusions emerged. First, the authors concluded that the cohesion–performance relationship was small but positive and significant. Interestingly, this relationship was stronger for sports teams than for any other groups (e.g., ad-hoc, artificial groups) in the sample. The authors attributed this trend to the fact that sports groups tend to have a unique sense of collective identity, and they differ from other groups by virtue of being formally organized according to explicit rules of competition. Second, Mullen and Copper (1994) found that stronger cohesion–performance relationships existed among "real" (i.e., naturally formed) groups than among

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"artificial" groups. Third, they concluded that performance was more strongly related to cohesion than was cohesion to performance (see also Box 7.1). Fourth, the type of athletic activity (e.g., interactive versus co-active sports) did not seem to mediate the relationship between cohesion and performance in sports teams. Fifth, Mullen and Copper (1994) claimed that commitment to the *task* was the primary component of cohesiveness in the cohesion-performance relationship. This conclusion suggests that team-building techniques aimed at enhancing the other components of cohesion (see Figure 7.3) may not be effective. Mullen and Copper (1994) were sceptical of the merit of fostering interpersonal attraction among members and/or attempting to "pump up" the group in an effort to enhance team performance. Incidentally, the next section examines the nature and efficacy of some popular team-building techniques in sport.

In 2002, Carron et al. (2002b) updated the preceding meta-analytic review by focusing on studies conducted only in the domain of sport. Using a database of forty-six published studies, they discovered that there was a "significant moderate to large" effect size of 0.655 for cohesion on performance – indicating that cohesiveness was significantly associated with team performance in sport. In contrast to the findings of Mullen and Copper (1994), Carron et al. (2002b) found that both task *and* social cohesion were significantly related to athletic performance. Another notable finding emerging from this study was that cohesiveness in female teams was more strongly related to performance than was cohesiveness in male teams.

So far, we have examined the relationship between cohesion and performance only in relation to the variable of objective team success. But as Kremer and Scully (2002) observed, the focus on only one type of outcome is too narrow as it neglects other ways in which cohesion may affect team dynamics. For example, the cohesion of a group may affect subjective variables such as team satisfaction, team identity and the perceived self-efficacy of a team. These variables could be included fruitfully in future research in this field, although it should be pointed out that "satisfaction" may be either a cause or a consequence of team cohesion. In a longitudinal field study of cohesion, Holt and Sparkes (2001) explored the factors that contributed to the cohesion of a university soccer team over an eight-month season. Using a variety of ethnographic methods (such as participant observation and interviews), Holt and Sparkes (2001) identified four main factors that shaped team cohesiveness. These factors were, first, clear and meaningful roles (e.g., in mid-season, some of the teams' midfield players wanted to play a more attacking game to the relative neglect of their defensive duties), second, team goals (in late season, the fact that the team was eliminated from one competition helped to refocus the team for the league campaign), third, personal sacrifices (e.g., the team captain made a three-hour train journey in order to play in the final match of the league) and fourth, communication (especially "on-field" communication among the players).

Before concluding this section, it may be interesting to explore two intriguing questions. First, can group cohesion ever be harmful (see Box 7.2)? Second, would you be surprised to learn that cohesion does not feature in a list of the characteristics of a successful team – at least in the opinion of one successful coach (see Box 7.3)?

Box 7.2 Thinking critically about ... whether or not team cohesion can ever be harmful

It has long been assumed that high levels of team cohesion are associated with better performance and improved results. In general, empirical research supports this putative connection between cohesion and performance. Carron et al. (2002a) suggested that the relationship between cohesion and performance is reciprocal – with high cohesion leading to improved performance and successful performance in turn increasing cohesion. But Rovio et al. (2009) challenged this conclusion. Briefly, these authors investigated the relationship between the performance of a junior ice-hockey team and various social psychological phenomena (including team cohesion). They used a mixed methodology involving interviews, observational data, a diary and psychometric testing, with the Group Environment Questionnaire (GEQ: Carron et al., 1985). Results showed that despite high social cohesion, the team's performance deteriorated during the season. Based on this finding, Rovio et al. (2009) concluded that cohesion is not always beneficial to team performance.

Critical thinking questions

In the light of the complex relationship between team cohesion and team performance, are you surprised by the findings reported by Rovio et al. (2009)? Can you think of any other explanation of their findings above – besides the one that claims that team cohesion is overvalued? Do you think that the authors' conclusion were justified by the methodology that they used? If you wanted to replicate or extend this study, what methods would *you* choose?

Box 7.3 presents former England coach Sven-Göran Eriksson's views on the ingredients of a successful team.

Box 7.3 Thinking critically about ... a coach's view of successful teams

According to the former England soccer manager Sven-Göran Eriksson (2002), who has coached championship winning teams in three countries (Sweden, Portugal and Italy: Every, 2002), there are eight key characteristics of a successful team in sport.

First, the members of the team must have a common vision. Second, they should have a clear understanding of the team's goals. Third, they must have a good understanding of team strategy and tactics. Fourth, they must have "inner discipline" – which involves both knowing and adhering to the rules of the team (e.g., with regard to time-keeping). Fifth, successful teams must have players who complement each other. For example, Eriksson claims that more than one player like Messi in a team could cause problems because of the unpredictability of their skills. Sixth, effective teams require a division of roles – but the

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coach must respect each of them equally. Seventh, players in a successful team must learn to put the common good before their own interests. Finally, the members of a successful team must accept collective responsibility and think of "we" instead of "me".

Critical thinking questions

Notice that Eriksson did not specify "social cohesion" as one of his criteria of successful teams. Do you agree with this decision? If not, why not? Do you think that all of Eriksson's eight team characteristics can be developed psychologically in players? Which ones are the most difficult to develop?

Team-building in sport

Having established the nature, measurement and correlates of team cohesion in sport, let us now consider the main methods by which coaches, managers and psychologists have attempted to enhance it. One popular method in this regard is through team-building activities or experiences that are intended to enhance aspects of team harmony such as trust, communication and leadership (Statler, 2010). According to Martin et al. (2009, p. 3), the purpose of team-building is "to help a group become more cohesive while working toward its common goals". Increasingly, sports teams try to achieve this latter objective by the use of special training camps – often held away from home either before the competitive season starts or during it. Although such trips are often useful, they may also prove to be counterproductive in generating adverse publicity for the team involved as a result of unruly antics. In 2004, eight Leicester City footballers on a mid-season "bonding session" in Spain were taken into custody by local police (and subsequently released) following allegations of rape by two women (Kremer and Moran, 2008a). Similarly, a team-building trip to Portugal by Liverpool Football Club in February 2007 in preparation for an important Champions' League match turned sour when one of the players (Craig Bellamy) assaulted a teammate (John Arne Riise) with a golf-club during a karaoke session in a local bar (Wallace, 2007). Although anecdotal in nature, these examples highlight the danger of assuming that "away days" inevitably foster team cohesion. Howard Wilkinson, a former manager of Leeds United and Sunderland, showed commendable awareness of this problem when he pointed out that there is a big difference between facilitating a temporary form of camaraderie and generating an abiding sense of team cohesion among players. Specifically, he noted that "going out and getting drunk generates a feel-good factor which is different to real team-spirit. I think real team spirit is much more enduring – that (other) feel-good factor cracks under pressure" (cited in Fanning, 2004b). Moving on from anecdotal examples, it is evident that relatively little empirical research has been conducted on the nature and efficacy of team-building techniques in sport psychology (but see the special issue of the *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology* edited by C. Hardy and Crace, 1997). From the research

literature available, however, it is possible to identify some principles and findings as follows.

To begin with, a definition of team-building is required. Several possibilities are available. B. Newman (1984, p. 27) defined this term as an attempt to "promote an increased sense of unity and cohesiveness and enable the team to function together more smoothly and effectively". Bettenhausen (1991, p. 369) described team-building as an attempt "to improve group performance by improving communication, reducing conflict, and generating commitment among work group members". In a similar vein, C. Hardy and Crace (1997) suggested that team-building involves interventions that purport to enhance team performance by positively affecting team processes or team synergy. Echoing this view, Brawley and Paskevich (1997, p. 13) defined team-building as "a method of helping the group to (a) increase effectiveness, (b) satisfy the needs of its members, or (c) improve work conditions". More recently, C. Klein et al. (2009, p. 183) defined team-building as "formal and informal team-level interventions that focus on improving social relations and clarifying roles, as well as solving task and interpersonal problems that affect team functioning". In summary, a common theme running through these definitions is the idea that team-building is designed explicitly to enhance team cohesion.

Does team-building actually work? In an attempt to answer this question, C. Klein et al. (2009) reviewed the effects of four team-building strategies – goal-setting, interpersonal relations, problem solving and role clarification – on various indices of team performance, mainly in organizational settings. The results were encouraging in being "suggestive of the idea that team-building does improve team performance" (C. Klein et al., 2009, p. 212). Nevertheless, at least three caveats must be noted when evaluating research and practice in this field (Crace and Hardy, 1997; McLean, 1995). First, team-building should not be regarded as a type of "quick fix, pep talk" which ensures team harmony through the cursory application of some arcane psychological strategies. Instead, it involves a long-term commitment to the development of task-related and interpersonal dynamics of a team in the interests of enhancing its performance. Emphasizing this point, McLean (1995, p. 424) claimed that team-building "is not a set of exercises that get wheeled out from time to time, but it is a way of thinking which pervades every interpersonal interaction within that group". Second, team-building is not designed to increase similarity or agreement between group members but to enhance mutual respect among teammates. As Yukelson (1997) suggested, sports teams resemble families in the sense that although teammates may not always like or agree with each other, they know that they belong to the same "household". Third, we should acknowledge that most of the principles and strategies of team-building in sport are derived from research on organizational development in business settings (see C. Klein et al., 2009). Although this cross-fertilization of ideas between business and sport has been valuable in certain areas of sport psychology (most notably, perhaps, in goal-setting; see Chapter 2), it has also generated activities (e.g., participation in outdoor adventure weekends) whose appeal is based more on intuition than on empirical evidence. Put simply, the fact that a team-building technique is popular in business does not make it either valid or effective in sport settings. Bearing these caveats in mind, let us now consider the theory and practice of team-building interventions in sport psychology.

Developing team cohesion: from theory to practice

As we learned in the previous section, the main objective of team-building interventions is to increase the effectiveness of a group by enhancing the cohesiveness of its members (Carron et al., 1997). But as cohesion is a multidimensional construct (see earlier in chapter), what aspects of it should team-builders focus on in designing interventions? More generally, what team-building exercises are most effective in strengthening cohesion? Let us now consider each of these two questions.

According to Mullen and Copper (1994), the three most important dimensions of cohesion are interpersonal attraction, commitment to a common task and pride in the group itself. Most cohesion theorists have explored the first and second of these aspects of cohesion but have tended to neglect the "pride in the group" aspect. Naturally, these different aspects of cohesion have different implications for team-building initiatives. First, if one wishes to strengthen the interpersonal determinants of cohesion, team-building techniques should focus on increasing mutual liking and affiliation among team members. Second, if one wishes to increase group members' commitment to a given task, team-building exercises should be directed at helping them to increase the intrinsic enjoyment of tackling this task. Third, if group pride is seen as the most important dimension of cohesion, activities that "psych up" the group may be appropriate (see also Chapter 3).

In general, two types of team-building interventions may be distinguished in sport and exercise psychology – direct and indirect interventions (Eys et al., 2005). In the direct interventions paradigm, the coach, manager or sport psychology consultant works *directly* with the athletes in the team in an effort to increase cohesion among them and to foster a communal vision and sense of identity. In the indirect interventions paradigm, the consultant instructs coaches and managers in the skills of team-building rather than working directly with the athletes or players concerned.

Usually, team-building in sport is conducted through the *indirect* intervention paradigm for three main reasons (Carron and Hausenblas, 1998; Estabrooks and Dennis, 2003). First, most coaches and managers like to be involved in mediating the interventions of consultants to their team members because they tend to know the individual athletes well. Second, many coaches are reluctant to relinquish their control over the team to an outside consultant. Third, some coaches may be wary of the possibility that the consultant in question may use his or her work with the team for personal promotional purposes. Let us now consider some examples of direct and indirect team-building interventions.

Direct team-building interventions

Based on his experience as a sport psychology consultant to a variety of university athletes, Yukelson (1997) delineated four stages of direct team-building work with athletes: assessment, education, **brainstorming** and goal-setting. First, he suggested that the consultant must assess the current team situation as accurately as possible. This step requires the consultant to meet relevant coaching staff and listen to and observe the athletes or players in order to determine the goals, expectations

and concerns of the entire team. Second, in the education stage, the consultant should provide the team with some elementary information about how groups develop over time. In the third stage, Yukelson (1997) proposed that the consultant should use brainstorming techniques to help the team to generate and prioritize its current needs. In the fourth stage, these needs should be analysed to determine the goals of the team-building intervention. Across these four stages, a number of practical team-building techniques are recommended. These techniques are evaluated in Box 7.4.

Box 7.4 Thinking critically about ... building a great team

Veach and May (2005) proposed the MAPS framework for building a successful team. The acronym MAPS stands for Mission, Assessment, Plan and Systematic evaluation. Here is a summary of the steps involved in this approach.

- **Mission:** What does the team stand for? What are its values and how strongly is it committed to achieving excellence? Following discussions with the team and its coaches, develop a concise mission statement that tries to answer these questions as clearly as possible.
- **Assessment:** Try to assess team strengths and weaknesses by observing how well players work together, communicate with each other and respond to feedback from coaches during practice sessions and competitive matches. Regular appraisal of these qualities is crucial to effective team-building.
- **Plan:** Help the team members and coaches to develop an action plan designed to improve individual and team efforts. This can be done by facilitating team goal-setting meetings and by encouraging open and honest communication about how best to achieve team goals.
- **Systematic evaluation:** You need to review the entire "road map" regularly.

Critical thinking questions

Imagine that you are a sport psychologist hired to engage in direct team-building work with a squad of athletes and coaches. How could you use the MAPS approach to facilitate this task? Do you think that it would be difficult to devise a mission statement for the team if there are lots of conflicting goals among the players? How would you handle a situation in which some of the players rejected the coach's goals for the team? Can you see any contradiction between teaching team members to be self-reliant and yet encouraging them to depend on each other? How would you like to be introduced to the team – as a sport psychologist or as a team-building consultant? Give reasons for your answer.

Apart from the suggestions contained in Box 7.4, a variety of other team-building exercises have been used by coaches and managers in sport. Some of the more unusual ones are described in Box 7.5.

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Box 7.5 Team-building exercises in soccer: bingo, bathing, drinking and ... injecting monkey-testicles!

Soccer coaches and managers have used many unusual strategies in an effort to foster team spirit among their players. Don Revie, who managed the highly successful Leeds United team of the 1960s and 1970s, used to organize games of bingo for his players. In addition, former players claim that he often used to personally soap and massage them in baths after training and matches! Apart from such hands-on techniques, other favourite bonding strategies include playing practical jokes on teammates and engaging in drinking games. The “crazy gang” members of the Wimbledon team of the 1980s used to cut each other’s suits, set their clothes on fire and pack talcum powder into teammates’ motor-cycle helmets as initiation rites. D. Taylor (2003) reported that when Neil Warnock was manager of Bury, he used to encourage his players to drink cocktails made of raw eggs and sherry after training every Friday. According to Dean Kiely, Bury’s goalkeeper at the time, this technique was Warnock’s way of saying “we stand and fall together”. Perhaps the strangest technique used to enhance team performance was that involving the injection of monkey-testicle serum – allegedly pioneered by Major Frank Buckley (manager of Wolverhampton Wanderers from 1927 to 1944) (Norrish, 2009).

Incidentally, Don Revie was ahead of his time in extolling the psychological value of bingo because research by Julie Winstone (cited in Horwood, 2002) revealed that this activity can yield measurable cognitive benefits. Specifically, she reported that people who played bingo regularly tended to perform faster and more accurately on visual search tasks than those who did not.

Direct team-building techniques are increasingly evident in sport – even in games which are regarded as quintessentially individual activities such as golf. Consider the various practical strategies used by the captains of the 2002 and 2006 Europe teams in their matches against the United States in the Ryder Cup. Sam Torrance (captain of the 2002 Europe team) used the thirteen months period between the date on which the European team was selected and the match itself (recall that the long delay was caused by the cancellation of the 2001 Ryder Cup match in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks) to boost the confidence of his players. He circulated catchy inspirational statements such as “out of the shadows come heroes” and “Curtis has one Tiger – but I’ve got twelve lions”. These motivational phrases were delivered regularly at team meetings and were accompanied by video screenings in which the players were encouraged to view themselves holing putts, hitting wonderful shots and winning tournaments (A. Reid, 2002). He also appealed to his players emotionally: just before the match itself, Torrance addressed the team with the words, “this is going to be the best day of your life. You were born to do this. This is what we practise for. This is what we live for” (cited in A. Reid, 2002). Turning to Europe’s team preparation for the 2006 Ryder Cup, a rather different approach was used by the captain, Ian Woosnam, who recruited Jamil Qureshi, a former

professional cricketer turned hypnotist and stage entertainer, to help the team of golfers. Qureshi staged a 45-minute show for the golfers after Woosnam had delivered his opening speech to the team (Donegan, 2006).

Perhaps the most bizarre example of team-building techniques in modern sport is that used by the South African rugby union in preparing its national team for the 2003 World Cup – the infamous Kamp Staaldraad (Kremer and Moran, 2008a, Ray, 2003a). Box 7.6 provides some details of this extraordinary boot camp for the South African rugby squad.

Box 7.6 Team-building exercises in rugby: Kamp Staaldraad – a (jack) boot camp that failed

Kamp Staaldraad (from the Afrikaans meaning “Camp Barbed Wire”) was a military-type boot camp established under the direction of South Africa’s national rugby coach, Rudolf Straeuli, and his assistant Adriaan Heijns (a former Special Services military man from the country’s apartheid era). Its goal was to develop team spirit and cohesiveness among the South African rugby squad prior to the 2003 World Cup.

At this camp, the players were forced to undergo a series of torturous and humiliating exercises in an effort to forge team spirit and mental toughness. In particular, the players were allegedly:

- forced to stand naked in a freezing lake and pump up rugby balls underwater (and those who tried to climb out were forced back literally at gunpoint)
- ordered to climb into a foxhole naked and sing the South African national anthem while ice-cold water was poured over their heads (recordings of *God Save the Queen* (England’s national anthem) and the New Zealand All Blacks pre-match haka were played at full volume)
- made to crawl naked across gravel
- coerced into carrying tyres, poles and bags branded with the flag emblems of England and New Zealand
- made to spend a night in the bush, including killing animals and cooking meals.

These unconventional team-building strategies (or alleged human rights violations: see Ray, 2003b) were of little benefit to South Africa as the team lost in the quarter-final of the tournament to New Zealand. Shortly afterwards, Straeuli resigned. The South African public was shocked by revelations surrounding the camp and one of the country’s most respected religious figures, Archbishop Ndungane, was reported to have said: “You don’t motivate people with jackboot tactics, and the proof is certainly in the World Cup pudding” (cited in Wildman, 2003). Curiously, despite the absence of any scientific evidence to support the strategies used in Kamp Staaldraad, and the worldwide outrage it generated, the team captain, Corne Kriege, claimed that “most of the stuff was really good for team spirit” (cited in Evening Herald, 2003, p. 8).

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Before concluding this section, we should remember that a great deal of caution is necessary when evaluating the impact of direct team-building interventions. Specifically, when comparing the preparation techniques used by the European and US teams we must be careful not to fall into the trap of assuming that team success means that team preparation must have been ideal. In other words, we should be wary of *post-hoc* reasoning when attempting to determine the possible causes of a given sporting outcome. This problem is also called the “glow of success” bias and reflects the invalid reasoning procedure by which people think “we won – so we must have been cohesive” (Diane Gill, 2000).

Indirect team-building interventions

As explained previously, indirect team-building involves the sport psychologist working with the coaching staff rather than the team members. Within this paradigm, Carron et al. (1997) developed an influential theoretical model which proposed a four-step intervention process. In the first stage, which typically lasts for less than twenty minutes, the consultant outlines for the team coach or manager both the nature and benefits of team-building. Second, in the “conceptual stage”, which takes about the same length of time, the goal of enhanced team cohesion is explained as being the result of three main factors: the team’s environment (e.g., the distinctiveness of the team), the team’s structure (e.g., norms) and its communication processes. Third, the “practical stage”, which takes place in collaboration with the team coach or manager, involves the practical work of generating as many team-building strategies as possible. Fourth, in the “intervention stage”, the team-building methods are implemented by the coach or manager with the assistance of trained assistants, if necessary. Box 7.7 presents examples of the various team-building exercises advocated by Carron et al. (1997, 2009).

Box 7.7 Theory and practice of team-building (based on Carron et al., 1997, 2009)

<i>Team-building objective</i>	<i>Possible strategy</i>
Enhancing team distinctiveness	Emphasize unique history or traditions of team and design special team T-shirts or sportswear (e.g., warm-up tracksuits) for players and coaches
Increasing team togetherness	Organize social outings for teammates and design team drills in the lead-up to matches
Clarifying team goals and norms	Set goals in consultation with team members and encourage “goals for the day” exercises
Facilitating team communication	Arrange regular meetings for team members and alternate the role of “social organizer” within team

Evaluating team-building interventions

How effective are the direct and indirect team-building interventions described above? As Pain and Harwood (2009, p. 523) pointed out, despite the importance of team-building to coaches and psychologists, "surprisingly little sport-specific research has been conducted". Of the handful of published studies on this topic, results are equivocal. Prapavessis et al. (1996) assigned soccer teams to one of three conditions: a team-building intervention condition, an attention-placebo condition, or a control condition. The attention-placebo condition consisted of an intervention strategy which involved soccer-specific information (e.g., nutrition) rather than team-building information. The soccer players' perceptions of team cohesion were evaluated before the beginning of the season and also after an eight-week intervention period. Surprisingly, results indicated no significant difference in cohesiveness between the players in the various conditions: the team-building intervention was not effective in this study. By contrast, Pain and Harwood (2009) evaluated a team-building intervention (based on structured team meetings) with a soccer team during a competitive season. Using a single-case research design (see Chapter 1; see also Barker et al., 2011), these researchers reported that their intervention had led to increased team cohesion and improvements in team performance. In the domain of exercise, team-building interventions have also been shown to be moderately effective (Carron and Hausenblas, 1998; L. Martin et al., 2009). Carron et al. (1997) explained how team-building strategies were successful in developing cohesion in, and adherence to, exercise classes for young adults. Estabrooks and Carron (1999, 2000) reported similar results for more elderly exercisers. One possible reason for this apparent discrepancy between team-building effects in sports teams and exercise groups is that a "ceiling effect" may be at work. To explain, the cohesiveness among sport team members is probably greater than that among exercise group members and so interventions designed to enhance cohesion may produce less change in the former than in the latter participants. As Carron and Hausenblas (1998, p. 342) speculated, the "opportunities for increased cohesiveness through team-building are greater in exercise groups". L. Martin et al. (2009) conducted a meta-analysis of research on the efficacy of team-building interventions in sport. Following a review of seventeen relevant studies, the authors concluded that team-building had "a significant moderate effect" on cohesion and performance (L. Martin et al., 2009, p. 11). Furthermore, results showed that the most successful interventions used goal-setting techniques and lasted between two and twenty weeks in duration.

Perhaps a more interesting question for the layperson is: how do athletes themselves react to team-building interventions? Although little or no research data exist on this issue, some relevant insights can be gleaned from athletes' autobiographical accounts of their experiences of team-building. Typically, these accounts reveal considerable scepticism about the merit of team-building activities. Jeremy Guscott, the former England international rugby player who travelled on a seven-week tour of South Africa with the British and Irish Lions in 1997, was very wary of the management consultants who were hired to engage in team-building exercises with the squad prior to its departure. He revealed:

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rugby players are not the most receptive audiences to new-fangled ideas ... I shared the scepticism. I'm a bit old-fashioned about these things and, as far as I'm concerned, a quick drink down the pub would have been enough for me to get to know everyone.

(Guscott, 1997, pp. 19–20)

One of the exercises which was the target of his derision involved the attempt by a subgroup of players to balance a long bamboo cane on the edges of their fingertips before lowering it to the floor. Canoeing and crate-stacking exercises were also used in an effort to develop team spirit among the Lions squad members. As I indicated previously, however, such techniques lack both a coherent theoretical rationale and evidence of empirical validity. Martin Johnson, who captained the England rugby team to victory in the 2003 World Cup, provided some fascinating insights into the motivational ideas and techniques used by the manager, Clive Woodward. Johnson claimed:

some of the ideas were good, some OK and some just plain crazy – like the computer system (designed to identify true winners) from Mossad ... There was a joystick and you had to line up all these targets and fire things ... At that point, we thought Clive had completely lost it ... we used the program for a couple of months, then we never saw it again.

(cited in Kervin, 2005, p. 72)

Clearly, Johnson was not impressed by fads like the use of computer game playing as a team-bonding exercise. In passing, scepticism about team-building is also prevalent in professional soccer. Recall the story (in Chapter 1) of what happened when a management consultant used an exercise involving plasticine in an attempt to promote team-building among the Sunderland club's soccer players (Dickinson, 2007). Statler (2010) examined some common pitfalls in team-building activities; she noted that some athletes do not feel comfortable in sharing their thoughts with others in a public discussion of team goals. Similarly, sport psychologists engaged in team-building must be sensitive to the possibility that some players will give socially desirable suggestions (i.e., will say what they think the coach wants to hear) rather than honest feedback in group brainstorming sessions. Finally, Statler (2010, p. 333) pointed out that the task of developing a group identity or a team vision is a lengthy process and is "only as great as the commitment to working on it".

Implication of team-building techniques for coaches

At least five practical implications for coaches may be identified from theories of effective team-building (Weinberg and Gould, 2007). First, coaches should try to create a team environment in which open channels of communication exist among teammates and between team members and the coaching or management staff. The assumption here is that clear communication processes foster mutual trust among team members. Practical ways of improving communication in teams include

arranging regular team meetings to discuss issues that can be filled into sentences such as "It would be better if ...". Second, although many coaches proclaim that "there is no 'I' in team", it is essential that they recognize the importance of individual roles within groups of athletes. At the very least, all players should be told exactly how they can contribute to the success of the team. Also, if individual players know what skills they have to work on, they are likely to work harder for team objectives. Third, coaches must learn to set challenging group goals for their teams. Fourth, a collective sense of team identity can be strengthened by encouraging teammates to wear similar team clothing. Fifth, successful coaches tend to spend a lot of time in getting to know their players as well as possible (for some practical advice on team-building techniques, see also Estabrooks and Dennis, 2003).

School sports: helpful or harmful?

School sports are among the earliest and most powerful ways in which young people are introduced to athletic activities, but what are the psychological benefits and hazards associated with playing competitive sports in school? Does sport build character – or merely *reveal* it? Let us now consider these questions briefly.

Many people have happy memories of their youthful days on the playing field. Samuel Beckett, a Nobel Prize-winner for literature, wrote fondly of the time he spent playing cricket for Portora Royal School in Enniskillen, Northern Ireland. At inter-varsity level, the sheer delight of winning a rowing race is captured in the faces of the young women in Figure 7.4.



Figure 7.4 Jumping for joy ... University College Dublin women's rowing team celebrate victory

Source: Courtesy of The Irish Examiner and University College Dublin, Sport

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We must remember that for every winner in competitive sport, there has to be a loser. So, not surprisingly, cheers can quickly turn to tears for young athletes when they equate “winning” with “success” and “losing” with “failure”. This problem is exacerbated if excessive emphasis is placed by parents and coaches on winning (Shane Murphy, 1999). Psychologically, there are several problems with the assumption that “winning” is the sole, or even primary, goal for sports performers of any age. Apart from being outside one’s control, this goal may encourage the view that victory can come only at someone else’s expense. But as we learned in Chapter 2, many of the world’s top athletes are motivated not by a desire to defeat others but by the goal of improving upon their *own* performance. This idea of seeking to improve one’s skills lies at the heart of the developmental models of sport coaching developed by psychologists such as R. Smith and Smoll (2002a) and Smoll and Smith (2005, 2010). These researchers postulate that “success” in sport transcends winning – and instead involves enjoying the challenge of expending maximum effort to develop one’s skills. Put simply, according to Ronald Smith:

the best way to maximize performance is by creating an environment in which athletes are having fun, are highly motivated, they’re trying to improve, they’re giving maximum effort, and you have a good relationship with them, so they’re more likely to listen to what you tell them. That’s the way you get to winning.

(cited in Munsey, 2010, p. 59)

More generally, what do we know about the psychological consequences of participation in youth sports?

The long-term effects of competitive athletic activity in young people have attracted relatively little research attention from psychologists. Therefore, it is difficult to evaluate the widely held assumption that school/youth sports develop “character”, team spirit and/or the virtues of sportspersonship (which may be defined broadly as “sport behaviours that carry moral connotations because of their connections to fundamental issues of fairness and respect”: Shields et al., 2007, p. 747). In an early review of the literature in this field, Shields and Bredemeier (2001) proposed that sport does not *automatically* build character – a conclusion echoed by Gould and Carson (2008: see below). Shields and Bredemeier (2001, p. 599) also proposed that “the longer one stays in sport, and the higher the competitive level reached, the more winning becomes the dominant value”. This conclusion is endorsed by Shane Murphy (1999), who suggested that the longer athletes remain in sport, the less sportingly they behave and the more likely they are to condone cheating and violent behaviour on the field of play! In a similar vein, Miracle and Rees (1994) found no support for the claim that sport builds character in school or anywhere else. Given such research findings, it is not surprising that Shields and Bredemeier (2007) question the evidence underlying the common assumption that participation in sport builds moral attitudes that transfer to other domains in life. Although such a conclusion seems controversial, it has played a valuable role in stimulating popular and scientific debate about the advantages and disadvantages of youth sport involvement. Fortunately, advances have been made

in the development of coaching programmes that are designed to enhance enjoyment and to promote moral and ethical development in young athletes (see R. Smith and Smoll, 2002b). Progress is also evident in the measurement of the construct of sportpersonship. Vallerand et al. (1997) reported the development and validation of a psychometric scale to assess a general commitment to fair play in sport as well as a respect for the rules, officials, social conventions and opponents encountered in the specific game in question. Shields et al. (2007), M. Lee et al. (2007) and Kavussanu and Boardley (2009) have developed other potentially valuable questionnaires to measure aspects of sportpersonship/moral behaviour in sport.

Although the link between sport and character development is tenuous, what of the claim that athletic involvement can forge a sense of identity and cohesion among competitors? As before, little or no research exists on this issue, but there is some historical evidence to corroborate the idea that sport fosters cohesion. In Ireland, Sean Moran (2001) showed how Gaelic games in the nineteenth century played a significant role in strengthening people's sense of identity in their struggle to establish independent political rule. Unfortunately, problems can arise when this sense of identity becomes rigid or entrenched. In Northern Ireland, allegiance to various sports and teams has a distinctive sectarian dimension (McGinley et al., 1998). A graphic example of the depth of this sectarianism occurred in August 2002 when Neil Lennon, the Northern Ireland player, was forced to retire from international soccer after he had received death threats from "supporters" of his own national team (McIntosh, 2002). These death threats were believed to have been prompted by Lennon's affiliation with the predominantly Catholic team for which he played at the time – Glasgow Celtic.

Finally, can life skills be developed through sport? Although a detailed analysis of this question is beyond the scope of this chapter, research in this field has been reviewed by Gould and Carson (2008). Having defined "life skills" as "those personal assets, characteristics and skills such as goal setting, emotional control, self-esteem, and hard work ethic that can be facilitated or developed in sport and transferred for use in non-sport settings", these authors found that such skills do not automatically result from mere participation in competitive sport: "life skills are taught not caught" (Gould and Carson, 2008, pp. 60, 75).

To summarize, it may be argued that school sports offer potential health, social and psychological benefits to young people. They can help children to discover the benefits of systematic practice (A. Moran, 2001), but to achieve these benefits fully, young sports performers need to be exposed to an enlightened coaching philosophy rather than a "win at all costs" mentality that causes stress to athletes of all ages and levels of ability.

New directions for research on team cohesion

Based on some comprehensive reviews of the empirical literature (e.g., Carron and Brawley, 2008; Carron et al., 2007), at least six new directions can be suggested for research on team cohesion in sport. First, in view of formidable definitional problems in this field, there is an urgent need for conceptual clarification of such key terms as group, team, social cohesion and task cohesion. Second, there is a need for empirical

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studies designed to test explicit hypotheses about, and/or possible explanations for, group processes in athletes. This type of hypothesis-testing research is preferable to descriptive, atheoretical studies. Third, there is a paucity of knowledge at present about possible *changes* in group dynamics within sports teams over time; additional longitudinal studies (e.g., extending the research of Pain and Harwood, 2009) are required in which such key variables as athletes' social and task cohesion could be measured at various stages over a competitive season. This type of research would rectify the danger of over-reliance on data obtained from "snapshot" studies in this field. Fourth, in examining the relationship between team cohesion and athletic performance, it is important either to measure or to control for the moderating influence of such variables as sport type, group structure and intra-group relationships. Fifth, just as in many other areas of sport and exercise psychology, there has been a dearth of field studies using top-level athletes. Sixth, the field of sportspersonship and moral behaviour in sport is ripe for investigation. Kavussanu (2008) pointed out that few studies have investigated the consequences of morally relevant behaviour in sport for such variables as team cohesion, team performance and enjoyment.

Ideas for research projects on team cohesion in sport

Here are six ideas for research projects on group processes in athletes.

- 1 According to Carron and Brawley (2008), studies on group processes in sport are hampered by the use of static, "snapshot" research designs. The problem with this latter approach is that it fails to examine the dynamic nature of groups. Therefore, these authors recommend the use of prospective, longitudinal studies. In order to fill this gap in the field, it would be interesting to investigate possible changes in social and task cohesion in a sports team over the course of a competitive season (see Pain and Harwood, 2009).
- 2 Given the equivocal nature of the evidence surrounding the psychometric characteristics of the Group Environment Questionnaire (GEQ: Carron et al., 1985), it would be interesting to conduct a systematic attempt to validate this measure for adults in sport and exercise settings.
- 3 It would be intriguing to examine the relationship between team cohesion and individual cognitive processes such as decision making in sport situations. As yet, little or nothing is known about this topic.
- 4 Few studies have been conducted on the relationship between a coach's leadership style and the cohesion of his or her team.
- 5 Given the substantial research literature that has accumulated on expert-novice differences in sport (see Chapter 6), it would be interesting to examine the effects of expertise on the type of team-building strategies used by coaches in different sports.
- 6 Additional research is required on the nature, correlates and development of sportspersonship in young athletes (e.g., see Shields et al., 2007). For example, do athletes' perceptions of team cohesion and coaching climate/values affect their level of sportspersonship?

Summary

- Despite the importance of group processes in athletic performance, less research has been conducted on team-related processes in sport than on the individual characteristics of the performers. To rectify this trend, this chapter examined the nature, measurement and correlates of one of the most popular constructs in this field – team spirit/cohesion (or the degree of closeness and collaboration between teammates).
- The second section explained the meaning of such terms as group, team and group dynamics.
- The third section reviewed psychological research on the measurement and correlates of team cohesiveness (or the degree to which team members stick together) and teamwork (or the productive cooperation between group members) in sport.
- The fourth section examined the nature and efficacy of team-building activities in sport psychology. This section concluded with a summary of the practical implications of these activities for coaches.
- The fifth section described the advantages and disadvantages of young people's participation in school sports.
- The sixth section sketched some potentially fruitful new directions for future research on team dynamics in athletes.
- Finally, six ideas for possible research projects in this field were outlined.