

The Core Principles of Sports Team Development: Pathways to Excellence Through Leadership and Collaboration

Sittisak Thongsuk¹, Kullaya Sukpongthai², Intira Chapandung³, Amalia Jaramillo Miguel⁴

¹Data Science and Information Technology, Thonburi University, Thailand, Sittisak@trums.thonburi-u.ac.th

²General Education Affair, Thonburi University, Thailand, kullaya_lib@thonburi-u.ac.th

³The National Table Tennis Team, Sports Association for the Disabled of Thailand under Royal Patronage, Thailand, Nuiintira@hotmail.com

⁴Independent researcher, Philippines

Abstract

An article to study the extremely important history of sports teams and their progress toward excellence by studying and analyzing documents and conducting direct research. The results of the study found that the development of sports teams towards excellence has five main important components. Including 1) creating a shared vision. This requires clear communication and a sense of shared ownership within the team. 2) Strengthening flexibility. The team must be able to adapt to changing situations and various challenges. 3) Creating a good atmosphere in the team. that emphasizes learning and creative development, 4) Leadership development at both the coaching and athlete levels, and 5) Team goal setting that balances skill development and competition results. It was also found that the transformational leadership style had the most positive effect on team development because it was able to inspire and stimulate the development of team potential effectively. The findings from this study can be applied to develop sports teams to achieve sustainable success.

Keywords: Teamwork, Sports Team Development, Sports Excellence, Sports Leadership

Background and Statement of the problem

The development of sports teams towards excellence is a systematic process that requires the integration of multiple components, not only focusing on competitive achievements but also emphasizing the holistic development of athletes' potential in physical, mental, and social aspects. Team success stems from the combination of clear vision, strong team culture building, and effective leadership development. The development of teams towards excellence requires an evidence-based development framework with clear relationships established between key performance indicators, essential qualities, and appropriate training approaches. Furthermore, it is crucial to create an environment conducive to learning and development, fostering trust, responsibility, and empathy among team members.

Another crucial factor is striking a balance between performance goals and athlete welfare, considering both sports skill development and personal growth. Building intrinsic motivation through a clear vision and strong values will drive teams toward sustainable long-term success. This article will present key concepts and components in developing sports teams towards excellence, serving as a guideline for stakeholders in developing sports teams to achieve their set goals.

1. Definition of Team Development Towards Excellence

Team Development towards Excellence is a comprehensive developmental process encompassing all dimensions including personnel, management, environment, sustainability, and outcomes, aimed at continuously elevating team performance standards and capabilities. This process must focus on developing both physical and mental aspects of team members through building a strong organizational culture with shared values. The development must be based on empirical evidence and systematic evaluation, including clear performance indicators, progress testing, and continuous improvement of training plans. Moreover, it is essential to create an environment conducive to development, taking into account physical safety, self-value enhancement, ethical support, and empowerment of all team members, leading to sustainable development and long-term success (Turner et al., 2019).

This elaboration helps provide a clearer picture that team development towards excellence is a complex process requiring the integration of multiple components, not merely focusing on competitive outcomes but also emphasizing personnel potential development, strong culture building, and creating an environment conducive to sustainable development.

2. Teamwork Development

Team Development towards Excellence (Teamwork Development) refers to the process focused on creating and developing teams to achieve maximum efficiency, enabling them to accomplish organizational goals stably and sustainably. This team development comprises several key components, such as establishing shared goals, planning, effective communication, and creating a friendly atmosphere for teamwork. Team development towards excellence also includes training in various skills essential for collaborative work, such as problem-solving, collective decision-making, and mutual support within the team. Having visionary leaders who can inspire the team is also crucial in developing successful teams (Whee, 2005, At Our Note Asia, 2023).

Teamwork is an essential skill for every societal role, whether in educational settings, teaching and learning environments, or workplaces. All successful tasks must go through collective thinking and collaboration processes. Group assignments and various projects cannot be effectively created without efficient teammates. Therefore, everyone needs to prioritize having shared goals, mutual understanding and trust, and jointly overcoming challenges that arise. Team members must always be ready to develop themselves alongside their teammates. Only when a strong team can be built, will the intended goals of victory be truly achieved. Developing teamwork skills to accomplish objectives and strive for excellence must therefore consist of the following elements (Jutamas, 2022).

2.1 Everyone on the team should have a shared goal

In teamwork, members must have team and personal goals that align. Suppose the team's goal is to win a sports competition for first place, to succeed in a science project contest, or to present a project that beats competing companies. In that case, it is certainly beneficial when everyone on the team understands and is committed to reaching that goal. Equally important are personal goals, referring to the abilities, enthusiasm for self-development, and progress of each individual in the team, which need to be as aligned as possible.

2.2 Assign appropriate roles to each team member

The leader or group head is the first crucial role when assigning appropriate roles to everyone. The team must have criteria for selecting a person with knowledge who can manage the team effectively—handling time management, work distribution, and conflict resolution within the team, which may always occur. Afterward, roles and responsibilities should be distributed to each team member according to their aptitudes and suitability.

2.3 Systematically plan work processes

Good work processes with systematic planning and agreements within the group help save time and team effort and reduce team expenses. When facing obstacles during work, planning allows for a broader overview of how to proceed, leading to faster progression to the next steps. Additionally, work planning helps everyone involved understand and visualize the work in the same direction.

2.4 Strengthen relationships between team members

Everyone in the team should be connected through good human relations, effective communication, and efficient coordination. All members should be open to discussing various matters directly with each other and listen to opinions, whether similar or different to close gaps of misunderstanding within the team. Processes that build these relationships can be used, such as brainstorming, holding regular meetings so everyone understands situations simultaneously, or even engaging in activities outside of work to build team bonding.

2.5 Trust and encouragement are essential

Trust and encouragement are important so that everyone feels like an equal part of the team. On days when work doesn't go as planned, we may feel discouraged and weak. Reinforcing encouragement within the team is crucial to motivating everyone to regain their energy. Furthermore, within the team, it is necessary to respect and trust each teammate. Although they may have different responsibilities, they should be confident that they can achieve their goals.

For work to be successful, it is not enough to have knowledge and be skilled in the job itself; one should also be adept at working with others in society. Human relations, communication, and empathy are fundamental principles for working efficiently, resulting in quality work and gaining teammates who become good friends in life as well.

3. Components of Team Development towards Excellence

Team development towards excellence should consist of the following components:

3.1 Building Teams with Shared Vision

Vision Identification: The first step in this process is conveying a shared vision in a manner that resonates with every team member. This not only involves defining the vision in clear and compelling terms but also contextualizing it in a way that reflects the relevance to diverse roles and contributions within the team. Effective communication of a shared vision ensures everyone understands, accepts, and supports such vision, paving the way for unified efforts towards its achievement.

Aligning Goals with Shared Vision: Once the vision is clearly communicated, the next step is aligning individual goals and overall objectives with this encompassing vision. This alignment is crucial to ensure that the efforts and aspirations of every team member contribute constructively to the collective endeavor. It involves carefully balancing respect for individual goals while ensuring those goals serve the broader objectives of the team. This alignment fosters a sense of purpose and direction, guiding team efforts toward the shared vision.

Building Ownership and Commitment: Effective communication and goal alignment also help instill a profound sense of ownership and commitment among team members. When individuals see their personal and professional growth reflected in the shared vision, their engagement and motivation increase; this enhanced sense of ownership promotes proactive participation and innovation, which drives the team towards achieving their collective objectives.

3.2 Strengthening Flexibility

Strengthening Flexibility is a crucial component in developing sports teams to achieve excellence. According to Turner et al. (2019), successful teams must have Flexibility in adapting to changing situations. Experienced coaches should be able to adjust strategies and techniques to suit the changing needs of athletes and teams, which may include modifying training, goal setting, or changing team roles and responsibilities. Kao (2019) also emphasizes that team adaptation is a key capability in dealing with changing situations. Highly flexible teams can adapt better to various situations, especially during high-pressure competitions. Mierlo and Hooft (2020) found that successful teams must have the ability to adapt to situations and challenges by creating an atmosphere that emphasizes learning and development along with efficient communication and information exchange within the team. Strengthening Flexibility is, therefore, a process that must be continuously developed, both at the individual and team levels, to enable the team to effectively handle challenges and changes, leading to sustainable development and long-term success.

3.3 Creating a Positive Team Atmosphere

Creating a positive team atmosphere is a key factor in developing sports teams towards excellence. Turner et al. (2019) emphasize that leaders must create a positive environment that does not create pressure by promoting creativity and calculated risk-taking. Additionally, they must focus on building intrinsic motivation rather than external rewards. Kao (2019) suggests that creating a fun and challenging learning atmosphere is an important part of team development, with coaches needing to create a learning environment conducive to development, promoting member participation and responsibility. Creating a positive team atmosphere also involves building relationships between members. Cotterill et al. (2022) identify that social leaders play an important role in creating a positive team atmosphere, building good relationships, and resolving conflicts among teammates. Van Mierlo and Van Hooft (2020) emphasize the importance of creating an atmosphere that focuses on learning and development, with coaches needing to balance mastery goals and performance goals to create an atmosphere that emphasizes positive success rather than avoiding failure. Creating a positive team atmosphere is, therefore, a process that requires cooperation from all parties - coaches, team leaders, and all members-to create an environment conducive to the team's sustainable development and success.

3.4 Leadership Development

The leadership of coaches and athletes affects team success. Using transformational leadership and building good relationships between coaches and athletes can promote skill development and positive experiences for athletes.

Sports Team Leadership

Duguay et al. (2016) defined athlete leadership as athletes who have formal or informal leadership roles within the team, influencing team members to achieve common goals. In this sense, formal leaders are assigned

roles by coaches or as a result of team selection. In contrast, informal leaders emerge through their interactions and behaviors with teammates.

Fransen et al. (2015) stated that: Task-oriented leaders provide strategic guidance and make decisions to help the team achieve its objective goals, such as athletes who can identify relevant plays in game situations and gather teammates to execute the plan. Inspirational Leaders motivate teammates to perform their best and give their all during competitions and training, such as athletes who are first to congratulate or acknowledge teammates' successes and development. Social Leaders promote and develop relationships and resolve conflicts between teammates outside of training or competition time, such as athletes who can connect and have good relationships with all teammates, unifying the team. External Leaders lead communication with external sources such as management, sponsors, and media, such as athletes whom teammates trust to coordinate with coaches and referees.

3.5 Team Goal Setting

For team goal setting that leads to team success, Van Mierlo and Van Hooft (2020) classified team achievement goals into four types: Mastery-approach goals that focus on developing team skills and abilities; Mastery-avoidance goals that try to avoid making mistakes; Performance-approach goals that aim to beat competitors; and Performance-avoidance goals that avoid losing or performing worse than other teams. Turner et al. (2019) found that team development should be based on a model that clearly defines relationships between key performance indicators (KPIs), necessary physical attributes, tests to measure progress, and appropriate training. This ensures a systematic and neutral development approach. Kao (2019) suggests that goal setting should consider developing skills applicable to real life, building a strong and sustainable team culture, and promoting growth in both sports and personal development. For effective goal setting, Cotterill et al. (2022) emphasize that teams must have systematic planning and evaluation, monitor development in unity and teamwork, assess social skills and adaptability, and analyze competition results and collaborative behaviors. Team goal setting must, therefore, balance development (mastery) goals and performance goals, emphasizing a positive approach to continuously and sustainably developing the potential of the team and each member.

4. Leadership Styles for Developing Sports Teams Towards Excellence

Leadership Styles

In developing sports teams to achieve excellence, various leadership styles can be applied in sports team management. (Chelladurai, 2017; Pitts, 2017, & Fried, 2015) Explain as follows:

4.1 Autocratic Leadership

This style involves team management by a leader who makes decisions without consulting the team and expects the team to strictly follow his orders.

4.2 Democratic Leadership

This style involves team management by a leader who promotes participation and voting from members in decision-making and considers others' opinions.

4.3 Laissez-faire Leadership

This style involves team management by a leader who does not exert much pressure or provide extensive guidance but delegates decision-making authority to members. The leader provides necessary resources, both equipment and budget, to enable subordinates to work independently.

4.4 Transformational Leadership

This style involves team management by a leader who inspires and motivates members to strive toward common goals, sometimes setting high standards and leading by example. Additionally, (Chelladurai, 2017; Pitts, 2017; Fried, 2015; Jiménez-Pavón, & Castro-Piñero, 2014) explain research findings and summarize knowledge about how different team leadership styles affect sports competition. They found that "Transformational Leadership" has positive effects on team performance, with teams under this leadership style having higher inspiration and determination than teams with other leadership styles. However, research has also found that other leadership styles, such as transactional leadership and autocratic leadership, can also be effective. Selecting the appropriate leadership style for the team's context and goals is important for good competitive results.

5. Leadership Strategies for Developing Sports Teams towards Excellence

5.1 Strategies that can be used to motivate and manage teams effectively (Chelladurai, 2017; Pitts, 2017, & Fried, 2015) have been summarized as follows:

Setting Clear Goals: Providing clear direction and objectives can help inspire teams to work toward success.

Effective Communication: Effective communication is essential in sports team management because it helps build confidence, provide feedback, and support good collaboration.

Resource Provision and Support: Providing appropriate resources and support for team members helps build confidence and trust within the team.

Recognition and Response to Success: Rewarding good performance is important for motivating team members and creating a positive team culture.

5.2 Various strategies and techniques

Various strategies and techniques to promote teamwork will create motivation and manage sports teams for high-performance efficiency (Lirgg, 2011).

Clear communication: Effective communication is essential for successful team management. Coaches and team leaders should establish clear communication channels with their athletes, providing feedback, criticism, encouragement, and guidance as appropriate.

Goal-setting: Setting clear goals and outcomes is important for motivating athletes and teams. Goals should be specific, measurable, and realistic, with clear timeframes for completion and criteria for measuring progress.

Positive reinforcement: Providing guidance, positive feedback, and rewards for good performance can motivate and stimulate athletes' ability to develop themselves. Rewards, such as prizes, bonuses, or other benefits should be provided in various forms.

Team building: Building understanding and good relationships within the team is important for success in sports competitions. These can be achieved through collaborative training, setting clear goals, and working together to solve problems to stimulate and motivate athletes and their teams to succeed in competition. Goal setting should be measurable, with clear timeframes and criteria for measuring progress.

Individualized coaching: Each athlete has different abilities. Therefore, experienced coaches should take time to study and understand each athlete's needs and then adjust their coaching to suit those needs.

Flexibility: Experienced coaches should be able to adapt their strategies and techniques to meet the changing needs of athletes and teams. This may involve modifying training, goal setting, or changing team roles and responsibilities. In summary, motivating and managing teams in sports requires leadership expertise, communication skills, and understanding of individual athletes and teams. By using these strategies and techniques, coaches and team leaders can help their athletes and teams perform at their highest level and achieve their goals.

In conclusion, leadership strategies for developing sports teams towards excellence require the use of various strategies and techniques, which can be used to motivate and manage teams most effectively.

6. The Essence of Developing Sports Teams towards Excellence: A Case Study of the National Table Tennis Team, Sports Association for the Disabled of Thailand under Royal Patronage

Developing sports teams towards excellence requires integrating several key components, particularly in the context of parasports which present unique challenges. Parasport organizations are defined as entities that work to promote access to sports and recreational activities for individuals with various types of disabilities, to create equality, improve quality of life, and encourage social participation through sporting activities adapted to the limitations and capabilities of each type of disability (DePauw & Gavron, 2021). The case study of Thailand's national para table tennis team provides a valuable example of applying principles of team development towards excellence in a real-world scenario, through management that considers the specific needs of athletes across various disability classifications, the integration of expertise from multiple professional disciplines, and the establishment of support systems that encompass both competitive performance and athletes' quality of life. This case study reflects the concrete application of the five core principles discussed earlier.

Successful sports teams must have many components within the same teams, skilled athletes, effective teamwork, and talent as well. The Thai para table tennis team has specific management challenges because each athlete has different disabilities across 11 levels, or "classes," divided into wheelchair athletes (classes 1-5), standing athletes (classes 6-10), and athletes with intellectual impairments (class 11) (International Table Tennis Federation, 2020).

Team Development Towards Excellence:

The Sports Association for the Disabled of Thailand under Royal Patronage (2024) has established a multidisciplinary expert team consisting of coaches with an in-depth understanding of each class, sports scientists who help develop specific muscle groups, and physiotherapists who prevent injuries. These expert teams work together to assess potential and design training programs appropriate for each athlete. For example, for a class 3

athlete with limitations in torso movement, the coaching team will design hitting techniques and movements suitable for wheelchair sitting, while sports scientists focus on developing upper body muscles and balance, and physiotherapists monitor and prevent shoulder and wrist injuries, which are points that bear significant weight.

Clear Establishment of Team Success Goals:

For the upcoming Paralympic Games, the sports team has set goals to win 7 gold medals from wheelchair racing, 4 gold medals, table tennis 1 gold medal, wheelchair fencing 1 gold medal, and boccia 1 gold medal. These goals were established by analyzing athletes' potential and comparing them with international competitors. Regarding budget, the association has been allocated funds for training, personnel hiring, and various facilities, including team welfare. There is also a government reward system for athletes who succeed in international competitions. Team success is measured not only by the number of medals but also by the improvement in athletes' quality of life. The team prioritizes both physical and mental care, provides comprehensive welfare systems, and supports athletes' education and career development, giving them stability in life beyond being athletes.

This case study demonstrates that developing para-sports teams towards excellence requires collaboration among various experts, careful planning, and systematic support, with primary consideration for each athlete's differences. This not only creates competitive success but also serves as inspiration and a good example for disabled people who still lack opportunities in this area while sustainably elevating the quality of life for disabled athletes.

Conclusion

Success in developing sports teams towards excellence depends on integrating leadership styles appropriate to the team's context. It has been found that Transformational Leadership is particularly effective in inspiring and creating commitment within the team. However, other leadership styles, such as Transactional Leadership and Autocratic Leadership, are also appropriate in certain situations (Chelladurai, 2017; Pitts, 2017; Fried, 2015; Jiménez-Pavón, & Castro-Piñero, 2014). According to the following diagram:

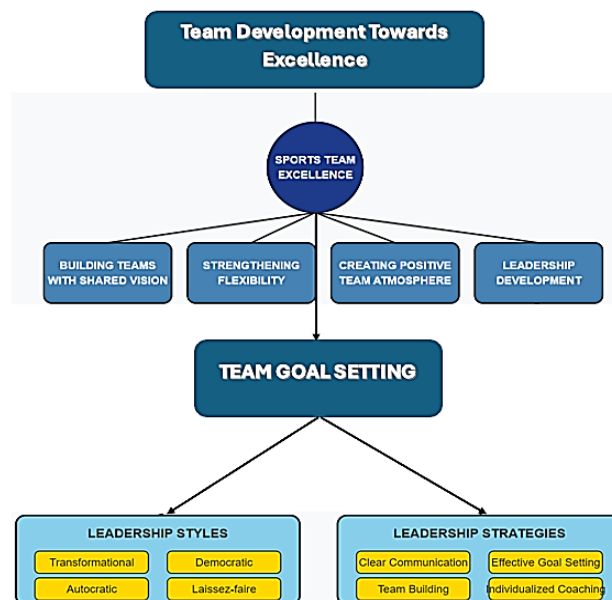


Figure 1: Sports Team Development Process Diagram for Excellence

This figure illustrates the comprehensive framework for Sports Team Development Towards Excellence. At the top level, it identifies four fundamental components: Building Teams with a Shared Vision, Strengthening Flexibility, Creating Positive Team Atmosphere, and Leadership Development. These components feed into the central element of Team Goal Setting, which branches into two critical implementation approaches: Leadership Styles and Leadership Strategies. The Leadership Styles section presents four distinct approaches: Transformational (shown to be most effective for team development), Democratic, Autocratic, and Laissez-faire. The Leadership Strategies section outlines four key techniques: Clear Communication, Effective Goal Setting, Team Building, and Individualized Coaching.

Goal Setting, Team Building, and Individualized Coaching. This hierarchical diagram effectively demonstrates how the integration of these components, properly implemented through appropriate leadership styles and strategies, creates a systematic pathway for sports teams to achieve sustainable excellence and success, as supported by the research findings presented in the academic article.

Team leadership success does not depend solely on choosing a leadership style but also requires building a strong foundation in relationships between members, trust, and effective communication. Especially in large teams, Group-Centered Leadership is often more effective than individual leadership, as it helps reduce tension and creates better balance within the team. Developing sports teams towards excellence is, therefore, both a science and an art that requires a deep understanding of team dynamics, accurate situation assessment, and appropriate application of leadership styles to extract the team's maximum potential, leading to sustainable success in both competitive results and team personnel development.

References

- Chelladurai, P. (2007). *Leadership in sports administration. Sports Publicity, Promotion, and Public Relations: A Practical Guide*, 55-78.
- Chelladurai, P. (2017). *Managing organizations for sport and physical activity: A systems perspective*. Routledge.
- Cotterill, S., Loughhead, T., & Fransen, K. (2022). Athlete Leadership Development Within Teams: Current Understanding and Future Directions. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.820745>.
- DePauw, K. P., & Gavron, S. J. (2021). *Disability sport*. (3rd ed.). Human Kinetics.
- Duguay, A.M., Loughhead, T.M., & Munroe-Chandler, K.J. (2016). The development, implementation, and evaluation of an athlete leadership development program with female varsity athletes. *The Sport Psychologist*, 30(2), 154-166. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1123/tsp.2015-0050>
- Fransen, K., Puyenbroeck, S.V., Loughhead, T.M., Vanbeselaere, N., Cuyper, B.D., Broek, G.V., & Boen, F. (2015). The art of athlete leadership: Identifying high-quality athlete leadership at the individual and team level through social network analysis. *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 37(3), 274-290.
- Fried, G. (2015). *Sports management: An overview*. Routledge.
- HR Note Asia. (2023). *Working together creates the power to achieve success better than working separately in a disorganized and directionless manner*. Retrieved November 28, 2024, from <https://th.hrnote.asia/org/development/190509-team-work>
- International Table Tennis Federation. (2020). *Para table tennis classification*. <https://www.ittf.com/para-table-tennis-classification>
- Kao, C. (2019). Development of Team Cohesion and Sustained Collaboration Skills with the Sport Education Model. Sustainability. <https://doi.org/10.3390/SU11082348>.
- Pinyosri, J. (2022). *How to work as a team to successfully reach goals*. <https://news.msu.ac.th/msumagaz/smain/readpost.php?mid=405>
- Pitts, B. G2., & Stotlar, D. K. (2017). *Fundamentals of sport management*. Human Kinetics.
- Sports Association for the Disabled of Thailand under Royal Patronage. (2024). https://www.facebook.com/spadtthailand/?locale=th_TH
- The SAFE Pledge. (2024). *Achieving Success Together: Shared Vision in Leadership*. <https://voltagecontrol.com/articles/achieving-success-together-shared-vision-in-leadership>
- Turner, A., Bishop, C., Cree, J., Carr, P., McCann, A., Bartholomew, B., & Halsted, L. (2019). Building a High-Performance Model for Sport: A Human Development-Centered Approach. *Strength and Conditioning Journal*, 41, 100-107. <https://doi.org/10.1519/SSC.0000000000000447>.
- Van Mierlo, H., & Van Hooft, E. (2020). Team Achievement Goals and Sports Team Performance. *Small Group Research*, 51, 581-615. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1046496420913119>.
- Whee, S. A. (2005). *Creating Effective Teams: A Guide for Members and Leaders*. SAGE Publications.